

# **Consumption and Urban Space in Post-Soviet Moscow**

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## Abstract

### Consumption and Urban Space in Post-Soviet Moscow

This thesis is based on field research conducted in Moscow in 1992-1993. It addresses a theoretical literature on urbanism, and examines the consumption and interpretation of space by urban social actors. The hypothesis is that a particular social context, in this case a post-Soviet city, can only be understood by examining the meanings of the city as these are constructed by its inhabitants. It is an analysis of the ways in which these meanings are constructed through practical experience as people consume things, spaces, and interactive moments as they move through the city in pursuit of individually intended, cooperatively negotiated and institutionally directed projects. It is suggested that the resultant meanings are the product of partial and contingent knowledge, of interpretations of the physical landscapes of the city, and of the socio-emotive face to face interactions that characterise distinctive places and spaces in the city.

The thesis is also concerned with elucidating the nature of social change in the specific context of post-Soviet transition. The transition to the Market is examined through analysis of the ideas and practices of the city's inhabitants. The thesis concludes with an examination of the differences between Soviet urbanism and the urbanisms described by authors interested in cities of the capitalist world. These differences and their effects on urban culture, are imported to give a sense to the ways in which Muscovites consume and interpret the new socio-economic phenomena which attend the transition period.

The thesis attempts to elucidate the links between abstract and changing social, political and economic forces and their operationalisation in everyday life. I argue that attention to the interactive moment illuminates the point of articulation between structural forces and embodied or internalised identity. These moments are cued by the specifics of different socio-spatial contexts, which in turn inform the ways in which social actors interact with and construct the meaning of post-Soviet urbanism.

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## Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>6</b>

### **Chapters**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Contemporary Russian Urban Culture:</b>	<b>45</b>
	The Construction of a Theoretical Framework	
<b>3</b>	<b>Social Change in Practice: Work,</b>	<b>79</b>
	Under-employment and the Move from Work to Commerce	
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Public Space Outside Place: Moving through the City</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Moving about the City:</b>	<b>181</b>
	Above Ground:Underground Movement,	
	Anonymity, Sociality, Exchange	
<b>5</b>	<b>The Changing Nature of Shopping: From Deficits to Inflation in Time and Space</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Not Creative Self-Construction through Consumerism and Choice but Cosy Commensality and Sincerity</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Private Space, Leisure and Agency, Kinship and Friendship, Commensality and the Consumption of Strong Spirit</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Structuration, Urbanism as Process and Post-Soviet Urban Culture</b>	<b>345</b>

### **Maps**

<b>1.1</b>	<b>Metro map showing locations of households and institutions frequently visited</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4.1.1</b>	<b>Part of Skhodnensky micro-raion</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>4.2.1</b>	<b>Metro map showing Sergei's home, workplace and households frequently visited</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Metro map showing purchase prices (flats) by area</b>	<b>301</b>

## ***Diagrams***

1.1	Network of close informants	22
1.2	Sergei's network	36
1.3	Valeria's network	37
1.4	Maria's network	37
1.5	Natasha's network	38
1.6	Julia's network	38
6.1	Purchase prices (flats) in Moscow	299

## ***Tables***

3.1	Time budgets 1990	83
3.2	Time budgets 1992	84
3.3	Time budget 1992-1993 : Sergei	85
3.4	Time budget 1992-1993 : Vladimir	86
3.5	Time budget 1992-1993 : Valeria	87
3.6	Time budget 1992-1993 : Natasha	88
3.7	Time budget 1992-1993 : Sasha	89
3.8	Time Budget 1992-1993 : Galia	90
3.9	Unemployment July 1991 - May 1994	92
3.10	Short time, involuntary leave 1993-1994	94
3.11	Short time, involuntary leave 1993-1994	94
3.12	Wage arrears April 1992 - June 1994	95
3.13	Average wages RSFSR 1940-1987	100
3.14	Average wages and pensions 1987-1995	101
3.15	Friends and shared occupation	108
3.16	Measured : survey consumer expenditure 1991-1992	113
3.17	Structure of consumer expenditure 1989-1993	114
3.18	Average consumption of selected foodstuffs 1990-1993	114
3.19	Wages, pensions, meat prices 1985 : 1993	115
3.20	Wages, pensions, bread prices 1985 : 1993	116
3.21	Wages, pensions, price refrigerator 1985 : 1993	116
3.22	Wages, pensions, price men's suits 1985 : 1993	116

3.23	Poverty trends 1980-1993	119
3.24	Employment by type of organisation 1985-1994	130
4.2.1	Time:distance ratios overground : underground travel	183
4.2.2	Journeys to work on Metro	186
4.2.3	Daily Metro travel	187
4.2.4	Metro travel and visiting friends	188
4.2.5	Name changes of Metro stations	197
4.2.6	Price privatisation vouchers October 1992-July 1993	211
5.1	Time spent shopping RSFSR 1991	228
5.2	Time spent shopping Moscow 1991	228
5.3	Time spent shopping 1992-1993	230
5.4	Sources of consumer goods	231
5.5	Price differences in different type shops 1993	247
5.6	Exchange rate rouble : US dollar February 1993	247
5.7	Average prices: Central Market prices February/March 1993	255
5.8	Inflation 1971-1990	262
5.9	Inflation 1991-1992	262
5.10	Inflation 1993-1994	263
6.1	State : cooperative : self-build housing 1981-1991	269
6.2	Average per person housing space	277
6.3	Flat purchase prices Moscow 1991-1992	298
6.4	Flat rental prices Moscow, January 1993	298
6.5	Flat purchase prices by area of Moscow 1993	300
7.1	Marriage : divorce 1980-1991	315
7.2	Alcoholism 1980-1990	342

## *List of Photographs*

4.1.1	View of Skhodnensky micro-raion	139
4.1.2	View of Skhodnensky micro-raion	139
4.1.3	The block of flats where the author lived	141
4.1.4	The view from the tram stop	141
4.1.5	The spaces between the blocks of flats	143
4.1.6	ditto	143
4.1.7	ditto	143
4.1.8	ditto	147
4.1.9	ditto	147
4.1.10	View of Skhodnensky micro-raion	149
4.1.11	ditto	149
4.1.12	The local chemists	151
4.1.13	The local library	151
4.1.14	The local bakery	151
4.1.15	Informal street trade outside the bakery	155
4.1.16	The tram stop	155
4.1.17	Waste ground, shops and flats	155
4.1.18	Novodevichi Monastery	165
4.1.19	A militiaman in Revolution Square	169
4.2.1	Women selling goods 'from the hand'	207
4.2.2	Buying potatoes from the backs of lorries	209
4.2.3	The street market around Skhodnenskaya Metro station	213
4.2.4	ditto	213
4.2.5	ditto	213
4.2.6	Colourful displays of fruit and vegetables at street market	215
4.2.7	Noticeboard at street market	215
4.2.8	Informal street trade near Rechnoi Vokzal Metro station	215
4.2.9	Forbidding trade on train station platforms	219
4.2.10	Street trade outside Teatralnaya Metro Station	219
4.2.11	Young girl selling artwork in Metro station	219
5.1	A queue outside Galeries Lafayette in GUM	251
5.2	Signs which appeared in a local shop window	257

6.1	Balconies	287
6.2	Balconies: note that some are enclosed	287
7.1	The consumption of 'strong spirit'	337

## ***Appendices***

	<b><i>Appendix 1 Flats - Layout Diagrams</i></b>	379
i	Sergei's flat	380
ii	Natasha, Igor and Anna's flat	381
iii	Rosa and son's flat	382
iv	Vladimir, Alexandra and Svetlana's flat	383
v	Olga and Maria's flat	384
vi	Julia, Mikhail and Margarita's flat	385
vii	Lyuba and Boris's flat	386
viii	Valeria's flat	387
ix	Galina's flat	388
	<b><i>References</i></b>	389-401





# Chapter I

## Introduction

This thesis is a study of the ways in which people perceive, evaluate, and engage with the new socio-economic phenomena associated with the transition to a Market economy in post-Soviet Moscow. It is a study of changing patterns of consumption, but one that is not restricted to examining the consumption of commodified goods and services. It is a study of the consumption of space: as people move around the city, they consume and interpret the cityscape, endowing it with meaning. Being in and moving through the city constitutes a process of consumption of social spaces and places, which cue differently empowered relationships, modes of interaction, and identities. It is not a study of a bounded urban community, but a study of urban sociality that gives due weight to relations with anonymous others. It is an original exercise in welding anthropological theory and practice to the urban theories of sociology, social geography and critical social theory.

My initial research proposal was based on the assumption that the change to a 'market economy' from an 'economy of shortage'<sup>1</sup> would herald the appearance of a wider range of consumer goods (both in terms of quantity and quality). Basing my initial hypothesis on the theorisation of consumerism in market economies (in the 'west'), I assumed that one of the ways in which Russian citizens would meaningfully engage with the 'market economy' was through familiar patterns of identity formation through consumption. Muscovites' lust for jeans, Marlboros and Coca Cola was part of the taken-for-granted background of our understandings of the Soviet Union. By examining who bought what, where, when, why and how, I hoped to be able to extrapolate from this information to a wider interpretation of changing identities, aspirations and understandings. The inapplicability of this model of consumerism to post-Soviet consumption is a theme that runs through this thesis.

Instead, I have retained the notion of consumption, but applied it to a much broader field than that of commodities. Defining consumption as a process at the interface

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<sup>1</sup> See Kornai 1980 for a discussion of the 'economy of shortage'.

between the individual and his/her body and all that stands outside that body, I suggest that being in and moving around the city constitutes a process of consuming different kinds of meaning-filled spaces. This movement is the product of individual intentions, which are necessarily encouraged or constrained by the presence or absence of socially defined projects of production, consumption and reproduction. The city is constituted by environments that may be intimate, familiar or unknown. It is a nest of 'man-made' environments, whose meanings are constructed by urban inhabitants as they interpret the physicality of the city through the lens of social experience. In contemporary Moscow, these spaces are changing, and it is by moving through the city that this change is experienced at a fundamental perceptual and conceptual level.

This thesis is not a study of a bounded urban community, because Muscovites do not live in geographically bounded communities. Instead, they live in a city peopled by spatially differentiated relations of kinship, production and consumption, anonymity, patronage and friendship. These relationships are consumed as people move from one socio-spatial environment to another. Thus movement through the city's spaces and places constitutes movements between different social environments, where people simultaneously interact with one another in distinctive ways and construct and maintain different identities, appropriate to those interactions. As they move through different socio-spatial environments, they move in to and out of relations of relative autonomy, dependence, dominance and subordination. If urban identities are 'fractured', this is a product of the movement and change that characterises urban living.

Although I have incorporated urban theories developed in disciplines outside of mainstream anthropology, this thesis is based on the anthropological premise that understanding any social environment requires intimate participation in everyday life. This project is aimed at collapsing the dichotomy between structure and agency, by attending to the lived meanings of structural forces. I am concerned with elucidating the ways in which meaning is constructed through experience, practice and interaction with other social actors. I suggest that paying attention to the different ways in which Muscovites engage with others in different socio-spatial environments reflects moments of resistance and complicity as they encounter the new phenomena

of the Market. Welding urban theories drawn from sociology and social geography to anthropological practice, I hope to make some contribution to urban anthropology.

### **The temporal framework**

The fieldwork on which this dissertation is based was conducted in Moscow between August 1992 and July 1993, a period characterised by substantial social change, as political and economic reforms were taking effect. This period of initial fieldwork was complemented by subsequent trips to the FSU.<sup>2</sup> In the course of these subsequent trips, I visited Nizhni Novgorod (November to December 1993, January 1994 and May 1995), Stavropol and Tver (May to August 1994), Voronezh and Belgorod oblasts (October to November 1994 and May to June 1995). Experience gained in provincial settings has enabled me to compare experience in Moscow with experience elsewhere; re-visiting the FSU through 1994 and 1995 has given me a longer temporal perspective and insights into the further direction and depth of social change. Where fruitful, use will be made of this additional data.

Conducting a time-bound piece of fieldwork in a situation of drastic social change has specific methodological and theoretical implications. Methodologically, the fieldwork was characterised by a relative absence of consistent local understandings and explanations. Many of my questions were answered with expressions of ignorance, ie, "I don't know. No one knows." Further the explanations offered by pundits and politicians are often disbelieved. The time-frame of this fieldwork was one of liminal uncertainty, where 'traditional', Soviet era, beliefs and practices were being rapidly eroded and where new beliefs and practices had yet to become established. If subsequent visits have revealed a certain accommodation to uncertainty, the period of my initial fieldwork was one in which uncertainty was the cause of much suffering, incomprehension, doubt and a sense of betrayal. One of the major causes of these negative reactions to reforms was high inflation which was ranging between 9% (August 1992) and 26% (November 1992) per month.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> FSU: Former Soviet Union

<sup>3</sup> See Inflation tables in Chapter 5.

more importantly the cause of insecurity as incomes and prices became wildly unpredictable from one month to the next. This can only be fully appreciated against the background of a relatively stable relationship between incomes and prices throughout most of people's lives prior to January 1992.

Further, the period of my fieldwork is the product of other times, some real and some imagined, whose influences are experienced in diverse ways. The importance of Moscow in Russian history, means that the past is constantly being imported into the present. This was evidenced by both the spatial continuity of significant locations (eg, the Kremlin), by fond references to 'old' or 'real' Moscow, by the imprint of different historical periods embodied in the city's architecture. Dramatic social change emphasises temporality: people draw comparisons between an imagined pre-revolutionary Moscow, the rosified Moscow of the 1970s, and the schizophrenia<sup>4</sup> of the contemporary city. These various influences of the imagined past impinge on the meanings of the present.

### **Places, paths and spaces**

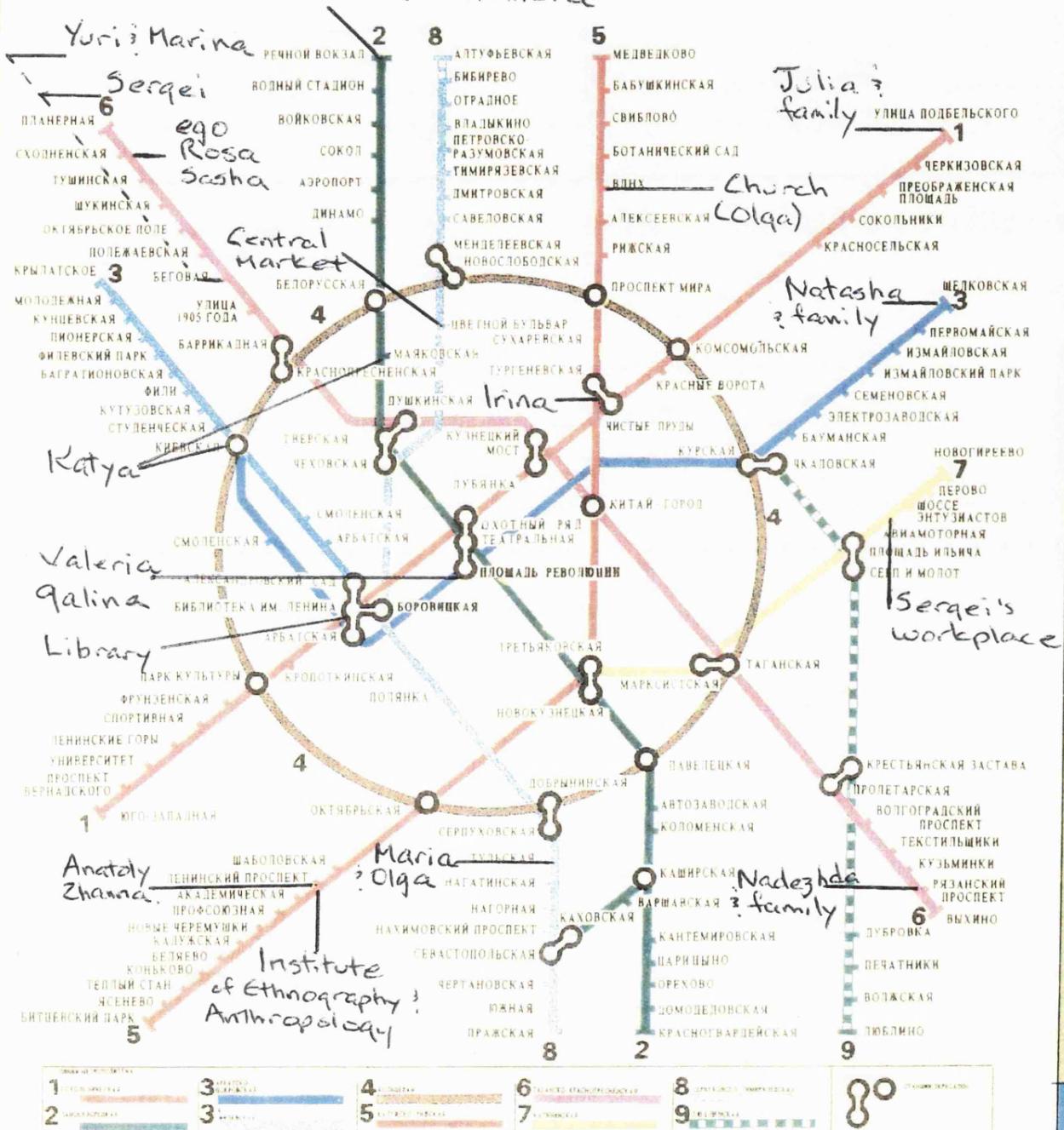
It is more than usually difficult to define the geographical parameters of my fieldwork. Working in a large city with close to nine million inhabitants means that I cannot refer to my field site as 'Moscow'. Although I would have liked to limit my fieldwork community to a bounded social unit, for example, the residents of a housing block or neighbourhood or the workers in an enterprise, this was not achieved for reasons given below. My 'informants' lived in scattered locations throughout the city, yet there are areas I have never visited. The accompanying map indicates my frequent ports of call, and the routes I regularly travelled between them. Thus, the specific nature of my 'fieldwork site' is more a series of paths and places throughout the city, defined by the people I knew, rather than by some more local or geographic criteria. This is not however unusual for Muscovites. Most of my informants also live in paths and places in the city, defined by the dispersed locations of home, work, family and friends.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a common evaluation of contemporary Moscow. As a space it is referred to as a madhouse ('sumashedshie dom'), and the quality of urban experience described as schizophrenia ('skitsofreni').

# МОСКОВСКИЙ МЕТРОПОЛИТЕН

Vladimir ? Alexandra



## Новые названия станций:

Горьковская — Тверская  
 Проспект Мариса — Охотный ряд  
 Площадь Свердлова — Театральная  
 Калининская — Александровский сад  
 Дзержинская — Лубянка

Площадь Ногина — Китай-город  
 Кировская — Чистые пруды  
 Колхозная — Сухаревская  
 Щербаковская — Алексеевская  
 Ленино — Царицыно

----- : Suburban Electric Train



## **Conceptualising Moscow**

Further, it is impossible to conceptually bound my fieldwork site, as the city is the product of a variety of spatial, temporal, cognitive and affective factors. It is the lived in city of paths and places, and the conceptualised capital city of the contemporary Russian Federation, as well as the capital city of the former USSR. It is a Russian city in the sense of being the heart of a Russia not defined by geo-political boundaries, but by mystical attachments to the motherland ('rodina-mat'), and to imagined people, traditions, culture and religion. It may be referred to in terms of the 'third Rome', and as the crime capital of the world, depending on the context of the conversation. All of these diverse spatial identities infect the meaning of Moscow and the connotations of the kind of place it is. If modern ethnographers increasingly acknowledge the fallacy of boundedness of even remote rural communities, this fallacy is all the more apparent in a capital city of world importance. The supra-city significance of Moscow is both recognised and experienced as people make explicit use of a comparative perspective in conceptualising the city. Moscow is characterised as much by the places it is not, as it is by its own contained qualities. It is both centre and pinnacle of indigenous nation-state geography and culture, a space towards which the rural and urban provincial gaze with longing. As a symbol of pre-revolutionary Russia, the USSR, and the contemporary Russian Federation it stands in opposition to an imagined 'west'. It is 'concentric', 'feminine', and 'Russian' in comparison to the 'square', 'masculine' and 'European' St Petersburg.

## **The social framework**

The 'informants' who informed the development of this dissertation can be distinguished by degrees of proximity. First and foremost are my close informants; second, there are the members of my close informants' social networks, whom I met from time to time; third, there are all the anonymous faces of people in the streets, on the Metro or in the shops.

## Close informants

In fact, these were not informants in the traditional sense of the word, they were my friends. I had no desire to define my research community before I arrived, as I knew that I had insufficient information at my disposal to make such a choice. Consequently, when I arrived I was open to whatever possibilities presented themselves. Although I had expressed the desire to work in a smaller city, my research visa was only valid for the Moscow area. If I later learned that this could have easily been changed, none of my early contacts showed any enthusiasm for assisting me to find a field site elsewhere. There are two reasons for this: first, my early contacts wanted me to stay in Moscow in order to be around to protect me from what they see as the dangers of being a foreigner alone in the FSU. Secondly, they wanted me to stay in order to exploit the ill-defined benefits of having a 'foreign' acquaintance. Rightly or wrongly, I allowed these pressures to determine my decision to remain in Moscow. With the benefits of hindsight and of my experiences elsewhere in the FSU, this was perhaps not ill-advised. The depth of change in Moscow in 1992-1993 was undoubtedly stronger than elsewhere in the FSU (with the exception of St Petersburg). The physical fabric of the city was changing on a daily basis as new markets, private shops and kiosks sprouted like mushrooms after rain. The havoc wrought by inflation combined with changes in the value and meaning of production and consumption to make social change the topic of daily concern.

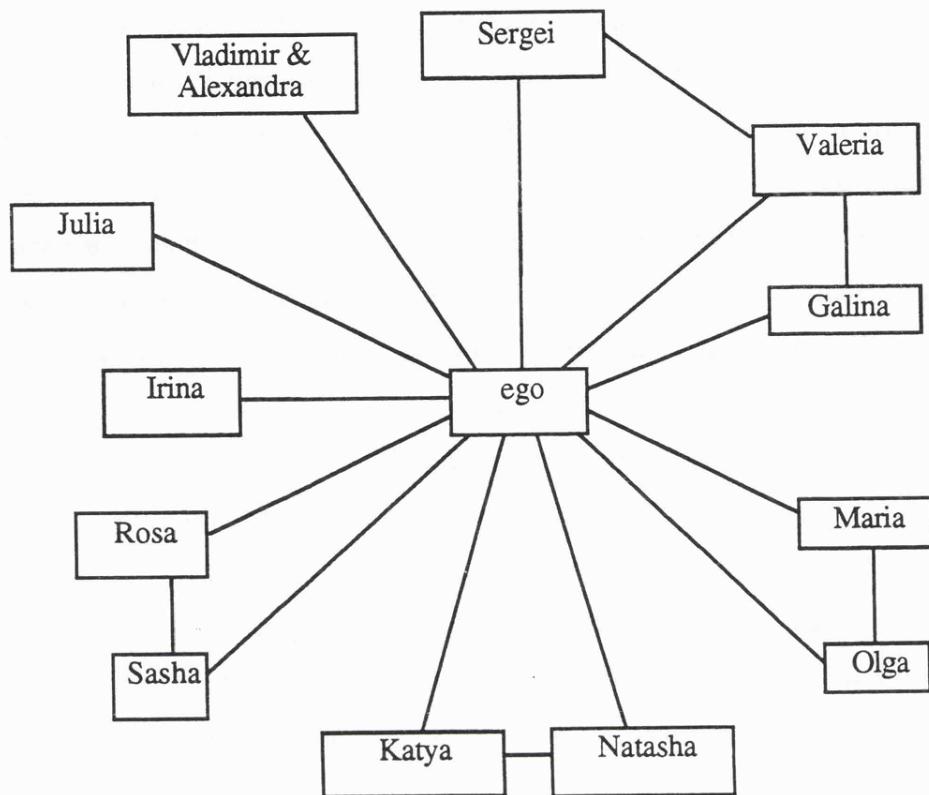
My 'close informants' were self-selecting to some degree. They were people I happened to meet, who seemed to be interested enough in me to exchange telephone numbers and to pursue further contact. As I could see no reason to disturb this process with fallacious notions of the boundedness of social universes, I allowed this self-selection to establish the nature of my fieldwork. There was also a practical aspect to the process of self-selection. The people I saw most frequently, that is, most of my close informants, were people whose time was not severely determined by the demands of full time employment, as I needed to know people whom I could visit during the day as well as evenings and weekends. This does affect the nature of my research, as these 'close informants' do not represent anything like a representative cross-section of Muscovites. Four were pensioners, two were young

women at home with a small babies, four were 'self-employed': three in a variety of part-time occupations connected to the arts, and one was a young entrepreneur engaged in 'business'; the remaining three were in full time employment at the beginning of my fieldwork, although with considerable flexibility as to actual attendance at the work place. A few of these informants knew each other, as can be seen from the diagram below. If the structure of my social universe owes more to chance than determination, this is consistent with the nature of urban social processes. Knowing people who don't know each other is one of the most salient characteristics of urban sociality. Through each of these informants I gained access to at least a portion of their social networks, to varying degrees. Again, I do not think that this is problematic, as degrees of familiarity and intimacy characterise most social universes, all the more so in cities.

In the following pages, I give brief descriptions of my closest friends and informants. These are neither formal life histories, nor descriptions of their socio-structural roles, but reflect critical features of their self-construction. As the remainder of this thesis is largely concerned with description and analysis of spaces and places, it is important for the reader to be at least partly familiar with the influences on the social lens through which I learned to interpret the city.

Diagram 1.1

## Network of Close Informants



Lines between boxes indicate that people were known to one another.

## 1. *Sergei*

Sergei was a 50 year old man, originally from Georgia although of Armenian nationality. I met Sergei whilst staying with Valeria (see below) at the beginning of my fieldwork. The two had met many years previously as his best friend's aunt Lisa, had been a close friend of Valeria's. Lisa had emigrated to Vienna, but was fondly remembered by Sergei, Valeria and Vladimir (see Sergei's network diagram), as a person with intelligence and sensibility, who had had the good fortune to emigrate successfully. Sergei was a scientist, who was pursuing his research interests in a semi-independent capacity at a Moscow research institute. In return for a very small salary, he was allowed considerable independence, and a small work space. Much of the equipment he was using he had acquired independently of the

research institute, through complex exchanges with former colleagues. He was fiercely anti-communist, pro-west (ie, pro-America), and was constantly concerned that I understand the FSU from his perspective. He had been married twice, and had two daughters by his second marriage: one 'of his own' and one he had 'adopted', who was the daughter of his second wife. He had been living in Moscow since the age of 25, having originally come to Moscow as a post-graduate student at Moscow State University. Unusually, he had lived 'all over Moscow' for awhile after finishing his studies, looking for employment. As this proved impossible without a permanent residence permit ('postoyannaya propiska'<sup>5</sup>) he eventually married a Muscovite in a marriage of convenience in order to acquire the coveted Moscow propiska, and the right to work in the capital. He divorced this wife after two years and eventually married his second wife, a teacher, and whose father was a well-connected Armenian. This second marriage broke down 'because of conflicts with his wife's parents' over the importance of conforming to Soviet practices in order to access Soviet era privileges (flat in the centre, good wages, a car, a dacha, and annual holidays in the south). He had then bought a cooperative flat in a suburb of Moscow with money borrowed from relatives. Five years before my arrival, he had sold this flat and bought a one-roomed cooperative flat on the south western outskirts of Moscow. Sergei was a very close friend, whom I met on an almost daily basis. Without his constant friendship, assistance and unconditional support, my fieldwork would have been even more difficult.

## 2. *Valeria*

Valeria was a woman in her sixties, and Azerbaijani both by original residence and by nationality. I met Valeria through someone I had met in London, who found me temporary accommodation in her flat. She was acquainted with Sergei as noted above and with my next informant Galina. She had worked as a composer, and was still composing music (mostly children's songs), as well as giving piano concerts at schools, children's homes and other locations. She was, or had been, an extremely

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<sup>5</sup> The 'propiska' system was initially designed to control the growth of large cities (especially Moscow). The first internal passport system was introduced in December 1932 (Shimotomai 1991:67-68). Although the system has been less than successful in controlling urban population growth, it has been an important means of controlling internal mobility. As a residential 'propiska' is required for access to employment, housing, education, health care etc., only those on the very margins of society remained hidden from bureaucratic monitoring of their whereabouts, residence, place of employment, etc.

privileged member of Soviet society, with a relatively high income, prestigious housing and relative autonomy. Politically, she was a not uncommon mix of anti-Soviet fervour (epitomised by memories of her father's arrest and imprisonment in the 1930's), mixed with nostalgia for a more stable recent past in which she had enjoyed secure privilege. She had moved to Moscow in her twenties to attend the Music Conservatory, and had stayed, working in various capacities as a composer, often for films. She had been disastrously married once, and regretted the absence of children (she became infertile as the result of a careless abortion). Although she had 'adopted' a girl from an orphanage, this had not been successful and the child had 'run off with some woman claiming to be her relative'. Valeria attributed the child's 'erratic behaviour' to her 'bad genes'. She lived in an expensively furnished, large, two roomed flat in the Dom Kompositorov (House of Composers) in a very prestigious central location. During the period of my fieldwork, Valeria was sometimes still giving piano concerts for very small fees, or renting her flat for dollars, or lending money at high rates of interest to 'friends' in business. She also had an unusually wide circle of friends and acquaintances, mostly in the performing arts (music and theatre). Valeria was also a very close friend, always cheerful, and always happy to spend an afternoon telling me 'what was wrong with the Russians'. I saw Valeria at least once a week.

### 3. *Galina*

Galina was also a woman in her sixties, the widow of a composer, and a Muscovite born and bred. Indeed she proudly showed me the flat where she had grown up, emphasising its (central) location and describing its 'high ceilings' (both signs of prestige). I met her through Valeria as she lived in the same Dom Kompositorov. I lived with her for two weeks after staying with Valeria, and before I moved into a flat of my own. Although she claimed to be a historian by profession, her accounts of her life indicated that her actual occupation had been that of a wife of a well-known Soviet composer. Galina also exhibited contradictory political inclinations although she was far more nostalgic about the certainties and benefits of Soviet era stability than Valeria. She could be eloquent on the 'stupidities' ('glupostie') of the Soviet system , but really came into her own furiously expounding the stupidities of the current leadership. She had no children. Again she had been relatively privileged, with a 'high' pension, some savings, and a prestigious flat in the Dom

Kompositorov. She claimed that the falling value of both pension and savings were making her a pauper, and that she could only foresee salvation in selling some of her valuable household possessions (jewellery, china, furniture). Galina was very fond of me, always chatty, if always complaining, and had a good sense of humour. She was always home and grateful for a visit as she rarely went out, due to a 'bad heart'. I visited Galina about once a week.

#### 4. *Maria*

Maria was a young women in her early thirties, who was an acquaintance of a Russianist I know in the UK. I rang her and introduced myself; we met and swiftly became friends. By profession she was a musicologist, who had written a dissertation on Russian folk music and songs. Originally from Minsk in Belorussia, she had also come to Moscow to study at the Conservatory in her twenties. After finishing her dissertation (about a year before I met her), she had been engaged in a variety of part-time activities. She was earning some money, teaching music to children two afternoons a week, and was given a small sum for singing in the choir of a church one or more times a week. She did occasional training workshops in Russian folk music techniques and had good contacts with Polish folk musicologists, whom she visited regularly; these workshops and visits often gave her access to small quantities of hard currency, which she spent sparingly. She was sometimes positive about current reforms as they gave her improved access to the wider world (ie, Polish friends, myself etc.) She thought of herself as highly spiritual, always interpreting the world in terms of 'struggles for power' on some unseen 'astral' plane, or in terms of astrological determinants. On the other hand, she was as obsessed with inflation as everyone else, and was quick to make more material comparisons between her own standard of living and that of various others. Sveta had many acquaintances, but her friendships were often short-lived, destroyed by suspicions of betrayal. Many of my secondary informants were met through Maria, and her support for me was reliable if sometimes jealously proprietorial. After I left Moscow, she became pregnant, and was disappointed when the child's father failed to offer to marry her. She has since returned to live with her mother in Minsk, and now has a baby daughter. I met Maria at least twice a week, sometimes more often, and we spent a week together in Poland.

## 5. *Olga*

Olga was a woman in her seventies, of Jewish 'nationality', and Maria's landlady. Maria rented a room in her three roomed flat near Tulskaya Metro station, for a very small rent (200 roubles a month initially). She had worked in the construction industry and was proud to inform me that she had acquired her large flat in a relatively central location, 'because she had built it with her own hands' (ie, she had been a hod carrier during construction). She was an extremely intelligent old woman, with a truly wicked sense of the absurd and often regaled me with her philosophies about 'socialism, communism and idiotism'. I spent many afternoons sitting in her kitchen, with or without Maria, being fed borscht, smetana or small dishes of cranberries which would give me 'vitamins'. She spent considerable energy throughout the year in preparations for the garden at her dacha, where she grew fruit and vegetables. All containers were saved to plant seedlings, egg shells and tea leaves were carefully washed and dried; she was rightly proud of being almost self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables, of the quality of her salted cucumbers, and of her fruit flavoured vodkas. She and Maria had an almost kin-like relationship, and they were heavily inter-dependent although Maria sometimes resented the old woman's interference in her personal and social affairs. Indeed, Maria moved out shortly after I left as Olga had been telephoning the mother of the father of Maria's baby to ask her to put pressure on her son to 'do the right thing'. Olga was a widow, but said that her husband had been violent and a heavy drinker. Her relations with her only son were strained because of conflicts with her 'grasping' daughter-in-law. She often cried as she related stories of their refusal to help her in the dacha; she said that without the help of Maria and her friends, she would be unable to carry on with the dacha. As a Jew, she said that she had always suffered from discrimination, and claimed that people rarely stood up to give her a seat on the Metro because of her Jewishness.<sup>6</sup> I saw Olga at least once a week.

## 6. *Natasha*

Natasha is an ethnographer, whom I had met when she visited London before I went to Russia. She was one of two initial contacts, and met me when I arrived. She was married to Igor, a nuclear physicist, and had a daughter Anna who was a

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of anti-semitism in Moscow see Brym and Degtyarev 1993.

student. Her mother Elena lived close by. I lived with this family for three weeks when I first arrived, in their two roomed cooperative flat on the northeastern edge of Moscow. Natasha was proud of being a born and bred member of the Moscow intelligentsia. Like many members of the Moscow intelligentsia, she had stood on the barricades during the 1991 putsch, but felt profoundly betrayed by subsequent developments. I had a strained relationship with Natasha, although she seemed to feel that we shared common values, intellectual interests and manners, based on a shared astrological sign and a shared affinity to the 'south' (meaning liking spicy food, the sun, and having a 'passionate' nature'). However I was extremely fond of her family, and was always warmly welcomed and reprimanded for not visiting more often. Through Natasha I met other people at the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology, although she was often critical of her colleagues, with the exception of her only friend Katya. I visited Natasha and her family about once a fortnight, but felt uncomfortable about using an 'ethnographer' as an informant, although she would often feed me with insights that she thought were significant. These inevitably referred to the 'real' Moscow/Russia', which for her, was distinctly pre-Soviet. She eventually recovered from her early depression, and became more confident, even impulsive. I remained however somewhat fearful of being infected by her perpetual anxiety.

## 7. *Katya*

Katya was Natasha's best friend and also an ethnographer, working in the Siberian section of the Institute. She had come from her home in Briansk to Moscow in her twenties to study at Moscow State University and had stayed. She was in her late forties, kind, shy, but always willing to accompany me to eg, a pro-communist demonstration (none of my other informants would come with me). Politically, she was more inclined than others to claim that there had been good things about communism. She often referred to the shared values of communism and christianity, and would engage in political discussions with complete disregard for the unfashionable nature of her views. Whilst watching the results of the April 1993 referendum on the television in her flat, we drank champagne and toasted democracy and communism. When I first met Katya, she was living in a communal flat in a beautiful big old house in a square made famous in the opening scenes of Bulgakov's 'Master and Margarita' ('Patriarshkie Prudie'). This flat was in an

extreme state of disrepair, and her small room reflected her own disdain for tidiness. She eventually moved into an extremely prestigious address in the building which houses the Hotel Ukraine, where she quickly created the same chaos that had characterised her room in the communal flat. Although she had not been blessed with traditional good looks, she seemed to have had a vibrant if tragic romantic career, which she eventually became very keen on sharing with me. I saw Katya about once a week, and through her met her sister, her sister's husband, and his mother on a brief trip we made together to Briansk.

#### 8. *Rosa*

Rosa was my neighbour and lived across the hall from me. She was in her seventies, unwell, and lived with her divorced 40 year old son whom I never met. She was a very 'simple woman' (*prostaya zhenshchina*) by her own description, and had worked 'all her life as a simple labourer'. She had a tiny pension, and found it very difficult to manage; indeed she said that without her son's support, she would be unable to buy enough food. She was lonely and found it difficult to get to the shops when the ground was icy. I often did errands for her, and, apart from her son, was apparently the only person who helped her. She was always absolutely adamant about giving me the right amount of money, down to the last rouble, and would remember a debt for weeks. Whenever I brought her a gift (if I had been away), she would immediately reciprocate with a small return-gift, often with tears of gratitude. Although I saw Rosa almost every day, I would sit with her for awhile about once a fortnight, often just watching the popular Mexican soap operas with her, or discussing the latest antics of our drunken neighbour. She had come from a small provincial town as a young girl, married and had lived in Moscow ever since. Her memories were often confused, and I could never get a full picture of her past, except that her life had been one of suffering and hard work, poorly compensated. She was very frightened about what would happen to her.

#### 9. *Sasha*

Sasha was the 23 year old son of my landlords, married with a small son. He had decided to divorce his wife by the time I left, 'because she was never content, no matter how much money he gave her. She spent it all but there was never any food in the house. She only wanted to 'guliat' (literally go for a walk but meaning to do

nothing constructive'. Sasha had come out of the army two years earlier, where he had trained as a radio operator. He had then 'weighed up his options', decided there was no future in going to work in a factory like his parents, and had set himself up in business. He found someone to advise him and had been engaged in business ever since. Like most young Moscow entrepreneurs, he was engaged in a wide variety of businesses, from currency speculation to internal trade to importing goods from China and Turkey. Unusually, he also had a small workshop where they were making furniture for sale. He was forever impressing on me that 'I had only to ask and he could arrange anything I wanted'. Sasha started to visit me on the pretext of wanting to learn English. However he always seemed to prefer to regale me with stories of his deals and profits, or losses due to deception by business partners. His parents were highly displeased with his activities, which were not 'real work', and he seemed to appreciate having someone to believe him when he said that he worked hard, took risks, didn't spend all his earnings on consumer goods, and was generally honest. Either he or his father would do any repairs that were needed in the flat, always with good humour, sitting in the kitchen drinking tea, smoking and chatting for hours afterwards. Although it was initially his mother who came around to collect the rent, Sasha was the most frequent visitor. His visits were erratic, three times in one week and then a month later. I was very fond of Sasha as he was young enough to feel optimistic about his future.

#### 10. *Irina*

Irina was a woman in her late thirties, an 'artist' who never sold anything, and by far the most eccentric of my close informants. She was forever penniless, living on the margins, unemployed, and enthusiastically trying to ignore her plight. I met Irina through the daughter of a Russian friend who lives in London. Initially she was living in a dacha in Peredelkino, the famous enclave formerly reserved for the literati, for which she paid a very small rent. She was eventually unable to find even this small sum of money and was reduced to sleeping in friends' flats, or in temporary 'squats' with other young marginals. Her appearances in my life were as unpredictable as her disappearances. Frequently she would invite me out to her dacha to drink wine, play in the snow, or visit friends of hers in some derelict building. Occasionally we would go to an exhibition, and once to a cafe where young artists gathered to show off for one another. Originally from the Ukraine, she

had spent all of her adult life on the margins, travelling around the country, trying to be an artist, failing to sell anything, but remaining irrepressibly good humoured.

## 11. *Vladimir and Alexandra*

Vladimir was Sergei's oldest and closest friend. They had originally met whilst studying at Tbilisi University in the 1970s. After university, both had moved to Moscow. Like Sergei, Vladimir then spent about a year looking for work and renting 'corners' in other people's flats, trying to resolve the impossibility of acquiring work without a propiska or a propiska without a job. He also eventually married a Muscovite which resolved this problem, although Vladimir's marriage was not a 'marriage of convenience' like Sergei's. His first wife had died some years previously after a long illness during which he had nursed her, neglecting his own work. (Sergei frequently repeated this point, in order to emphasise his friend's unselfishness.) Trained as a scientist, Vladimir worked in a scientific research institute, whilst also pursuing his real passion which was for painting. Although an abstract artist of considerable talent, both he and Sergei agreed that he had never enjoyed 'success' because he was unwilling to comply with the politics of the 'cultural apparatus'. When I met Vladimir, he had re-married Alexandra and they had a small daughter Svetlana. Vladimir was working two to three 24 hour shifts a week, monitoring the equipment at a seismographic institute. This suited him as it left him considerable free time in which to paint and spend time with his wife and daughter. In March he left his job at the institute because his wages were no longer sufficient to support his family (Alexandra was not working). He found a job in a 'commercial firm' where he was designing logos for tee-shirts; he joked about finally using his artistic talents, but declared that his first responsibility was towards his family. Alexandra was also trained as a scientist, but had given up work to look after their daughter. She was absolutely devoted to this child, who received total attention from both parents. This devotion was however linked to Alexandra's isolation: refusing to take Svetlana on public transport effectively meant that Alexandra was confined to an area within walking distance of their flat. She never complained about this, but clearly required Vladimir's presence to lessen the isolation. Sergei and I visited Vladimir and Alexandra at least once a week, usually spending a whole evening in their kitchen eating, drinking tea and/or vodka, and playing with the baby. Both were extremely hospitable, intelligent, kind, and

seemed to be genuinely concerned with how I was coping. Alexandra in particular was very sympathetic, as she herself found Moscow almost intolerable, although she was a born and bred Muscovite.

## 12. *Julia*

I met Julia and her family as they are distantly related to a Russianist I know in the UK. Julia was a young woman in her mid-twenties, an economist by training; she was not working as she had preferred to stay at home with her young daughter Margarita. Julia was married to Mikhail, who was a manager ('nachalnik') at a state transportation agency. Her mother Lyuba and father Boris lived nearby. This family was perhaps the most traditionally Soviet family that I knew. Her father had been in the military all his life, but had retired at the time of my fieldwork. His wife Lyuba worked in a department store. All were disgusted with current developments in the country which they accounted for in various ways. Where Lyuba and Boris felt that the government was to blame for inflation and the fall in the value of their pensions and wages, Mikhail in particular felt that the problems were due to innate Russian laziness, a preference for drink and a tendency to steal. I visited Julia's immaculate two roomed flat about once a week, played with the baby and listened to her complaints about inflation, and the family's falling fortunes. Simultaneously I was frequently shown their newly acquired consumer goods. This family was by far the most financially secure of all the households I knew, with a large dacha and garden outside Moscow, two cars by the time I left, a plethora of consumer durables and three well-placed family members. Although they were always hospitable, they were always angry and I found their company somewhat trying.

## **Some methodological considerations**

These brief descriptions are intended to demonstrate the distinctive nature of my informants and of my relationships with them. There are a number of critical features.

First, the number of my 'main informants' was defined by the number of households I could visit on a regular basis. Although I met other people through these initial

contacts, I never had the time to establish independent relationships with these secondary contacts. The frequency of visits varied between households, but remained more or less constant for each. In order to sustain a reasonably 'close' relationship, it was necessary not to further reduce the frequency of visits. This is a particular feature of fieldwork in an urban context, in the absence of a geographically bounded community.

Second, my social network was at least as wide and often wider than the social networks of my informants. Moscow is not a city of small neighbourhood communities where everybody knows one another. Although two of my main informants (Natasha and Julia) lived near their mothers, all other acquaintances are dispersed throughout the city. Thus the spatial distanciation between friends limits the number of friendships one can reasonably service. In terms of age, 'class' and ethnicity, my social network was comparatively more diverse than those of most of my informants. As few of my informants knew one another, the maintenance of these relationships required separate visits. I considered the trade off between restricting myself to more in depth intimacy with the social networks of one or two of these main informants, but felt that this would have been methodologically too restricted a view. More importantly, concentration on a single social network would have placed undue demands on the time and attention of its core member. Although I could have conceivably 'shadowed' Sergei or Maria, this would have been a wholly unnatural relationship for them as well as for me. I felt unable to make this kind of demand on people whose lives were undergoing considerable change, requiring comparatively new kinds of activity in order to subsist.

Thirdly, the absence of a face to face community, visible from the anthropologist's veranda, meant that I had no access to the casual knowledge that comes from daily observation, or from overhearing snatches of gossip. Again this is an aspect of urban living that distinguishes it from its more spatially constrained rural counterpart. I also spent considerable time travelling between households. This also is not unusual for Moscow and time spent amongst anonymous others is discussed below. The logistics of sociality in a city without neighbourhoods are excessively

complex, and contribute to a certain 'thinning' of social relationships<sup>7</sup>. Given the time space constraints of the individual body, there is always a choice between seeing a few people often and seeing more people less frequently. Climate, the small size of flats, and the absence of spaces for casual socialising (cafes etc.) all preclude large gatherings.

## Friendship

My relationships were specifically constructed by my informants in terms of friendship. If all of my informants knew that I was listening to them and interested in their views with a view to writing about them, to make this explicit would have been offensive to the nature of friendship. Friendship was the only relationship possible with my informants for a number of reasons:

- i) I had no work-relationships (which need not be relations of friendship),
- ii) There are almost no forums for casual sociality in Moscow, and socialising with people to whom you have not been introduced is almost impossible,
- iii) I visited people in their homes: home visits imply an open relationships of trust, intimacy and therefore of friendship (See Chapters 6 & 7).

Thus the nature of my fieldwork was constrained by the nature of my friendship relations with informants. They were not respondents to my questions but co-conversants, who set the agenda of conversations at least as often as I did. I could not insist that we discuss 'household consumption patterns', or record life histories with a tape recorder without causing offense. As these friendships were necessary not only to the research but also to my social sanity, I could not in all conscience damage them by transforming them into interviewer: interviewee relations. Indeed, when I asked Sergei or Maria, for example, if they thought that one of their friends would be offended if I asked them to keep a consumption diary or to tape record a life history, they always advised me against such action, saying 'no I don't think you should. S/he would be very uncomfortable with you for that and they would not be too happy with me either. Of course they might do it as a favour to you (or to me),

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<sup>7</sup> These are the 'coupling constraints' identified by Hagerstrand and discussed by Giddens (1984: 113-114).

but I think they would be offended'. The ideals of friendship are more fully discussed in Chapter 7.

The equal relations that I enjoyed with my 'informants' constituted both an advantage and a disadvantage. If 'equal relations' make it unacceptable for the researcher to dominate the agenda, I would suggest that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Contemporary critiques of 'traditional ethnography' address the ways in which 'writing culture' reflects the explicit or implicit power relations between researchers and the communities they study. They recommend first acknowledging the imbalance in power relations and secondly, adopting new techniques for the presentation of fieldwork experience in the production of 'polyvocal texts'. However, it seems clear to me that the advocates of a 'new ethnography' consistently fail to acknowledge the methodological difficulties which attend a new approach. These include the distinction between the analytical aims of researchers and the more prosaic conversational intent of their co-conversants. When informants set the agenda, conversations reflect their daily concerns, and talk wanders freely with no respect for neat anthropological categories. This makes the collection, recording, and subsequent analysis of material far more difficult. A concrete example of this is the quantity of discourse about rising prices. People were understandably obsessed with rising prices, phrased in terms of examples: "Eggs cost 80 roubles for ten last week but cost 140 roubles for ten this week". A large proportion of my informants conversation reflected these concerns. While this is of course significant, constant repetition does not give the researcher any new information. Similarly, an overview of people's opinions on the new political and economic realities could be summed up in one word, 'uzhasno' (literally terrible). This was repeated ad infinitum. On the other hand, dramatic and rapid social change undermines people's ability to formulate an explanation for events. In response to 'why', questions, my informants often preferred to express ignorance, explicitly emphasising the **incomprehensibility** of Russian policy and practice.

In order to overcome, some of the disadvantages associated with respecting my informants rights to set the agenda, I did some formal interviews with shop workers and managers and with local officials in charge of the 'transition to a market economy'. These were always difficult to set up through the barrier of suspicion

that surrounds anyone in their official capacity. Further my friends always explicitly warned me never to believe anything said by anyone in their official capacity. On one occasion, when I went to make an appointment at the local Prefecture, the unusually chatty security guard advised me that I would be better off talking to ordinary people (like himself, or the cloakroom attendant). Indeed interviews with people in their official capacity yielded predictable responses. The association between lies and officialdom contrasts with the association between truth and friendship; although this is of course an idealised opposition in the FSU, I was nevertheless infected by my friends' fear and suspicion of official contact. The strong association between friendship, trust and truth encouraged me to rely more on my friends as informants, and to avoid concentrating on official responses.

### **Social networks**

The diagrams below indicate the known social networks of my main informants. As this is not a 'network study' as such, I have included in the social networks only relationships that were the product of some degree of intention. This includes only people that my informants made specific arrangements to meet either in the home of one or the other, or in a more public context (usually at a Metro station and including a walk together). I exclude colleagues who were never met outside the work context, as well as contacts with official dispensers of goods and services. I met all of these people at one time or another, some of them only once, others more frequently. These meetings were useful for identifying the extent to which the views and experiences of my close informants were shared by others. Obviously, as the friends of my close informants, they presented few surprises. These meetings did however allow me to feel that I could formulate a reasonable reflection of the concerns of an ill-defined portion of the population.

The following diagrams are intended to illustrate the ways in which my sources of information from main informants were complemented by occasional meetings with various members of their social networks. The numbers in brackets represent the average number of times they would meet in the course of a month. The letters refer to different types of relationships.

- K Kin (the type of kin relation is given in brackets: M - mother; F - father;  
 D - daughter)
- F Friend
- C Colleague or ex-colleague
- SP Shared profession
- ST Studied together
- BR Business relation
- IR Instrumental relation (this refers to a patron:client type of relationship)
- SE Shared ethnicity (this sometimes refers to shared original residence in one  
 of the republics of the FSU)
- CR Co-residence (ie, within walking distance of one another)

Diagram 1.2

Sergei's Network

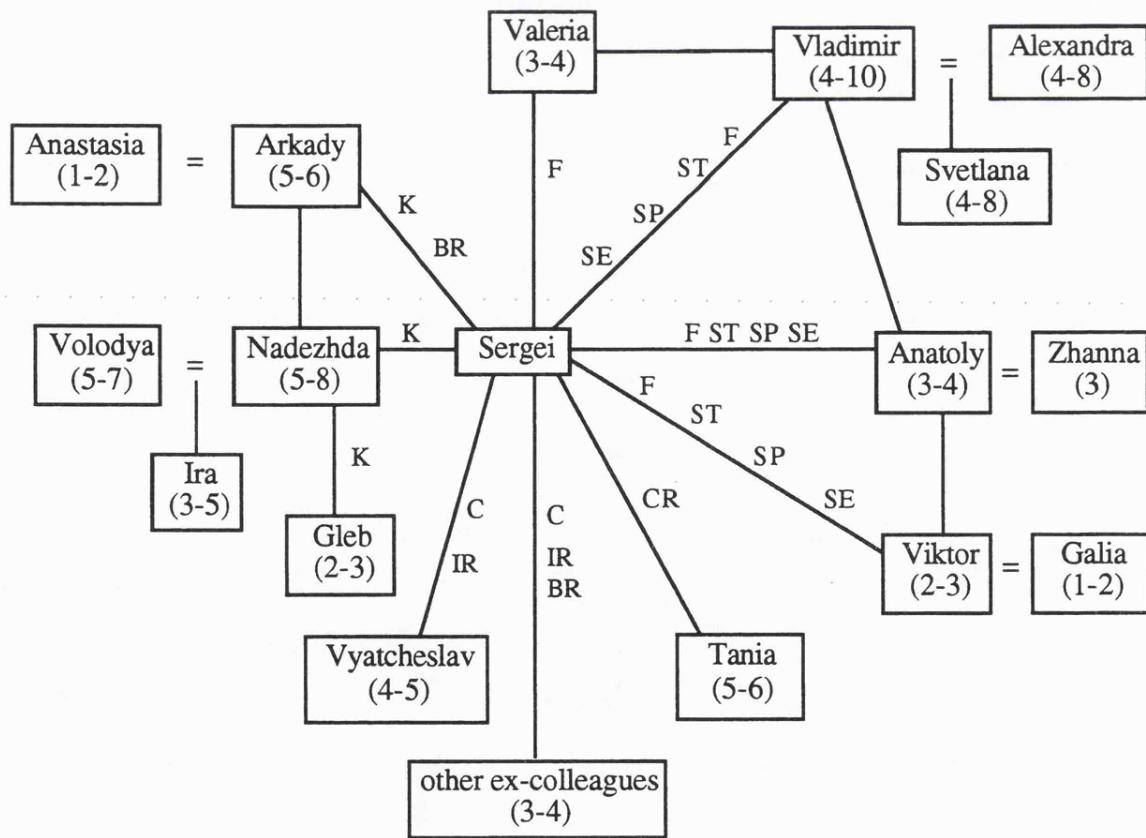


Diagram 1.3

Valeria's Network

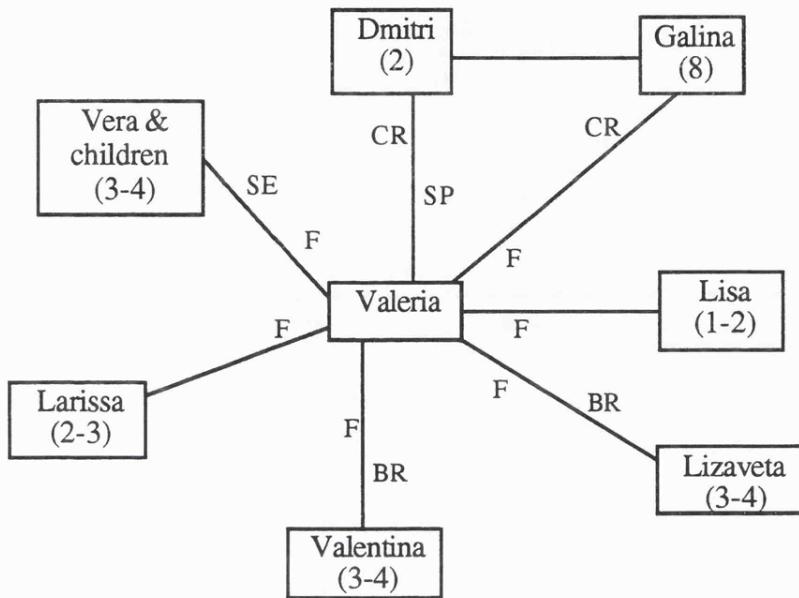


Diagram 1.4

Maria's Network

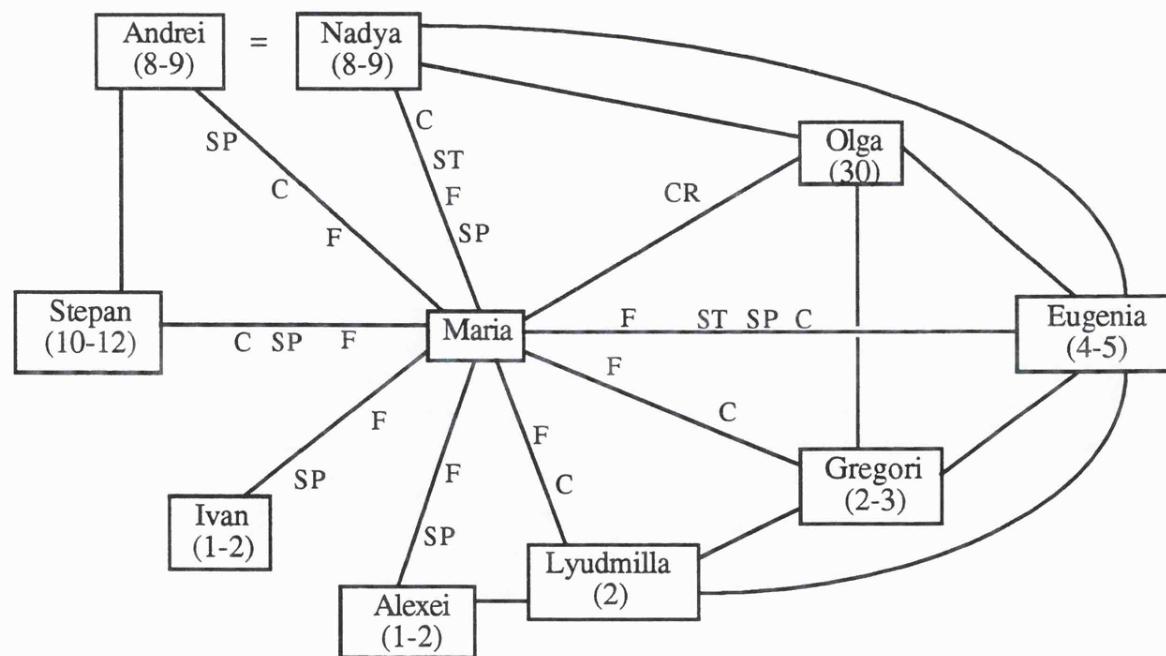


Diagram 1.5

Natasha's Network

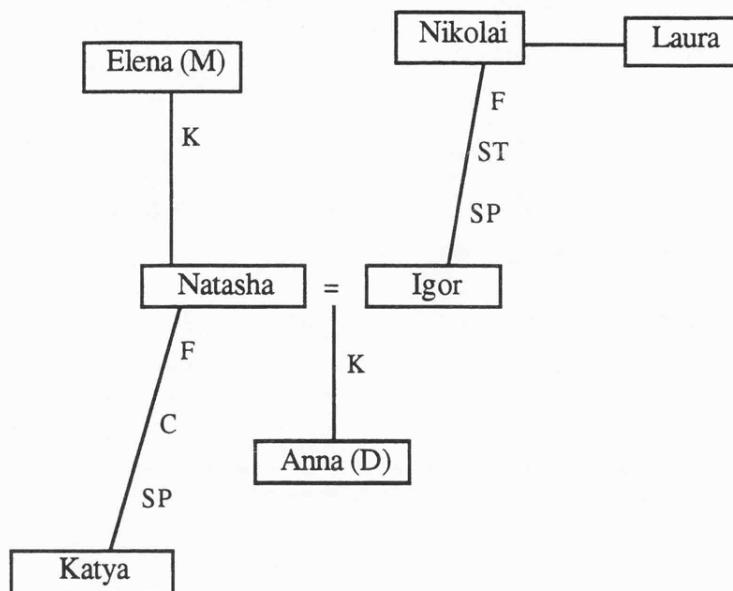
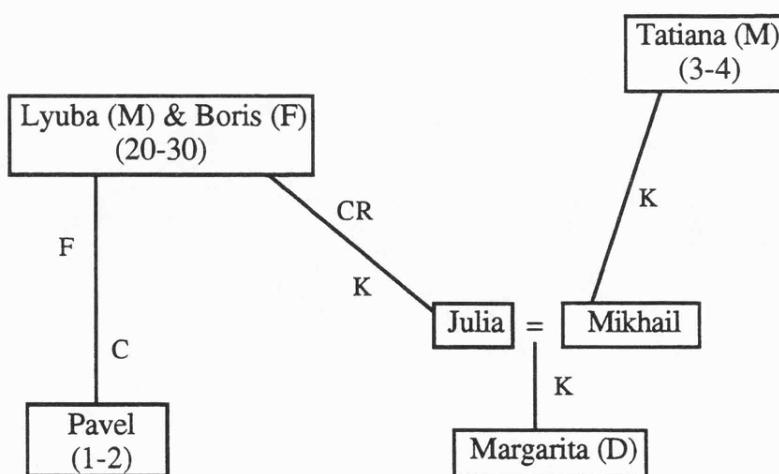


Diagram 1.6

Julia's Network



And all the anonymous others.

Much of my understanding of Moscow during the period 1992-1993 is based on extensive proximity to and observation of anonymous others. Like most of my informants, I spent on average two hours a day on the Metro and perhaps another two hours on the streets, in shops or in other contexts where I knew no one and spoke to no one; the sheer weight of these experiences requires attention. Where I travelled all over the city servicing my friendships, most of my informants also travelled over long distances to and from work, visiting friends or relatives, or searching for goods and services. The problem of dealing with anonymous others requires both methodological and theoretical attention.

Anonymous others yield methodologically curious kinds of information, sensible, emotive but mostly non-linguistic. Their behaviour may be patterned, but not formally so. It may reveal meaning but cannot be 'explained'. The forms of unintended communication between anonymous others include posture, facial expressions, movements, clothes, make-up and hairstyles. Although Bourdieu (1977 and 1990) has alerted us to the importance of attending to the habitus of daily life, the interpretation of these forms of silent communication is necessarily precarious when we are dealing with unknown others.<sup>8</sup> It is however imperative that we address the issues if we are to develop a sound anthropology of the city. To the extent that I was sensitive to differences between a Moscow crowd and a London one, I felt that I could not ignore the barrage of signals of discontent that assailed me on my daily travels. In order to confirm my interpretations of these non-linguistic communications, I would ask friends travelling with me on, for example, the Metro to guess what other travellers did for a living, what they were thinking about, what their lives had been like. Initially unable to place people in terms of 'class or occupation', I eventually learned the subtle codes of representation that mark differences. If I was partly relieved to learn that the facial expression of emotions in Moscow resemble the expressions of emotions familiar to me, I was simultaneously distressed by the overall proportion of negative emotions unwittingly expressed.

From a more theoretical perspective, both the quantity and quality of these

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<sup>8</sup> See discussion of theoretical treatments of anonymous social interactions (Goffman, Milgram, Wolff, Levine Vinson and Wood, and Nash) in Chapter 2.

multitudinous anonymous daily encounters are an important key to understanding both cities in general and ex-Soviet cities in particular. The differences between anonymous or de-personalised relationships and relations of acquaintance and familiarity will be discussed in detail. If my informants were more or less inured to the specific character of Moscow anonymous interactions, their distinctive character seemed to me to cry out for explanation. I suggest that even if these anonymous daily interactions are not usually the subject of conscious deliberations, they nevertheless construct the 'structure of feeling' that is the taken-for granted background of movements through the city. This atmosphere is the product of the emotionally charged actions and expressions of individual members of the population; I suggest that this atmosphere simultaneously causes feelings as unconsciously people react to the moods of unknown others around them. Were it not so negatively charged, this atmosphere might have remained meaningless to a casual observer; as it is, the strength and quality of the atmosphere demands at least an attempt at explanation. In a sense it is the unintended consumption of this emotional soup that constitutes at least some of the explanandum of this thesis.

### **Discourse and Practice**

The data which inform this dissertation are of two structural types: discourse, and the observation of and participation in practice. Here I refer to 'discourse' in its restricted definition, ie, what people actually say. I have no argument with the suggestion that everything constitutes 'discourse'<sup>9</sup>, but simply want to emphasise the distinction between consciously articulated thought and the 'silent' expression of feelings and opinions, or the unconscious ways of being and moving. Where the observation of practice applies to all categories of informants, discourse applies only to the first two (main informants and secondary informants). There is perhaps some what more emphasis on silence and practice than is usual in an anthropological monograph. There are two reasons for this.

First, the proportion of time the urban population spends in anonymous situations is

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<sup>9</sup> This is often attributed to Foucault. Gottdiener (1995:70-71) however suggests that Foucault was clear about the distinction between discursive or ideological factors (eg, legal institutions and sentencing), material factors (the prison as object) and associated practices (the prison regime, social relations etc.) These are separate if inter-related aspects of a wider institutional genus (the legal/penal system).

reflected by the relative weight given to the analysis of anonymous interactions, observed practice, and the interpretation of the animate and inanimate components which constitute the socio-spatial universe. These by definition are not discursive, in the restricted sense of the word.

Secondly, in a situation of drastic social change, there is a relative collapse of ideological or explanatory discursive potential. The demise of official Marxist-Leninist ideology<sup>10</sup> has not yet been replaced by a coherent explanatory paradigm. One of the most frequently heard laments in Moscow is that, "No one knows what's happening or why. No one knows what to do". In response to my explanation of what I wanted to achieve in Moscow, ie, 'understand what is going on from your point of view', I was inevitably told, "How can you, a foreigner, possibly hope to understand what is going on. We ourselves don't understand what's going on ... and anyway, ... 'Russia cannot be understood, you can only believe in her'".

Explanations that **were** offered almost always referred to betrayal, or deception ('obman') by powerful others (politicians, mafia, foreign interests etc.). Convinced that the available official explanation for important contemporary phenomena (eg, inflation) were bound to be lies, my informants often expressed ignorance if pressed for their own explanation. On a more immediate level, explanations for the actions of known others were also often couched in a discourse of deception ('obman').

'Explanation' for various social phenomena constantly refers to the unreliability of articulated explanations. If social actions are theoretically comprehensible by reference to shared values and meanings, the collapse of a common ideology means that people no longer feel secure in their interpretation of the actions of others.

Hence the common reference to deception reflects the relative absence of interpretive potential, based on coherent, shared values and meanings.

In this sense 'discourse' often either takes the form of an explicitly tentative hypothesis or becomes the expression of conflicting values and competing interests. Discourse as simple explanation is almost wholly restricted to personal biographies.

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<sup>10</sup> This does not imply that all social actors 'believed' official Marxist-Leninist explanation. Yet as the idiom of all official explanations of social life, it was also the focus of doubt and disbelief, creating its own more or less coherent discourse of resistance.

Given the complex and disparate nature of my sources of information and the absence of a 'whole' to be explained, I make extensive use of observed practice. This seems methodologically preferable for several reasons.

First, practice is at least directly observable, especially in comparison to the ontological status of statements like 'she did that because she wants power' (a not uncommon explanation for the actions of others).

Second, where 'explanation' is lacking or inadequate, I would argue that it is because meanings have yet to be consolidated. Building on cues from Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Giddens (1984) and Pred (1986, 1990 a & b) on structuration processes, I suggest that meanings are constructed and reproduced through the exercise of both novel and conventional practices. This is not to deny the existence of accompanying thought processes, but to suggest that it is the emergence of novel practical possibilities that generate thinking about what those novel possibilities might mean. If current changes in the FSU must be linked to changes in consciousness before perestroika, the actual changes that have occurred were neither planned nor predicted. Practical and ideological resistance to the pre-1985 Soviet polity can be imported as a partial explanation for the actual practical shape and experience of post-Soviet society. However, as the changes are explicitly referred to as emanating 'from above', the principles which underpin change to a 'Market economy' remain opaque to many members of the population.

Concentrating on practice, I have chosen to base my analysis on interpretation of the time-geographies of my informants. These yield a picture of practical changes taking place in the day to day lives of my informants. Each chapter is an analysis of aspects of meaning of the significant spaces and places in which people find themselves as they pursue a variety of individual and institutional projects. In each case, I attempt to demonstrate that what people feel think and act in significant spaces reflects the articulation between a sometimes rosy past and an always uncertain present. My choice of emphasis on the temporal/spatial configurations of people's lives is enabled by reference to theoretical treatments of urban space, which are discussed in Chapter 2.

The analysis of change in the absence of good baseline studies is perhaps precarious. In order to understand social change in the FSU from the point of view of some of the participants, I have had to rely on their own accounts of the Soviet past. The extent to which these represent a consensus is perhaps debatable. My search for useful urban ethnography of the FSU has so far proved fruitless. If the more sociological treatments of Soviet Russia go some way towards rectifying this absence, they do not have a foundation in practice-based fieldwork experience. Much has been written on the basis of Soviet statistics, both within and without the USSR, but this yields general overall impressions rather than illumination of the minutiae of people's lives. Given that it is the remembered past that is imported into the present in order to give meaning to experience, I do not feel that this is overly problematic. There has been surprisingly little mainstream anthropological interest in the FSU with notable exceptions, especially Caroline Humphrey's work on a collective farm in Buryatia in the 1970s (Humphrey 1983), and her more recent work on barter and the 'Mafia' (Humphrey 1991, see also her treatment of consumption in Moscow forthcoming). This thesis has benefitted from the work of other contemporary PhD students working in the FSU, especially David Anderson, Miriam Hivon and Nikolai S Sorin-Chaikov (forthcoming PhDs dissertations)).

The thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the theories to which this thesis is addressed, and offers the theoretical basis of the field research. Chapter 3 presents a sample of time geographies, based on the major spaces and places in which my informants live their daily lives, and indicating the changing proportions of these spatial orientations. These provide the basis for discussion of these different spaces in the remaining chapters. Chapter 3 is also concerned with the ways in which poorly understood macro-level changes in the economy are affecting the nature of work. The relationship between work and identity in Soviet ideology is complemented by discussion of attitudes to new alternatives, particularly 'trade/commercial activity'. Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 are concerned with 'public space'. Chapter 4.1 discusses 'walking in the city' and includes description of the sights and sounds of centre and periphery (micro-raion), as well as the distinction between a functional movement to or from Metro, shops, or home, and the common leisure activity of going for a walk ('guliat'). Chapter 4.2 is concerned with the practices and meanings of reliance on public transport. Travelling on the Metro is a daily

occurrence for most Muscovites and is the occasion for intimacy with unknown others. These two chapters constitute a reflection of the background, taken-for-granted, practice based knowledge on which urban experience is formed. As a social space, Moscow is constituted by its population who collectively express the mood of the city in all its contradictions. It is largely in 'public spaces' that this knowledge is formulated. Chapter 5 discusses changes in the meaning of 'shopping' as this moves from a logic of shortage to a logic of inflation. The interactive social relations between buyers and sellers is discussed in terms of their contribution to the meaning of consumption, and the ways in which these reflect wider economic structures. Chapter 6 moves from the public world to the private world of the self-contained household flat. Discussion of perennial housing shortages, and relatively uniform construction and layout, combine with descriptions of the ways in which interior spaces are personalised through the displays of objects and the relations between them. The meanings of distinctive interior spaces (rooms) is also discussed. Chapter 7 describes the ways in which interior spaces are made private by association with particular kinds of social relationships, particularly kinship and friendship. The interplay between space and sociality is discussed in terms of private space commensality, especially the role of vodka consumption as a symbol of intimacy. Chapter 8 draws together some of the theoretical issues raised in Chapter 2 and interwoven throughout the thesis.

## Chapter 2

### Contemporary Russian Urban Culture The Construction of a Theoretical Framework

In order to construct a theoretical framework for understanding post-Soviet urbanism, we need to take into account the simultaneous operation of changes in the principles and practices of macro-level forces and the micro-level interpretations of social actors. If we are to address the process by which the meanings of the post-Soviet city are constructed, we need to understand the ways in which people conceptualise and interact with the urban environment. This process is forefronted in a period of intense social change as new phenomena are interpreted according to existing paradigms, which are themselves then changed by collision with new interests. This is a practical process of meaning construction initiated at the level of the body, which sees new phenomena, feels fear or curiosity, hears the opinions of others and slowly formulates partial and contingent explanations for those phenomena.

Given the distinctive nature of post-Soviet urban culture, I have ventured outside the paradigms more familiar to anthropology in search of a theoretical framework that would help me make sense of my fieldwork experience. Data drawn from a distinctive ie, urban context, has a number of specific characteristics which differentiate it from the more usual anthropological matter. These notions were introduced in Chapter 1 and include:

- i) the ambiguous relation between the social and geographical universes of urban social actors;
- ii) the distinctive nature of urban relationships (kinship, friendship, acquaintance, work relationships, and anonymous relationships);
- iii) the nature of my informants' social networks (small but geographically widespread throughout the city, with little inter-connectedness);
- iv) the relatively high quantity of anonymous interactions;
- v) the fractured and uncertain nature of social identity.

Further, data collected during a period of intense social change also demonstrates specific characteristics. Values and ideas are in turmoil, creating social relations that are characterised by mistrust and uncertainty. Novel opportunities, experiences and practices appear, which are incomprehensible by reference to existing cognitive or evaluative paradigms. This creates a higher than usual preponderance of contradictory, competing or inconsistent explanations; these are often couched in expressions of ignorance, anger or frustration. Social relations become sodden with mistrust, reflecting the feeling that the rules of the game have been changed without the consent of the majority of the population. The experience of rapid and ill-understood social change further reduces the role of ideologically sound discourse, as the 'shared social universe' is reduced to the consensus that Moscow is a madhouse ('sumashedshie dom'), where chaos ('khaos') reigns.

Contemporary Moscow is in the throes of transition, with contradictory social forces competing for dominance at different levels and with different weapons. This transition is of a fundamentally original type, as the overall shape and direction of change from Soviet to post-communist polity takes effect. There is an ample literature on urban social change but we shall see that its utility is more heuristic than explanatory. The well-documented urban transformations via merchant capitalism, industrialisation, rural-urban migration and the various capitalisms of the 20th century furnish us with tools and devices for examining the transformation of contemporary Moscow. However, it is important to stress that the demise of Soviet-era state ownership and central planning and the advent of capitalism and free market economics is a wholly unique phenomenon in the history of urban transformations. 'Capitalism' and 'free market economics' in contemporary Russia may resemble familiar brands of capital and free market economics, **but are not mirror images**. The uniqueness of the Soviet past reinforces the distinctiveness of the post-Soviet present. Reference to theoretical literature which deals with the western models of transition to modernity and post-modernity equips us with heuristic devices for examining the Russian present. The more ethnographic chapters will demonstrate that the 'penetration of capitalism' and free market economics in late 20th century Russia is both like and unlike the development of similar processes in western cities.

## The Classic Theorists

My search has ranged over treatments of 'space' and of 'urbanism' by social scientists of varied disciplines. The distinctions between the early writers in the field reflect both differences in emphasis and more importantly differences in causal determinations. Classical urban theorists focused on three aspects of 19th century cities:

- i) urbanism as socio-spatial process,
- ii) modernism as a cultural complex of beliefs and practices, and
- iii) industrial capitalism as economic system with specific means and relations of production.

If Marx's predecessors and contemporaries were concerned with examining the interplay between the three factors, Marx himself and his ideological successors necessarily forefronted the causal role of industrial capitalism. Writers such as Henry Maine (1870), Tonnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893) were less concerned with the articulation of material determinants (ie, capital), but equally concerned to investigate the inter-dependence of urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation as linked processes. All three detected fundamental shifts in social relations as a consequence of the rational, urbanised modernity of industrial capitalism. This shift was variously defined as one from 'status to contract' (Maine), from 'Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft' (Tonnies) or from 'mechanical to organic solidarity' (Durkheim). Tonnies linked the shift from "the assumption of perfect unity of human wills as an original or natural condition which is preserved in spite of actual separation" (Tonnies 1940:99) to a state in which individuals are "essentially separated in spite of all unifying factors" (1940:74), to the development of commodity exchange, contracts, the universalisation of the cash nexus and the contingent monetarisation of the value of self and other. Durkheim, noting the importance of ever-narrowing specialisations in the division of labour, both appreciated the potential for autonomous interdependence presented by organic solidarity, and feared the inevitable alienation and potential anomie that constantly threaten organic solidarity. Echoing Maine, Durkheim notes "the contract is par excellence the juridical expression of cooperation" (Durkheim 1947:123), which reflects both the increasing

importance of the individual actor and the hidden guarantee provided by society (Durkheim 1947:114). If Maine, Durkheim, and Tonnies assume some form of historical determinism, (if only in the acknowledgement of social transformation as the object of enquiry) the writings of Durkheim in particular emphasise the interplay of contemporaneous forces. Explanatory descriptions of urbanism are preferred to linear examinations of the roots of modern urbanisation.

In contrast, Weber (1958) concentrates on the historical processes that fostered the development of the modern city. Weber's major contribution to our understanding of the city is the insight that modern cities are characterised by their role as market centres, and therefore by the preponderance of commerce and trade as urban activities par excellence. The importance of commerce and trade encourage the development of the cash nexus and the spillage of economic rationalism onto other spheres of urban activity (legal, administrative, social).

This insight was further developed by Simmel in his seminal essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1950). In this essay Simmel addresses the various factors that contribute to the 'metropolitan personality type'. These can be allocated to two main conceptual frameworks.

First, economies based on money and markets, and the attendant rational evaluation and organisation of time and space, creates rational, calculating, economicistic individuals and social relations. According to Simmel, "Money economy and the dominance of intellect are intrinsically connected" (Simmel 1950:49). The pre-eminence of indirect exchange<sup>1</sup> or exchange mediated by the Market, fosters exchange relations that are 'matter of fact, just but hard, calculating, rational, blasé and anonymous'. The predominance of exchange relations in turn creates specific individual personality orientations, which are the "faithful subjective reflection of the completely internalised money economy" (Simmel 1950:52). Thus the specifics of the dominant forms of economic exchange create qualitatively specific personalities and relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Indirect exchange is defined in opposition to direct exchange between producer and consumer; in indirect exchange both producer and consumer only exchange directly with a middleman, whose only interest is in making a profitable (calculated) exchange.

Secondly, Simmel addresses those aspects of the urban personality, which is characterised as a defence against 'too many social contacts'. The quantity and quality of social contacts which characterise life in the modern city, also contribute to the construction of a specific urban personality type.

With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life

(Simmel 1950:48)

These sensory foundations include the

intensification of nervous stimulation, which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of inner and outer stimuli

(Simmel 1950:48)

These fleeting impressions require more mental energy and attention than the repeated and regular impressions of the village resident; this in turn encourages the urbanite to use his brain instead of his emotions, as a defense against emotional stimuli. The density and intensity of social contacts fosters atomisation, a degree of necessary mistrust, or even a "slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion" (ibid:53).

Further these more calculative, exact, quantitative and complex relations need to be ordered in space and time. This creates the impetus for the rationalisation of time-keeping and for efforts to reduce the costly inconvenience of spatial distanciation. Conversely, the rationality and social alienation of metropolitan individuals and relations also creates a space for the free expression of individual creativity and eccentricity. As the division of labour increases, so too does competition between producers, creating more and more diversified goods and services. This diversification in turn encourages both the pursuit of and the tolerance for difference.

The conjunction of money economy and rational intellectualism is echoed by Spengler (1928:67) who notes that: "intellect, geist, esprit is the specific urban form of the understanding making consciousness"; or that "the city is intellect" in resistance to the "feudal powers of blood and tradition" (ibid 1928:72).

What will be of interest to us here is the extent to which these investigations can illuminate urban phenomena in a context that is equally subject to the density and intensity of urban social relations, but one in which the influence of the (capitalist) Market on urban social relations was relatively absent. If Muscovites of pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and current time frames have all had to deal with 'over-stimulation' and 'too many social contacts', it is only Muscovites of the pre-revolutionary and post-perestroika periods who have had to deal with the 'Market'. Weber and Simmel both seem to use the terms 'market' and 'money economy' more or less inter-changeably. I would argue that this is a dangerous conflation which masks distinctive influences. The presence of a 'money economy' in Soviet Moscow (ie, one in which money is prevalent as the universal means of exchange, as a store of value and as a calculative device) was accompanied by the absence of some of the critical features of the 'capitalist market' (money as capital, consumerism, and M:C:M exchanges).<sup>2</sup> Further neither Weber nor Simmel fully acknowledges the restricted contexts in which rational, calculating, economicistic relations prevail, (commodity markets, competition for profits) and which contrast with other more 'social' contexts (kinship, leisure, friendship, etc) within 'capitalist, market-oriented' urban contexts.

### **The Chicago School**

The development of urban theory by the Chicago School was characterised by a more sociologically grounded approach to the study of the city. Eschewing the armchair social theorists' forays into explanations of the broad social forces at play in the long duree of modernisation, members of the Chicago School were concerned with social geography on their doorstep.

However, Simmel's influence on the urban theorists of the Chicago School cannot be underestimated, although the latter were concerned not to confuse urbanism, industrialisation and capitalism (Wirth 1938:148). Wirth's definition of the city as a "relatively large dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (Wirth 1938:148), concentrates attention on the **urban** section of the tri-

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<sup>2</sup> This conflation will be discussed further in the Conclusion in Chapter 8.

partite model.

What characterises the city is the nature of social contacts:

the contacts of the city may indeed be face to face but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental

(Wirth 1938:153)

This fosters reserve, indifference and a 'blasé outlook' as immunisation against the constant onslaught of others. Sophistication, rationality, utilitarian relations, and a more complex division of labour combine with decreasing participation and the delegation of power to create a Durkheimian sense of anomie. On the other hand the heterogeneity of the city encourages tolerance and a relativistic secularism. The density of urban settlements is associated with the emergence of visual stereotypes (Wirth 1938:155).

As a sociologist, Wirth is especially interested in the ways in which cities structure social organisation: the decreased role of kinship and neighbourhood, the increasing role of secondary over primary social contacts,<sup>3</sup> the increased division of labour, and the growth of passive forms of leisure. Wirth also notes the emergence of voluntary groups as expressions of diversified interests, for it is

through voluntary groups that the urbanite expresses and develops his personality, acquires status...

(Wirth 1938:162)

Wirth's development of Simmel's metropolitan personality almost disregards the role of money and markets whilst highlighting the role of dense, heterogeneous urban

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<sup>3</sup> For Wirth, secondary contacts are those impersonal or anonymous social contacts which contrast with the personalised social contacts of kinship, co-residence, etc.

settlement on both individual personality formation and on social relations. We shall however see that Wirth's comments on the **inevitable** emergence of voluntary interest groups and their role in urban identity formation require re-formulation if applied to Soviet-style urbanism.<sup>4</sup> Although Wirth notes that the competition for space encourages the development of both land values and the social, political and economic specialisation of different parts of the city, he omits to specify the interrelationships between capitalism and these land markets. Again the data from the FSU indicates that in the absence of capital, the commoditisation of space or the mobility of the market, either such specialisations fail to emerge, or they emerge as a result of the political manoeuvrings of the planning apparatus.

Similarly, the more 'ecological' approach adopted by Park, Burgess and McKenzie quietly universalises processes and phenomena by reference to the 'metabolism of the city' and its 'natural areas'. Using Chicago as their template, the ecologists suggested that the growth of the central business and administrative district is accompanied by the impoverishment of the immediately surrounding area as developers wait for land values to rise. Moving from the centre in concentric circles, the inner city slums give way to working class areas, which in turn lead to middle class areas which eventually give way to 'upper class suburbs'. (Park et al 1925) They emphasised the spatial aspect of social mobility as improvements in social status are reflected in changing domicile. Hoyt (1939) challenged the concentric view of the city, and suggested that outward urban development followed main lines of transport creating star-shaped cities, rather than spherical ones.

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<sup>4</sup> On the rise of social movements in post-1985, Russia, Butterfield and Sedaitis note that "They are particularly notable considering that most forms of autonomous social expression has been ruthlessly suppressed since the dark days of the Stalinist period". (Butterfield and Sedaitis (Eds.) 1991:1). This is reported to be largely true especially for any politically oriented type of organisation. However, see Chapter 7 for discussion of more informal groupings of friends and kin, which share some if not all of the characteristics usually associated with 'informal, voluntary interest groups'.

Interestingly, although Moscow is a 'concentric city' par excellence, the congruence between class (economic) distinctions and location were almost wholly absent during the Soviet period. We shall see however that the emergence of a housing market is creating distinctively valorised housing areas (see Chapter 6).

### **The Ethnographic Approach**

These holistic overviews of the city as impersonal arenas for the expression of terminal anomie were instrumental in encouraging more closely grained investigations of city life. Excellent monographs on taxi dance halls (Cressey 1932), rooming houses (Zorbaugh 1937), 'sentiment and symbolism' on Beacon Hill (Firey 1945), Italian immigrants (Whyte 1943), or black ghetto dwellers (Liebow 1967; Hannerz 1969) re-discovered thriving communities within the urban social wasteland painted by less ethnographic analysts. The processual mediation between these 'communities' and 'the urban impersonal' is described by Stone (1954) as he observes the transformation of 'impersonal economic exchange relations' into the 'personalised relations between shop-keepers and local customers'. Local shops and cafes are more than the loci of impersonal economic exchange; they are simultaneously the location of meetings, steeped in exchanges of gossip and information. It was these ethnographic treatments of city life that I had hoped to emulate. Optimistically, I proposed to centre my study on some kind of urban community, be this residents of a housing block, estate or neighbourhood, members of a formal or informal voluntary or interest group, users of a local service or facility, or whatever local phenomena provided the appropriate degree of focus. Again we shall see from the ethnography that the absence of residential choice and

mobility provided by a housing market prevents the congruence of geographical and social universes. If this study is not circumscribed by the geographical boundaries of my research community, it is because social life in Moscow does not experience itself in contexts that resemble western notions of formal or informal communities. Social life in Moscow shifts between participation in the intimacy of a small circle of family and friends, in the labour collective at various levels (from the brigade, the workplace, the occupational or professional sector, to the labour collective of the FSU as a whole), and in the familiar anonymity of streets, the Metro and shops.

## **Networks**

The next phase of urban theorisation reflected the growing sophistication of the discipline as it pursued two conceptually different directions. On the one hand, network analyses were developed as a way of tracing actual urban social relations. Network analysts such as Wellman (1973, 1979, and 1985) were instrumental in uncovering the complex weave of social networks as they cross between kinship, friendship, neighbourhood, work, leisure and 'interest groups'. This work was complemented by the notion of networking as work, as Wellman (1985) demonstrates the gendered aspect of the 'division of network labour'. Women's labour creating and maintaining social networks remains largely overlooked although there are significant exceptions (Stack:1983). Network studies seemed to offer a solution to the theoretical difficulties of urban research, by offering an objective methodology for ascertaining exactly who interacts with whom. In practice however, it would seem that network studies tend to become an end in themselves, as the numerical quantity of urban social relations combines with the complexity of

adequately evaluating the relative strength of these relations. Network studies very quickly produce unmanageable quantities of data as the imposition of boundaries between 'primary' and 'secondary' relations stretches and blurs.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

On the other hand some urban researchers turned their attention to impersonal, anonymous secondary relations. Goffman's 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1959) challenged the notion that the silent encounter with unknown others is wholly asocial.

Interaction encompasses more than direct verbal interaction. We advocate a view that interaction is occurring in any social situation in which persons are acting in awareness of others and are continually adjusting their behaviour to the expectations and possible responses of others.

(Karp et al 1991:80)

Goffman saw the urban context as a theatre, where individuals' self-presentation could draw on a repertoire of different appropriate or 'proper' identities. Self-presentation both acknowledges the impossibility of correctly predicting the reactions of unknown others and attempts to attenuate the effects of sharing space with persons unknown. In the city, we can never assume that others share our values or meanings. Behaviour therefore reflects this risk as it is necessary to simultaneously 'doubt and trust' unknown others. Building on Goffman, Milgram (1970) suggests that social action in impersonal contexts reflects conformity to the 'norms of non-involvement', or the 'social contract', preserving ones' own and others right to be left alone. The members of an anonymous crowd cooperate to "minimize involvement and maximize social order" in order to maintain "public privacy" (Milgram 1970:91). Milgram noted that such behaviour is patterned by use of defensive props (newspapers), demeanour and facial expressions (the passive mask or scowl). Wolff's (1973) work on the cooperative behaviour of pedestrians conforming to 'yield distances', was complemented by Levine, Vinson and Wood's

(1973) observations of subway travellers limiting eye contact and preserving maximum distance between bodies. Nash (1975) discovers communities on wheels, as he describes bus culture and the encounters between travellers. These studies indicated that although urban social relations differ substantively from the social relations of the familiar face to face community, 'asociality' is a less than accurate descriptor. The usefulness of Goffman et al for the analysis of much of my ethnographic material will be discussed in Chapters 4.1, 4.1, 5 and 6 in particular.

### **Marxists, neo-Marxists and 'humanist' Marxists**

These closely focused ethnographic studies of urban communities and of patterned public performance that emerged from the interactionists' camp have been complemented by the wider view adopted by Lefebvre, Castells and Harvey.

Whether we like our Marxism vulgarly determinist, structuralist or neo-humanist, the interplay of specifically capitalist economics, politics and ideology is causally linked by these authors to twentieth century urban phenomena. If I want to pay close attention to these theories in particular, it is because we might expect to find a kind of inverted utility for our subsequent analysis of post-Soviet urban data.

Lefebvre (1974) favoured a Marxism tempered by Althusserian 'humanist' influence: his 'capitalism' is economic **and** political **and** ideological. Eschewing vulgar material determinism, he nevertheless casts capitalism in its expanded guise, as the major determinant of urban spatial phenomena. For Lefebvre the political, economic and ideological processes of capitalism not only take place in space but are also constituted by space. Space is:

'a multi-faceted container' (where action takes place),  
land (means of production),  
the object of consumption (housing or access),  
a political instrument (hierarchy of access and control),  
the united space of the nation state or the fractured space of private property, and  
an element in the class struggle.<sup>5</sup>

Further, spatial design itself is political as architectural creativity is funnelled into

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<sup>5</sup> See discussion of Lefebvre in Gottdiener, 1985: 121-136.

elite projects. Yet what most concerns Lefebvre and his followers is the "central contradiction of capitalist space: its pulverisation by the social relations of private property" (Gottdeiner 1985:126). The proliferation of boundaries between privately owned spaces reflects the dominance of exchange values in the construction of urban space in particular. The state may pursue its own interests but mostly acts in the interests of capital, destroying 'free space' and replacing it with the dense, 'instrumental, fragmented space' of the city. Both implicit and explicit in Lefebvre's theory is the notion that non-capitalist (or socialist?) space will signify the end of private property and the state's political domination of space (Lefebvre 1979: 292). Yet elsewhere he acknowledges that as capitalism has transformed social space into abstract space (private property), so state socialism has transformed social space into abstract space through the mechanics of bureaucratic planning (see Lefebvre 1991 original 1974).

According to Lefebvre, the role of the state is to provide the means of collective consumption for the reproduction of labour power, in the absence of willing capital. This complex of 'collective consumption' became the focus for Castells's (1978) analysis of urban socio-spatial politics. Defining the city's role as the collective provision of consumer goods and services for the reproduction of labour, Castells notes the emerging importance of 'consumption classes' (see also Weber 1970 180-183; Veblen 1925). As urban struggles arise between consumption classes, competing for goods, services and space, the role of production classes in the formation of the urban polity dwindles. This struggle imprints itself on the urban landscape as 'housing classes' divide the city into class based neighbourhoods. The diverging interests of home-owner and tenant are played out in distinctive lifestyles and cultures. Yet community interests in the provision of eg, housing, recreation space, clean air or transport can and do span the old divides between capitalists and workers. If the contradiction between capital and use value remains salient, these do not necessarily reflect the contradictions between real social groups sharing dense urban spaces.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> If it seems somewhat surprising that Castells's should need to emphasise the disjunction between interests based on the contradiction between capital and labour, and interests based on consumption classes, we need to remember the almost scientific status of some aspects of Marxism in the 1970s. At the time the suggestion that urban political conflicts were played out between anything other than capital and labour was fairly original.

These concerns are echoed by Harvey as he notes that if money as the medium of commodity exchange transforms the meaning of space and time, money as capital fixes these meanings. Command over money (especially money as capital) represents real power as it offers control over space and time....

these independent but interlocking forms of social power, the repressive qualities of which spark innumerable movements of revulsion and revolt

(Harvey 1989:165-166)

Political struggles become struggles over the control of time and space and the extent to which this control is linked to the control of money. Harvey echoes Simmel in his analysis of the link between the increasing strength of M:C:M exchange relations, and the need to rationalise time and conquer space. Money and time are linked in the compartmentalisation of the working day, in the need to calculate loan terms and interest rates, in the ability to wait for better market conditions, or in long term investments. Money and space are linked as the time and money costs of distanciation are overcome, as the means for the transformation of nature, as the fragmentation of both real and abstract (mapped) space reflects distinctive land and property values, and urban spaces come to reflect the structure of power. The communities of money and of capital intersect with neighbourhood and district.

Yet in spite of his Marxist appreciation Harvey significantly acknowledges that,

On the other hand, nationalisation of the land and abolition of private property rights does not necessarily liberate space for popular appropriation... It can even lead to the erosion of those limited rights to appropriate space given by private property and other mechanisms of securing social space. The prevention of one mode of dominating space merely creates another.

(Harvey 1989:198)

Harvey also draws an important distinction between the oppressive qualities of money as capital and its liberating qualities as cash and universal means of exchange (Harvey 1985:254). If classical urban theorists remarked on the link between the money economy, 'calculating rationality', a blasé attitude, individuation and increased tolerance and personal freedom, they paid less heed to the role of money

in the liberation of the individual from fixed and obligatory social and exchange relations. If 'the people' are oppressed by capital, they nevertheless seem to pursue money with consenting enthusiasm.

It seems to me that this is not a trivial point as the different aspects of money make distinctive contributions to the meanings of the contexts in which money is an issue. If urban populations are oppressed by the 'pulverisation' of space by 'abstract private property relations', they seem to participate rather enthusiastically in their own oppression as they toil in order to acquire a piece of 'pulverised space' to call their own. If it is always possible to suggest that this is a matter of 'false consciousness', we end up with a tautological Marxism whose meaning evaporates at every turn. Indeed all of the authors writing from variously construed Marxist stances, refer to an implicit notion of 'free', 'natural' or 'social' space, which has been 'pulverised' or 'made abstract' by the illusion of private property. I have yet to find an explicit definition of this 'free, natural and social space' that is constructed as the ideal against which current urban evils can be condemned. However, since it is the causal nature of the abstraction of private property that concerns all the writers of the broad Marxist school, it should be enlightening to examine the spatial nature of urbanism in a context where private property has been more or less non-existent for the last seventy years. Indeed the opportunity to observe its recent introduction should enable me to contribute to our understanding of the diverse meanings of private property in different contexts. Harvey suspects that 'socialist space' might be as abstract as 'capitalist space'; we shall see the extent to which this supposition holds true in formerly communist urban spatio-politics.

### **The Literature on Soviet Urbanism**

Literature which addresses the specific nature of Soviet urbanism is necessarily more limited than the literature on urbanism generally. If the latter occasionally makes implicit claims to universality, the former struggles to explain narrowly defined aspects of 20th century Soviet urban phenomena (often housing, see Chapter 6). From a theoretical viewpoint, what stands out is the explicit attention given to contradictions in Soviet urban practices. Bater (1980 and 1989) concentrates on the

distinction between ideal and reality, rhetoric and practice, born of the contradictions between relatively weak municipal planning authorities and the urban activities of relatively strong enterprises and ministries. Revolutionary political concerns were consistently obstructed by the inefficiency born of the unacknowledged competition between ministries and enterprises.

Vladimir Paperny (in Brumfield and Ruble (Eds.) 1993) discusses the cultural shift signified by policy changes of the 1930s, which was reflected in contrary evaluations of urban ideals. Specifying the distinctive before and after periods as Culture I (1917-1932) and Culture II (1932-1954), Culture I is characterised by ideals of eliminating social divisions, ie, the divisions between

employer:employee

men:women

urban:rural

east:west

rich:poor

physical:intellectual labour

labour:leisure

art:life<sup>7</sup>

The dynamic and revolutionary Internationalism, egalitarianism, collectivism, and futurism of Culture I was also fanatically modernist, in the sense of enthusiasm for rational, scientific or design solutions to social ends. If collectivism and egalitarianism were to be realised by the generous provision of public/communal spaces and services, this was complemented by policy, planning and designs to minimize private space. Culture I was also strongly anti-family and anti-religion; it favoured collective, rational, scientific solutions for the realisation of human potential. In terms of architecture and planning, the dynamic futurism of Culture I was to be realised in an environment of 'cold, hard, grey, constructivism'. Indeed Le Corbusier's interest in Russia was directly linked to the potential it presented for the realisation of the constructivist project, subordinating aesthetics to the glories of

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<sup>7</sup> See Paperny, 1993:151.

function and utility (see Cohen 1992).

This period also saw competition between urbanists and de-urbanists. The urbanists generally celebrated the possibilities of collectivism and high population density, whilst the de-urbanists insisted on the human scale and the role/rights of the individual. The de-urbanists were associated with movements to reduce both the size of cities and the distinction between urban and rural areas. Okhitovitch suggested means for doing away with cities altogether by developing mobile sleeping cells that could be set up anywhere (Paperny 1993:154-155).

Competition between schools of architecture in the early 1920s gave way to central state control of design and construction in the first Five Year Plan of 1928. The shift to Culture II in 1932 was instigated by Stalin's inspired recognition of the potential of a return to 'traditional values'. The advent of Culture II in 1932, transformed revolutionary ideals into nationalist parochialism, hierarchy, individualism, traditionalism and stolid immobility. Both in terms of reassuring an exhausted population and in terms of facilitating their oppression, this shift marked the end of early revolutionary creative fervour in the arts, architecture and urban design. The harsh rationalism of constructivism was replaced by 'classicism with a Russian face'. If changes in design policy represented a 'humane' turning away from the cold functionalism of constructivism, policy changes in other areas were distinctly oppressive. In 1934 'fleeing beyond the state borders' became punishable by death and confiscation of all household property (Paperny 1993:154); internal passports and the propiska<sup>8</sup> system were introduced in 1932, to control internal mobility. The return to traditional values was reflected in family policies with abortion re-criminalised in 1936, and by increased emphasis on women's roles as wives and mothers. Workers were encouraged to individual self-sufficiency and dacha building increased accordingly.

The cultural change also signalled the victory of the urbanists over the de-urbanists. Even if the 1931 Plenum of the Central Party Committee claimed that the Soviet

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<sup>8</sup> This was a system whereby all Soviet citizens were required to have a resident's permit. Changing residence, especially from rural to urban locations was difficult. The acquisition of a permanent Moscow propiska was almost impossible, as one needed a propiska to work and work to get a propiska. Many people married Muscovites in order to acquire the desired propiska, (see Chapter 1).

Union was 'closer to elimination of the distinction between the city and the countryside', it also declared that Moscow itself was to become a separate administrative entity, a unique city with its own government and budget. On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of Moscow in 1947, Stalin proclaimed Moscow 'the ideal model of the cosmos' and the 'paradigm for all the capitals of the world' (quoted in Paperny 1993:159). Space became both more highly stratified, with the allocation of living space used as threat and reward (see Chapter 6) and more iconically symbolic.<sup>9</sup> If the author can pinpoint the temporal parameters of these official policy changes, it is more difficult to disentangle the effects of these opposing ideologies on the development of Soviet understandings. As we shall see, aspects of both Culture I and Culture II continue to reproduce in unhappy couplings in contemporary Moscow.

The intense interest in architecture and urban planning that characterised the early experimental period (1918-1937) is discussed by Bliznakov, who notes that the new architecture had to

evoke desired feelings, promote action and change human behaviour" through the configuration of form, colour and space.

(Bliznakov 1993:97)

Ladovski in 1928 notes that

the Soviet state must make use of architecture as a powerful means for the organisation of the psychology of the masses.

(quoted in Bliznakov 1993:100)

If few of Ladovski's plans were ever constructed, they served nicely as revolutionary propaganda. Shrinking private space was overtly designed to encourage people to spend their free time together. In one student hostel, access to private space was in fact forbidden during the day (Bliznakov 1993:116). Nikolai Kuzmin favoured

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<sup>9</sup> For example the Red Army Theatre in Moscow was built in the shape of a five pointed star. Facades are decorated with hammers and sickles. Red stars adorn the towers of the Kremlin, etc.

completely communal living in spite of his experiences in Anzhero-Sadensk.<sup>10</sup> Less fanatical theorists such as Okhitovitch claimed that the individual was a product of the technical and not just social division of labour; s/he ought therefore to be respected and acknowledged as a 'singular body and mind'. That this singularity of the person had to be articulated indicates the depth of the challenging ideology. The urbanist Miliutin was instrumental in the development of various plans for a socialist city ('sotsgorod'), most famously the linear city with residential areas separated from industrial areas by green spaces, and communal houses with individual rooms for each inhabitant.

As we can, there were two intertwined strands to early post-revolutionary planning theory. Egalitarian notions required the abolition of 'spatial differentiation'. In order to accomplish this egalitarian ideal, post-revolutionary ideology was attempting to resolve altogether the conflict between the individual and society. It was deemed necessary not only to resolve the question of proportion between individual and communal space, but to dissolve the distinction altogether. Only the wholesale merging of individual/private and social/public interests would signal the realisation of communism proper. I would argue that in spite of changes in official policy, that there is a continuing tension in the relation of public/collective to private/individual in the FSU, that is reflected in the layout, design, aesthetics and function of urban space. This tension continues to make itself felt as the urban environment again undergoes metamorphosis in the 1990s.

The politics of space in Soviet Russia are clearly articulated in Stephen Kotkin's analysis of the political uses of housing shortages in Magnitogorsk during the Stalin period. He demonstrates the ways in which both physical proximity and the social conflicts born of competition for space, facilitated policing of the disappointed proletariat. The provision of 'red corners' for the display and discussion of revolutionary material was clearly insufficient for the wholesale conversion of the workers. Hostel managers relied heavily on reports from residents to maintain strict surveillance of actions and ideas.

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<sup>10</sup> Kuzmin lived for a while in a hostel for miners in Anzhero-Sadensk. Observing high levels of drinking and domestic violence, he blames the 'material manifestation of bourgeois ideology', instead of crowding, lack of privacy and services (Bliznakov 1993:116-117).

The co-operation of tenants in their own mutual surveillance was the ultimate weapon of the security police...in all this the organisation of living space played a crucial if inadvertent role.

(Kotkin 1993:191)

Few contemporary Russian writers have devoted attention to the socio-political implications of changing spatial relations in the post-perestroika period. The exception is Alexander Vysokovskii who argues for a 'return to domesticity', to a 'personal attachment to space'. This notion is based on his observation of current detachment from the local environment.

Most city dwellers who live in the high-rise projects lack any sort of relationship to their buildings and neighbourhoods, either positive or negative.

(Vysokovskii 1993:289)

or

**when people have no vested interest in the urban environment, as is the case with their apartment, there is no urban environment to speak of... the environment forms around them passively.**

(Vysokovskii 1993:288) - bold mine

As urban dwellers are obsessed only with the quantity of living space they can manage to appropriate, they have no interest in the world beyond the door to their private flats. Further, deprived of any choice about where they might live, no preference can be articulated and no criteria for preference can be formulated. This lack of possibility of choice or preference results in a lack of connection to space and place. This apathy leads to the degradation of the urban environment. If Vysokovskii can be accused of 'naturalising' the instinct for 'place making', and suggesting that it is this 'natural' instinct that was stunted by Soviet housing policies, the burst of enthusiasm for dachas, whose numbers doubled between 1970 and 1984, seems to uphold the notion that the "yearning to create a personal, private, individualised living space" (Vysokovskii 1993:289) is alive and well. If more than a third of Russian households enjoyed access to a dacha at the time of writing, this proportion has continued to soar. Indeed the outskirts of any concentrated settlement

are dotted with dachas ranging from glorified garden sheds to five bed-roomed 'private houses'. Vysokovskii's analysis of the contradiction between policy makers' explicit support for privatisation of housing and their practical obstruction of privatisation reveals intimate local knowledge. If contradiction between rhetoric and practice was familiar to Soviet era politics, it is clear that this disjunction is more tenacious than the promiscuous political orientation of policy makers. I would suggest that Vysokovskii's description of 'domesticity as anti-hero' is based not only on analysis of Russian survey statistics which refer to attitudes to housing and local environments, but also on his own taken-for-granted knowledge, based on observations and experiences of living in Moscow. His implicit references to a peculiar Russian urban culture mirror my own sense that the 'structure of feeling' of contemporary Moscow warrants deeper investigation.

### **Space and Meaning**

Lefebvre (1974), Castells (1978), Harvey (1985, 1989 a,b,) and Gottdiener (1985) have argued for an analysis of space, particularly urban space as constitutive of society, especially the late-modern and post-modern spaces of advanced capitalism. All have been engaged in a process of unearthing the deep-level forces (of capitalism) that structure the spaces in which we live. Recently the pendulum of academic fashion in the study of urban spatiality has swung back in favour of attention to the meanings of the city. Symbols and interpretation are re-vitalised as the city is cast as text and context, as actor and theatre in complex semiotic displays of intellectual acrobatics.

Analysts of a more semiotic bent have treated space (again especially but not exclusively urban space) as a text. The city has meaning, and its material objects are the vehicles of signification: streets, squares, buildings, facades, advertising hoardings, codes of property ownership, discourse and the institutions of planning and design (see especially, Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (Eds.) 1986) are the media of communication. Ledrut suggests that 'society speaks a tangle of messages through the mouth of the city' (Ledrut 1986:120). Criticising the emphasis on 'knowledge, denotation and perception' of writers concerned with mental maps (eg, Lynch 1960, Downs and Stea 1973 and 1977, Mackay, Olshavsky and Sentell 1975, Robinson and

Pechenik 1976, Spencer and Dixon 1983, Ward Newcombe and Overton 1986), Gottdiener et al turn their attention to meaning, connotation and conception as well as acknowledging the extent to which urban residents as readers play an active role in the construction of urban meaning. However, the 'pure semiotic' approach seems to imagine the possibility of interpreting the city without acknowledging the specific literacy of its residents (eg, papers by Greimas, Eco, Barthes and Boudon in Gottdiener and Lagopoulos 1986). Gottdiener's (1995) and Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (1986) critiques of the pure semiotic approach is directed mainly at the Baudrillardian post-Saussurian style of analysis, in which the material world evaporates into inter-referential signifiers. Seeking to re-establish the link between a realist world of political and economic forces and the sophisticated insights of semiotics and hermeneutics, Gottdiener (1986 and 1995) recommends the development of a socio-semiotic approach.

However, the European urban socio-semiotician in particular seem to prefer acknowledgement of the role of the actor/agent in the construction of urban meanings, to analysis of either the practical mode of meaning creation or of meaning interpretation. If Gottdiener discovers the prominence of a community of shared powerful interests, this discovery is a structural one that tells us little of the more quotidian construction of meaning by real participants on a daily basis. Writers interested in the meaning of space seem to have a collective tendency to be satisfied with constructing arguments for the inclusion of (inter-)actors in the study of spatiality; few seem prepared to make the methodological leap from theoretical to practical research based socio-semiology (see for example, Duncan and Ley (Eds.) 1993; Agnew and Duncan (Eds.) 1989; Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (Eds.) 1986, Lagopoulos 1986; Gregory and Urry (Eds.) 1985; Lash and Urry (Eds.) 1993).

However geographers (for example, Lagopoulos A. Ph. and Boklund-Lagopoulos K. 1992) and semiotician (Ledrut 1986) venturing into social research suffer from methodological naivety, relying on questionnaires, formal interviews and statistical analysis of findings.

If the semiotic approach presented by some of these authors often seems to ignore the specificity of the city, it could be argued either that

the city has ceased to represent a significant social unit of organisation in advanced industrialised societies.

(Saunders 1985:70)

or that the city

stands at the very heart of some of the most fundamental problems of general sociological interest.

(Giddens 1981:140)

Either way, the contemporary distinction between the urban and the non-urban is not the dichotomous opposition favoured by analyses of the days of rapid industrial urbanisation. If rural areas have become a 'rural hinterland' subordinate to the 'urban centre' this indicates the increasing dominance of urbanism and a tendency to universal urbanism, or a 'poly-nucleated metropolitan region' (Gottdiener 1985:7).

Whether this makes the urban a category without content or a super-category to which all social phenomena can be referred is a matter of semantics.

In the case of the former Soviet Union however, there remains a fairly clear distinction between urban and rural both in native conceptualisation and in practice. The very definition of the urban environment depends on its opposition to the rural; this opposition is elaborated as the city (especially Moscow) is cast as centre to the rural periphery, or as the apex where the highest Cultural values are constructed and maintained.

### **Praxis and Structuration**

If it has been established that spaces have meanings and that urban spaces have specific meanings, we need to address the processes through which those meanings are constructed. Bourdieu (1977 and 1990) and Giddens (1984) in particular are

concerned with the need to still the theoretical pendulum swings that have characterised the dichotomisation of 'individual and society' or more fashionably 'agency and structure'. Bourdieu's notions of praxis, doxa and habitus incorporate individual agency in the construction of social structures as well as incorporating structural forces in the embodied practices of daily life. Similarly Giddens (1984) develops the notion of structuration to expose the mutual inter-dependency of agency and structure. Although both authors are trapped by inherited dichotomous vocabulary, they are concerned to emphasise that it is the dichotomisation that is an abstract construction. Social reality proceeds seamlessly and more or less coherently as a product of both individual choices and impersonally patterned habits. The distinction (between, for example, individual and social determinants and interests) is more in the mind of the analysts than in the mind of the actors.

Pred (1986, 1990 a & b) has contributed useful conceptual tools for the application of structuration theory to the production of historical geographies (rural and urban landscapes in southern Sweden, the spatial imprints of social forces in especially 19th century America). These concrete studies based on historical documentation have been complemented by some extremely elegant theorisation of the interplay between space and place, individual and institutional actors and forces of both the long and the short duree. Recasting spatiality as the context and product of social action, Pred's interest in the processual aspects of spatiality leads him to favour concentration on the daily activities of local actors. Starting from the simple premise that spaces acquire meaning through functional and creative practices, he notes that these are structured by historically contingent processes and by individual goal orientation (and see Giddens 1984). The individual's life path intersects with a

variety of institutional projects to create specific notions of personhood and identity.

Movement through time/space 'causes' thoughts and feelings as they echo past experience; current experience also influences the development of future thoughts and feelings (Pred 1986:19-22). The implication is that we cannot know what a place or space means without reference to the actual use, thoughts and feelings associated with it by real social actors.

In order to access these thoughts and feelings, Pred formulates a number of heuristic devices to assist empirical research of structuration processes; these include the daily paths, biographies and life-histories of individuals and/or groups, and the ways in which these intersect with 'institutional projects'. Pred uses time geographies<sup>11</sup> to provide a graphic representation of the proportions of the space:time nexus in which social actors construct 'the meaning of place'. This thesis also makes use of time geographies, in order to elucidate the significant paths and places which constitute the lived-in city (see Chapter 3).

In order to investigate the construction of a 'sense of place', or the 'meaning of space' Tuan (1977) and Giddens (1984) recommend attention to heuristic conceptual devices such as the different kinds of knowing of differently bounded spaces and places, eg, the intimate knowledge of home versus the indirect knowledge of cities and nation states. We are reminded of the various sensory attributes of spaces and places (see also Rodaway 1994), as clues and cues to spatially specific sentiment and knowing. Shifts in meaning accompany shifts in perspective as formal frontal regions contrast with profane back regions (see also Weatherill 1988), the heights

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<sup>11</sup> These are based on the work of Thorstein Hagerstrand: see, for example, Hagerstrand 1970; 1976; 1978.

look down on the ghettos or the periphery pales with distance from the centre.

Developments in information technology from the telephone to E-mail make communication possible without requiring face to face contact: this dissolves the traditional congruence between spatial and social contiguity (see Urry 1991).

Other attempts to operationalise structuration theory in contemporary contexts include Gottdiener's analysis of the globalisation of production, distribution, consumption and finance, accompanied by the emergence of science technology and information technology as the dominant forces of production. As the city centre is occupied by the headquarters of multi-national organisations, it becomes detached from the surrounding area (Gottdiener 1985:215). Geographically neighbouring ghettos house an underclass detached from global participation. According to Gottdiener, the motor force of late twentieth century urban development is the coalition of bankers, politicians, developers, organised labour and planners pursuing pro-growth policies (Gottdiener 1985: 220-222). These 'personalised networks suspended in abstract commuting space' are replacing the more familiar 'communities of the past'.

Other applications of spatial theorisation to the conduct of on the ground research combine the sensitivity of earlier ethnographic treatments with more sophisticated theoretical interpretation. In particular Moore (1986) focuses on the gendered spatial representations of social change amongst the Marakwet. Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulos (1992) investigate sociologically diverse conceptualisations of the region in northern Greece. Feminist analysts investigate the relation between unequal gender relations, 'domesticity', and architecture and design (Hayden 1981, Weisman

1992). The distinctive behaviours appropriate to distinctive public spaces is another focus for practical research (see for example, Richardson 1982 and Robben 1989).

It will be clear that this thesis is informed by structuration theory and notions of practice and practical knowledge, operationalised by the use of time geographies, in order to understand 'the impact of the ordinary day of the ordinary person' on the construction of urban meanings (see Hagerstrand 1970, 1976, 1978). The 'city' is constituted both as an abstraction constructed of stereotypical evaluations and partial knowledge and as a lived in network of familiar paths and places. As far as possible, the analysis will incorporate both the relevant structural features of a given space or place as well as the more immediate and intimate experience of consuming that space. It will include attention to the ways in which institutional projects impact on the landscape of the city and on the daily paths of my informants. The practical processes by which the meaning of spaces and places is constructed, will be investigated as this construction is forefronted in a situation of substantial social change, as both old and new urban phenomena acquire new meanings. The relation between urban phenomena and meaning will be investigated as the product of sensory perception, conceptualisation, knowledge, discourse, emotion, behaviour, institutional constraints and individual desires.

The ability to interpret these diverse factors is based on participation in and observation of movement throughout the city, both alone and with indigenous urban residents.

## Space and Power and Practice

The inter-relation between institutional and individual factors in the construction of practice, discourse and meaning is, a priori, fraught with political implications.

Power relations at different levels shape and constrain both spatial forms and person:space relations. Urban layout, architectural design, ownership, control and accessibility are all direct products of the contest for power: political history is embedded in the stone brick and concrete of the urban physique. The socio-political division of labour is also a spatial division of labour, resulting from the decisions of spatially absent decision makers. The spatial analysis of who does what, where, when, and with whom reflects the political capacity to require, permit, or forbid the time:space coupling of others (Pred 1986:26). If the total institution is characterised as a space in which all action is observed and constrained, the exercise of power in and through the 'field of action' in which 'freely chosen activities' are practised reflects the 'internalisation or embodiment' of that exercise. If the overt exercise of power entails the enclosure of space and time and the management of bodies in isolation or in groups (see Foucault 1973; 1979; 1980), spatially cued self-control reflects a more covert form of embodied power.

Early post-revolutionary Russian theorists were explicitly concerned with the political use of urban space. Both the intentions and the unintended consequences of the actions of Soviet urban powers have created a specific urban landscape. This urban landscape is transformed as it is differentially consumed by urban dwellers. This process of consuming the cityscape includes not only the consumption of Soviet-era iconography, 'classicism with a Russian face', and modernist

monstrosities but also of the inter-relationships between the people of the city, and their tangible and expressive donations to the emotional landscape of the city.

Here I would like to briefly 'de-construct' the operationalisation or 'structuration' of power relations. Contemporary social theory is dominated by structural oppositions inherited from predecessors, specifically 'individual : society' or 'structure : agency' oppositions, even as theorists like Bourdieu and Giddens strive to collapse such abstract oppositions. I would suggest that we need to develop a heuristic which addresses not a binary opposition, but a tripartite model which addresses two sets of relations between three levels of social inquiry:

Structural forces : Interactive practices : Internalised/embodied identities.

In other words, structural power relations (of eg, class, gender or ethnicity) do not directly 'determine' the 'internalised/embodied' identities of social actors; Capitalism or Communism, for example, are too general, abstract and remote to be a direct factor in the formation of individual identity. However, these 'abstract and remote' structural forces do influence the nature of inter-relations between persons in roles with different relations to these structural forces (eg, man : woman, employer : employee). In cities in particular, where anonymous social relations are common, patterned interactive practices develop in order to reduce the 'dangers of social unknowing': people enact roles to facilitate social interactions in situations where persons are not personally known to one another. These become part of the social grammar, and as such become 'taken-for-granted', and 'embodied or internalised'. Thus even with the demise of the structural factors that influenced the development of the original relations, the political/grammatical character of inter-relationships

continues to be re-produced, else social competence disintegrates. Thus, even when an 'oppressed' social actor consciously 'resists' his/her subordination, the requisites of social intelligibility encourage him/her to reproduce practices in which unequal power relations are (or happen to be) immanent. Further the reproduction of practices which maintain social intelligibility are highly spatialised, to the extent that institutionalised roles have spatial referents (at work, at the office of a powerful bureaucrat). In Chapter 5, I will present an example of practices, engendered by the unequal relation between state (distributor) and individual (consumer), enacted in thousands of daily face-to-face interactions between shop assistants and customers, and which continue to operate even after the disintegration of the state's monopoly on the distribution of goods and services. I argue that this is because the interactive style appropriate to certain spatial locations (former state shops) cue patterned and embodied behaviours, which function simultaneously as enactments of unequal power relations and as a social grammar reducing the 'dangers of social unknowing'.

The embodiment of certain 'identities' is a product of real, felt, day to day interactions in diverse socio-spatial contexts, which are only partially the product of more abstract structural forces. I suggest that we need to pay more detailed attention to the interactive aspects of social life, if we are to understand the process whereby structural forces are transformed into embodied practices and identities.

Industrialisation

Urbanisation

Modernisation

Socialism : Capitalism

The Penetration of the Free Market

Urbanism

It is clear that the utility of theories developed on the basis of observations of western cities for the analysis of urbanism in the post-Soviet context will depend on the extent to which these theories are 'about' industrialisation, urbanisation, modernism/post-modernism, or capitalism. This is not a trivial point. As western theorists are examining cities that are the product of all four processes, they are rarely required to disentangle which aspects are about industrialisation, which about capitalism, which about rapid urbanisation and which about the socio-cultural processes of modernisation and post-modern existentialism.<sup>12</sup> In a general sense Moscow has also undergone rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in the last century. During the post-revolutionary period however, this urbanisation and industrialisation has occurred within a diametrically opposed political and economic system. These three factors have combined in a conscientious process of modernisation to create a distinctive form of urbanism. The ethnographic sections of the thesis will demonstrate that if 'similar (urban) phenomena' can be discerned in Moscow, they cannot also be the product of industrial capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, similar processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation will be seen to have combined to produce locally distinct phenomena. It is this congruence and dissonance between urban phenomena that should enable me to conclude this thesis with some theoretical insights.

Further the very recent penetration of Capital, of Market Forces, and the increased connectedness to the international economy create superficial similarities between contemporary Moscow and the cities on which western urban theories were modelled. The observation of the introduction of these structural forces into a contemporary setting should illuminate the relative force of hypothetical interdependencies.

There is an assumed temporal order and causal determinism in the writings of Weber, Simmel and their descendants. The ubiquity of capitalism in the cities on which they focus their attention leads them to believe that it is capitalism and its

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<sup>12</sup> Although Wirth (1938) was analytically sensitive to this distinction.

<sup>13</sup> Any suggestion that Soviet communism was 'not really communism' are deemed matters of semantics. Whether other, better forms of communism might exist is not the point. If Soviet communism is not diametrically opposed to western industrial capitalism, then one might ask what is or could be.

attendant phenomena (the development of a money economy, commoditisation, the dominance of exchange values) that is the major causal force in the development of western urbanism. If sophisticated Marxists favour attention to the interplay between economy, politics and ideology (eg, Althusser, Lefebvre), they nevertheless prioritise the role of capitalism because the economy happens to be causal in industrial capitalism. The authors cited generally characterise modern (capitalist) urbanism as relatively atomised, dominated by impersonal exchange relations, rational, and fractured (socially, economically and geographically on the basis of either production or consumption classes). How then are we to explain the congruence of revolutionary communism (based on principles diametrically opposed to the dominance of money as capital, commoditisation and the pre-eminence of exchange value) and atomisation bordering on anomie, impersonal exchange relations made more impersonal by the absence of the market, technocratic rationality, and fractured not into interest groups but into isolated nuclear family units?

Examining Soviet and post-Soviet urbanism should enable us to disentangle these distinct social forces and to begin the process of defining specifically Russian/post-Soviet/post-communist meanings of 'capitalism', 'urbanism', 'industrialisation' and 'modernism/post-modernism', as these are in the process of becoming.

### **Social Change**

Further the application of spatial theory to the fieldwork based study of a society in the throes of severe social upheaval should make a contribution to the development of theories of social change. By contributing observations of 'structuration processes' in action, I hope to illuminate the ways in which meaning is constructed through practice. Spatial features both shape and are shaped by the diverse interests and understandings of the people engaged either actively or passively in the construction of spatial meaning. I have chosen to focus on 'space' for a number of reasons:

- i) The explanandum of this thesis is the 'structure of feeling' or the 'emotional landscape' of Moscow, that is both the product of the experiences of the city's population and a continuous factor in the construction of those

experiences. I argue that people unwittingly consume this emotional soup as they move around the city, as they feed it to others.

- ii) Spatial theory is both broad enough to deal with diverse data (discourse, buildings, facial expression of Metro travellers) and specific enough to enable interpretation of more finely grained observations (the interplay between layout, function, kinship and vodka) in the construction of meaning of the private flat.
- iii) In the absence of an established theoretical paradigm which might assist analysis of post-Soviet society,<sup>14</sup> spatial theory is flexible enough to be adapted to the analysis of an original social phenomenon.

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<sup>14</sup> Although Katherine Verdery (1991) has made a valuable contribution to the construction of such a theoretical foundation.



## Chapter 3

### **Social Change in Practice 'Work', under-employment and the move from 'work' to commerce**

This chapter is concerned with the relationship between work and identity. In the FSU, work was a critical factor in the production of identity, because of the relative absence of other avenues. Processes of identity formation based on consumption (or consumerism), leisure, or participation in intermediate social groups (voluntary interest groups) were but a weak facet of Soviet culture. In the absence of processes for the construction of identity through consumption, production therefore remains critical. As my friends and informants conceptualised themselves more as 'producers' than as 'consumers', changes in the labour market were more important to them in the first instance, than changes in the commodity markets.

In order to apply structuration theory to the understanding of the specific meanings of 'social change' in Moscow, we need to articulate the ways in which certain changes in the macro-level political economy produce effects on the structure of people's daily lives. Macro-level forces are causing an unemployment crisis that is only partially disguised as widespread 'hidden unemployment' or underemployment in many sectors of the economy. This crisis is revealed both in the reduction in working time and in the reduction in incomes.

These changes are simultaneously, or sequentially, interpreted according to evaluative paradigms formed during the Soviet period, and/or a factor encouraging a re-evaluation of those paradigms. The changing nature of 'work'<sup>1</sup> is related to changes in the practical activities associated with the time:space structure of people's daily lives, which creates new practical opportunities (not always operationalised), which in turn create

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<sup>1</sup> 'Rabotat': to work has more or less the same denotation as in English, but different connotations borne of different ideology and practices associated with work. It was often pointed out to me that the root of the word 'rabotat' is 'rab' which means slave.

new topics of conversation. It is argued that changes in work oriented activities contribute to changes in the construction of identity, particularly in the absence of other kinds of identity forming activities. I shall discuss first the meaning of 'work' during the pre-reform period as I understand it; this understanding is based on my own observations of people 'at work', and on the ways in which people express a semi-nostalgic attitude to work, wages and other benefits, the workplace, or relations between co-workers 'before'. This is complemented by a more extensive discussion of attitudes to new 'work' opportunities, especially in the commercial sector. To the extent that 'to work' is closely associated with presence in the 'workplace', and includes both actual labour and other related activities (sociality in particular), changes in the 'meaning of work' translate into changes in the meaning of the 'workplace' (and vice versa). The chapter includes the presentation of a sample of 'time budgets' which provide the basis for the remainder of the thesis, where changes in the pattern of daily life are discussed more fully.

During the Soviet period, work was an important factor in the construction of identity because it was:

- i) rhetorically glorified in the FSU in line with prevailing Marxist-Leninist ideology,
- ii) closely associated with 'citizenship',
- iii) an important source of 'scarce goods' (material or symbolic),
- iv) the most significant (and sometimes the only) source of non-kin social relationships,
- v) significant in terms of the proportion of people's time that was occupied by labour and labour related activities.

In order to examine the link between labour and identity, we shall discuss the role of labour in the construction of both individual and social identity. For the purposes of the former, we shall examine the proportion of people's time spent engaged in labour, and the role played by ones occupation/profession in self-identification. This will include a discussion of labour for access to both material and symbolic scarce goods. For the purposes of the latter, we shall examine the coincidence of work and 'citizenship', and the congruence between work-related social relations and people's

social networks. This will be complemented by an examination of the meaning of the 'labour collective' both in rhetoric and in practice; we shall discover the ways in which leisure and sociality were embedded in Soviet labour practices.

## Work and individual identity

### *Rhetoric*

The role of labour ('trud'<sup>2</sup>) in Soviet rhetoric was nothing short of glorious. The government's predilection for billboards extolling the achievements of Soviet labour and urging the workers to greater discipline and productivity ensured that highly visible reminders of the role of labour were to be found on every street corner. Although these had largely disappeared from Moscow streets by the time of my fieldwork, faded signs declaring 'Labour, the Glory of the USSR' still welcome visitors to many of the former state and collective farms. A policy of full-employment was one of the critical distinguishing characteristics of Soviet socialism. A system based on Marxist-Leninist ideology is founded on the premise that human beings only realise their full potential through socially useful labour. Labour is both a need and a right of the individual; participation in labour is both a duty and an obligation. In order to assist 'the realisation of man's species being', the First Constitution of the RSFSR (published 13 July 1918) enshrined the obligation to work in the very foundations of the Soviet state. Constitutional rights were restricted to those who laboured (see Lane 1987:14). The 1936 Constitution declared

Work in the USSR is a duty, a matter of honour for every able-bodied citizen - He who does not work, shall not eat.

(quoted in Lane 1987:14)

These early legal and ideological declarations combined with the young Soviet Union's need for rapid industrialisation, to produce a specifically Soviet 'work ethic'. The agitprop of the early post-revolutionary period is soaked in references to the bright future of happy workers. Even in its maturity, the Soviet state forbade

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<sup>2</sup> There is a slight distinction between to work ('rabitat'), and labour ('trud'). Where the former is the common usage of real practical activity, (where you work, going to work, being at work, working), the latter is a somewhat more abstract concept, highly politicised in the FSU. 'Trud' connotes actual productive labour, whereas 'rabitat' connotes activity which includes strictly defined productive labour, but has a more inclusive sense of all the activities associated with working and the workplace.

any allusion to the difference between rhetoric and reality, for, as scientific Marxism demonstrates, 'workers are only exploited under capitalism'. As the Soviet state was founded on principles directly opposed to capitalist exploitation, the workers could not therefore be exploited. Indeed, the emic view expresses its discontent without reference to the concept of exploitation, preferring reference to the unfair advantages of high level bureaucrats, 'nachalniks'<sup>3</sup> or the inefficiency of labour organisation. Similarly 'alienation' was deemed wholly abolished by "public ownership of the means of production, the demise of the capitalist class, and the replacement of production for the market by planning...." (Lane 1987:13). There was no place for unemployment in Soviet ideology. As recently as the 27th Party Congress in February 1986, Ligachev declared that

"Socialism cannot allow and will not allow large groups of working people - and the count may well be in the millions - to find themselves redundant in society as a result of scientific and technical progress ...

(quoted in Lane 1987:17)

### ***Practice***

If we take as our initial premise the suggestion that individual identity, the sense of who one is, is inextricably linked to practice, it seems feasible to suggest that identity is a product of ones different activities, sketched over days, weeks, months and years. The following have been selected as examples of changing time budgets, in order to enable me to discuss the meaning of these changes with the confidence that comes of close acquaintance.

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<sup>3</sup> Nachalnik: literally chief or boss, but often carries a negative connotation of inept management, appointed for political reasons.

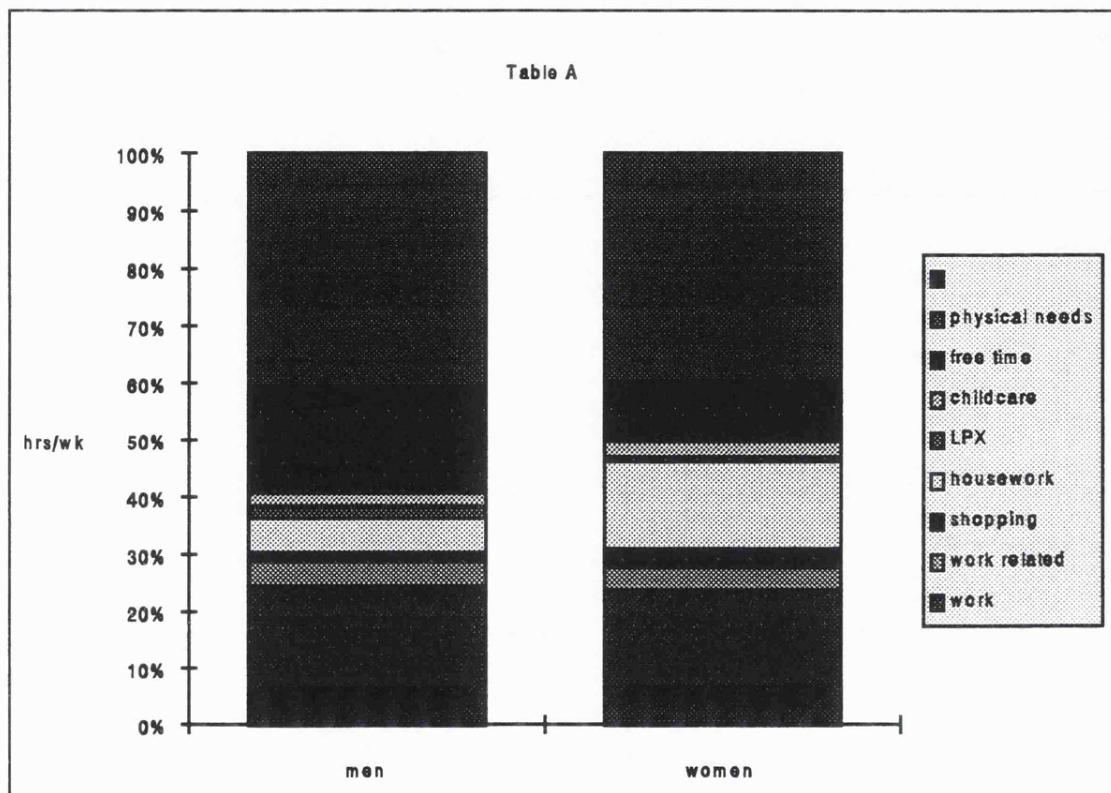
**Table 3.1****Time Budgets 1990**

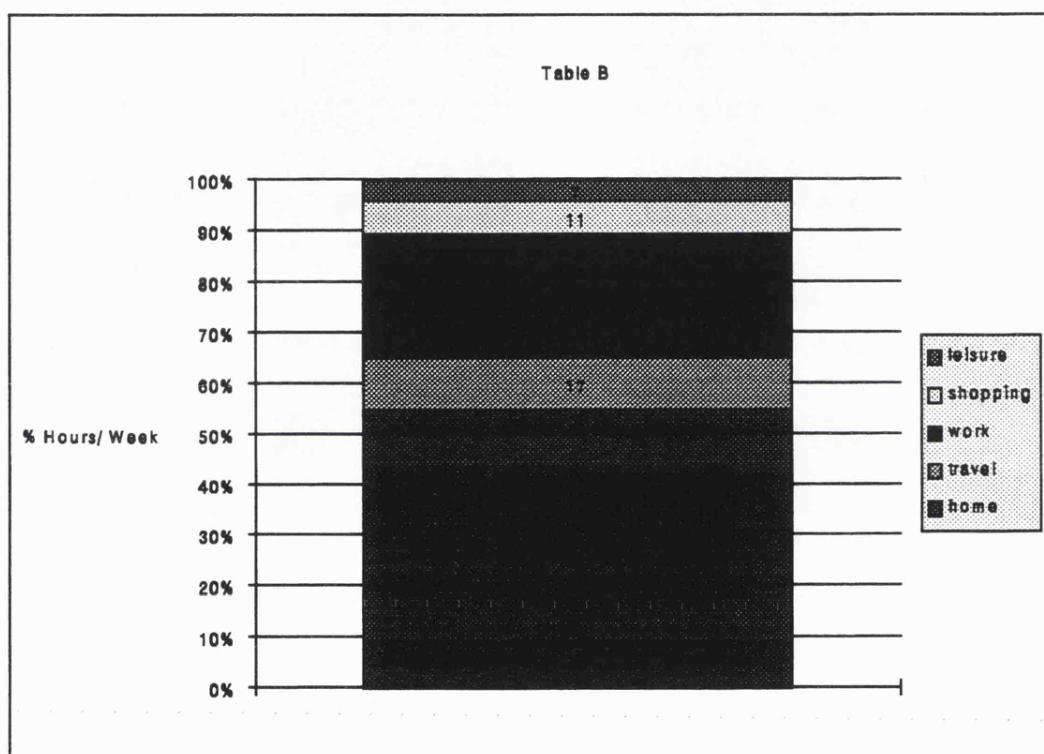
Table 3.1 represents the time budgets of male and female workers based on a survey of 47,000 households in March 1990.

Source: Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, Russian Federation 1992

Table 3.2 is based on a survey conducted by the Sociology Institute of the Russian Academy of Science between February and April 1991 in Moscow and Moscow Oblast, and from supplementary material.

**Table 3.2**

**Time Budgets 1992**



Source: "The Time of Inhabitants of Moscow and Moscow Oblast", Patrushev, V. D., Karaxanova T.M., and Kushnareva O.N. in Sotsiologicheski Issledovanie 1992, No.6. Supplementary information was gleaned from an article entitled "Moscow Buyer" , Rukavishnikova, T.P., Sapozhnikov, A.M., and Xazova L.M. in Sotsiologicheski Issledovanie 1990 No. 7, and from an article in Vecherniaia Moskva 11-12 September. 1989 , "Muscovites and Deficit: the Panorama of the Goods Crisis", Kuznetsov N. and Rukavishnikova T.P.

Tables 3.3 to 3.8 represent time budgets for certain key informants during my own fieldwork in 1992-1993. In all of the examples given, the portion of the week spent engaged in 'traditional employment' has decreased.

**Table 3.3**

**Time Budget 1992-3: Sergei**

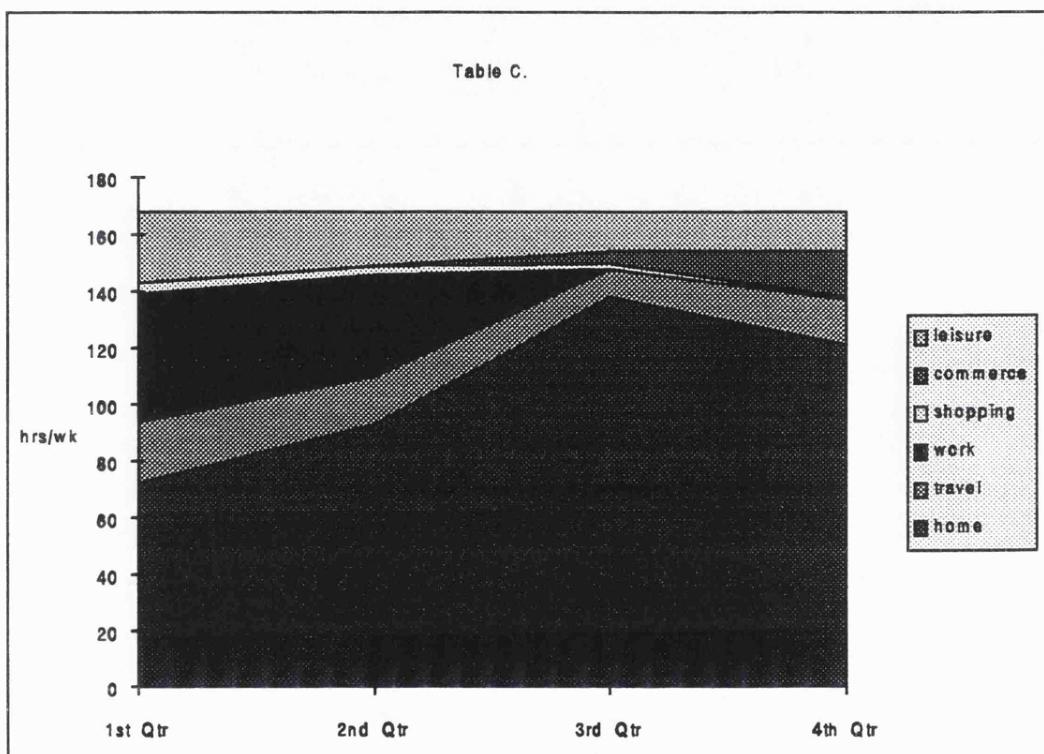


Table 3.3 Sergei became wholly unemployed in February 1993, and became slowly engaged in various forms of commercial activity. At first, this was restricted to making phone calls from home, making contact with buyers or sellers on behalf of acquaintances already fully engaged in commercial activity. By the end of the relevant period, he was spending on average two full days a week visiting prospective buyers. He was also working at his profession 'at home', having transformed his one roomed flat into a laboratory. Sergei was struggling to retain his identity as a professional physicist, by continuing to work 'at home', although his financial straits had forced him to engage in commercial activity in order to survive. Although he claimed that his main aim in life was to emigrate to the west, he was insistent that he wanted to do so as a physicist, and **not** as a businessman.

Table 3.4

Time Budget 1992-3: Vladimir

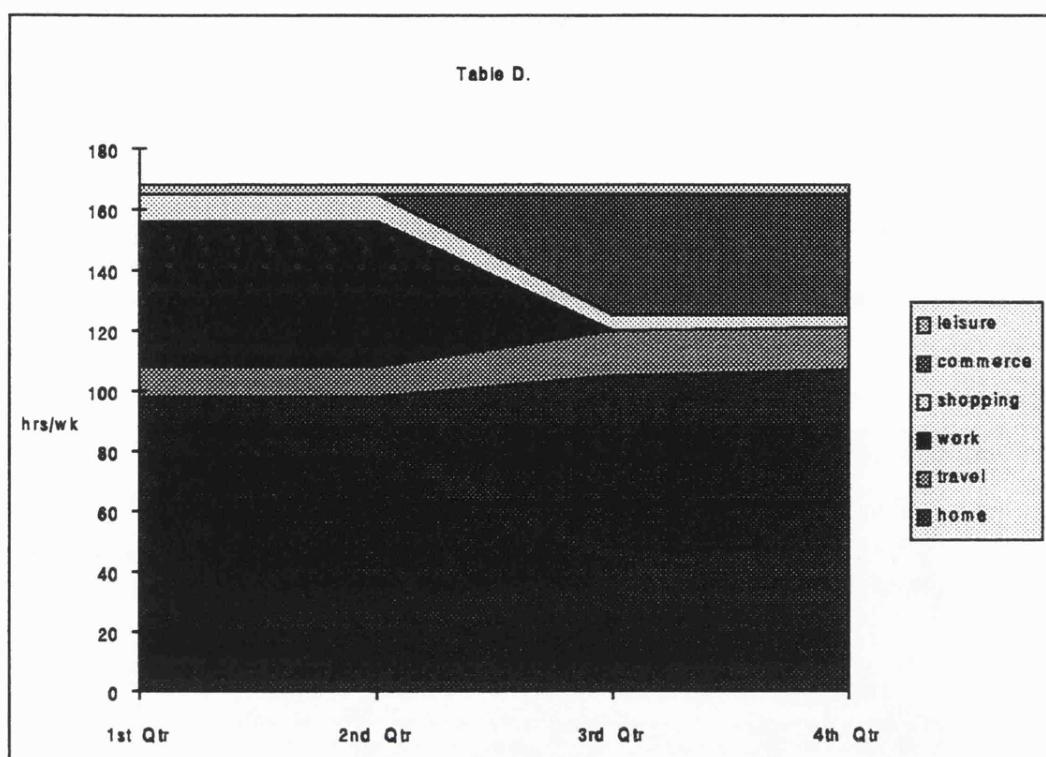


Table 3.4 refers to Vladimir, who changed jobs in March 1993 from employment in a state run research institute to employment in a commercial firm making printed tee-shirts. Although this change of employment doubled his income, he referred to his employment in a commercial firm as a matter of necessity (he had a dependent wife and small child). Further both his wife and his friend emphasised that he was engaged in the 'artistic' side of the business, designing logos for the tee-shirts. However, when he showed me one of these tee-shirts, he literally cringed with embarrassment. Vladimir was also a painter of fine abstract paintings; he clearly found it impossible to associate his work designing logos with 'art'.

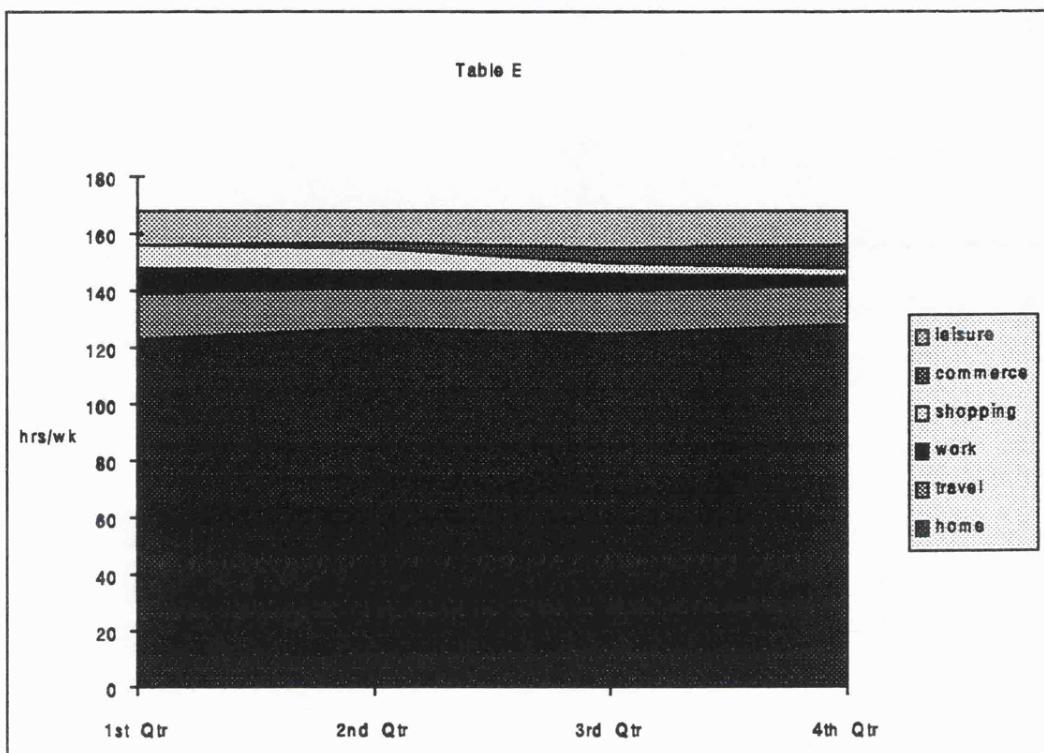
**Table 3.5****Time Budget 1992-3: Valeria**

Table 3.5 refers to Valeria, who was already in receipt of a pension. At the beginning of my acquaintance with her she was still working as a pianist giving concerts on average three times a week. This decreased to about once a week by the end of my fieldwork. However, during the same period she increased her 'commercial activity' considerably. At the beginning this was restricted to renting her flat for hard currency to foreigners for short periods of time (from a few days to a week at most). As she acquired a substantial quantity of hard currency, she increased her commercial activity lending money to entrepreneurs, and slowly became more engaged in her 'investments'.

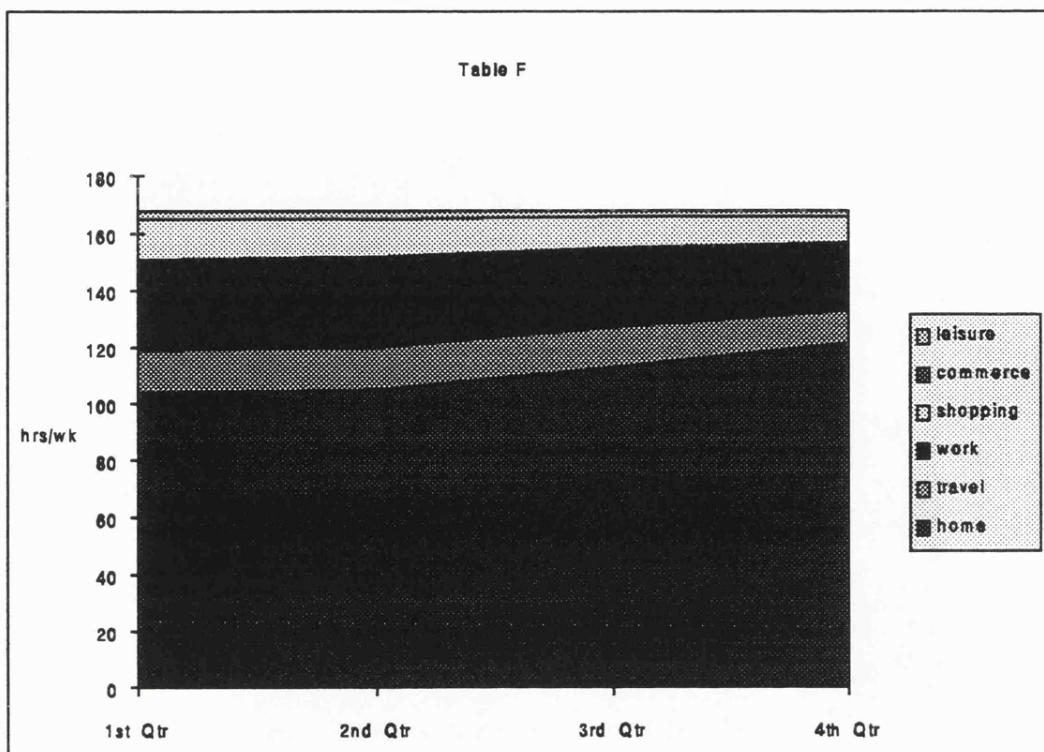
**Table 3.6****Time Budget 1992-3: Natasha**

Table 3.6 refers to Natasha, who worked in a research institution, where she was and remains a 'full time employee'. However, her commitment to this institution was changing as the degree of security in terms of regular wages decreased. She often said she didn't know how much she would be paid, or when, as it became clear that funding a pure research institute was not high on the list of government priorities. Similarly, if through the end of 1992 she actually went into the institute four days a week (with an agreed day for working at home or in other libraries), she began to attend more irregularly through the first half of 1993. When 'working at home', she happily admitted that she didn't, but justified her decreasing input by reference to the decreased value of her wages.

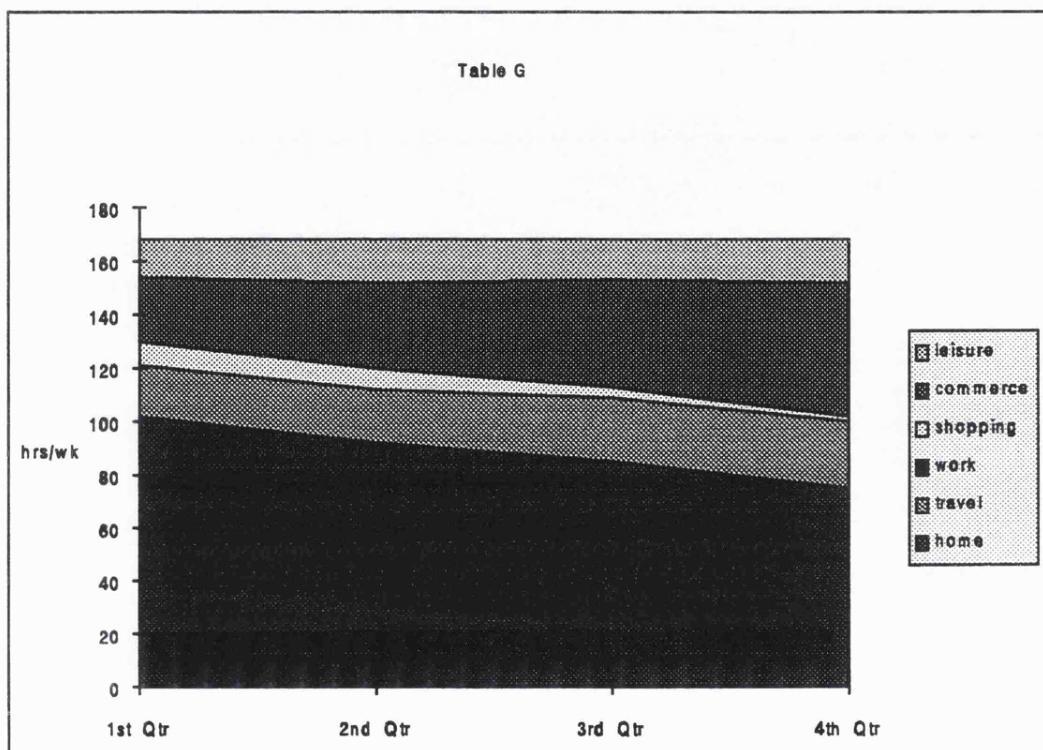
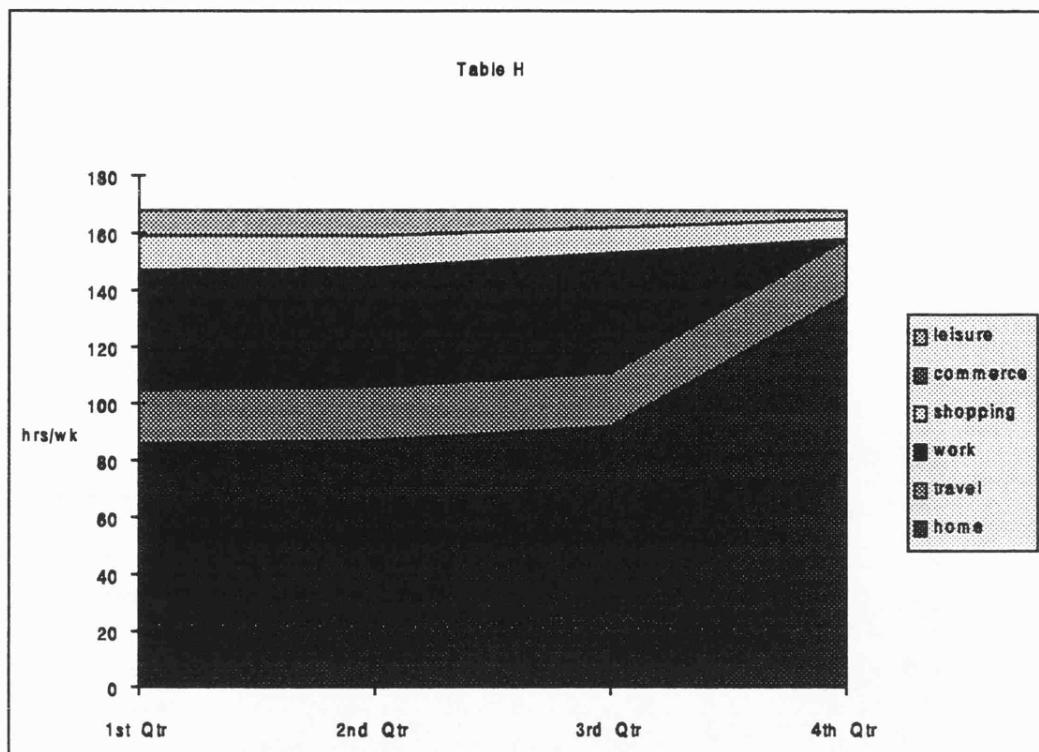
**Table 3.7****Time Budget 1992-3: Sasha**

Table 3.7 refers to Sasha who was engaged in 'business' from the very beginning of my acquaintance with him. As his business developed, it occupied more of his time and by the time I left, he was working at least 50 hours a week by his own reckoning.

**Table 3.8****Time Budget 1992-3: Galia**

Finally, Table 3.8 refers to my landlady, who, although of pensionable age, was still working full time in a factory until March 1993 (as was her husband who was also in receipt of pension). As it was only a matter of time before they were laid off (the factory where Galia worked had reduced its workforce from 30,000 to 7,000), they decided to retire and devote their energies to their dacha. Thus although the table indicates that Galia spent more time at home in the fourth quarter, this is somewhat misleading. She and her husband spent on average four days a week building a house on their dacha plot, or working in the garden there. Much of the rest of the time 'at home' was spent engaged in the search for funds and materials for their dacha.

Other changes to the pattern of people's daily lies will be discussed elsewhere. What it is important to note for the purposes of this chapter, is the rise in unemployment and underemployment: this trend is evidenced by unemployment figures for the Russian Federation as a whole. More difficult to ascertain is the level of 'hidden unemployment' ('skritaya bezrabotitsa'). Although there is as yet little evidence of predicted widespread unemployment, figures do show an increase in involuntary leave, short time working and wage arrears. These are indicative of falling demand for labour: with nothing for them to do and no cash for wages, enterprise managers often decide to reduce workers' time commitments, in preference to permanent dismissal.

**Table 3.9****Unemployment, July 1991-May 1994**

(in thousands)

		Registered Vacancies	Registered Jobseekers	Registered Total	Unemployed Receiving Benefits
1991	July	707.6	350.5	16.1	1.9
	October	898.0	473.7	51.4	7.8
	December	841.0	468.5	61.5	11.9
1992	March	450.6	617.7	118.4	52.2
	June	398.5	779.9	202.9	107.7
	September	345.4	921.3	367.5	219.4*
1993	December	314.5	981.6	577.1	371.1
	March	358.0	1,082.2	730.0	495.9
	June	518.9	1,003.2	717.4	470.9
1994	September	495.8	968.6	706.0	449.2*
	December	351.7	1,084.5	835.5	550.4
	March	289.4	1,363.6	1,083.4	887.6*
	May	347.2	1,482.9	1,219.0	1,009.0
As percentage of labour force					
1993	October		1.3	1.0	0.6*
1994	May		2.0	1.6	1.3*

Source: Goskomstat and State Committee for Employment, reproduced from IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation, 1994, p.76.

\* ILO figures for unemployment for the same period are as follows:

October	1992	3,600,000	(total jobseekers reported	982,000)
October	1993	4,100,000	( " )	944,200)
March	1994	4,400,000	( " )	1,363,600)
May	1994	4,500,000	( " )	1,482,900)
October	1993	5.5%		(1.3%)
May	1994	6.0%		(2.0%)

It should be noted that these figures are likely to under-represent the number of unemployed. Many unemployed do not register with the Employment Service, as unemployment benefit is low (11.3% of average wage in 1993<sup>4</sup>) and many continue to rely on (traditional) networking for access to employment. However, the trend of rising unemployment is clear.

<sup>4</sup> Source: IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation, 1994 p.253.

Accompanying the increase in registered unemployment, has been the emergence of partial or hidden unemployment ('skritaya bezrabotitsa'). Although it is necessarily impossible to verify levels of partial and hidden unemployment, there are some figures for short time working, involuntary leave and wage arrears. Short time working is fairly self-explanatory: managers reduce the working hours of all or some of their personnel. This is done in order to retain labour should there be an increase in demand and, in order to avoid putting large numbers of people out of work when it is known that the unemployment service would be unable to cope. 'Involuntary leave' refers to unpaid leave/holidays. Again, this tactic is adopted by enterprise managers who want to retain labour should there be an increase in demand and to avoid large scale unemployment. In the adoption of this practice we can see the continued working of Soviet era ideology (there cannot be and should not be unemployment), and of chronic perceived labour shortages during the Soviet period. The increasing quantity and duration of wage arrears is another index of 'partial', 'hidden' or potential unemployment. Workers are theoretically still in full time employment, but are simply not paid in full or on time. This is due to extreme cash flow difficulties, many of which arise from non-payment for deliveries by ex-state procurement agencies. All of the above are likely to be under-reported and the figures should be regarded as an index of the direction of change, but not as statistically accurate.

**Table 3.10****Short time, Involuntary leave - 1993-4**

	1993q1	1993q2	1993q3	1993q4	1994q1
<b>Short time (share of employed)</b>					
Russia	1.7%	1.6%	1.9%	2.8%	5.9%
max.	10.1%	8.0%	8.2%	9.0%	13.5%
min.	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
<b>Involuntary leave*</b>					
Russia	3.4%	4.9%	6.5%	8.6%	8.3%
max.	13.0%	15.4%	16.8%	20.4%	16.0%
min.	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	1.2%	1.0%
<b>Average duration of involuntary leave (days)</b>					
Russia	18	18	24	29	19
max.	49	47	63	64	45
min.	5	9	10	15	4

Source: Roskomstat, (reproduced in Commander S. and Yemtsov R. 1995:6)

**Table 3.11****Short time, Involuntary leave - 1993-4**

	1993q1	1993q2	1993q3	1993q4	1994q1
<b>Shortened work day</b>					
	2.8%	2.8%	3.3%	4.9%	10.6%
<b>Involuntary leave (thousands)</b>					
	1,907.7	2,818.8	3,681.5	4,875.5	4,632.0
<b>Average leave (days/person)</b>					
	14.0	18.0	23.6	28.9	19.0

Source: IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation, 1994 p.77

\* Some workers on 'involuntary leave' receive partial 'compensation payments', either from their enterprise or from the Employment Service.

Although, involuntary leave and short time working are likely to be under-reported, the rising trend is clear.

Finally, although I have figures only for wage arrears in Industry, Agriculture and Construction, these are deemed to be representative of trends in all sectors of the economy. Figures are in billions of roubles, at constant March 1992 prices, deflated by the Consumer Price Index.

**Table 3.12** **Wage Arrears, April 1992-June 1994**

	Industry	Agriculture	Construction
1992	April	9.0	2.0
	June	27.5	4.2
	September	10.1	2.6
	December	5.4	2.0
1993	March	4.1	2.0
	June	5.4	1.8
	September	6.5	3.6
	December	11.6	8.1
1994	March	20.6	11.1
	June	28.1	10.3

Source: Goskomstat and IMF calculations, reproduced in IMF Economic Review 16 Russian Federation 1994 p.80.

Wage arrears are clearly rising, in spite of sporadic rescue attempts by the Federal Government, which are likely to cease under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank. Informants both in Moscow and in the provinces report 'informally' reducing their labour input, as a result of wage arrears. Given Soviet era full-employment, and wage stability, it is clear that rising unemployment, under-employment and hidden unemployment (short time, involuntary leave and wage arrears) are undermining the notion of work as a stable and secure occupation and source of the means of subsistence. On the other hand it has been suggested that one of the reasons that unemployment has not grown as rapidly as expected, is related to the close identification of work and identity (see Layard and Richter 1995:9). Indeed in response to the observation that a former collective farm was heavily over-staffed, the director agreed but noted, "What can I do? Fire them? Then what would they do?"

## **Stability of employment histories, low job mobility, working in your profession, and identity**

In this section, I want to discuss the ways in which 'work', occupation or profession are related to identity. It is important to note that this is not the only factor. Others include ethnicity, origins (being a native versus immigrant Muscovite) and gender.

If we ignore for the moment those of my informants who had never been engaged in typical full time employment, we find considerable job stability. Based on an example of fourteen, the average number of years they had been in their current job was 13, with a range from 30 (in the military) to five (for a young woman who had only been working for five years). Mid range = 12 years. Yet if these figures refer to the time spent working in a single institution, closer inspection reveals a more significant kind of stable relationship between work and identity. First there is the notion of profession or specialisation, acquired in ones youth through study or training. This initial choice of profession establishes a life path, with few if any detours into other realms of employment. A sociologist who was asking me about teaching and sociology in the UK, was astounded to learn that students of sociology only rarely become full-time sociologists. He found it extremely difficult to understand how someone trained in 'sociology' could go on to work in industry, commerce, banking, social services, the health service, government, education etc. When people learned that I had worked for a number of years as a plumber on building sites, they were absolutely astounded as this crossing from a manual to an intellectual profession in mid-life was unimaginable for them. People frequently asked about my family and friends, inquiring 'and what do they do' ('chem on/ona zanimaetsa?'). Whenever I gave complicated answers, such as 'my daughter is at university but she works in a café', or 'my friend used to be a carpenter but now earns his living as a musician', people shook their heads in disbelief. This disbelief was tinged with the suspicion that 'it is not serious' to have multiple occupations/specialisations, or to change occupations. Dedication to one's profession is to some extent unquestionable.

As my Moscow informants were for the most part engaged in intellectual pursuits, the professions or the arts, one might suspect that the coincidence between

occupation and identity are the product of a certain class relation to occupation. However, other examples seem to bear out my suggestion. One of my informants was the wife of a man who had spent his whole career in the military (he had retired by the time of my fieldwork). She was working in the acquisitions section of a large department store, where she had worked for the last eight years (ie, since they had moved to Moscow). When I asked about what she had done before, she replied that she had worked in the acquisitions section of department stores all over the FSU whilst her husband was in the military. When I inquired whether she had always worked in the acquisitions section of department stores she replies 'Of course, ever since I trained for the job'. Thus although this woman had only worked in her current job for eight years, she had done the same job in different stores for the last 28 years. Similarly, Sergei had spent ten years employed 'outside his profession', due to a conflict with other experts in the field. He deemed this a criminal waste of his time and 'had never considered changing his area of expertise from the one he had pursued as a post-graduate twenty-odd years before'. He had eventually come to an unusual arrangement with another institution who allowed him to 'follow his profession' on their premises and without interference, for a minute wage packet. When this arrangement collapsed due to a further conflict, he started seeking an alternative space in which to carry on his work. Failing to agree with various offers, he ended up working in his one room flat, which he transformed into a laboratory. He was convinced that he had no choice but to pursue his chosen career, whether anyone was willing to pay him for it or not. As far as he was concerned, he 'couldn't find a place to work because of conflicts with others in his field'. The suggestion that maybe they would not take him on because they didn't need him clearly had no meaning for him and was an irrelevant contribution to the discussion.

More recent research that I have conducted in rural areas of Russia indicates a similar attitude to work amongst agricultural workers. There is severe under-employment looming in rural areas. When asked what they would do if they were made 'completely unemployed', the inevitable response was either 'look for another job as a tractor driver, collective farm bookkeeper, etc.', 'nothing', or work on my

'khoziaistvo'<sup>5</sup>. Asked if they would be interested in re-training, most respondents replied in the negative, saying either: "I'm too old to re-train (any one over the age of ca. 35)" or "No, I'm a tractor driver, I have always been a tractor driver, and I always will be a tractor driver... I don't want to do anything else".

Although it could be the case that these two sectors of the population (urban intelligentsia and rural proletariat) are particularly conservative in their attitudes to work: the one through a sense of dedication to a 'higher pursuit', the other through connection to the land and the not-uncommon conservatism of rural populations. Yet the ways in which Soviet citizens acquired training was very much geared to narrow specialisation. Shop assistants, bakers and managers in my local bread shop had all received training in the 'bread and flour products industry' at specialised institutes. Only the cashiers, who never handled the products, had not received specialised training.

This notion of job stability does not discount internal promotion to supervisory or managerial status. What I want to emphasise is the consistent identification with a given occupation, profession or skill and/or the relative stability of employment within a given institution. If a significant proportion of one's week was spent at work and the entirety of ones adult life was spent in stable employment within a given profession and/or institution, it is not surprising if identity is strongly linked to occupation. In response to the question 'what do you occupy yourself with? ('chem vyi zanimaetes'), the answer is almost always phrased in such a way that it refers to a permanent identity (I am a physicist, tractor driver, engineer etc.), rather than to a (temporary) occupation.

Further the policy of full employment meant that everybody worked, all the time with short breaks for re-location (rare enough except to difficult areas like Siberia), or, for women, for childbirth. The absence of a reserve army of labour meant that the category 'unemployed' was simply non-existent. With no alternative to employment, it becomes synonymous with adult status for men and for women.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Khoziaistvo' in this context refers to the individual subsidiary plots of members of former state and collective farms. These include at the very least a small vegetable plot surrounding the house but may include land-holdings of ca. 0.6 ha. (occasionally reaching even 1.0 ha.) and some livestock.

One of the most striking aspects of women's self-identification in the FSU for me was the extent to which all women identify themselves by reference to their occupation or profession. The full employment of women has implications for the strength of identification with work. Where in the west, the traditional stereotype has suggested that men have occupations, skills and professions, whilst half the adult population (ie, women) does not. This makes (or at least made) non-employment a not unusual occupation for an adult woman. Where there is no gender difference to employment per se, it acquires a universalistic connotation. Indeed, the only unemployed were those who were 'not able to work' ('nie trudno-sposobnie'), the young, the aged, the sick and the infirm.

### **Work and Citizenship**

Official employment was a necessary pre-requisite to full civil status in terms of the right to abide in a given locality (ie, the right to a *propiska*), which was associated with the right to local public services such as housing, schools and medical facilities. In Moscow in particular, the right to a '*propiska*' giving the holder the right to housing and public services in the capital, was a highly valued prize. It is common knowledge that non-natives often married Muscovites (often for a fee) in order to attain the coveted '*propiska*'. Employment and rights of residence were interdependent, all the more so for the in-migrating population. To be unemployed in the FSU was synonymous with loss of civil status, except for those unable to work ('nie trudno-sposobie').

## Work and access to scarce goods (material): wages, goods and services, perks

Further, full employment policies ensured that everybody had access to a reasonably adequate regular income. Moreover the wage structure was relatively stable until 1991 as the table below indicates.

**Table 3.13** **Average monthly wages in the Russian Federation**  
**1940 -1987 (roubles/month)**

1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1982	1984	1986	1987
33.9	65.7	83.1	126.1	177.7	187.3	195.5	207.8	216.1

Source: Pockney 1991:59

If wage increases between 1940 and 1987 showed a slow but steady increase (a six fold increase over 47 years), the sudden leap in prices and the subsequent leap in nominal wages subsequent to price liberalisation in January 1992 was of shocking proportions. Nominal wage rises between 1987 and July 1994 were over 1000 fold. The sharp drop in the real value of wages (to 66% of their 1987 value) in the first quarter of 1992 has been followed by rises and falls, with a brief increase in the value of real wages in December 1993 (101% of the value of wages in 1987).

**Table 3.14****Average monthly wages and pensions****1987 - August 1995**

	Nominal Wage	Real Wage	Nominal Pension	Real Pension
1987	216	100	94	100
1988	235	109	96	102
1989	259	117	101	105
1990	297	127	110*	126*
1991	552	119	130*	78*
1992q1	2,056	66	572	43
1992q2	3,931	82	1,168	57
1992q3	6,236	98	1,663	60
1992q4	11,833	97	2,913	56
1993	March	23,559	84	4,275*
1993	June	47,371	100	8,122*
1993	Sept.	80,897	90	14,620*
1993	Dec.	141,218	101	26,320*
1994	March	164,833	84	34,320*
1994	June	207,000	86	38,700*
1994	July	224,000	88	38,700*

Source:IMF Economic review 16, Russian Federation 1994 p.78

\* Indicates minimum nominal and real pensions where averages are not given.

In addition to wages, many enterprises offered their employees a wide variety of perks and privileges ('lgotii'). These included access to scarce goods from enterprise shops, offered as a reward for increased productivity and/or for political favours. Some enterprises had their own subsidiary farms to ensure a supply of agricultural foodstuffs to their employees. 'Pushers' ('tolkachi') roamed the country in search of both necessary productive inputs, and in search of other consumer goods (including consumer durables such as refrigerators or televisions) with which to attract and keep skilled labour and politically compliant staff. Often employment was linked to housing as enterprises and organisations built housing for their employees.

Similarly, many enterprises offered better quality health services to their workforce, insuring them against the risks of treatment in the general public hospitals and polyclinics. Holidays were very often accessed through work, with enterprises and ministries maintaining sanatoria and resorts in the country side or on the Black Sea coast for use by workers and their families. Access to children's holiday camps was often cited to me as the main reason for remaining employed at a given enterprise. Active leisure activities such as sports facilities were often provided by the enterprise for its employees. The more privileged might gain access to the use of a car or a dacha; only rarely did this constitute the ownership or use in perpetuity of said car or dacha. Thus continued access to such privileges was wholly tied to continued employment in the enterprise or organisation from which they were acquired.

To the extent that the consumption of both basic and 'luxury/prestige' goods and services was often tied to employment in a given enterprise, the identification between personhood and employment was further elaborated. As the FSU operated as an 'economy of shortage' (see Kornai 1980), access to basic and 'prestige' goods and services was always problematic, and extremely time consuming if forced to rely on public sector provisions. Thus commitment to a workplace that alleviated the need for searching for goods in short supply was a major incentive to a deeper identification. As in the 'small face to face communities' of traditional anthropology, some enterprises partially collapsed the distinction between spheres of production, distribution and consumption. This closed circle is usually consistent with a greater identification between members than where such spheres are separate.

### **Work and 'symbolic goods'**

Not unusually in the industrialised world, status and prestige are associated with work. In the FSU however, the relative absence of alternative sources of status and prestige reinforce the dependence on work for a sense of personal value. There are a number of factors which contribute to this dependency:

- i) insufficient free time to pursue outside interests, due to the time committed to work, travelling to and from work, shopping, and domestic labour, including

- household maintenance,
- ii) insufficient material resources: although most goods were relatively affordable, many preferred to spend excess cash on stores of necessities as a hedge against future shortages than spend cash on leisure activities,
- iii) poor public provision of spaces for the pursuit of active leisure activities: sports centres are believed to be difficult to access unless one is a professional 'sportsman', use of poorly equipped 'community centres' was bureaucratically controlled, and flats are too small to allow for other than restrained behaviour and small gatherings,<sup>6</sup>
- iv) a relative absence of the kinds of **informal interest** groups and associations that characterise a pluralistic society.<sup>7</sup>

None of my informants engaged in any kind of informal group activities apart from the gathering of family and friends in a private flat for the consumption of food and drink and the exchange of conversation. The almost total absence of alternative group activities for the construction of identity again reinforces the importance of the workplace as sole location of competition for status/prestige and identity.

### **The social relations of production and the prevalence of 'patron:client relations'**

The 'social relations of production' in the FSU were highly politicised, by default if not by design. In practice, relations between co-workers can be distinguished into two major forms: relations with superiors, and relations with peers. The intrinsically hierarchical pre-suppositions of Russian notions of human nature underpin the former and constantly threaten the ideology of cooperation that is idealised for the latter. Relations to superiors take one of two forms: either avoidance or patron:client. If a worker is not interested in advancement or has another patron, they will exercise a cool but polite avoidance with other superiors. Where a worker seeks advancement or favours, s/he will seek out a patron, approaching them with

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<sup>6</sup> The importance of networks of family and friends as a major constituent of identity are discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>7</sup> Tong discusses the continuation of alienation in the post-Soviet period as a barrier to the formation of the social groups which constitute civil society (Tong 1995). Although see Sedaitis and Butterfield (1991) for a discussion of the emergence of some autonomous social groups in the post-perestroika period.

demonstrations of respect and flattery, developing into offers of small services, or in some cases gifts. Rumours about the need to bribe superiors with substantial gifts and favours abound, but none of my informants would admit to ever having actually bribed a superior. On the other hand everyone agrees that the practice is rife, and that the possibility of demanding bribes is one of the major incentives for advancement. The favours that can be received in return for loyalty are not necessarily restricted to those that can be offered within the workplace. In fact the external social relations of patrons are often their most valuable asset.

These patron:client relations are ranked according to the strength of the relationship. To say "I had some relations with him" indicates the presence of either a weak relationship or one that is in the early stages of minor exchanges. To say "I had good relations with her" indicates that the relationship has developed to a degree of mutual security and trust with more substantial exchanges. To say "I had good relations with him, we used to drink together" indicates that a substantial level of mutual trust and intimacy has been achieved through (real or symbolic) 'drinking together' (see Chapter 7). It is a commonplace that real politicking takes place over bottles of vodka and zakuski. Thus access to material or symbolic goods and services is closely linked to the strength and range of ones patron:client relations, most of which originate at work.

In spite of the rhetoric, Soviet enterprises were not based on the principle of economic efficiency, which is theoretically meritocratic in order to achieve the best results from the labour force. Although it is well known that the position in western firms is far more complicated than the theory allows, the 'social relations of production' in Soviet enterprises was almost wholly based on politicised patron:client relationships. Although advancement in terms of promotion, wage increases, or access to scarce goods and services was linked to labour, it was linked in a specific way to 'socially productive labour'. The term 'socially productive labour' has contradictory connotations: on the one hand it refers to the conscientious fulfilment of ones productive tasks, and on the other it refers to social and/or political activities undertaken within the workplace. In practice, the social utility of ones efforts was always judged by managers ('nachalniki') who were often appointed on a political basis. Thus 'success' at work was often the product of

successful politicking, as much as of conscientious fulfilment of productive tasks. As the system became more corrupt,<sup>8</sup> a cynical manipulation of the criteria of 'fulfilment of socially useful labour' developed, where fulfilment became synonymous with loyalty to the political aims of card-carrying patrons/superiors, whatever their political aims might be (eg, their own advancement).

Both Sergei and Vladimir told me endless tales of being undermined at work because of unwillingness to connive in the advancement of superiors they thought were incompetent. Sergei's unwillingness to participate in this process had been the cause of his exclusion from his field, and of his divorce from his second wife. She (and her family) were dissatisfied with his ability to 'provide' them with the privileges of a flat in the centre, access to 'special shops', holidays in the south, or a dacha. Although his professional status should have been adequate to ensure these provisions, his political intractability meant that he was effectively denied access to these goods and services. Indeed all of my informants told endless stories about work-related intrigues, and of the capriciousness of *nachalniks*.

### **Labour and sociality: relations between peers**

On a more positive note, the rhetorical and practical significance of the 'labour collective'<sup>9</sup> cannot be underestimated. However 'formal' the relationship, major decisions about production and management were often ratified by a General Meeting of the Collective; in most institutions the 'General Meeting of the Collective' was structurally at the top of the pyramid of the 'social relations of production'. Although it is well known that the real powers of the 'collective' were much attenuated by the intrigues of shifting patron:client relations and subservience to Party directives, it is important to remember that the 'collective' nevertheless

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<sup>8</sup> This increasing corruption is largely associated with the stagnation of the Brezhnev years. See eg, the collection of papers edited by Clark 1983, Grossman 1977, and Katsenelinboigen 1977, Schlapentokh 1989, and Tong 1995.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of the collective ('*kollektiv*') has distinctive connotations in Russia. It is a more formalised notion than in English referring more to a structural group of eg, co-workers, than to any kind of informal social group. It does not have the 'subversive' connotations that it has in English ('collective action' is eg, the strike, the street demonstration etc.) It also has more universalistic connotations. Where in English, a collective is partly defined by an assumption of specifically shared interests, which originate in the individual: membership is voluntary almost by definition. In Russian it often refers to eg, 'the workers', 'all Soviet citizens' or 'society', making membership of the '*kollektiv*' de facto rather than a matter of choice. The solidarity implied by the word 'collective' was abused by Soviet rhetoric, which has entailed a corruption of the 'solidary' meanings of '*kollektiv*'.

retained a strong symbolic significance. If interviews with collective farm workers fail to uncover any real participation in decision-making, they still reveal an occasional pride in the exercise of power.<sup>10</sup> It is as if, although people recognise that they rarely exercised the power that inheres in the labour collective, they are keen to assert that they could if they wanted to.

Amongst peers, I noted a complex tangle of mutual affection and mutual distrust. Overtly, people who work in close contact with each other on a daily basis demonstrate a superficial bonhomie laced with polite intercourse. On festive occasions, those who work together will gather around tea and small snacks, or even a bottle or two of vodka, to celebrate the occasion, be this the birthday of an individual or International Women's Day. On two occasions I was invited to birthday parties at work, which were to be the only celebration of the persons in question. Whenever I visited the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography, it was the occasion for a tea party; someone was inevitably sent out for cakes (not a quick errand). Usually the whole process took at least an hour, and no one seemed to begrudge the time. Indeed whenever I visited anyone at work, which was not infrequent, a small tea party always ensued, in which all the co-workers participated. I have noted a similar propensity to stop work and drink tea and chat on collective farms. Indeed the same principle of hospitality which should be accorded a visitor to a private flat is applied to visitors to the workplace. The distinction between appropriate levels of hospitality at home and at work is one of degree rather than one of kind. Whenever vodka is drunk at these workplace gatherings, there are inevitable toasts to individual members of 'our collective' (nash kollektiv).

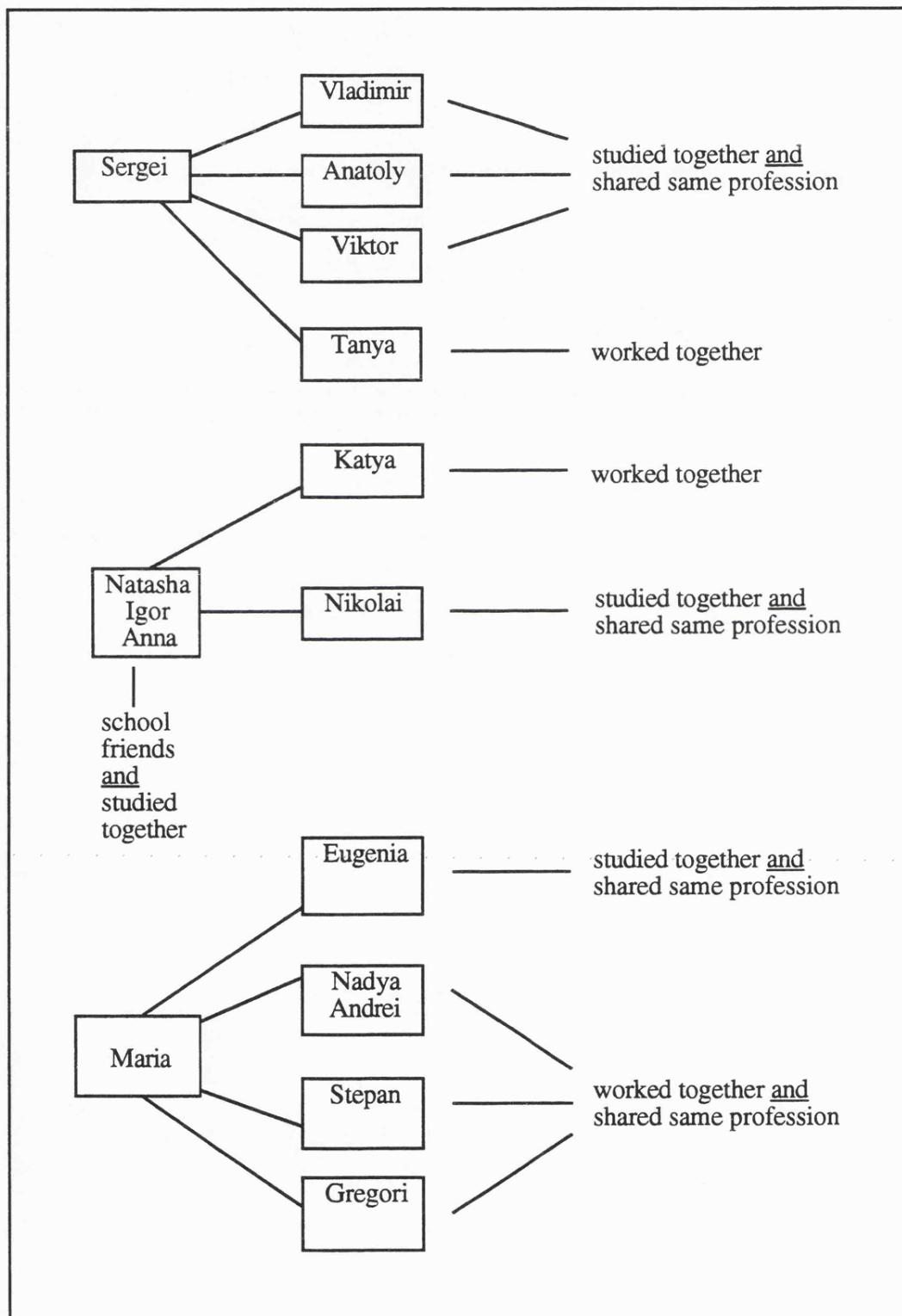
In contrast, I was impressed by the viciousness of the gossip about co-workers that was offered in private. I learned of bitter resentments, laced with accusations of offering sexual or material favours in return for advancement, and accusations of gross incompetence. When I tried to discover to which co-worker the accusations were levelled, I was often shocked to discover that it was a fellow tea drinker, a 'loved member of our collective', or the person to whom I had been introduced with

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<sup>10</sup> The most common example given is that the General Meeting of the Collective' elected a farm director, and can likewise terminate his post. In reality, a director is usually proposed and the election is a show of hands 'in favour'.

excessive politeness. It is a taken for granted assumption that co-workers are involved in intrigues for power and influence. Significantly, the advancement of the one is thought to be inextricably linked to the loss by others. Competition is enacted through slander and each fears the secret machinations of the others. This suspicion is the taken for granted background to work relations, alleviated only by the establishment of a small circle of colleagues that can be trusted.

One of the most remarkable aspects of social relations amongst my informants was the role of occupation in the establishment of friendship. If we define friends as people you will invite to your flat to share food, drink and conversation, Table J. indicates the source of guests/friends at a selection of gatherings, which I attended. Kin have been excluded from this diagram.

**Table 3.15****Friends and shared occupations**

The importance of occupation for the creation and maintenance of friendship is rivalled only by shared ethnic identity.<sup>11</sup> If it is not surprising that the workplace is an important source of friends, it seems significant when it is almost the sole source. All of the friends of my close circle of informants were either previous co-students or, more frequently, past or current colleagues (See Chapter 1). This phenomena is strongly linked to the relative absence of other forms of informal interest groupings, and to the relative absence of spaces for casual sociality (cafes, bars, clubs, sports centres etc.) Similarly co-residence in an area or in a block of flats was never the source of intimate relations except where these coincided with work.<sup>12</sup> If one of my informants certainly 'knew' the co-tenants in her communal flat, she most certainly didn't consider them to be friends.

This tendency to draw friends from the workplace is linked to the notion of coincidence between occupation or profession and identity, and ones choice of friends. To the extent that identity is linked to occupation, the 'shared interests' that often form the basis for friendship tend to be occupational ones. Thus musicians have friends who are also musicians, physicists have friends who are also physicists, etc. The tendency is all the stronger in relation to very close friends. This is not of course an absolute, but a tendency, but one that is much stronger than it is, for example, in the UK.

### **Under-employment, 'free time', consumption, shifting social relations, fracturing identities**

The impending collapse of traditional full-time employment in the FSU is one of the most significant aspects of current changes, as changes in the employment structure affect changes in the daily habitus of much of the population. At the end of my fieldwork, many of my informants were spending less time actually at work, and three had become wholly unemployed. Now, time spent at work or in work-related activities has decreased further. The shift to what is in effect part-time employment

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<sup>11</sup> This applied particularly to two of my informants, who were both originally from the Caucasus. They both tended to associate more closely with fellow Caucasians than with other ethnic groups.

<sup>12</sup> This exception refers to informants who lived together in the same block of flats which was the 'House of Composers'. They had acquired residence in this block through their work, and consequently it could be argued that their relationships were as much a factor of their work as of their co-residence.

is often not formally acknowledged, but is evidenced by decreasing relative wages as much as by a decrease in the time actually spent at work.

This decrease in the time spent engaged in work-related activities creates a concomitant increase in 'free time'. The increase in 'free time' is also affected by the decrease in time required to shop. In all the time budgets presented, the time spent shopping decreased significantly between 1992 and 1993 (see Chapter 5). Better supplies and higher prices of consumer goods have resulted in much shorter queues for most goods from most outlets (although exceptions remain). However, this increase in 'free time' is not experienced as an increase in leisure time, partly because it is closely related to reduced real incomes (although this is imagined to be more severe than it is: see wage table above and discussion of importance of relative wages below). Often this 'free time' is associated with increasing feelings of uselessness, impotence, boredom, anxiety and disorientation. On the other hand many people continue to work full time for what are in effect part-time wages, in order to continue to feel wholly occupied.

The increase in 'free time' that is the outcome of under-employment could be used in different ways:

- i) leisure activities (including doing nothing),
- ii) pursuit of diversified income generating activities,
- iii) household 'production' activities.

Most of my informants are using their novel surplus 'free time' in all these directions, but in differing proportions. Where a few are fully occupied in seeking out new income generating activities, most will engage in new income generating activities only if invited to do so by others. As this increase in free time is linked to falling incomes, there is often little motivation or possibility to spend this 'free time' in pursuit of leisure activities which require cash outlay. One of my informants spent increasing proportions of her time sitting at home, steeped in depression. Some, who refused point blank to engage in any occupation other than their 'specialisation', were continuing to follow their interests regardless of whether or not they were being paid for their efforts. Many (of the women in particular) were

spending much of their free time reducing the costs of consumption by eg, preserving fruit and vegetables for winter consumption, making clothes for themselves and their children. Those of my informants with access to a dacha plot, spent much time in the spring, summer and early autumn growing their own fruit and vegetables and collecting berries and mushrooms for household consumption. Men engage in minor household repairs, or, if lucky enough to own a car, can spend huge quantities of time in repairs and maintenance, and in seeking out spare parts.

I would suggest that this increase in household production activities increases the extent to which identity is linked to the household as a consumption unit as it decreases the extent to which identity is a product of labour or social production. The importance of private life is increasing with the demise of time spent at work.<sup>13</sup> This is bound to have a gender dimension as it develops further. The one young woman I knew who was a full-time mother and housewife was perfectly satisfied with this identification. Other older women were more inclined to feel that 'as well as working full time for part time wages, their domestic workload had also increased'. High female unemployment is forecast as hidden unemployment becomes official. Part of the rhetoric of the changing role of domestic life entails the return of women to a domesticated identification. Although some women explicitly welcome this return as a recognition of 'real femininity', and a reduction in working hours, others foresee a drastic reduction in women's contribution to public life, female impoverishment and a slide into inactivity and depression.<sup>14</sup>

Although under-employment is linked to falling real incomes, I would argue that the more significant change is linked to falling relative incomes. Indeed, although all of my informants (except Sasha) claimed to be unable to afford a range of goods and services that they had been able to afford without question before the freeing of prices in January 1992, none of the households I visited on a regular basis ever seemed to lack

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<sup>13</sup> See Shlapentokh 1989 for a discussion of the increasing 'privatisation' of Soviet life.

<sup>14</sup> I attended a conference in Moscow entitled "Women and the Path to Freedom" where I was surprised to find that most of the speakers (almost all of whom were women) were concerned with reconstructing an ideal of femininity, stressing motherhood, child rearing, domesticity, 'beauty', or 'natural female spirituality'. The minority who spoke of the importance of retaining and strengthening women's participation in economic and political life were accused of being conservatives, communists, and anti-reform.

an ample supply of basic (bread and eggs) or luxury (sausage) foodstuffs. They all claimed to be unable to afford as much sausage as previously, adding that they rarely ate sausage for breakfast any more, and that meat was not consumed as often as before. However, even when I visited people more or less uninvited, I was almost always offered a full meal, often with sausage and/or meat. One of my informants said that 'before' they had been able to afford more bread/sausage than they needed and frequently threw bread away or fed sausage to the dog. By comparison, she said that they now never throw any food away and have ceased feeding sausage to the dog. Many of my informants had adapted a Soviet era anecdote to current conditions: 'Before, although there were constant shortages, empty shelves in the shops and long queues, most people's refrigerators were full of a wide variety of foodstuffs'. 'Now, although no one can afford to buy anything because everything has become unbelievably expensive, most people's refrigerators are full of a wide variety of foodstuffs'. If hoarding made sense in an economy of shortage as a hedge against future shortages, it also makes sense to hoard, as a hedge against inflation (this is discussed further in Chapters 5 & 6). If 'before', people could buy deficit goods rarely but in bulk (as they were easily affordable when actually available), people can now buy 'scarce' goods frequently, but in small quantities (as they are more or less always available but relatively expensive). Tables 3.16, 3.17 and 3.18 demonstrate changes in patterns of consumption. Tables 3.19, 3.20, 3.21 and 3.22 indicate changes in the relations between wages, pensions and prices between 1985 and 1993. These table are based on an article in *Argumenti i Fakti* which argues that people's references to a golden 'pre-Gorbachev' relation between prices and incomes are largely imagined. He reminds readers of the constant shortages that plagued the pre-Gorbachev era and attempts to demonstrate that the deteriorating relation between incomes and prices is

not as severe as is commonly thought.

**Table 3.16**

**Indices of real consumers' expenditure: 1991-2  
measured v. survey data (1991=100)**

	Measured consumers' expenditure	Survey data consumers' expenditure
1991	100.0	100.0
1992q1	42.1	51.8
1992q2	38.2	52.8
1992q3	43.4	74.2
1992q4	49.2	70.4

Source: "The Conditions of Life", Illiaronov, Layard and Orszag, Centre for Economic Performance Discussion Paper 165 August 1993.

The survey data indicates a higher level of consumer expenditure than does the measured data, which is drawn from reported sales (from former state shops and service outlets). What it is important to note is that although there was a severe fall in consumer expenditure subsequent to price liberalisation in January 1992 (as there was in the real value of wages) both average wages and consumer expenditure have been steadily creeping up. Although consumer expenditure at the end of 1992 had only reached 70% of 1991, it was 20% higher than in the first quarter of 1992.

**Table 3.17****Structure of Consumer Expenditure 1989 - 1993**

(in % of total expenditures)

	Food	Non-food	Alcohol Tobacco	Paid Services	(of which housing & utilities)
1989	38.0	43.0	5.2	13.8	4.0
1990	36.1	45.7	5.9	12.3	3.6
1991	38.4	47.4	5.2	9.0	2.0
1992	47.1	40.6	5.1	7.2	1.2
1993	46.3	42.2	4.0	7.5	1.1
<i>Poland</i>					
1989	36.9	38.9	13.7	10.5	3.9
1991	26.3	24.3	-	40.8	-
<i>USA</i>					
1991	14.0	26.6	3.1	56.3	18.2

Source: IMF Economic Review 16 Russian Federation 1994 p.82

The rising proportion of household income spent on foodstuffs is commonly linked to falling living standards. Although expenditure on food in the Russian Federation is substantially higher than in Poland or the USA, and grew between 1990 and 1992 (covering the period of initial and drastic price inflation), it was beginning to fall again in 1993.

**Table 3.18****Average Annual Consumption of Selected Foodstuffs**

(kgs/per capita, unless otherwise indicated)

	1990	1991	1992	1993
Meat and Meat products	69.8	65.3	57.9	61.2
Milk and milk products	378.4	348.5	294.2	318.0
Eggs (pieces)	231.0	229.0	243.0	254.0
Fish and fish products	15.5	14.1	11.5	11.5
Sugar and confectionary	32.1	29.1	26.4	32.6
Vegetables	81.1	86.4	78.0	78.0
Fruit	37.3	34.5	29.3	34.2
Bread products	96.9	100.6	103.9	110.4
Potatoes	94.4	98.1	106.6	116.7
Vegetable oil & other fats	6.8	6.2	6.7	8.1

Source: Goskomstat, reproduced in IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation, 1994 p.81.

The reduced consumption of meat, milk and fish is perceived by many Russians to be indicative of a reduced standard of living. Although figures for consumption of vegetables and fruit have also decreased, this is in part due to increased reliance on household production of fruit and vegetables (and a decrease in sales from monitored outlets). Increased consumption of sugars, fats and carbohydrates is consistent with decreased protein consumption, as the latter are comparatively 'cheap and filling',

**Table 3.19**

**Wages, pensions, meat prices**  
**Comparison 1985:1993**

Meat		1985	1993
average monthly wage		200 r.	23,000 r.
price kg. meat	(state shop, Moscow)	2 r/kg	600 r/kg
	(state shop, provinces)	(4 r/kg)	
	(kolkhoz Market)	(7 r/kg)	
total meat/monthly wage	@ 2 r/kg	100 kg	38 kg
	@ 4 r/kg	50 kg	
	@ 7 r/kg	30 kg	
average pension		77 r	12,600 r
total meat/monthly pension	@ 2 r/kg	37 kg	21 kg
	@ 4 r/kg	19 kg	
	@ 7 r/kg	11 kg	

Clearly meat is more expensive than it was. However, this difference decreases substantially if we compare the quantity of good quality meat (from a kolkhoz market) that could be bought in 1985 (30 kg. per average monthly wage) and in 1993 (38. kg. per average monthly wage). This indicates that although 'meat' was indeed cheaper, good quality meat that consumers didn't have to queue for was not that much cheaper.

**Table 3.20****Wages, pensions, bread prices****Comparison 1985:1993**

Bread	1985	1993
average monthly wage	200 r	23,000 r
cost 1kg bread	20 kopeks	33 r
total bread/monthly wage	1,000 kg	700 kg
average monthly pension	77 r	12,600 r
total bread/monthly pension	385 kg	388 kg

**Table 3.21****Wages, refrigerator prices****Comparison 1985:1993**

Refrigerators	1985	1993
annual wage	2,400 r	276,000 r
price one refrigerator	600 r	132,000 r
total refrigerators/annual wage	4	2

**Table 3.22****Wages, Men's suit prices****Comparison 1985:1993**

Men's suits	1985	1993
average annual wage	2,400 r	276,000 r
price suit	150 r	14,000 r
total suit/annual wage	16	20

Source Tables 3.19, 3.20, 3.21, and 3.22: Argumenti i Fakti No.18, May 1993.

As we can see, if the average annual wage in 1993 was sufficient only for the purchase of two refrigerators (compared to four refrigerators in 1985), it was sufficient to buy an increased quantity of bread or of men's suits. Listening to conversations on the radio, on television, or in private conversations, one would be lead to believe that the entire population is on the verge of starvation due to rising prices and falling real incomes. Where significant changes have occurred is in reduced spending on non-food items and services. This change to higher proportional expenditure on foodstuffs is traditionally associated with falling living standards. Yet I would suggest that although a higher proportion of regular cash incomes is spent on food, this masks the extent to which many people acquire non-food items in one of a number of ways: sporadic income from other economic activities (often part time engagement in commercial activity), or through barter. Again although all of my informants claimed to be absolutely unable to afford new items of clothing, Maria managed to buy a new coat with savings she made on expenses for a trip to Poland; Valeria bought several items of clothing as she made 'profits on her loans'; Katya's sister made her several woollen jumpers; Natasha bought new clothes for herself, her daughter and her mother whilst on a trip to the UK; Mikhail acquired clothes, toys and consumer durables as 'gifts' from various 'contacts'; Lyuba was given an expensive jumper as a bonus from work and was acquiring clothes for her grand-daughter from colleagues. All of these acquisitions would have remained 'hidden' from official statistics; even those that were bought for cash in Moscow were bought from one of the new commercial outlets (shops or kiosks), whose sales were largely unrecorded. If we take the middle line between people's statements about drastic reduction in household consumption and evidence of changing patterns of acquisition (what, where and how), we are lead to what is probably a fairly accurate picture, ie, one of falling consumption, but at a slower or less drastic rate than is popularly perceived. I would suggest that there are three reasons for the perception that incomes are falling relative to prices.

- i) Incomes **are** falling relative to prices, if at a lesser rate than popularly perceived. The population is however inclined to overstate, or exaggerate their new poverty because,
  - a. they are reeling from the shock of inflation, and
  - b. it is in their interests to make politicians aware of their discontent.

- ii) Incomes are falling **relative** to the range of goods and services now on offer. The freeing of prices (and attendant inflation), the privatisation of trade and the liberalisation of imports has created a totally novel supply of consumer goods in Russian shops. Many of the imported goods are extremely expensive (even by western standards) and totally out of the price range of most consumers. The inability to afford such a wide range of goods is a new and disturbing experience for most Russian consumers, creating a novel sense of relative poverty.
- iii) Nominal incomes have become unpredictable. If 'before' many of my informants had received a timely and slowly increasing wage for the ten years prior to current economic changes, they now receive their wages irregularly, and in varying amounts, eg, 15,000 roubles one month, then 6,000 roubles three weeks later, then 12,000 roubles six weeks later. The overall shortage of cash in the economy means that enterprises and institutions often do not have the cash to pay wages, and/or divide up what they do have amongst the workforce regardless of what is owed to each (See table 3.12, Wage arrears). Many people are now unable to state their monthly income with any certainty, but can only offer examples of what they have received over the last three months. Amongst some groups of employees (professionals in particular), minute irregular wage packets are sometimes supplemented by substantial bulk payments as a result of the fulfilment of a specific time-bound contract with a government or commercial agency, for example. Thus, falling and irregular incomes are sometimes increased hugely by one-off large payments. But as these windfalls cannot be relied upon for overall financial security in the future, their value in terms of perceived economic well-being is much reduced.
- iv) There is an increasing disparity in income levels: the poor are becoming poorer, and beggars have appeared on Moscow streets.

**Table 3.23****Poverty Trends 1980-1993**

	Poverty line* roubles/month per capita	% below poverty line
1980	64.6	11
1985	76.7	13
1988	84.0	11
1990	93.3	10
1991	190.0	11
1992	January 635.0	30
	March 1,031.0	23
	June 1,639.0	23
	September 2,163.0	19
	December 4,282.0	16
1993	March 8,069.0	35
	June 16,527.0	25
	October 32,400.0	29
	December 42,800.0	23

Source: IMF Economic Review 16 Russian federation 1994 p.251

\* For the years 1980 to 1991 these figures were computed using the 'minimum consumption basket' (MCB) which constituted the income necessary to maintain a decent standard of living (including eg, costs of clothing and transport). For the years 1992 and 1993, the 'minimum subsistence basket' (MSB) was used, which is based on minimum food intake and minimum housing costs. As the MSB is always lower than the MCB, a consistent use of the MCB would indicate a much higher incidence of poverty.

On the other hand a small but highly visible minority are becoming richer (the nouveau riche). A new and conspicuous form of hierarchy is emerging. Many of my informants had an ambiguous attitude to these new distinctions and found it difficult to orientate themselves. If previously, intellectual prowess was rewarded by respect if not by wealth, it was difficult for reform minded intellectuals to be clear about their attitudes to the nouveau riche. As an 'effect' of democratisation they were in favour of western style meritocratic differentiation; on the other hand, the benefits seemed to accrue to traders who were deemed ill-deserving of such conspicuous gains.

Thus the formerly stable relationship between work, incomes, consumption and identity (to the extent that consumption is always a factor in the construction of identity) has become a more variable and unpredictable one. If previously, relatively stable identities were the product of secure if average incomes linked to stable patterns of consumption, identity is now the product of wildly changing fluctuations

in income and associated consumption. If one month, Maria was bemoaning her inevitable impoverishment and the lack of respect now accorded to intellectual endeavours, the next she was enjoying an admittedly short term experience of being able to afford expensive imported clothes and the proud identity of the economically successful. Yet, on balance, she was more disturbed by the uncertainties of her social position than enthused by the opportunities for occasional success. Given the relative stability of people's economic experience throughout the Soviet period, this new instability is traumatic.

### **Patron:client relations**

Similarly, the value of established patron:client relations has shifted both in terms of the identity of valuable patrons and in the range of opportunities they can offer. If 'before' a patron could be relied on for access to scarce goods and services, the shift to a money economy entails the decreased reliance on a work-place patron for access to these goods and services. Where before many scarce resources were allocated from **within** enterprises and institutions, the development of the Market is increasing the supply of goods and services **outside** the control of enterprises and institutions. Rather than relying on relations with a powerful 'nachalnik' (boss or chief) for a pass to a Black Sea resort in summer, anyone can now go to these resorts provided they have the money. Visiting a Black Sea resort in June 1993, I was told that access used to be restricted to Party apparatchiks, "but now it is only used by the 'mafia'". The scarce goods often provided by enterprises and institutions in order to attract and keep skilled workers, are now freely available in retail shops, but at inflated prices. Thus the link between work-related socio-political relations and household consumption has been substantially weakened.

As the value of patron:client relations has shifted, so have the relations between peers in their competition for patrons. If the value of a patron no longer carries the opportunity to access deficit goods and services, it may now entail preferential treatment when it comes to rationing wages, or even to secure employment. Where actual cut-backs in staff are taking place (and this is less than it could be), the lack of a powerful patron could mean the permanent loss of a job, and the attendant access to even irregular wages. In practice, this means that the intrigues that

characterised Soviet era relationships between co-workers have been given new meaning, creating further suspicion and distrust between peers. Rumours abound and the seemingly random differences in people's wage packets are interpreted as signs of successful manoeuvres which inevitably entail private accusations of slander and/or bribery by the 'successful'.

On the other hand, the ability to engage in diversified income generating activities is closely linked to relationships, usually established at work, either with 'trusted' colleagues or with still-powerful superiors. The importance of the emerging commercial sector in Russian life will be discussed below; suffice for now to note that success in commerce is strongly linked to the strength of ones personal relationships.

### **Identity and Decreasing Production**

The use of increased 'free time' occasioned by under-employment has important implications for the construction of identity. If we have established that full-employment made for strong links between occupation and identity, the experience of under-employment necessarily affects both the strength of the relationship and the content of the categories. If work, occupation or profession occupies a lesser proportion of ones waking life, this entails a decrease in reliance on occupation for a sense of purpose and identity. The sense that 'nikomu nie nuzhno', that no one needs (ones labour), entails a feeling of uselessness. To the extent that 'before' all labour was by definition 'socially useful labour' feeding industrialisation and/or the growing demands of the country for a variety of goods and services, sudden under-employment is also experienced as a betrayal. The government paternalistically assured the labour force that it was constructively occupied; the command economy has been dismantled and replaced by one based on 'demand'; 'demand' for traditional Russian produced goods and services has fallen drastically; therefore ones labour either never was really socially useful (ie, satisfying real demand), OR, corruption at the top and/or speculation has caused inflation, unfair competition from imports and the impoverishment that decreases demand. Almost all of my informants preferred the second explanation, seeing solutions in change of government rather than in a change in the productive strategies of the economy.

Suggestions that perhaps they were not being paid because no one was willing to pay for, for example, another paper on Evenki ritual, research into the activities of magnetised crystals or for (poor quality) refrigerators, fruit or vegetables were inevitably taken as insults.

The identity between producer and product in post-Soviet Moscow remains linked to the Marxian maxim of the labour theory of value, that is, the value of a product is created solely by the value of the natural resources and by the value added by labour. The notion that the value of a product is synonymous with demand for the product was anathema to almost all of my informants. Even if they agreed that, theoretically, it makes sense to make things that people actually want to buy, the notion of human identity and purpose being inextricably linked to productive activity remained an *a priori* assumption. The *de facto* shift to an economic system based on the priority of consumption is effectively a complete reversal of economic logic. This shift requires a sensitivity to the desire and demand of real 'others' for a product, rather than compliance with desires and demands determined by a paternalistic state, a state that knew best what people needed and restrained what the people might want.

Thus the shift to an economy based on demand entails both the demise of the priority of the producer and the emergence of the priority of the consumer. This is difficult because:

- i) The notion of people having distinctive desires (as opposed to 'functional' or 'rational' needs)<sup>15</sup> is alien to traditional Soviet ideology, and to the experience and practice of the populace.
- ii) 'Demand' was determined by the state, based on rational needs, and adjusted only for changes in the demographic profile of the population. Soviet producers have no experience of fluctuations in demand, resulting from the fickleness of consumers.

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed scanning the Soviet literature on consumption ('potreblenie'), I noted that most commentators were concerned to define the 'rational level of consumption'. This takes the form of 'minimum subsistence' requirements for workers, pensioners, children, men, women, and the need for one new pair of boots etc. at regular intervals. As production of consumer goods was always based on these (publicised) calculations, the criteria simultaneously became part of the ideology of consumption.

- iii) The state no longer mediates the relation between producers and consumers through the State Procurement Agencies. Producers therefore are now in a more direct relation with consumers. This requires a novel kind of psychological imagination and sensitivity to the desires of others. 'Producing what other people might want' is a novel approach to production (and therefore to labour and to identity). This requires improved lines of communication between consumers and producers, as well as an acknowledgement of the need for this communication.

Reductions in both the time spent 'at work' and in the significance of normal employment for access to 'scarce goods' is thus experienced as one of the major factors affecting understandings (and therefore the meanings of) current change. As one of the major sources of alternative income generating employment is now commerce, which was a criminal activity (as 'speculation') and the ideological equivalent of prostitution in the popular imagination, engagement in alternative employment wholly fails to resolve the crisis of identity engendered by falling employment in traditional institutions. The now under-employed are faced with a simple set of alternatives: either engage in commerce, gaining income and access to scarce goods but losing the self-respect associated with working productively in one's profession, or, remain under-employed with insufficient income to construct new identities through consumption and/or leisure. The collapse of the old employment system is thus associated with the dissolution of a significant source of social identity, with no socially acceptable alternatives in sight. The changing meaning of 'commerce' will be discussed in relation to this movement.

### **Emergence of commercial activity**

Perhaps the most significant change in the construction of identity through occupation, is linked to the emergence of commerce as a legal activity. It is impossible to underestimate the extent to which this is a complete reversal of the moral economy familiar to the Soviet citizen. The negative evaluation of commerce as a legitimate occupation has deep roots in feudal Russian culture, and classical literature is full of derogatory allusions to traders. Traders are characterised as grasping, profiteering and the identification of Jewry and trade exploits both anti-

Semitic and anti-trade sentiments in a mutually reinforcing loop. The Russian word for merchant ('*kuptsi*') has derogatory connotations, and when reference is made to the fact that the merchant class lived on the south side of the Moskva river in pre-revolutionary times, the south side of the river acquires negative connotations as a consequence of this connection. The derogation of trade and commerce in pre-revolutionary Russia is similar to the derogation of trade in eg, England during the period of transition from land-owning feudalism to a political economy based on profitable trade.<sup>16</sup> Castells also suggests that the Paris Commune was a protest against 'speculation'.<sup>17</sup> That Russia was arguably still experiencing the transition from land-owning feudalism to modernity immediately prior to the revolution combined with Marxist-Leninist derogation of profiteering commerce to create an almost unchallenged ideological condemnation of trade.

During the Soviet era, distribution of goods and services was undertaken by the state, which was the sole decision maker in terms of what goods and services were distributed to which regions, which warehouses and which retail shops. These decisions were theoretically based on assessments of the 'rational needs of the population', and in practical terms based on the distribution patterns of previous years, adjusted for political preferences. It is a commonplace that Moscow was always the best supplied of all Soviet cities (with Leningrad a close second), because,

- a. of the concentration of population in the Capital city,
- b. of the dangers of a dissatisfied population close to the residence of decision-makers,
- c. of the ideological priority of Moscow as capital city,
- d. of the potential for observation by resident foreigners,
- e. of the concentration of power-holders and the need to fulfil their consumption needs.

Elsewhere, the supply of consumer goods was erratic, causing constant shortages.

Due to the inefficiency of the central planning mechanism, private trade (or

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Carrier 1995 pp 67-69.

<sup>17</sup> See Gregory 1994:219.

speculation) flourished,<sup>18</sup> although it was both illegal and severely punished. If a trade-like mechanism was in operation at the level of distribution of producer goods,<sup>19</sup> this was not undertaken legally by private individuals or institutions in pursuit of profit. Indeed, to the extent that the value of a good was calculated solely on the basis of the natural resources plus the value added by labour, no further value could be added by the distributive mechanism. Distribution was a mechanical operation organised by the state, but one that could not logically add value to the product. Thus the simple notion of trade as the purchase of a good where it is plentiful (and therefore cheap) and re-sale where it is scarce (and therefore dearer) was deemed to be profiteering and speculation. Any profit made by the trader/speculator was not only illegal in the formal sense but is even now considered to be unearned income, not far removed from the profits of outright theft. In Marxist-Leninist ideology, trade is not considered to be labour, because it is not directly productive labour, and cannot therefore add value to a product (as value comes solely from productive labour).

The liberalisation of trade in the FSU has resulted in an explosion of commerce. Highly visible street traders offer both Russian made and imported goods. During the period of my initial fieldwork (summer 1992- summer 1993), the goods on offer on the streets were significantly more expensive than comparable goods on offer in the shops. The freeing of prices and trade made speculation a profitable undertaking: enduring shortages made it possible to buy Russian made goods in the still state or recently privatised retail shops, and sell them outside the shops for higher prices. At the beginning of my fieldwork, this practice was universally condemned by all but one of my informants, and vocal condemnation of street traders was common on public transport (especially above ground transport) and on the streets. The remark 'well you don't have to buy anything if you don't want to', often caused furious accusations that it was the street traders causing shortages in the shops, that they were 'speculators' ('spekulantie'), 'filthy scum' ('svolochie'), or

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<sup>18</sup> Research conducted in Moscow in 1989 reported that 19% of Muscovite respondents bought 'deficit' goods from 'speculators'. Source: Kuznetsov N. and Rukavishnikov V. "Moscovites in Deficit Conditions" in *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 11-12 September 1989.

<sup>19</sup> The inability of the system to effectively distribute productive inputs resulted in the development of an informal system of exchange between enterprise managers. 'Pushers' (tolkachi) would set up exchanges between enterprises outside the official distribution system, oiling the wheels of production with bribery, or the provision of needed inputs.

'prostitutes' ('prostitutkie'). A frequently cited reason for the condemnation of street traders was that 'they don't work, they just sit there all day and make huge profits'; 'the young people today don't want to work, they just want to trade'. There was no acknowledgement of the fact that manning a street stall in winter was hardly a comfortable occupation, and certainly no understanding of the risks involved in commercial undertakings. If emergent entrepreneurs like Sasha were quick to point out that they had a right to profit because of the risks they took, the link between risk-taking and reward was anathema to everyone else. If in conversation I suggested that maybe these traders did work, acquiring the initial capital, travelling to Poland or China, buying goods, returning to Moscow, and either travelling around shops trying to sell them or selling them from street stalls, most of my respondents would shrug and say 'yes but that's not work'. This indicates a much narrower field of meaning: 'rabortat' (to work) still meant proper employment within either the manual or intellectual, productive or service sectors which had been the sources of employment during the Soviet period. The new income-generating activities presented by commerce are not 'work'.

Most of my informants claimed to 'never buy anything' from commercial traders, and often asked me if I did. If I replied that I often did, because it saved me from having to queue in the shops and that I felt that the extra cost was worth the saving in time, they would offer me a variety of reasons why I should desist. Often these reasons referred to the lack of quality control exercised over street traders in foodstuffs, or on the possibility of being 'deceived'. My respondents were always vaguely angry with me for my defense of traders, and they seemed to feel that my tolerance of street trade was inconsistent with either the moral status I enjoyed as a friend or with my (high) status as a foreigner. They seemed to feel that tolerance of street trade was somehow 'below me' (as it was 'below them') and that I was 'letting the side down', by buying from speculators.

Not infrequently, people would point to a busy street market and condemn the scene for being a 'bazaar', 'chaos', or comment that the government should restore 'order' ('pariadok') to the streets. Street trade was strongly associated with concepts of chaos and disorder, and was rapidly becoming the symbol of the general break-down of predictable stability. The fear and loathing that attended the association of street

trade and disorder indicates the depth of the reversal that was undermining the moral economy.

We have discussed the link between identity and employment, and the ways in which the demise of the latter is causing changes in the construction of the former. Traditional employment occupies less time than previously, and work no longer can be relied on for a reliable income. Status and patronage are no longer the necessary pre-requisites for access to certain privileges, which are now available via the market/for cash. The only income generating activity now open to those who find themselves under-employed and with 'free time' on their hands is engagement in trade and associated forms of commercial activity. If, for some professionals, this means agreeing contracts for specified pieces of work linked to their traditional field of interest, for many this means engagement in wholly novel spheres of exchange. If, in the second half of 1992, most of my informants were decrying the emergence of unregulated street trade and speculation, by the end of 1993, a few were engaged in some form of commercial activity. Conversations about mutual acquaintances engaged in commercial activity have also changed their tone over the last two years. Those who became involved in commercial activity early on were quietly condemned for so doing by their friends and acquaintances: it was said that they had become 'interested only in making money', with an implicit comparison as to how they used to be more interested in artistic or intellectual pursuits. Or, it was said that their activities didn't constitute 'real business' but were simply 'trade' ('torgovlia'); 'real business' has connotations of the serious commercial activities of foreigners in implied comparison with the 'not serious' approach of native participants.

In the course of the last two years, there has emerged a kind of ranked categorisation of private sector activity. At the pinnacle there is 'business', serious, professional, honest and hard-working; this is followed by 'commercial activity' ('komercheskoe delo'), which is also becoming professionalised, but retains a somewhat tainted connotation; at the bottom remain 'trade' ('torgovlia'), and speculation ('spekulatsia') with all the negative connotations of non-productive labour noted above. Of those who have shifted their occupations to more or less full-time engagement in commerce, it is inevitably said that 'he or she is now only

interested in business/commerce/trade', depending on the strength of the implied insult. If the person was previously engaged in either artistic or intellectual pursuits, this shift is seen as a betrayal of the ideals of the Russian intelligentsia, or as participation in an activity suitable only for those 'without culture'. Several of my informants who have more recently become involved with commercial activity, admitted this to me in hushed tones, with embarrassed shrugs, adding 'what to do' ('shto delat')? Most of my Moscow informants were members of a disaffected intelligentsia; never in their wildest imaginings had the change to 'democracy' been associated with the necessity to engage in base commercial activity. They clearly felt that participation in commercial activity was somehow unclean; the economic forces that had made commercial activity the only alternative to under-employment and poverty were deemed the product of betrayal and corruption in high places.

One of the most significant 'mistakes' I made in Russia can be illuminated by the following story. As part of my Russian lessons, I was writing a script for a Russian soap opera with help from my teacher (a very 'progressive' young woman in her late twenties). When I cast the educated, hard-working daughter of the fictitious family as a successful entrepreneur, my teacher laughed and said 'No one here would accept that it is the educated and hard-working daughter who becomes a successful businesswoman. It is more likely that her lazy and drunken brother would become involved in trade (targovlia).'

It is important to note that although the majority of my Moscow informants were members of the intelligentsia, 'class' membership has little significance for differences in attitude to commerce and trade. The same attitude was noted amongst more 'working class' Moscow informants, amongst collective farm workers and managers, and amongst bureaucrats of all grades. Similarly differences in overall political orientation (particularly in terms of orientation to the communist past) are reflected weakly if at all in attitudes to trade. If staunch pro-communists condemn trade as 'criminal speculation', staunch anti-communists will often condemn trade as 'not real work', or as an unfortunate by-product of reforms in Russia.<sup>20</sup> Conversely,

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<sup>20</sup> Often, it is implied that reforms have taken the form of burgeoning trade, because everything in Russia is always badly organised, has negative unforeseen consequences, or is the product of sordid machinations at the top. The implication is that the same reforms undertaken elsewhere would not have the same consequences (trade instead of production).

those who have embraced the opportunities presented by the liberalisation of trade are drawn from the intelligentsia, bureaucrats and the 'working class' alike. This reflects the emergence of new forms of economic (and therefore political) alliances. These new alliances and the emergence of new interest groups have powerful implications for the construction of identity in the wake of current reforms. Former anti-communists find themselves trading with their former enemies as 'spiritual intellectuals' meet nationalistic reds and browns in similar if differently accented condemnation of the emergence of greed and common trade. Former successful CPSU card-carrying bureaucrats find themselves doing business-deals with youthful pro-reform entrepreneurs, ex-prisoners and foreign capitalists.

There is nevertheless a trend towards employment outside the state sector. This is the product of two types of development: first, the emergence of new privately owned and operated legal (and shadow) businesses; second, the privatisation of formerly state owned and operated enterprises and organisations. Changes in employment in different types of enterprises is given below. The continuation of the process of privatisation means that now a majority work in technically privatised enterprises and institutions. We can expect to see an eventual disappearance of the distinction between 'state' and 'commercial' as the process proceeds. Indeed I was recently (May 1995) told that the shame ('styd') attached to commercial activity has virtually evaporated. However, in 1992 -1993 the distinction was still cogent.

**Table 3.24****Distribution of employment  
by type of economic organisation (thousands)**

	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993*	1994q1*
State & city owned enterprises	68,252	62,198	55,688	49,661	37,000	34,600
Leased enterprises		2,764	5,590	2,199		
Joint stock companies		182	1,068	4,439		
Business associations & partnerships		100	795	916		
Public organisations		591	679	544	507	500
Joint ventures		67	141	195	302	250
Collective farms	4,492	3,979	3,945	2,217		
Consumer Cooperatives	1,455	1,550	1,499	1,329		
Manufacturing/ service cooperatives		2,566	2,489	746		
Private enterprises	738	1,289	1,915	9,786	18,620	20,350
Mixed enterprises					14,571	14,800

Source: Goskomstat, reproduced in IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation 1994 p.75

\* Preliminary figures

Needless to say, engagement in trade involves an important change in the content and form of social relationships. 'Relations' established under the earlier social order consistently provide the basis for ingress to commercial activity. A business-woman I knew said that she had become originally become involved in business, by helping friends to make contact with potential buyers or sellers of particular goods. Further, she noted that her former profession as a doctor had been helpful to her in establishing business relationships. She was explicit about using the trust traditionally invested in doctors, to create trust in her clients. Someone who had been involved in a few deals with this woman had a somewhat different interpretation: 'she uses her reputation as a doctor to create trust, but then deceives people'.

As the most scarce commodity in contemporary Russian business practice is trust, friendship is often invoked as the basis for secure business dealings. Conversely,

consistent deception by former 'friends' and now business partners, is often cited as an example of the ways in which reforms are causing a breakdown of the social fabric. If previously, patron:client relationships were classified as 'instrumental', and opposed to friendship, there has occurred a partial collapse of the categories for those engaged in commercial activity. In a sense, business relationships are a new form of social relationship, that entail horizontal exchange and the potential for economic gain by either or both parties. This potential for economic gain introduces an element of risk into the relationship, which is theoretically reduced by doing business 'with friends'. Thus friendships are now potential business relationships, and the intrusion of economic maximisation into horizontal relationships with 'friends' is a novel experience. More seriously, it is becoming rapidly acceptable to pursue 'friendship' with economic ends in mind. This creates further distrust and exaggerates both the rarity value of 'true friendship', and the likelihood of abuse. I was also told stories of abuse of kinship relations in pursuit of economic gain. The result is a downward spiral of ever deepening suspicion and mistrust accompanied by a pragmatic realisation that such mistrust has become 'normal'. This spiral is fuelled by hidden unemployment and rising economic insecurity, forcing more and more people into participation in a practice for which they are poorly prepared. One of my more perceptive Moscow informants told me that the competition, distrust and suspicion that characterise contemporary business practice have deep roots in Soviet labour practices. He said,

Before, people lied<sup>21</sup> to and about each other in competition for favour in the eyes of their nachalniks [which favour could gain them access to scarce material or symbolic goods]. Now people lie to and about each other in naked competition for profits. Nothing has changed very much. It's just that before people knew perfectly well that there was a contradiction between what people say and what people do, but never said so. Now they complain a lot because it's new people making profits.

In conclusion, it seems clear that changes in the structure of employment are causing changes in the construction of personal and social identity. This is complemented

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<sup>21</sup> The Russian word is *obmanivat*, which literally means to deceive, but includes lying.

by a breakdown of the 'old' social identities based in the work-place, and the unhappy acknowledgement of the nature of the new relations of commerce. We have examined changes in the structure and meaning of 'work' because it occupies a major proportion of people's waking lives. 'Work' as a source of social identity is particularly critical in the absence of alternative processes of identity construction, such as consumption, leisure or participation intermediate social groupings.

Structurally, the change to a market economy entails the empowerment of consumers over the interests of producers: in practice this transformation is far from assured as embodied identities remain strongly linked to 'work'. In Chapters 4.1 and 4.2, I want to shift the emphasis to movements through the city, as this constitutes a practical activity that both links and separates the spatially separate spheres of publicly and privately constructed identities.

## Chapter 4.1

### Public Space Outside Place Moving Through the City

In the preceding chapter, I presented some graphs of time geographies for my main informants. As a significant proportion of time was spent by my informants moving around the city, we need to examine the contribution that the experience of such movement makes to the construction of urban meaning. In this chapter and the next I want to examine the spaces **between** the bounded places of work, home, leisure and shopping, with their associated bundles of activity. It is in these ill-defined, unbounded and interstitial spaces that the **taken-for-granted** or **implicit** meanings of the city are constructed. The regularity of the experience of travelling *per se* is complemented by the regularity of specific journeys, for example, between home and work. This regularity contrives to make such movement seem invisible, without interest, silent and asocial. Yet there are important distinctions to be made, which indicate that the phenomenon is both more complex and more fruitful than might at first be expected.

Moving through the city constitutes a process by which inhabitants acquire knowledge of the city 'as a whole', even though this holistic knowledge is based on necessarily partial experience (ie, no one will have direct personal experience of all the city's spaces and places). This knowledge includes the explicitly acknowledged practical ability to navigate, through familiarity with directions, routes and distances, and the implicit sense of knowing the city as a collection of linked, emotionally charged spaces. Although movement through these interstitial spaces is backgrounded in people's explicit understandings of the city, it nevertheless constitutes the process through which more forefronted spaces are both linked and separated. Movement through the city constitutes a practical process of unification and fragmentation. It creates the sense of 'living in Moscow' as a unified conceptual space, and separates its personally significant places, by punctuating socially familiar environments (home, work) with comparatively asocial practices.

Solitary movement on foot or public transport to or from work, home or shops is explicitly explained in terms of specific, functional goals (going to work) and appears superficially to be a parenthetical pause of suspended animation. It is not however without meaning. Moving through the city, inhabitants consume a complex of signs, including architecture, layout, the means of transportation, and the messages expressed discursively and/or silently by unknown others. These messages are politicised and they are emotive.

This chapter refers to the experience of walking in the city; the next chapter refers to the use of public transport with distinctions made between above ground transport (buses trams and trolley buses) and underground trains (the Metro). As far as possible I have tried to address the tension between structure and agency, text and consumer. In order to elucidate the process by which the individual traveller constructs meaning as s/he consumes these very public spaces, I describe the physical and social attributes of specific spaces and the attendant expressions of emotion, discourse, and behaviour, which signify the ways in which these aspects of the urban environment are experienced.

Although the use of private cars has burgeoned in the last few years, travelling by private car or by taxi was unusual for most of my informants at the time. I have therefore ignored this form of transport here. During the time of my field research, only one of my informants (Julia's father) had a car;<sup>1</sup> as we never travelled together in this car, I do not feel able to comment. Sergei frequently regaled me with joyous tales of his previous car ownership, but always concluded these tales with explanations as to why he had finally sold it. He said that he would have had to dedicate his life to car ownership, as it required constant time and attention, repairs and searching for spare parts.

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<sup>1</sup> Julia's husband also acquired a car towards the end of my fieldwork, but was explicit in his intention to leave it in a garage for the time being. He seemed to be more concerned with the fact of ownership of this car, and its protection from thieves and vandals, than with its use.

## "It was my life or my car"

### ***Walking***

A discussion of walking must take into account the important distinction between the ordinary, functional use of two legs to get to or from flat, shop, Metro or workplace, and the common leisure activity of 'going for a walk'. What distinguishes the former from the latter is the motives, the degree of choice exercised by the walker in their choice of place, and the degree of sociality.

To walk ('khodit')	:	To go for a walk ('guliat' <sup>2</sup> )
Function/Utility	:	Leisure/Pleasure
Low individual choice	:	High individual choice
Mostly alone	:	Mostly in company
Wherever required to accomplish goal	:	Specified places

We shall see that the relationship between structural factors and agency differs in the two forms of ambulation. On the left hand side, structural demands dominate the destination and motives of the walker, to get to or from work, or to acquire necessary goods and/or services. This kind of movement is usually practised alone. People never 'shop together' as a social, leisure activity; if people do go to the shops together, this is in order to reduce the time costs of shopping by double queuing (See Chapter 5 on shopping). Further, all of my informants were living in either municipal or cooperative housing; there was therefore no relationship between location of residence and location of employment. Where there is a relationship, we might expect that travelling to work would be more social as co-workers commute in the same time and space.

<sup>2</sup> 'Guliat' literally means 'to go for a walk', but is also used to mean doing nothing much, being lazy, or being aimless. To say that a young couple 'guliaut' together means that they are courting. A woman, or more especially a young woman, who is a gulaiushaya (literally a 'walker') is being attributed with loose sexual morals.

To 'guliat' is to exercise choice as to where, when, for how long, at what speed one walks. To 'guliat' is highly social, with the stress on a somewhat aimless, idle pleasure.

In order to clarify the distinction between these two modes of moving around the city, I want to describe first the journey from my flat to my local Metro station in the micro-raion where I lived; the second section is an account of a 'walks' taken with friends in the city centre. This choice enables me to address two pairs of critical distinctions in the perambulation of the city. The first pair relates to the distinction between the 'centre' and the periphery, or the micro-raions.<sup>3</sup> The second pair relates to the distinction between the taken-for-granted functional walking required to get from A to B, versus the stroll as a deliberate leisure activity.

### **First Case Study : From Flat to Metro in a Micro-raion**

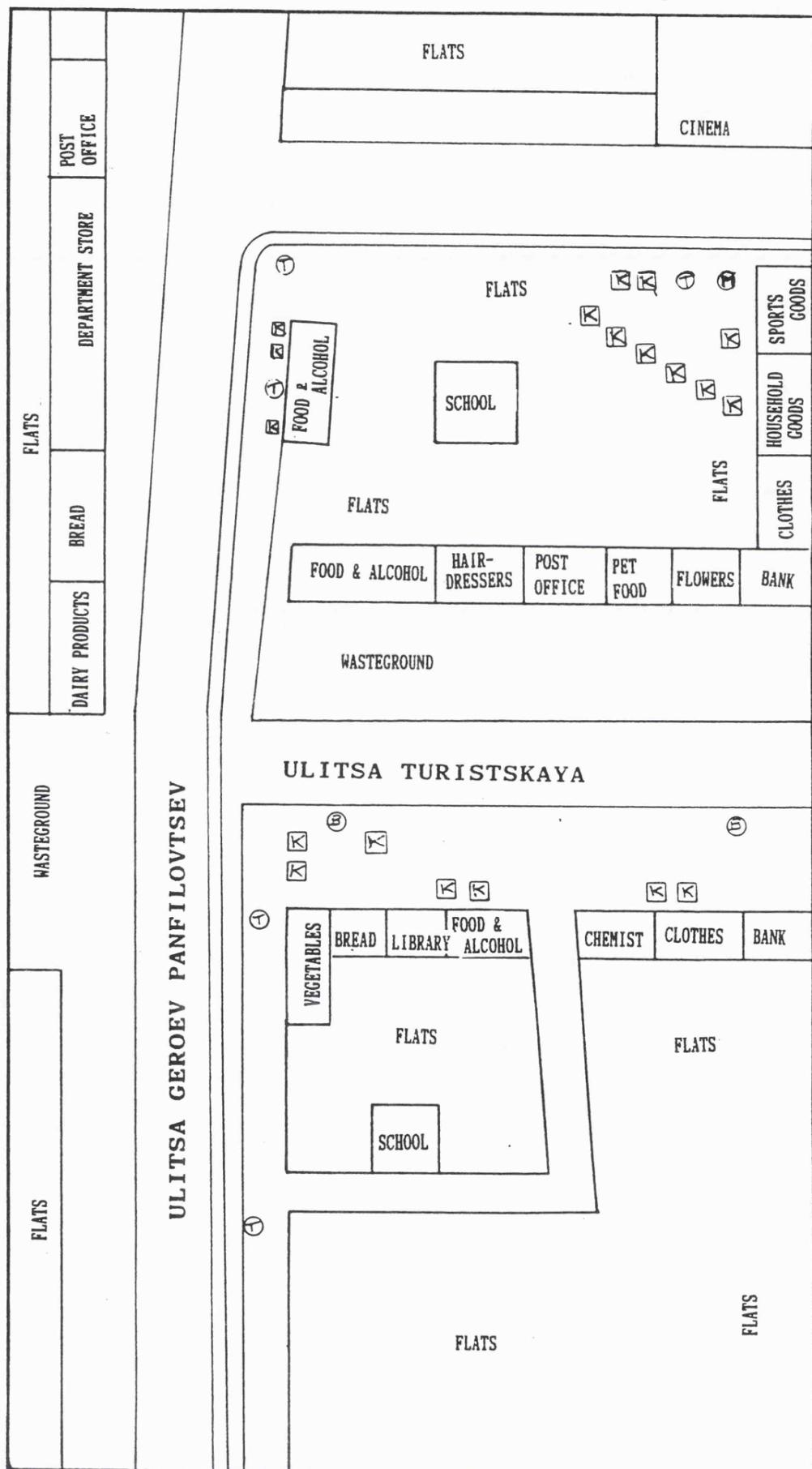
This case study describes the journey from my flat to the Metro station, which could be covered either on foot, taking about 20 minutes, or by taking either the tram or the bus. I will discuss the specificities of travelling by tram or bus in the next chapter, but the physical landscape is identical (see map). I have chosen to describe my own micro-raion as it is the one most familiar to me; all but three of my informants also lived in micro-raions, which were more similar than dissimilar to my own. Secondly, as moving through a micro-raion is mostly a solitary activity, I felt that it was more representative to describe my own solitary experiences, than to describe the unusually social experiences of walking with friends/informants in their micro-raions.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Micro-raion' refers to districts outside the city centre, built during the post-war period in order to tackle the city's housing shortages.

Map 4.1.1

Part of Skhodnensky Micro-raion  
between author's flat (bottom RH corner)  
and Metro station (top RH corner)



M - METRO STATION  
T - TRAMSTOP

B - BUS STOP  
K - KIOSK

### ***The Landscape: What you can see***

Like all other Moscow micro-raions, Tushinskie has been built up over the post-war period as a rational and functional solution to the housing shortages (See Chapter 6 for a more detailed account of the emergence of the micro-raions). It is a landscape dominated by five to twenty story rectangular blocks of flats of various ages and conditions. In all directions, tier upon tier of these modernist monstrosities rise as far as the eye can see. My flat was in an eleven story block of flats, a bit taller than the older 'pyati etazhki',<sup>4</sup> a bit lower than the newer blocks. The overall impression is of a 'built environment' hastily imposed on a barely domesticated landscape.

### ***The Spaces between the Blocks of Flats***

There are fairly generous open spaces between individual blocks of flats. These spaces are dotted with small playgrounds, a few benches and the occasional table. There are places for hanging clothes out to dry, as well as more substantial structures on which people drape carpets for beating. There are large rubbish bins and spaces for parking cars, concrete paths and lots of trees. Although I could appreciate the intentions of the original plans, the fact that most of the playground equipment was broken, tables and benches rickety and dilapidated gave the space an air of decay. Further the washing lines were rarely used as people assumed that their sheets would go missing if left unattended. The rubbish bins were often overflowing, surrounded by crows or elderly people picking through the contents with embarrassment.

In the late spring, summer and early autumn these spaces sometimes seem distinctly rural and green with sunlight filtering through the trees, birds twittering, children playing, old ladies sitting on benches chatting, old men drinking and playing chess or dominoes at the tables.

As the seasons change in early spring and late autumn, these spaces become a morass of mud, huge puddles indicating blocked or insufficient drains, with litter swimming in early or melting snow. People trudge past, shoulders hunched, eyes

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<sup>4</sup> 'Pyati etazhki' (five stories) is a term of 'endearment' applied to the five story blocks of flats built during Khrushchev's reign. Designed as 'temporary' solutions to the desperate housing shortage inherited from Stalin, they were built to five stories but without lifts. The flats are generally small and cramped. Needless to say, all are still occupied. See Chapter 6 for a fuller account of housing.

Photo 4.1.1

View of Skhodnensky micro-raion



Photo 4.1.2

View of Skhodnensky micro-raion





Photo 4.1.3

Block of flats where  
the author lived



Photo 4.1.4

The view from the tram stop at the corner of  
Vlitsa Turistskaya and Vlitsa Geroev Panfilovtsev







Photo 4.1.5



Photo 4.1.6



Photo 4.1.7



down, kids trailing. April is universally acclaimed to be the worst month of the year. As the snow melts, it leaves behind an archaeological history of the past winter, discarded cigarette packets peeping through the blackened snow, autumn leaves a slimy mush. There used to be 'Subbotnik'<sup>5</sup> on the Saturday nearest Lenin's birthday on the 22nd of April. People would gather for a day's (compulsory) voluntary labour at their place of work or where they lived and clean up the remains of the winter. This practice had fallen into the annals by 1993, and the clearing up was left to the 'dvornik' (people, usually women, responsible for clearing the roads and the 'open spaces' between blocks of flats) to deal with on their own. This meant that the spring clean up took weeks instead of days to accomplish.

In the winter, these spaces were sometimes bitter expanses of a non-user friendly environment, with tunnels of freezing wind and swirling snow, bitterly cold, to be crossed as quickly as possible, and only when absolutely necessary. At other times when the sun was shining and the air was still, these spaces would be transformed into a surreal fairyland with each branch covered with a glittering coating of frost, the ground a sparkling white blanket. Although cold, these still frosty days are deemed good for ones health and are much loved by Russians. The contrast between the dark and smelly interior hallways of the blocks of flats and this shining brightness is difficult to describe, as the ugliness of the built environment is cruelly accentuated by the pristine landscape on which it stands. On days like these, the spaces would again become the locus of activity with children making hills to slide down, voluminously wrapped old ladies sitting on benches monitoring the scene, and men gathered in alcoholically anaesthetised groups. People take advantage of the icy pavements and use sledges to cart shopping, temporarily relieved of the endless carrying of heavy bags.

Yet the sociality practised in these spaces should not be confused with the open and sociable concept of neighbourliness, based on co-residence. One aspect of this sociality was restricted to those looking after small children. The occupation of benches by conversing elderly women was occasional rather than common, rarely

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<sup>5</sup> For a history of the subbotnik see Von Geldern J. 'Bolshevik Festivals 1917 - 1920', 1993, pp.151-156.

comprised of more than two women, subject to weather conditions, and often linked to childcare. Thus, only a rather limited form of sociality was actually practised in these spaces. It was clearly **not** a space for initiating social relations: my greetings either provoked a rather startled expression, or were wholly ignored, or, more rarely, were returned quickly and quietly. The more ubiquitous form of sociality was linked to the consumption by men of alcohol. On warm days a group of men would often occupy one of the rickety tables, playing chess or dominoes, and drinking beer and/or vodka (the links between vodka drinking and sociality are discussed in detail in Chapter 7). Very occasionally, when very drunk, one might call out a somewhat unfocused greeting, 'zdrastvyi devushka' (hello miss). This was however exceptional.

### *The Roads and the Shops*

Linking my immediate neighbourhood with the Metro station were two main roads. These were incredibly broad, with tram tracks and wide pavements, sometimes separated by shrubbery. Across the road from where I lived, there was an immense, empty space between the road and the flats on the opposite side. This particular space was bereft of trees or of any attempt at landscaping. It was just a huge piece of waste ground the size of several football pitches. This space was criss-crossed by concrete pathways, collapsed in parts. Most mornings, this patch of waste ground was crossed and re-crossed by local inhabitants, traipsing from one shop to the next, laden with bags, shoulders hunched against the weight and/or the weather. Although the shops along these main roads were my/our local shops, it could take ten to fifteen minutes to walk from one to another, the spaces in between are so generous.

Along the main roads, a variety of 'shops', post offices, banks and libraries occupy the ground floor of most blocks. In one direction along the main road there were two bakeries, ('bulochnaya'), four general food shops ('produkti magazini'), one chemist ('apteek'), one bank ('sberbank'), two post offices ('pochta'), one library ('bibliotieka'), a 'univermag',<sup>6</sup> a hairdresser's ('parikmakherskaya'), a florist ('tsvieti'), a shop selling pet food, and three shops selling alcohol ('napitki'). If I walked the other way, the variety of shops was much the same but included a

<sup>6</sup> A 'univermag' is a 'universal store', ie, similar to a department store and (theoretically) selling clothing, household goods, toiletries and sundries.



Photo 4.1.8 and 4.1.9

The spaces between the blocks of flats





Photo 4.1.10 and 4.1.11

View of Skhodnensky micro-raion

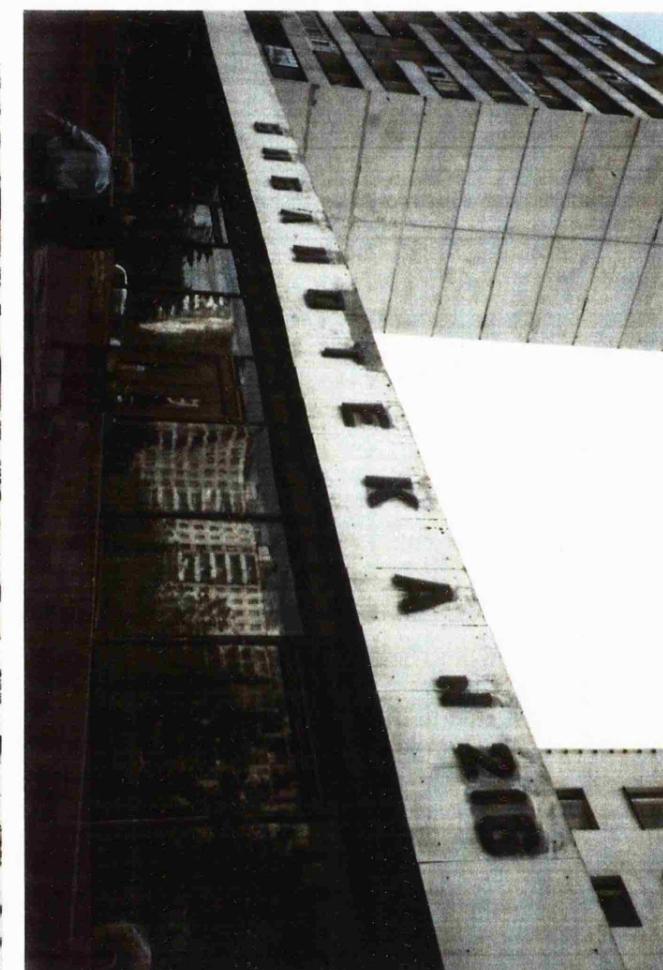


Photo 4.1.14



The local bakery

Photo 4.1.13



The local library

Photo 4.1.12 The local chemists





household goods shop, a textiles shop and a sports shop. There were a couple of small cafés (monopolised by a few local drunks) and a cinema near the Metro station. The planners hand is in evidence, and were there stamps in the post office, food in the shops or books that anyone might want to read in the library, the rational allocation of goods and services might have made the area pleasantly habitable if not aesthetically stimulating. Although shopping will be the subject of another chapter, I would like to dwell on the contribution these 'shops' make to the overall feel of public space in the micro-raion. I put the word 'shops' in inverted commas, because these distribution points bear little resemblance to the retail outlets such a word conjures. Although these 'shops' are large, and usually glass-fronted, there is a virtual absence of any kind of display of goods on offer. The dusty windows are either simply empty, sometimes curtained or blocked-off, or occasionally have a few faded painted signs with loaves of bread, bottles, clothes or whatever. Mostly one would need to actually read the large sign over the door to know there is a shop there and that it is a 'bakery' or a 'hairdressers' etc. The doors always look battered, and are either unpainted wood or metal with numerous locks. The majority of the shops in my local raion (and in most other areas outside the very centre) evince a 'withholding' rather than 'distributional' appearance. This 'withholding' aspect of 'shops' is linked to the logic of Soviet distribution (rational consumption of planned production), and to the unintended consequences of the practical inefficiencies that emerged from this logic (shortages). There is no impetus for a 'shop' to attract customers, in order to sell goods, stay in business. In a sense these are more 'distribution points', where rationed goods and services are dispensed to those whose rights to goods and services are at best contingent, at worst suspect.

Although the Metro station has pride of place as focus in these micro-raions, secondary centres sometimes spring up on 'significant corners'. The significance of my local corner ('ugol') was based on the congruence of a number of factors:

- i) It had a tram stop **and** a bus stop within easy reach of one another, both providing transport to the Metro station.
- ii) It had a comparatively good selection of retail distributors. There was a big and reasonably well stocked bakery on the corner and a large (state) kiosk selling fruit and vegetables. There were two smaller (private) kiosks selling

cigarettes, alcohol, a few sweets and a small selection of imported luxuries (tinned meat, fruit, biscuits, liqueurs etc.) There was also an ice-cream kiosk, which did brisk trade in all weathers, whenever it had ice cream to sell.

Frequently there were people selling fruit or vegetables from makeshift stalls. The library was also located on this corner and for awhile there was a man selling books from a table outside.

- iii) People were often forced to 'stop' on this corner either queuing for goods or waiting for transport.

Its significance was evident in that it was possible to refer to this corner as 'na uglu' or simply 'at the corner' without further specification. When someone came to visit me, I would often agree to meet them at the corner ('na uglu'), a designation which needed no further specification after the first visit.<sup>7</sup>

### **The social context**

This corner had tremendous significance for me, partly through daily familiarity, and partly because it was a sort of border between my 'local' world and 'greater Moscow'. It was also the nearest thing to a 'place where people gather for the purpose of exchange'. Yet, the 'bustle' that usually characterises the concentration of people and things was almost wholly absent. In the bakery (and occasionally extending out on to the pavement), or before the makeshift stalls, there were inevitably silent queues, longer in the shops with their goods at 'state' prices, shorter for the more highly priced goods for sale on the streets. Only rarely was there a queue in front of the fully commercial kiosks, although the ice cream kiosk could usually boast a healthy queue when it was open. In fair weather or foul, the atmosphere of these queuing crowds was sullen to anxious, patient and long-suffering, the faces of older women in particular bearing the traces of a struggle between worry and resignation. Any attempts at conversation on my part were rebuffed: conversation with strangers in a queue is absolutely restricted to the request to hold someone's place.

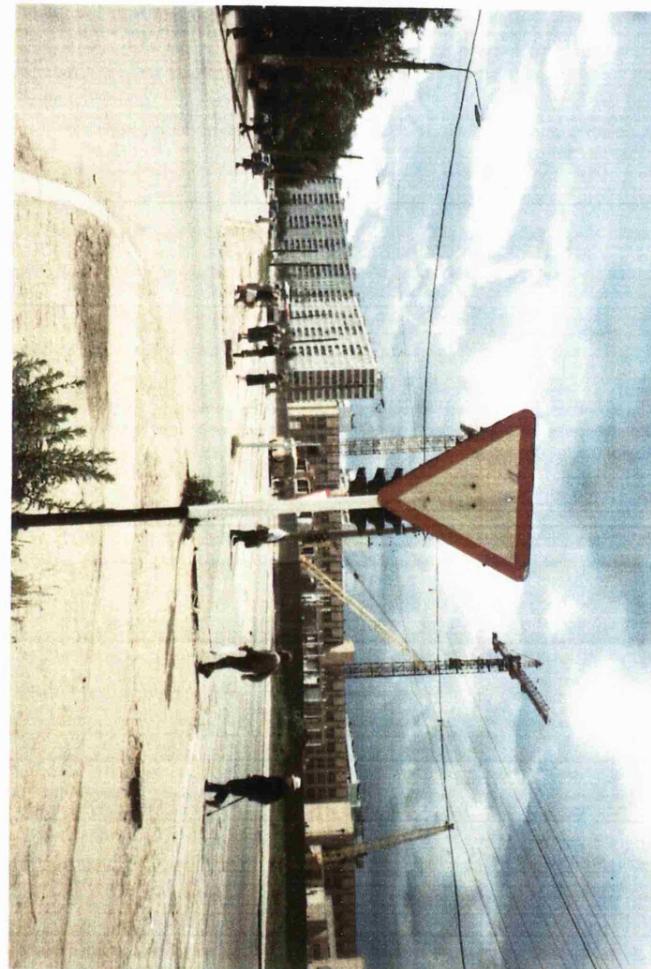
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<sup>7</sup> The practice of meeting especially first time visitors at an agreed and easily identifiable location was linked to the common knowledge of the difficulty of finding a private flat from the address alone. There is often an inscrutable logic to the numbering flats and blocks of flats.

Photo 4.1.17 Waste ground, shops & flats



Photo 4.1.16



The tram stop

Photo 4.1.15





I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this socio-emotional contribution to the meaning of the physical landscape. As these spaces are occupied by people silently but eloquently expressing their eternal discontent, the 'meaning' of the landscape is as much a product of their presence as it is of the rationally functional but practically alienating architecture, layout and provision of services. This is a landscape where the visual stimuli has an emotional impact as people consume the emotions of others, as they feed their own to fellow inhabitants. It is however important to note that this is taken-for-granted, and not deemed remarkable by most of my friends and informants. If Valeria and Sergei could draw on other experiences of growing up in the Caucasus in order to make a comparison, my Slavic friends seemed to take this emotional landscape for granted. If I introduced the subject, they would readily agree with my interpretation (ie, that people always look anxious/angry/depressed), but see nothing worryingly unusual in this. Occasionally one or the other would remember that they had heard that 'people in the 'West' are always smiling and laughing'. They would then shrug their shoulders and conclude 'but we don't do that' ('myu tak nie delaem').

### **Discourse Silence and Information**

Although there was some limited sociability in evidence in the spaces between the blocks of flats, this faded with proximity to the main roads, to be replaced by solitude and silence. It is however important to note that this silence was broken not only by the expression of non-verbal discontent, but also by limited discursive possibilities. There were a few questions that it was possible to ask of strangers: "Where did you get those eggs? How much were they? Is there any white bread left? Is it 'soft'?" Given the contemporary impossibility of predicting either the supply or the price of basic foodstuffs, especially in the formerly state shops, these questions are considered an acceptable means of reducing the time cost of searching for goods. Children often ask the time. It is also quite common for people to ask for a cigarette, or rather to demand a cigarette. This is invariably phrased 'give me a cigarette' or 'give me something to smoke'. I was initially somewhat taken aback by these 'demands', until someone told me that 'before', cigarettes were so cheap that they were considered to be virtually free, 'like air or water'. The other question that is frequently asked of strangers in the street is for directions, although this was

rare in the micro-raions.

As these questions were always asked without any introductory overtures (eg, excuse me), I initially was sometimes unaware that a question was being addressed to me. They are however very short interactions, wholly utilitarian in purpose and in form.

The only other verbal interaction with strangers in public spaces that I experienced was being approached by men, (almost always somewhat inebriated) offering 'to accompany me' as I waited for the bus or tram late at night. These latter were rare, but surprisingly good-natured interactions, and my refusal was always taken in good humour.<sup>8</sup> There was little threat to these encounters. Indeed, compared to walking the streets of London alone at night, I never felt nervous. This lack of fear was at least partly attributable to the reactions of eg, groups of men: they either paid absolutely no attention to me whatsoever, or, if very drunk, might tender a slurred but cheery 'spokoini noch, devushka' (good night miss).

Apart from these encounters, there is no verbal interaction between people on the streets. Even in the somewhat more sociable spaces between the blocks of flats, my greetings almost always went unanswered. When I discussed this 'problem' with my friends/main informants, they found it initially difficult to understand why I should want to establish relationships with my neighbours. If I replied that it would be useful for my fieldwork, they sympathised but could offer no advice. If I replied simply that 'it's nice to know your neighbours', they either looked baffled, disagreed altogether saying that its best to keep yourself to yourself, or agreed that it might be nice but was impossible because 'these people are so uncultured'.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that this type of 'functional' movement through the spaces of

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<sup>8</sup> No doubt the fact that these men were at least a little drunk combined with the distinctive nature of the services they were seeking (or offering) to make the encounter less harsh. See Chapter 7 on vodka.

<sup>9</sup> To be cultured (byt kulturnie) has two linked meanings:

i) to be Cultured in the sense of educated, familiar with high Culture (art, music, literature etc.)  
ii) to be well mannered, polite, (ie, to engage in social interactions with respect for others and in the expectation that you will be respected in return).

That 'these people' are 'uncultured' (bezkulturnie) is the most common complaint ranged against Russians, Muscovites, the public at large. The collapse of the two meanings in Russian is not insignificant. Many working class people will claim to be 'uncultured' (referring to the first meaning), whilst displaying better 'manners' or 'more respect for others' than their better educated counterparts.

the micro-raions is almost wholly determined by structural forces. It was (until very recently) the state which determined where you lived<sup>10</sup> and where you worked, thus determining the time and space necessary for commuting. The permanently inadequate supply of consumer goods which was the product of state policies, determined the population's routes to or from work in order to visit the shops and see if there had been any deliveries. Thus the spaces and directions of much movement through the city streets is the product of institutional forces (housing policies, industrialisation and employment policies etc.). The inordinate amount of time and energy required encourages the development of appropriate practices: hurried, silent and asocial. These structural forces literally inscribe themselves on the curve of shoulders hunched with the weight of scarce potatoes, milk or cooking oil. People's faces bear witness to a history of dependency on capricious supplies.

### **Meaning and the micro-raion**

Discussing the semiotics of the modernist cities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Choay suggests that the pre-eminence of economistic, efficient, and functional rationality in design and planning created cities of hypo-significance and of monosemy, depleted of the rich layers of meaning formation that characterise earlier urban forms (Choay 1965, see excerpts in Gottdiener & Lagopoulos 1986:241-258, and discussion in Gottdiener 1995:129). On the one hand, Moscow's modernist micro-raions epitomise this monosemy: there are tier upon tier of concrete slab boxes of 'accommodation', whose ground floors are occupied with 'shops' purporting to deliver 'necessities' to the population. There is no aesthetic to speak of. Yet if the 'signifiers' exhibit a relentless monotony, that which is signified is the product of a much more complex combination of factors. A 'socio-semiotic' approach (Gottdiener 1986, 1995), which takes into account participants interpretation of the environment, reveals that is not only the 'built environment' that speaks, but the practices and people which inhabit that environment. The micro-raion has meanings which are related to traipsing from one shop to another in sun, rain, wind or snow, with empty or heavy shopping bags, at the end of a full days'

<sup>10</sup>

The allocation of housing in Moscow was almost wholly through either the municipal authorities, through one's place of employment (formerly state owned and controlled enterprises and organisations), or through the purchase of a cooperative flat (subject to much less choice than would be offered by a housing market). See Chapter 6.

work, standing in queues for potatoes, communing with anxiously silent co-shoppers, or waiting for a bus or tram. The meanings of the micro-raion cannot be wholly represented by intellectual analyses of the intended criteria (function), nor by the articulated opinions of residents. Much of the meaning of the micro-raion is experienced at a non-discursive level (linked to solitary movement and non-interactive queuing), ie, at a conceptual and emotive level, revealed by the shape of movement and being: eyes down, moving swiftly, shoulders hunched, or, eyes fixed in the middle distance, expression of quiet anxiety, easily disturbed into an outburst of anger. It is the daily experience of these ubiquitous forms of non-verbal discourse, that make the micro-raion richly meaningful. The message emitted may be monosemic; its interpretation is as diverse as the weather, moods and experiences of those who construct its meaning through their lived experience.

In contrast, being, walking in the centre, is associated with participation in the life of the city. Indeed a young woman I knew who lived in a micro-raion similar to my own said

I have to go to the centre every day. Even if I'm ill I try and go. If I don't go to the centre, I feel like I'm dying. Just going out for a walk around here (her micro-raion) is impossible. I can't bear to look at the people. They're all completely depressed and it makes me depressed. At least in the centre, there are some distractions, some people look energetic.

## **Second Case Study : A Leisurely Walk in the Centre**

### ***Centre: Leisure***

In this case study, I want to emphasise the distinction between the 'centre' of Moscow and the peripheral micro-raions, whilst describing the difference between 'functional' and leisure walking. Leisurely walks are the most common form of leisure activity, and result from pre-arranged meetings between friends with the purpose of strolling, chatting idly, and getting some minimal exercise and fresh air.<sup>11</sup> The major distinction between the functional walk and the leisurely one is

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<sup>11</sup> This healthy aspect of leisurely walking is more accentuated in relation to walks 'za gorod' or outside the city, where the air is really 'good' and 'clean'. City walks acquire minor connotations of healthiness by association with country walks.

the degree of choice exercised by the walker as to his/her destination and therefore route. It is important to note that a pre-arranged meeting with friends to walk ('guliat') will usually be in the centre; it is unimaginable that people would meet to walk in a micro-raion, unless one lived there, didn't have time to travel elsewhere. Conjoining the notion of leisure walking and the space of the micro-raions is almost unthinkable. Conversely the meaning of the centre is partly constructed by its association with leisure/pleasure activity.

I want to describe two different kinds of leisurely walks here:

- i) the unfocused stroll where the point is to be together, chat, but where the actual geography is contextual rather than forefronted;
- ii) the more focused stroll, where my friends/informants were explicitly engaged in introducing me to aspects of the city that they either had a personal affection for or that they thought were important for me to know.

Although the importance of the spatial context of the walk is forefronted in the latter case, I would argue that it is also significant when it is not (as is the case with the unfocused stroll or in the more 'functional' walk through the centre of town).

### *The Unfocused Stroll: Intimacy in Public Spaces*

Choosing where to walk in the centre of Moscow when the purpose is to socialise rather than to focus on the environment, is influenced by fairly simple practical considerations. Convenience for both parties is dominant, eg, at a Metro station that is accessible without too many changes. If pressed for an explanation, my companions would say they preferred walking somewhere relatively quiet and not too crowded so as to facilitate conversation. It was clear to me that the presence of greenery (trees) was also a factor, as was the provision of benches for resting (the overall absence of inside spaces to stop and rest/take some refreshment is discussed Chapter 7). Thus the best spaces for strolling include the grounds of monasteries, or the tree lined boulevards which encircle the city's heart. These latter are broad green walkways flanked by traffic bearing streets, with tall trees, benches, and occasional small playgrounds. In all weathers, the boulevards are full of strollers, most often in couples walking arm in arm (single or mixed sex), mothers or grandmothers with children, groups of youths and groups of (mostly male) drinking

companions. Although the relative absence of cafes or other places for the casual but pleasurable consumption of food and drink precludes the inclusion of such consumption, eating ice cream is closely associated with the leisurely walk. As a consequence of this association between intimate leisurely strolls, and the boulevards and monasteries, the latter are imbued with a quiet affection.

Interestingly, none of my friends ever took me walking in other spaces which could provide an equal measure of quiet, benches and greenery (eg, The Park of Culture and of Rest [Gorky Park], or the park surrounding the Exhibition of the Achievements of the People's Economy). I would suggest that this unconscious avoidance on the part of members of the intelligentsia is linked to the association between these spaces and the Soviet period. Where the boulevards and monasteries have distinctly pre-revolutionary connotations, the parks have distinctly Soviet connotations. Indeed when I enthused about the park surrounding the Exhibition of the Achievements of the People's Economy, all of my friends looked disgusted; one added said that 'the buildings were kitsch and that they had not been there since school'. It should be noted however that both parks are well used, even though most of the fairground attractions in Gorky Park are closed and the Exhibition Halls now exhibit imported goods.

There is something intensely private about these strolls. Walking arm in arm, heads bent towards one another enables people to enjoy intimacy in the complete anonymity of the city streets. As this strolling was highly valued by all of my friends/informants, we spent many hours exchanging life histories, opinions and gossip, as we covered the city streets. Each couple or small group of walkers studiously avoids the others. Only the groups of drinkers are in any way inclined to converse with other passers-by. I would suggest that it is the combination of the anonymity provided by central streets with the movement of the walk which ensures almost total privacy. The unspoken agreement between walkers on the boulevards ensures that each group respects the privacy of others.

### ***The Focused Stroll***

In this section I will describe the ways in which different people chose to introduce the city to me. In the first two cases, my companions were explicitly showing me

'their favourite places'. In the second two cases my companions were showing me places that they thought I would (or should) be interested in.

*'My favourite places'*

1. Maria's favourite place in the city was the Novodevichi Monastery.<sup>12</sup> This wholly enclosed space contains a number of churches, as well as the residential quarters of the convents' former inhabitants. Buildings and grounds are well-maintained, and there were always very few other visitors. Walking in the grounds, her conversation would wander from accounts of her latest concerns to pointing out aspects of buildings that she thought were particularly beautiful ('krasivyi'), or that were examples of 'real Russian architecture' ('nastaiashaya Russkaya arkitektura'). Her appreciation of Novodevichi in particular was referred to in terms of the fact that the space is quiet/peaceful ('spokoina'), or that the rest of Moscow seemed far away ('daleko'). When one of the churches in the grounds was open, we would go in, light candles, and Maria would cross herself in front of the altar, genuflect and stand to one side for a few moments in silent prayer. When we emerged again she would comment on how the church contained a feeling of spirituality ('dukhovnost'); she explained the sanctity of the space as resulting from many years dedication to spiritual activities. For Maria the actual walls, ceiling and interior space had become imbued with spirituality, bearing traces of the spiritual feelings of centuries of visitors. Novodevichi was particularly important to Maria, as she was at the time somewhat torn between the desire to become a mother and the desire to devote herself to spiritual pursuits. She spoke occasionally about how it would be difficult for her as a woman to ever reach the upper echelons of the spiritual hierarchy in the Russian Orthodox Church, as training for women was more limited than training for men. Although she never explicitly referred to the fact that Novodevichi was a convent (a female monastery), I always felt that this gendered aspect contributed to her preference for Novodevichi.

On less focused walks, Maria would always aim for churches, and we would usually enter for a moment or two, again lighting candles and spending a few moments in

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<sup>12</sup> Novodevichi Monastery was built in 1524. It was in this monastery that Peter the Great confined his half-sister the Princess Regent Sophia in 1689, in order to pre-empt her attempt to retain the throne for herself.

quiet contemplation. Maria would often refer to the fact that she 'received energy' from being in the spiritually charged atmosphere.

Maria's affection for the space of church and monastery grounds was fairly explicitly constructed on the basis of her opposition to the city as a whole. For Maria, the real lived in day to day Moscow was a mad house ('sumashedchie dom'), full of coarse ('gruboi') people, and 'pragmatic'<sup>13</sup> Muscovites whose relationship to an idealised 'spiritual, Slavic Russia' was clearly problematic. If she was able to imagine that the peasants she met on short folk-song collecting field trips to the country side were untainted examples of this pure Russian culture, she was equally clear about it being 'impossible to live in the countryside...there are no roads, just mud half the year. Many people have to go to the toilet outside and have no heating (ie, central heating) or hot water (ie, running hot water).' For Maria it was alternately 'impossible to live in Moscow', and 'impossible to live anywhere else'.

2. The next walk around 'favourite places' was chosen by Natasha and her husband; another Russian acquaintance also took me on a similar walk. This walk was around an area roughly east/southeast of the Kremlin. The area was characterised by narrow twisting lanes, a relative absence of traffic (cars or pedestrian), and old houses (some wooden) with intricately carved facias, window and door frames. It also contained a former monastery. My Russian companions emphasised that the area was 'quiet' ('spokoina'), 'old' ('starie') and 'real Moscow' ('nastaiashaya Moskva'). To me it seemed also virtually deserted (many of the houses looked to be uninhabited), with unlovely derelict buildings alongside the delicate examples of Russian wooden architecture. The almost complete absence of either people or goods/shops also seemed to me to be significant.

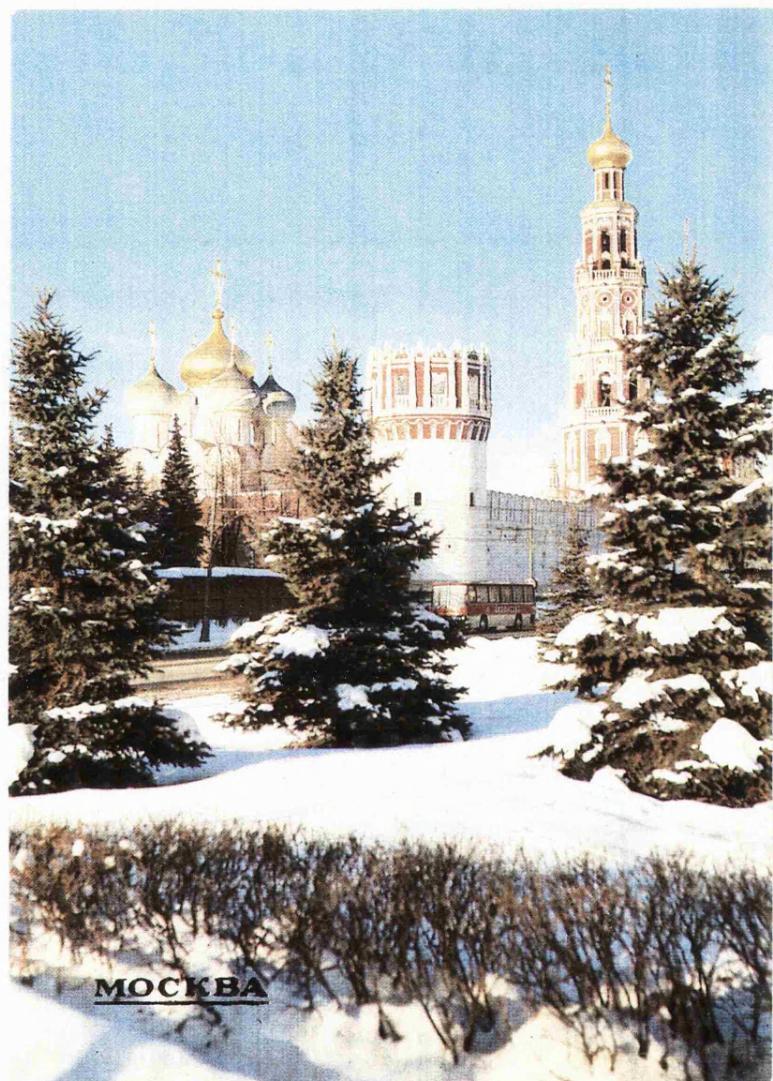
My other friend who took me on a walk around this area finished with a tour of the grounds of the Donskoy monastery. According to my companion, the diverse architectural styles embedded in the perimeter wall were sections of churches destroyed by the Soviet government. Pieces were salvaged as 'architectural mementoes' and transferred to the grounds of the Donskoy monastery. Similarly,

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<sup>13</sup> The connotations of 'pragmicheskie' in Russian include self-interest, competitiveness, greed, as well as the more familiar meanings of the English word.

Photo 4.1.18

Novodevichi Monastery





some graves had been salvaged from the cemeteries of destroyed churches and removed to Donskoy for safety, creating a graveyard of graveyards. Again, the emphasis was on the age, quietness, and spirituality of the space, although my friend jokingly also noted that "the more spiritual the place, the more disgusting the toilets".

Again affection for given spaces is related to the extent to which the space differs from the profane aspects of daily life. If Natasha in particular was explicitly an avid Muscophile, it was clear that the Moscow of which she was both fond and proud bore little resemblance to the Moscow of daily life. It was the imagined spirituality of Moscow, based on its age and 'high level of cultural development', that was important. The reality of daily life was construed as a kind of temporary blip, or as unintended consequence of an experiment that had gone disastrously wrong (the Soviet era). If she had entertained hopes that the demise of state socialism would herald a return to true Russian values, these were being sorely disappointed by the appearance of kiosks selling Marlboros, tights and Snickers.

### *Teaching me the City*

3. My third example is a tour of the centre guided by a friend who had worked as an Intourist guide. Misha had decided that foreigners were/should be interested in the Kremlin, Red Square and Lenin's Mausoleum. As soon as we entered the Kremlin, Misha fell into his old tour guide role. He started reeling off dates, the names of architects and bits of iconography (pointing out the twelve apostles flanking Christ on an Iconostas), hustling me into and out of churches with lightening speed. We hurried out on to Red Square for a quick perambulation of St. Basil's then joined the desultory queue for Lenin's tomb. It was clear to me that Misha was playing the role of the efficient and experienced tour guide, offering me a 'free guided tour' because we were friends.

### *The Centre that Attracts and Repels*

What is perhaps more interesting is my other friends' reactions to my visit inside the Kremlin. Many expressed surprise, because they believed that it was 'often closed' or 'difficult to get in'. My ex-Intourist guide's knowledge that it was relatively easy to buy tickets, and that the military connotations of the militia guarding the

entrances were undermined by their role as common ticket checkers, was not shared by my other acquaintances.

Conceptually, the Kremlin is the historic, geographic, religious and political centre of Moscow, Russia, and the former USSR; it is the stereotypical walled city, within which secret machinations decide the fate of millions. 'The Kremlin' often stands for Russia or the FSU as a whole, its government or its leadership. The young Bolshevik government made use of its symbolic power when it moved the capital from St Petersburg in March 1918, and the bells of the Saviour's Tower were adjusted to play the 'Internationale' instead of 'God Preserve the Tsar'. This move was opposed by Trotsky who found this concentration of cathedrals a "paradoxical place to establish a stronghold of the revolutionary dictatorship" (quoted in Vale 1992:35). Its force is thus derived from its mixed connotations as the heart of a mystical maternal Russia and of a practical political world power.

Although a museum open to the general public before the Revolution, the Kremlin was closed in 1918 and not re-opened to the public until 1955 (Vale 1992:35). In a practical sense it remains 'closed' through the continuation of entrenched avoidance practices. Its enclosure behind high thick red brick walls precludes casual entry, whilst making it impossible to see inside without actual entrance. The vast majority of visitors are foreign tourists. Yet this is **not** because of local scorn for 'tourist attractions' (indeed the Russians love corny tourist attractions both at home and abroad). Muscovites never go there, in spite of the fact that it is 'quiet, old, spiritual, and really Russian', ie, in spite of the fact that it is the epitome of the traits they claim to value. Given the very explicit emphasis on 'the centre' in urban discourse, this avoidance of the 'centre of the centre' seems to indicate the presence of a profound ambivalence. As the foremost symbol of concepts and values as diverse as Russianness, centrality, power, spirituality, communism and contemporary politicians, it is subject to love and hatred, attraction and avoidance. This ambivalence towards the Kremlin reflects the disjunction between ideals (Russian spirituality) and experience (the exercise of power), which are the common experience of the city's population.

Red Square is a strange, slightly inclined but absolutely naked expanse of tarmac,



Photo 4.1.19

A militiaman in Revolution Square



bounded on one side by the Kremlin wall in which are embedded memorials to various Soviet era leaders, and on the other by GUM.<sup>14</sup> The outrageous St Basil's cathedral sits at one end. If formerly there was always a long queue of tourists to Lenin's mausoleum, this has shrunk to a much smaller queue containing a much greater proportion of curious foreigners. Frequently, portions of Red Square are blocked off by portable metal railings, forcing people to take a given route across the Square, but without discernible reason. On one occasion when I had a western visitor who wanted to visit Lenin's tomb, we were severely admonished for not walking between the painted lines on the pavement, as we made our way towards the mausoleum. There are always militia milling about and movements in the square are always observed.

This 'security' in Red Square reflects the traces of its status as 'sacred' space. There is no greater security threat to the government buildings within the Kremlin from Red Square than from other approaches. As an vast open space, it is more easily 'watched', than other entrances. However, the presence of the bodies of the dead (Lenin's in particular), and its association with the engineered displays of Soviet solidarity, combine with the continued exercise of the right to direct and constrain the behaviour of pedestrians, to reproduce reminders of Soviet-style social discipline. Behaviour within the enclosed areas containing the bodies of dead revolutionary heroes is severely constrained and people are told not to talk, and to keep their hands out of their pockets. If the continued presence and activities of the militia indicate the 'sacredness' of the area, the increased appropriation of this space by entrepreneurs indicates its growing profanity. The presence of the militia is now complemented by that of entrepreneurs armed with polaroid cameras, offering instant photographs to tourists, children selling postcards, and 'private' tour guides hawking their wares through loud speakers. Yet older attitudes to taking photographs in Red Square were still occasionally in operation and on several occasions I was told to leave my camera in the 'cloakroom'.

As a central location I frequently crossed Red Square with various friends on our way to or from the Metro station. It only caused comment if there was a specific

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<sup>14</sup> GUM is the acronym for the Gosudarstvennie Universalnie Magazin or the State Department Store. In 1992-1993, it housed a mixture of local, joint venture and western retail outlets.

event (eg, an altercation with the militia), but remained otherwise invisible. Similarly all of my friends (except the ex-Intourist guide) refused to accompany me to Lenin's Mausoleum, saying that it was horrible ('uzhasna'), or 'kitsch'.

### ***Graffiti, the Master and Margarita***

Misha later introduced me to his own favourite place, which also became my own. Not far from the Mayakovsky Metro station, there is the arched entrance to a courtyard. In the courtyard there is a battered door, like millions of others leading into apartments buildings throughout the city. Yet if many a Moscow hallway ('vhod') is decorated with graffiti, none can approach the complex artistry of the many hued and layered graffiti that grace the stairwell leading to the flat of the author of 'The Master and Margarita', Mikhail Bulgakov. The walls, ceilings, windows, banisters, railings and stone steps themselves are painted and etched by hundreds of unseen hands with references to Margarita, the Master, Voland and the cat. These are complemented by references to western rock musicians, anarchy, and black magic.

Misha said that he loved the book, and therefore the author, and therefore the place, although he was ambivalent about the graffiti. His exposure to western influences enabled him to understand if not share my delight in this 'popular appropriation of space'. Interestingly, when I took Sergei to this 'shrine to the Master', his only reaction was to decry the hooligans who had vandalised the stairwell. After that, I avoided further disappointment and never showed the place to other friends.<sup>15</sup>

4. Our final stroll is an amalgam of several walks directed by Sergei, designed to convince me of the real folly of communism. These walks ranged throughout the centre, and often included the headquarters of various military, political or administrative institutions. Sergei was always concerned to emphasise the grandeur, the spaciousness, the high tech security of these important places in the communist apparatus. With unusual command of irony, he would note that of course defending fairness ('spravedlivost') required that these spaces be 'luxurious' ('roskoshno'). He showed me a renowned block of flats built in the 1930s, designed by American

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<sup>15</sup> See Bushnell 1990 for an excellent discussion of the sociology and significance of graffiti in Moscow.

architects and resembling certain New York apartment buildings. The external walls bore plaques commemorating the residence of various communist worthies. Yet, according to Sergei, although the place became known as a prestigious residence in the 1930s and 1940s, signifying proximity to the highest powers, it also came to have the connotations of death row as many of the powerful high level residents were arrested and executed during the purges. He showed me a minor driveway which gave on to a main road but whose traffic had enjoyed right of way. When I was unable to guess why this might be, he gaily informed me that Brezhnev had once lived there and that 'of course, he couldn't be expected to slow down, much less stop'. He showed me streets that 'were never included on maps of the city', in order to demonstrate both the paranoia and the stupidity of Soviet politicians.

('They thought that if they were not on the maps, no one would know they were there.') According to Sergei, these streets had housed Soviet politicians, 'defending the interests of the people but needing to be defended from the people'. Sergei's greatest delight was to find (after much twisting and turning) two, apparently identical blocks of flats on a central Moscow side street. He pointed out to me that the windows on one floor of one block were taller than the windows on any of the other floors in either block. According to Sergei, Brezhnev's son had a flat there and had required high ceilings<sup>16</sup> and high windows. What affronted Sergei was not that the rich and powerful had access to high ceilings (he felt this was perfectly natural), but that communist politicians had so blatantly contradicted their own rhetoric and ideology with impunity. Again my initial failure to guess the significance enabled him to triumphantly demonstrate both the level of my own ignorance and the excessive folly of Soviet practice.

What is perhaps most interesting about these tours is the way in which Sergei actively used the physical infrastructure of the city itself in order to make a political point in my education. Soviet politicians had left their (physical) marks on the city, which provided him with a series of mnemonics, stimulating memories of the 'folly of the Soviet period'.

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<sup>16</sup> High ceilings are a sign of prestige. See Chapter 6 on interiors.

### *Walking, Etiquette and Other People*

Having discussed the deliberate choices of the leisurely stroll, their orientation away from the here and now, or their politically mnemonic potential, I want to turn to issues of practice and sociality. If the deliberate social leisurely walk can be juxtaposed to the isolated trudging between shops, flat and public transport, there are aspects of practical sociality that are evident in each. Walking in the micro-raions or in the centre necessitates negotiating space with other anonymous pedestrians. If this is less problematic in the micro-raions because of lesser pedestrian density, broader pavements and less car traffic, the etiquette of giving way on the crowded streets of the city centre reveals a constant taken-for-granted attitude to self and other.

"How to Behave"<sup>17</sup> boasts six pages on how to behave on the street. How to dress, carry your umbrella, meet a friend, keep to the right, assist women, invalids, children and the elderly are described in detail. It discourages 'curiosity' (which is 'not nice'), using shop windows as a mirror, or throwing rubbish on the streets. It also says,

In the street, do not sing and do not whistle; it is not polite to talk loudly, to laugh, to fight, or to call your dog loudly.....In the street, do not eat. If for whatever reason you cannot go to a canteen or cafe, go to a secluded alley or park. Stand in a secluded place or sit on a bench to smoke"

(Aasamaa 1972:101 own translation).

Sober pedestrians generally obey the prohibitions on eating, laughing, talking loudly or fighting. Indeed, they refrain from any behaviour which might invite social intercourse: pedestrians keep moving, and studiously avoid all eye contact with one another. Most members of the population give way to people who are clearly frail, although some young males seem to pride themselves on their ability to flaunt even

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<sup>17</sup> 'Kak Sebya Vesti', published by Valgus in Tallinn in 1972.

common courtesy. Few pedestrians adopted the strategy of changing direction slightly, but in good time. More common was the quick twist of the shoulders at the last moment, when it became clear that neither party was prepared to alter course. Not uncommon was the preventable collision. Two people would approach each other, undoubtedly aware of being on a collision course, collide and then either ignore one another in angry silence or exchange insults. If the etiquette recommended in "How to Behave" represents a social hierarchy in which the 'strong' (young, male) give way to the 'weak' (children, invalids, women and the elderly), actual street practice is more akin to the game of chicken. It demonstrates a remarkable equality between the sexes. My first few months in Moscow were plagued by my London avoidance techniques, which in Moscow, meant that I spent my entire journey ceding the pavement to all and sundry.

### **Moscow: the Disappointments of Living in an Imagined City**

#### ***Discourse, Values and Discontents***

Discursive references to Moscow as a whole reflect the values and aspirations of individual inhabitants. By far the most common discursive references to the city are that it is horrible ('uzhasno'), terrible ('strashno'), impossible ('nievasmozhno') a nightmare ('kashmar') or a madhouse ('sumashedshie dom'). More positive references allude to an imagined or partial city, more historical than contemporary, including the centre but excluding the residential micro-raions. Some identify positive aspects of Moscow as they seek to bask in its reflected glory. Others bemoan the recent (post-revolutionary or post-perestroika) decay and degeneracy on the city streets. The causes of discontent reflect political, economic and ethnic

divisions. For example,

### ***Born and Bred Muscovites***

Natasha often expressed her love for Moscow, her pride in being a born and bred Muscovite. What she loved was the Moscow of her imagination, peaceful and quiet, ordered, safe and predictable, the locus of a pure, Slavic, spirituality, and/or of a refined intelligentsia discussing Chekhov over tea. The constant political tensions in the capital were disregarded as unfortunate examples of human weakness, or of socialist and now 'democratic' folly. Yet she hated and feared the crowds, the traffic, the bustle, and the burgeoning commercialism. Born and bred Muscovites like Natasha and Galina were of course also talking about themselves when talking about the city. As native daughters, their own status was reflected by the status of the city, their identity closely entwined with the city's more refined characteristics.

### ***Caucasians***

Valeria (from Azerbaijan), Sergei (an Armenian from Georgia), and Vladimir (from Georgia) and many of their close friends (also of Caucasian origin) were much more explicitly ambivalent about the city. On the positive side, they acknowledged Moscow's position at the centre or apex of Soviet society. Sergei noted,

When I was a child growing up in Tbilisi, Moscow was like the centre of the universe, and everything good or important came from Moscow. Later, when I was a student at Tbilisi University, my friends and I all dreamt of going to Moscow University. We thought that Moscow was where there was the 'highest level of cultural development'.<sup>18</sup> I think this helped me to work especially hard at

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<sup>18</sup> See footnote 8 Chapter 4.1 for an explanation of the meanings associated with 'Culture', being cultured, having culture. Here there is also a clear notion of a hierarchical or even evolutionary notion of 'cultural development'. Many are obsessed with this notion and often ask how Russia compares with the 'level of cultural development' in the west.

my studies. When I was accepted for post-graduate studies at Moscow University, I was really happy. I was incredibly excited about the prospect of living and working in Moscow. After finishing my post-graduate studies, I went to work in Yerevan for a while. But these small provincial cities are uninteresting.<sup>19</sup> I only wanted to come back to Moscow. Eventually I came back, and stayed with relatives and managed to live for about a year without work. I couldn't work as I didn't have a Moscow propiska and I couldn't get a Moscow propiska without work. Eventually, (I'm ashamed of it now), I married a girl I was going out with. She knew that the marriage was really only so that I could get a Moscow propiska. It didn't work out. But by that time I had my propiska and a job, so I could stay.

On a more negative note, I spent many hours with Valeria, Sergei, Vladimir and their friends, brooding over 'what's wrong with the Russians'. These discussions included references to rudeness, pessimism, love of suffering, with manifold examples from daily life in the metropolis. The format of these was invariably

'I was talking to so and so and told him/her about something good and they immediately replied with a negative interpretation or with the opinion that it wouldn't last, was bound to go wrong in the end, that you can't/shouldn't trust anybody.'

All of the Caucasians I met were nostalgic about the sunny, optimistic and sociable southern cities of their childhoods, and identified themselves partially with reference to the preferred attributes of their original residence. In some contexts, they emphasised their achieved status as Muscovites and the status and prestige connoted by holding a Moscow propiska. In other contexts, they characterised Moscow as cold, hard and northern. Moscow itself was at least partially defined by the attributes of its native inhabitants and the quality of social relations in the capital. Thus the meaning of Tbilisi, Baku or Moscow was a product of locally typical social relations as well as climate and architecture. Although all had been willing to endure the weather and the greyness for the sake of their professions, the continuing deterioration of social relations in general and towards Caucasians in particular was making continued residence in the city distinctly problematic. Blatantly racist (ie,

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<sup>19</sup> 'Nieinteresna': in this sense there is a distinct meaning of being without prospects for advancement, both material and professional.

anti-Caucasian) comments had become common both in the streets and on public transport in 1992-1993.<sup>20</sup> However, given the worsening situation in their own republics, none had any intention of moving out of Moscow unless it was to move to the 'west'.

### *Slavic Muscovites*

My more Slavic informants (Belorussian Maria, Ukrainians Julia and her family, Irina, and Russians Katya, Yura and Marina) concurred on the positive attributes of Moscow, but attributed its negative aspects to more diverse causes. Maria clearly felt that as an ardent Slavophile, she had a natural respect for or connection to the city. Yet she would complain bitterly about the city, its dirt, the crowds, and the greed and coarseness of Muscovites. On the other hand she claimed that she couldn't live anywhere else because the 'level of cultural development' was so low everywhere else. Originally from Belorussia, she claimed that she couldn't ever work in the Minsk Conservatory because they would be jealous of her Moscow training, and be sure to undermine her. Further the standards would be much lower and she would be unable to adapt.

Julia and her parents saw a previously clean, well-ordered Soviet capital city falling into chaos as the ordered and integrating power of the centre collapsed. Julia's husband furiously blamed weak politicians, Caucasians, lazy and drunken workers and Central Asians in more or less equal measure. Lyuda frequently commented on the fact that Moscow was a madhouse (a 'sumashedshie dom') as she escaped to her (rented) dacha at Peredelkino, or disappeared for weeks to some unknown destination in the countryside. Katya both loved the proximity to Culture, and loathed the increasing commercialisation of the city. Slava was an enthusiastic reformer who saw only good in the bustle and change, whilst his wife Lyuda quietly regretted the old order and predictability whilst sympathising with those unable to adapt.

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<sup>20</sup> This anti-Caucasian racism is based on the commonly held notion that all Caucasians are criminals. The high visibility of Caucasian fruit and vegetable traders on Moscow streets, charging high prices for high quality goods was infuriating to many Muscovites. Caucasians are referred to as 'blacks' (chiornie), in common parlance.

## Concluding Remarks

This partial perambulation of the city has focused on the distinctions between centre and micro-raion, function and leisure, the imagined city of the mind and the past and the lived in city of the body and the present. Its goods reflect values as diverse as Russianness, spirituality, centrality, prestige, political power, professional excellence and the complex understandings around a 'high level of cultural development'. Its evils include dirt, noise, crowds, murmured litanies of the nightmare and the madhouse, peopled by coarse, rude, greedy, 'pragmatic' inhabitants. In contrast to the imagined or idealised city, the lived in city is closely identified with the social relations of the city. The social relations of the street are characterised by avoidance, by avoidable collisions in the competition for domination of pavement space and by the force-feeding of other people's silent fear, anger and confusion. Those inhabitants who identify themselves most closely with the city (born and bred Muscovites, Russians, other Slavs) locate the roots and causes of the city's detriments elsewhere. Current ills are either the product of (conceptually non-Russian) Soviet or capitalist policies, or of the 'foreign' activities of Caucasian or Central Asian mafias. Inhabitants whose identity is located elsewhere locate the roots and causes in specifically Russian or Muscovite traits and attributes.

What is theoretically interesting is the ways in which the city is defined by the attributes of its inhabitants, as these are experienced in the social relations of the street. From the point of view of the consumer of city spaces, the actual live meanings of the city are the product of his/her daily experiences: in this the particularity of the unexcused collision is at least as important as the passive context of architecture and urban planning. If Sergei was laughingly scornful of the pettiness of Brezhnev's son's predilection for high windows, he was upset by the constant refusal of pedestrians to cede an inch of pavement. If Natasha and Maria identified themselves strongly with the refined spiritual quietness of church and monastery, this identification was constructed in opposition to the characterisation of 'these people', with their 'low level of cultural development'.



## Chapter 4.2

### Moving about the City

#### Above Ground : Underground

#### Movement, Anonymity : Sociality, Exchange

In this chapter I want to move on to a discussion of the significance of the public transport system. If particular places in the city are 'known' through occasional or regular experience of being in those places (the local environments of home, work, favourite places to walk), knowledge of the city as a whole is at least partly constituted by the practical daily experience of travelling on public transport. If we conceive of the city as an organism<sup>1</sup> whose life blood is its population, the public transport system is the circulatory system which links heart, mind and extremities.

The people circulating through this system have thoughts, emotions, intentions and disappointments, that are unwittingly shared as they move in streaming proximity. It is where and how the city's inhabitants formulate their knowledge of one another as they avoid one another's eyes on a train at rush hour. Apparently blind and deaf, travellers absorb knowledge of changing social distinctions as the Russian-made fur coat occasionally disappears to be replaced by the imported leather jacket.

It is via the public transport system that people come together to achieve productive tasks (leaving homes in diverse parts of the city to meet at the workplace). It is via the public transport system that they disengage from the productive tasks designated by supra-human forces (the state through planning mechanisms, the Market), and re-engage with kin and friends for the production and reproduction of privately engineered projects (children, friendship).

As such, the space of the public transport system links destinations and departures,

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<sup>1</sup> This is clearly a Durkheimian metaphor, but what I want to emphasise here is not the inter-dependence of parts which constitute a functioning 'whole' (the complex division of labour), but a more intimate sense of the ways in which this moving experience unites and fragments individuals by separating and linking their socio-spatial universes.

as it enables individuals to shift from one socio-spatial context to another. It is simultaneously a space in which the fragmentation of aspects of personhood (worker, mother) is experienced, and where differentiated identities are either before or behind. It is the space of transformation as movement in space reflects changes in individually felt and socially constituted identities. The public transport system is a social space, and one that is consumed on a daily basis. Forms of urban sociality are practically constructed as people adopt 'appropriate' behaviours and modes of interaction. The meaning of the public transport system is partly constituted by its particular sociality, as its sociality is at least partly constituted by the spatial context. Consuming the Metro is more than the consumption of a publicly provided service: it constitutes the consumption of particular kinds of interactions which themselves contribute to the construction of taken-for-granted knowledge of the city.

Spatial knowledge of the city is borne of the practically familiar experience of moving 'on auto-pilot' from tram to escalator to train to platform to train to escalator to bus. Taking the Metro may be conceived of in terms of 'pure function', but this is a myth which masks a rich seam of social processes of transformation and of knowledge formation.

In order to examine how these processes are actually constituted by the autonomous and automatic movement of bodies in space, I briefly describe the sensory experiences and social practices associated with above ground transport, before moving on to the more important discussion of the Metro. Discussion of the sheer quantity of time spent on public transport is complemented by descriptions of what it looks, feels and smells like, of the etiquette of social practice, and of the sociology of travellers as this was articulated by my local guides.

### **Buses, Trolleybuses and Trams**

Although the main form of public transportation in the city is the Metro, this is complemented by provision of buses, trolleybuses and trams. These are particularly important in the micro-raions, for connection between distant housing estates and the Metro system. In areas served by the Metro, above ground public transport is used

for 'short hops' rather than for journeys of any length.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the location of a flat is evaluated according to whether it is within walking distance from a Metro station. The regular dependency on above ground public transport for daily journeys is a minus, which is the product of two components.

First, reliance on above ground public transport consumes time that might have been otherwise used. A sample of time: distance ratios for travelling from flat to Metro station and from local Metro station to the ring line are given below. For example, in the first case, it takes 20 minutes to get from flat to Metro station (a distance of 1 kilometre), and 17 minutes to get from local Metro station to the ring line (a distance of 8 kilometres)

**Table 4.2.1** **Time:Distance Ratios**  
**Comparison of Surface and Underground Public Transport**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Distance</b>
Flat to Metro station: local M station to ring line	Flat to Metro station: local M station to ring line
1.	1 : 8
2.	1 : 5
3.	1 : 5.5
4.	1.2: 1
5.	1 : 10

The times given for travelling from flat to Metro station include walking to the overground transport stop and waiting. Thus we can see that the necessity of relying on overground transport for access to the Metro system makes a substantial contribution to the time spent travelling, whilst making a lesser contribution to the distance covered. Shortages of fuel were causing increasing unpredictability of bus transport. If I was lucky that my local area was provided with a reliable tram service, my visits to two of my more far flung informants were plagued by the knowledge that I would have to wait for buses. In two cases (Nos. 2 & 4 above), the distance was too far to cover on foot. This definitely decreased my inclination to visit either of these two households, especially on winter evenings. Visiting Case

<sup>2</sup> It was not possible to travel from any of the micro-raions with which I was familiar, to the centre, using a single above ground bus trolley or tram. If it might have been theoretically possible to change several times, this was not common practice.

No. 4 in particular created particular anxiety as there were very few cars and almost no possibility of successfully hailing a lift from the flat to the Metro station.

The description of overground public transport needs to make a distinction between both seasons and level of crowding. Levels of crowding are the product of two factors: the adequacy of the provision in terms of demand and the time of day. All public transport is very crowded at peak times ('chas pik'). Some public transport is crowded all the time, as the provision is less than demand. This applies particularly to decreasing bus transport in micro-raions with no other forms of transportation. Crowded buses, trams and trolleybuses are universally considered to be horrible ('uzhasno'): the competition for entry creates a veritable scrum to get on, and success is rewarded with the unpleasantness of extreme proximity to unknown others. For me, the memory of overground public transport is highly sensory, subject to seasonal change. In the summer, the windows never seem to open, and hot bodies are crammed together, sharing the smells of sweat and the alcohol that evaporates from the skin of the ubiquitous drunks. In the winter, the crowds make for relative warmth (although there always seems to be a window that won't shut), but the smells are of recently consumed garlic and the old smells of alcoholic breath. There is no heating on overground transport: it can be extremely cold and travellers vainly try and scratch small circular patches on the frosty windows, to relieve the claustrophobic effects of restricted vision.

## **The Metro**

First some history liberally sprinkled with rhetoric from the Moscow Metro Photoguide.<sup>3</sup>

In 1985 the Moscow Metro, which is named after Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and which has been decorated with the supreme government award of the Order of Lenin, celebrated its Golden Jubilee, on which occasion it was invested with another high award, this time, the Order

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<sup>3</sup> Moscow Metro Photoguide, Berezin, V., Arthur G. J. trans. published by Planeta Publishers Moscow, 1989.

of the Red Banner of Labour.<sup>4</sup> In June 1931 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union decided to build the country's first underground railway in its capitol, Moscow. May we digress to note that almost thirty years before, in 1902 the City Council of the then tsarist Moscow rejected out of hand an offer by the American banking firm, Werner and Co, to construct an underground railway. It remained for the young Soviet republic to tackle a task, which the imperial Romanov dynasty felt itself unable to accomplish despite its three-hundred-year reign. To carry out this project, the Soviet government set up a special Metrostroi Building Trust which it provided with the most sophisticated at the time Soviet made construction equipment and other machinery. Construction of the first line was launched in 1932. In response to a call issued by the Moscow Committees of the Communist Party and Soviet Young Communist League (Komsomol), for the entire country to go all out to build the Moscow Metro, coal miners from the Donbass coal fields in the Ukraine, building workers employed in the vast construction projects of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Mills in the Urals,<sup>5</sup> the Dnieper Hydroelectric Power Station, and the Turksib (Turkestan-Siberian railway) as well as factory workers of the Soviet capitol itself, plus 13,000 of its YCL (Young Communist League) volunteered. Plants in Moscow and Leningrad supplied the escalators and electric motors, the Kuznetsk Iron and Steel Mills in Siberia manufactured the rails. Chuvashia and Northern Russia provided the timber, cement came from the Volga region and North Caucasus, bitumen from Baku, and granite and marble from the quarries in Karelia, the Crimea, the Caucasus, the Urals and the Soviet Far East. In short the entire land pitched in to help build the Moscow Metro.

In the next few days Moscow's hard-bitten passenger clan, experienced in the ways of the tram and steeled in grapples on running boards of omnibuses and in squabbles with the greedy, dirty drivers of drozhkies will descend to the Metro, where they will find gleaming foyers with glass ticket offices, broad and superbly lit corridors and vast glittering halls of subterranean stations. Station is verily too modest a name for these terminals, a full thirteen clad in marble, granite, copper and variously tinted tiling; high, tidy with columns of a shiny pastel grey, pink, or streaky red, a steady milky glow from austere chandeliers, polished walls....' (Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov in *Pravda* 1955, quoted in the *Moscow Metro Photoguide*).

The first line of the Moscow Metro began service at 7 am on May 15th 1935.

<sup>4</sup> Note the sense that these were awarded to the Metro system itself ie, not to a person or persons/institution involved in design, construction or operation. The unstated 'recipient' of the awards seems to be the USSR as a whole system (of design, construction, ideology and labour).

<sup>5</sup> For an insightful history of Magnitogorsk see Stephen Kotkin's 'Steeltown USSR' 1991.

In this official rhetorical description, the Moscow Metro is construed as the symbol of progressive (Soviet) industrial development, its construction as the product of enthusiastic cooperation by workers in ethnically diverse and spatially distanciated industries and organisations. Although these official lines reflect a rather crude propagandistic style, it is impossible to underestimate the contribution of the Metro to the life of the city's inhabitants. The time geographies presented in Chapter 3 demonstrate that time my informants spent travelling either remained approximately the same or increased during the period of my fieldwork. The average duration, number of stops and changes for the one way journey to/from work on the Metro are given below for a selection of informants.

**Table 4.2.2**

**Journeys to work on Metro**

Number of Stops	Number of Changes	Duration (minutes)
1.	13	60
2.	8	30
3.	12	40
4.	11	33
5.	9	33
6.	11	33
7.	8	20
8.	13	43
9.	11	32

Other informants were engaged in more complex daily activities, which required them to travel less regularly but equally if not more extensively on the Metro. For example on a particular day that I spent with Maria, we met at 8 am at Prospect Mira and travelled together to VDNX where she was due to sing in a church choir for three hours. We then returned to her flat near Tulskaya for lunch. In the afternoon we went to see a friend of Maria's near Barricadnaya about some arrangements for a folk concert they were preparing. In the early evening we met a mutual friend at Arbatskaya for a walk. We then went back to my flat near Skhodnenskaya for something to eat. She then returned home to Tulskaya.

The table below gives the number of stops and changes we made in the course of the day.

**Table 4.2.3****Daily Metro Travel**

To Metro station	Stops	Changes		Stops	Changes
		Maria	Self		
Prospekt Mira	6	1		10	1
VDNX	3	3		3	1
Tula	9	2		9	2
Baricacnaya	5	1		5	1
Arbat	3	1		3	1
Sxodnenskaya	10	2		10	2
Tula	12	2			
Total	48	10		40	8
Total time		2 hours 50 minutes		2 hours 20 minutes	

This was in no way atypical for Maria, or for any of my other friends who were engaged in diverse activities.

As none of my informants lived close to their place of work, or enjoyed a concentration of friends in a given area (their own or another), all used the Metro on a regular basis in order to accomplish daily activities as diverse as earning a living, seeing friends, going for a walk or to the cinema, as well as for acquiring goods and services.

### **Consumption, Deficits and the Metro**

In cases of severe shortages of particular goods, Metro travel reportedly increased exponentially. It was estimated that the search for 'deficit' goods on the way to or from work added on average thirty minutes to the journey.<sup>6</sup> By the time of my fieldwork, the supply of consumer goods was improving as prices rose: both of these factors were reported to decrease the likelihood of making long special trips to find specific 'deficit' goods. Acquiring services continued to require extensive travel: Maria had to travel two stops with one change (a return journey made eight times) to acquire a new passport; Sergei had to travel eight stops with one change to post a letter abroad; Olga had to take one bus (three stops) and one tram (seven stops) to

<sup>6</sup> Reported in Rukavishnikova, Sapozhnikov, and Khazova 'Moskovski Pokupatel' (Moscow Buyer) in Sotsiologicheskie Issledovnaiye No. 7 1990.

get her television fixed at her 'local' service point.<sup>7</sup>

### Social Networks, Geographic Spread and the Metro

The extensive geographic spread of my informants' social networks was another major contributing factor to the use of the Metro. Taking Sergei as an example, the number of stops and changes he had to make to visit members of his social network are as follows:

**Table 4.2.4**

**Metro Travel and Visiting Friends**

To visit	Number of stops	Number of changes
Valeria	8	1
Vladimir & Alexandra	14	3
Anatoly & Zhanna	15	2
Viktor & Galia	9	3
Vyatcheslav	17	2
Volodya & Nadezhda	16	1
Arkady & Anastasia	3	0

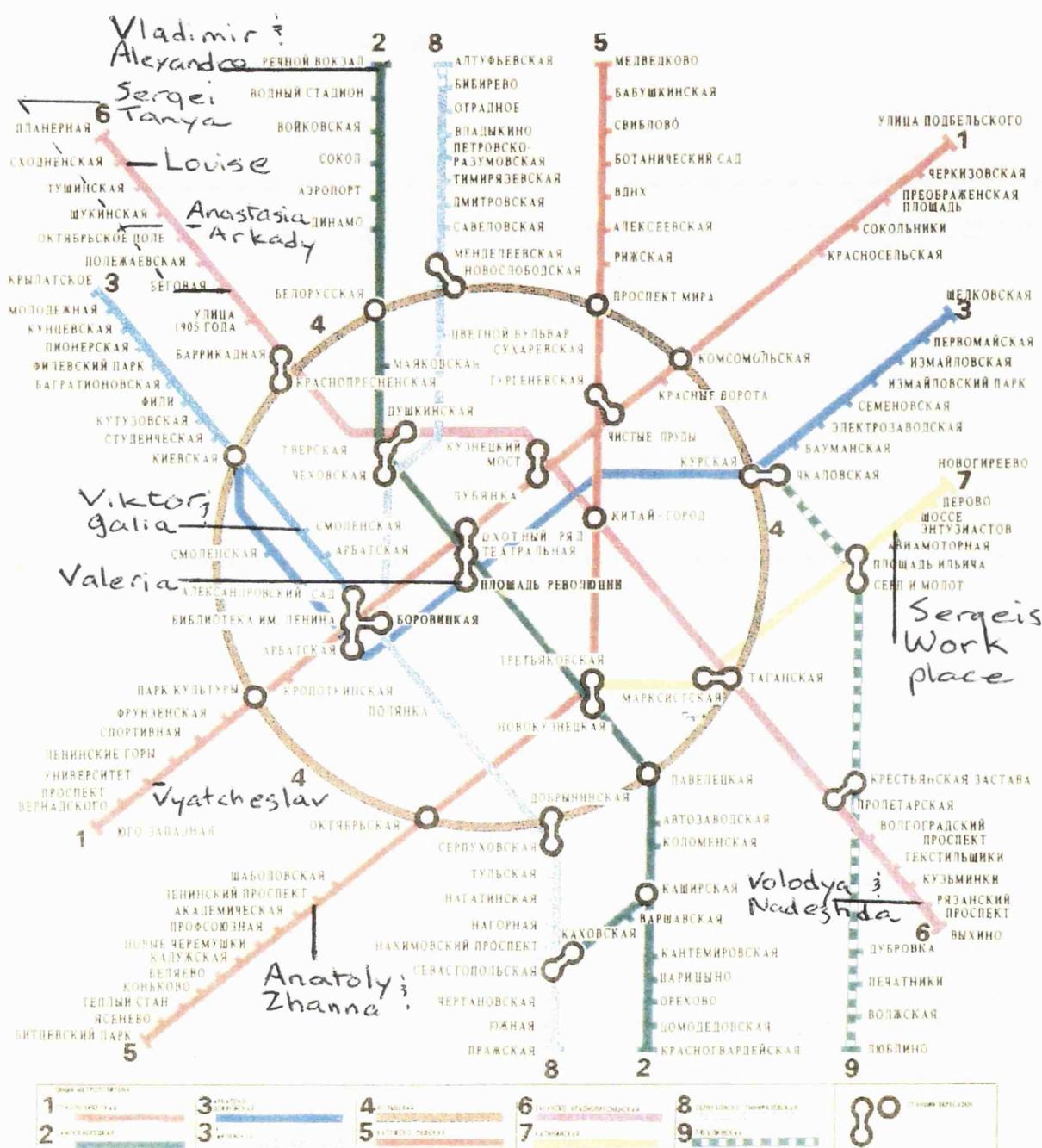
On an average day, Sergei would make one or two visits in the course of the day as well as travelling to and from work (thirteen stops and two changes). If, for example, he visited Volodya and Nadezhda on his way home from work, he would spend about 2 hours and 20 minutes on the Metro, passing through 31 stations and changing at 5 stations. If he visited Valeria and then me on the way home, he would spend 2 hours and 45 minutes on the Metro, passing through 35 stations, and changing at 4. Indeed, he always carried a small notebook in which he did calculations related to his research, in order not to waste the time. When Sergei became unemployed, his travelling increased as he replaced the daily (thirteen stops and two changes) journey to work with more frequent visits to friends and former colleagues, trying to organise either new employment or to generate some income through commercial activity. He estimated that he spent a total of nearly four hours

<sup>7</sup> Indeed this was used by Olga as an example of 'idiotism', which she thought a more appropriate appellation than communism, socialism, or capitalism. Although there was a television fixing point within walking distance of her flat, her address was not within their catchment area. As they refused to fix her television, she was forced to travel much further. Subsequent privatisation of these services ('bytovoi uslugie') has mostly resolved this kind of 'idiotism'.

Map 4.2.1

Metro map showing Sergei's home, workplace and households frequently visited

# МОСКОВСКИЙ МЕТРОПОЛИТЕН



## Новые названия станций:

Горьковская — Тверская  
 Проспект Мариса — Охотный ряд  
 Площадь Свердлова — Театральная  
 Калининская — Александровский сад  
 Дзержинская — Лубянка

Площадь Ногина — Китай-город  
 Кировская — Чистые пруды  
 Колхозная — Сухаревская  
 Щербаковская — Алексеевская  
 Ленино — Царицыно

— — — — — > suburban electric train



on the Metro one day (in June 1993) as he visited shops throughout the city, trying to sell some imported pickles.

As all of my informants' social networks were not local, meetings with friends required either long Metro journeys to private flats (often in distant micro-raions), or, shorter journeys to meet elsewhere, usually in the centre. Igor and Natasha's closest friends lived at the opposite end of the city, a distance of 21 stops with two changes requiring a full 60 minutes each way of Metro travel alone. The total journey time from one flat to the other and back amounted to three hours.

### **Leisure, Pleasure and the Metro**

Much leisure activity is encapsulated by the practice of meeting friends, usually in the centre, and going for a walk. Other leisure activities include going to the cinema, the theatre or to a concert. With the exception of the cinema, the bulk of venues are located in the centre, requiring travel from flats in the micro-raions to central stations. Travel associated with 'free time' was estimated to average 4.3 hours per week in 1991.<sup>8</sup> Travel 'za gorod' (out of town) to enjoy the 'clean air' on the weekends is a common leisure pursuit, which also requires a further half hour plus on suburban electric trains.

Those with dachas (estimated to be up to one third of urban populations)<sup>9</sup> increase the time spent on public transport as they travel by suburban trains to the countryside. In order to get to her dacha, Olga had to travel seven stops on the metro (with two changes), then travel an hour and a half by train, then walk for a further half hour. As a pensioner, Olga was lucky to be able to stay permanently in her dacha over the summer months, although spring visits were often only for a few days. When Galia and Gennady were still working (until spring 1993), they made a similar journey every weekend in order to tend the garden at their dacha plot.

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<sup>8</sup> See Patrushev, Karakhanova and Kushnareva, 'The Time of Inhabitants of Moscow and Moscow Oblast' in *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovanie*, No. 6 1992.

<sup>9</sup> This is likely to be even higher now.

## And the Exceptions

The exceptions to this kind of intense travelling were pensioners like Galina and Rosa, who almost never left their immediate areas, relying on overground transport or walking.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, mothers with young children (Julia and Alexandra) were adamant that it was 'impossible' to use the Metro with a baby, because it was 'too dirty' and 'there are too many people'.<sup>11</sup> Also my friend Katya rarely used the Metro, which she hated; she was however able to avoid using the Metro as she lived in the centre (at first near Mayakovskaya and later near Kievskaya stations), making it possible to rely on overground transport for most of her regular journeys. Her fear and loathing of the Metro meant that she was also one of the few people I knew who knew how to get around the centre solely above ground.

Thus we can see that extensive Metro transport is a structural feature of daily life, determined by distances to work, local shortages of goods and services, including leisure facilities, and by the far flung nature of my informants' social networks.

## Consuming the Metro

Shifting our gaze from the structural determinants of the quantity of travel on public transport, I would like to turn to the point of view of the traveller, in order to elucidate the contribution this practical daily experience makes to the overall 'meaning' of the city, as this meaning is constructed by social interpreters. This section will be organised as follows:

- i) a discussion of the architecture, or the visuals, of Metro travel;
- ii) a discussion of the social relations of Metro travel, including etiquette, 'consuming the other' and meetings;
- iii) a discussion of the Metro and the Market;
- iv) a discussion of how knowledge and practice of the Metro is a major constituent of the lived-in city.

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<sup>10</sup> Rosa's avoidance of the Metro was linked to her ill health; her poverty and restricted needs meant that she could more or less satisfy her needs locally, relying on her son for more distant requirements. Although also suffering from ill-health, Galina was comparatively wealthy and lived in the centre, which meant that she could also satisfy her needs locally.

<sup>11</sup> Both of these women had husbands and close kin who could make longer journeys on their behalf.

## Communist Busts, Hammers and Sickles, Poets and Representation

The concept of architecture as propaganda<sup>12</sup> was fully exploited in the design of the interior chambers of the Moscow Metro. Moving through the underground stations in the course of the day, travellers are surrounded by strong visual representations of Revolutionary heroes, Soviet icons, and the acceptable face of the Russian cultural intelligentsia. There are however distinctions between the elaborate decoration of the older, or central, Metro stations (ie, those on or within the ring line) and more recent additions serving the micro-raions. This reinforces the centre: periphery distinction. The rather plain (functional/modernist) marble facing of the latter stands in contrast to the complex and deliberately symbolic aesthetics of the former.

There are a number of themes that are repeated in the decor of the central stations, which reflect the categorisation of Soviet propaganda. The first of these is the representation of Revolutionary Soviet stereotypes: In the Ploschad Revoliutsie Metro station (Revolution Square), bronze figures of the young and healthy peasant, sportsman, student, industrial worker, technician, soldier, and Mother gaze into the future. In the Novokuznetskaya Metro station, similar figures are depicted in concave mosaics set into the ceiling: the skywards perspective adds to the sense of striving towards high ideals as firm breasted maidens reach up for apples, divers stand poised on high boards, and industrial workers guide a vast overhead smelting pot. These figures are notable for their youth and health, as well as for the occupations idealised: labour (agricultural, industrial and technological), study (improving the mind), sport (improving the body), military service (defense of the USSR/motherland), and motherhood (reproduction).<sup>13</sup>

In Kievskaya and Bielorusskaya stations, the emphasis is on the inclusion and participation of Ukrainians and Bielorussians in the revolutionary process. There are elaborate mosaics of Lenin with grateful Ukrainians in Kievskaya; a statuesque

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly the word 'propaganda' in Russian has none of the negative connotations it carries in English. References to propaganda inevitably connote a pragmatic attitude to a practice which was normalised by the Revolutionary flavour of the Soviet state.

<sup>13</sup> Falls in the birth rate have been a frequent source of worry to policy-makers: this has resulted in various policies to encourage women to have more children, eg, increasing levels of child benefit (especially to families with three or more children), paid leave, and awards such as the 'Mother Hero' (Mat Geroi') for mothers of ten or more children.

Bielorussian woman stands behind a golden shield which bears the five pointed star, sheaves of wheat, the hammer and sickle and the exhortation 'Workers of the World, Unite'.

## Names and Stations

There are stations dedicated to Revolutionary places (Barricadnaya, Oktiabrskaya Polie, Ulitsa 1905<sup>14</sup>), and the emblematic month: quite simply 'Oktyabr'<sup>15</sup>.

Similarly, stations have been named 'Marksistskaya', 'Proletarskaya', the 'Krestianskaya Zastava', 'Pionerskaya', 'Profsoiuznaya' and 'Komsomolskaya'<sup>16</sup>.

The industrial premise of the revolution is represented by stations dedicated to industrial endeavour: 'Aviamotornaya', 'Elektrozavodskaya', and 'Avtozavodskaya'.<sup>17</sup> The names are complemented by graphic representations of the relevant revolutionary themes, characters, or industrial activity, in each station.

Similar homage is paid to the greats of Russian literature, with stations dedicated to Pushkin, Chekhov, Turgenev, and Mayakovskiy although Gorky has recently lost his station to the more prosaically named Tverskaya.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the older, central stations, there are repeated representations of Lenin, the five pointed star, the hammer and sickle, in contrasting marbles or swathed in banners of gold and red. As the colours of preference of Soviet iconography, it is interesting to note the contradiction between the communist/revolutionary connotations of red and the glorious, wealthy, imperial connotations of the gold. Even in the absence of explicit representations of Revolutionary icons, the consistent use of elaborate decoration with carved marble seats, stained glass, and intricate chandeliers reinforces the sense of riches, of glory and of success.

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<sup>14</sup> Barricade, October Field, and 1905 Street respectively.

<sup>15</sup> October.

<sup>16</sup> Marxist, Proletarian, Peasant's Gate, Pioneer, Trade Unionist, Komsomol, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> Airplane Engines, Electric Factory, and Car Factory respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Tverskaya simply indicates the location of the station on the main road leading out of Moscow in the direction of Tver.

If the churches of pre-Revolutionary Russia were the sole space in which the oppressed could experience the glories of high Art 'from within' (as opposed to the vision of palaces from without), the construction of the Metro transformed the meaning of space as it shifted high Art from the spiritual and other worldly context of the church to the mundane and material context of a public transport system.

It could be argued that this use of a semi-religious or imperial style in the context of a public transport system constitutes a reversal of values (from the glorification of God or the Tsar to glorification of labour, technology, military honour, and the improvement and reproduction of the minds and bodies of the working class). Or, at another level, it constitutes the collapse of the sacred (religious/imperial) and the profane (labour). Yet the retention of individual glorification in marble, red and gold, or in intricately worked mosaics and carvings (revolutionary heroes like Lenin ubiquitously, Marx, Dzerzhinsky, Sverdlov, Kalinin, and Kirov particularly, and the icons of art and literature, Pushkin,<sup>19</sup> Turgenev, Tretyakov, Mayakovskiy and Gorky), bears witness to a continued tradition of individual sanctification. I would suggest that both processes operate simultaneously (whether as a product of intended designs or unintended consequences).

However, interpreting what daily movement through this museum of propaganda might mean requires that we look beyond the partially transparent intentions of the original designers. If we are to apply a notion of interpretation where the construction of meaning takes place at the interface between emission and reception, we need to examine the lived experience of Metro users. In the first place, the wholly quotidian and functional nature of Metro travel makes much of the iconography virtually invisible. If the first passengers were as overawed by the grandeur as I was on my first journeys, it was absolutely clear that the internal decor was taken for granted, ignored and virtually unseen by any of my companions. None ever made any unsolicited comments, and clearly felt that commenting on the Metro interiors was as interesting as discussing the particular hue of the pavements outside. If pressed they might express a preference for a given station,

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<sup>19</sup>

Reverence and affection for Pushkin is extremely widespread, and many can recite whole swathes of Pushkin by heart. I was once told that Pushkin was a true genius, "because even at a young age, he knew as much as an old man", implying a comparatively greater quantitative grasp of the (singular) truth.

'Mayakovskaya because it has an elegant art-deco style', or 'my own because it means that I am nearly home', or 'Bielorusskaya because it leads to the train station that takes me back to Minsk', or 'Pushkinskaya because that's where I meet my girlfriend'. Although my informants mostly expressed their preferences in terms of personalised meanings, eschewing reference to aesthetics or architecture, these were nevertheless weak preferences; I felt that it was my question that prompted the formulation of the preference. More spontaneous were comments about how it is now dirty or expensive, but was clean and cheap 'before'<sup>20</sup>

Yet the absence of explicit formulation of meaning in spite of the overt nature of the message seems to me to suggest a curious contradiction, which could be said to characterise much of Soviet culture. On the one hand much of the rhetoric and iconography was explicitly about change (Revolution), optimism, and progress. On the other, the mundane experience of travelling long distances on the Metro, of 'the non-rational use of time'<sup>21</sup> getting to or from work or in search of scarce goods, creates an embodied experience of contradiction. As 'nothing changes' and 'everything gets worse' ('nichevo menyaetsa' i 'vsio khuzhe'), the result is the normalisation of contradiction. Revolutionary exhortations become fossilised, as the spirit of 1917 is fixed in stone a generation later, becoming quaintly redundant by the 1990s. Mixing the revolutionary with the mundane both reduces the likelihood of explicit attention and, more importantly, increases its acceptance as the normal, taken-for-granted background to daily life. Yet the space which is ignored and taken for granted is a very different space than the one which is equally ignored and taken for granted in, say, London. Similarly, the glorification of political,<sup>22</sup> literary or artistic genius reinforces evolutionary notions of a personalised 'high level of cultural development', and appropriates genius to the sons of the Russian motherland (and by proxy to the abstract notion of Russia as a whole), whilst censoring

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<sup>20</sup> This time 'before', refers to a time before current changes, when 'public places were maintained and order prevailed.'

<sup>21</sup> The 'non-rational use of time' is one of the obsessions of indigenous social critics. See eg, Dukarevitch, E.A. "Consumer Behaviour in Deficit Conditions", in *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovanie*, No. 2 1987 p.66.

<sup>22</sup> Lenin was thought to be a political genius. A friend of Sergei's told me that he had been to a conference where they discussed what to do with Lenin's brain. This had been removed at the time of his death and sliced into thin layers, 'in order to discover the roots of his genius'. This is linked to the notion suggested by Berdyayev that Russian communism was not about the ethics of social justice, but about the operationalisation of a scientifically correct form of political, economic and social organisation (Berdyayev 1937).

contemporary art and literature. Again there is a contradiction between the ideal (Russian capacity for genius) and practice (the inability to provide basic consumer goods).

If naming stations was explicitly politicised at their inauguration, subsequent name changes reflect the ideological volte-faces of the contemporary polity. Stations named for Revolutionary heroes now sport distinctly Russian, pre-Revolutionary referents.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 4.2.5**

**Name Changes of Metro Stations**

Russian		English	
Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
Gordovskaya	Tverskaya	Gorky	Tver
Prospekt Markska	Okhotnie Riad	Marx Prospect	Hunters Row
Ploshad Sverdlova	Teatralnaya	Sverdlov Sq.	Theatre
Kalininskaya	Aleksandrovsky Sad	Kalinin	Alexander Garden
Dzerzhinskaya	Lubyanka	Dzerzhinsky	Lubyanka
Ploshad Nogina	Kitai Gorod	Nogina Sq.	Kitai Town
Kirovskaya	Chistie Prudie	Kirov	Clean Pond
Kolkhoznaya	Sukharevskaya	Collective Farm	Sukharevsky
Shcherbakovskaya	Alekseevskaya	Shcherbakov	Aleksei
Lenino	Tsaritsino	Lenino	Tsaritsino

<sup>23</sup> Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), was a renowned socialist writer and intellectual. Yakov Sverdlov (1885-1919) was Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union from 1917-1919. McCauley notes that he "ensured that no issue central to Bolshevik policy was ever debated freely under his chairmanship". (McCauley 1981:28) M.I. Kalinin (1875-1946) was a member of the Politburo from 1926, and Chairman of the Central Executive Committee from 1937-1946. F.E. Dzerzhinsky (1877-1926) was head of the CHEKA (All Russia Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Counter-revolution and Sabotage) from Dec. 1917 -1926 (The CHEKA became the G.P.U. in 1922). V.P.Nogin was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Sergei Kirov (1886-1934) was Communist Party Secretary in Leningrad (1927-1934). A 'popular, handsome and moderate member of the Politburo, he was a threat to Stalin. It is unproven but there are suggestions that his murder in Dec. 1934 was undertaken with Stalin's approval. The murder of Kirov allowed Stalin to unleash a wave of mass arrests, deportations and executions. A.S.Shcherbakov (d. 1945) was first secretary of the Moscow Communist Party during the Second World War. V.I.Lenin and K. Marx need no introduction.

## Social Practice and the Metro

This section will discuss access, etiquette, who's who on the Metro, and conclude with the relation between the Metro and sociality.

### *Access: Getting In and Getting On*

Access to the Metro is through sometimes long, marble-clad underground tunnels, which often link several adjacent stations. The ticket halls are often 'gleaming foyers', with 'glass fronted ticket offices'. Yet the grandeur of the architecture is not repeated in practice. The rise in prices since January 1992 means that the automatic ticket dispensers are redundant, requiring everybody to acquire tickets from the desks. Glass fronted they may be, but not infrequently they are partially curtained, obstructing direct visual contact between seller and buyer. The windows are low, usually about four feet off the ground, thus requiring travellers to bend down to state their request.<sup>24</sup> Ticket office attendants are invariably extremely bad-tempered. If the rhetorical description of the Moscow Metro cited at the beginning of this chapter draws on the distinction between 'squabbles with the dirty greedy drivers of drozhkies' and the glories of Metro, the architectural improvements do not seem to have been accompanied by an improvement in the relations between providers and consumers. Any deviation from the norm of stating what is required (single journey tokens, or monthly passes) is met with either verbal abuse or wholly ignored as attention shifts immediately to the next passenger. The only exception to this in my experience was when I asked for three, monthly passes for all forms of transport. As this was a relatively expensive purchase, I was treated with unusual respect as the ticket seller carefully confirmed my request and counted out the change. Access through the token barriers or past attendants checking passes often causes bottlenecks, which are the cue for much pushing and flagrant queue jumping. Passengers travel down long escalators, watched by an escalator monitor who sits in a cubicle at the bottom and exhorts people to stand on the right, not run, not place baggage on the handrail. The explosion of both street trade and of household

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<sup>24</sup> The low placing of windows in ticket offices, kiosks, and in shops is common throughout Russia. No one was ever able to give me a reason for this phenomenon. A positive interpretation might be that tall people can bend down whilst children and the very short couldn't reach higher windows. A more negative interpretation is that requiring people to bend in order to request goods and services wholly represents their status as supplicants. This phenomenon was remarked on by Michael Hetzer in an article entitled "Talking Heads: Cause or Effect of the System" in Moscow Times 5.3.1993.

production (from dacha plots) has combined with the habit of buying in bulk to ensure that a large proportion of the population travels with varying quantities of goods in bags, rucksacks or on trolleys. Recently, signs have appeared which limit the size of packages which will be transported for free. This is clearly aimed at restricting use of the Metro for the transport of 'commercial goods'.

### *Etiquette*

On the platforms, people place themselves in positions known to provide the best placement for subsequent transfers or exits. When it is crowded, the arrival of the train is the signal for an immediate scrum, with much bad-tempered pushing and shoving. Almost everybody participates in this scrum; only rarely have I seen anyone stand back and allow others to pass ahead of them. This stands in direct contradiction to the etiquette of seating. Seats are usually given up for elderly people, for invalids, and for children up to the age of ten or even twelve. Gender does not seem to play a significant role as, for example, young men do not give up seats for able-bodied women in their fifties or sixties.

There is also a common practice of giving up seats for solitary drunks (of which there are many). This seems to have various implications. On the one hand there is the pragmatic acknowledgement that drunks are unlikely to be **able** to stand. On the other, the attitude to drunks wavers between disgust (more often expressed by women) and a rather touching sympathy (more often expressed by men). Often people demonstrate a mixture of the two sentiments. The meanings of vodka and drinking will be discussed further in Chapter 7. However, the common (some say increasing) presence of drunks on the Metro makes a meaningful contribution to the kind of experience it is. As the accepted behaviour on all forms of public transport is silence, composure, avoidance of eye contact, and taking up as little space as possible, the behaviour of drunks is very often in complete opposition. The (rare) infringements of proper behaviour by sober passengers are admonished by a variety of dirty looks, muttered complaints or occasional outbursts of verbal abuse. Yet the infringements of proper behaviour by drunks is sometimes met by tolerance, amusement, engagement in conversation, or assistance. On one occasion, I saw a passenger who had just been covered in snot by a drunk, initially get very angry, and then wipe the man's nose, sit him down and ask him where he wanted to get

off. Similarly, the presence of a puppy on the train was once the occasion for passengers to exchange silent amusement at its antics.

In the absence of drunks and puppies, the principle which underlies behaviour is one of avoidance or even absence. Eye contact is strictly avoided, and there is no exchange of smiles or conversation....ever. I was deeply disturbed to discover that even children as young as two would look blankly at me if I smiled at them.

Appropriate behaviour consists of sitting with legs together, hands on lap, reading or looking unfocused into the middle distance. People never undo coats or remove hats on the Metro even though it can become very hot if one is dressed for freezing temperatures. People travelling together either remain silent, or engage in inaudible conversation between themselves.

Given the time the urban population spends on the Metro, in close physical contact with hordes of unknown others, these social relations of avoidance seem to me to both construct and express a taken-for-granted antipathy between strangers. If this behaviour is reminiscent of practices noted by researchers in western contexts (see discussion of Milgram 1970, Nash 1975, and Levine, Vinson and Wood 1973 in Chapter 2), the cooperation required to maintain "public privacy" (Milgram 1970:91) does not adequately describe the aggression evident in the social relations of the Metro. Eye contact may generally be avoided in both London and in Moscow, but reactions to infringements of this unspoken code are wholly distinctive. In London, a smile will often be returned, whereas in Moscow, a smile will be met with a cold hard stare of incomprehension. The smile as expression of goodwill is reciprocated in London because there is a common acknowledgement that friendliness (even between strangers) is preferable to unfriendliness. In Moscow, this assumption seems to be reversed, as 'cooperative maintenance of public privacy' is replaced by overt enmity.

This suspicion was legitimated in discussion with Vladimir and Alexandra, who had consistently refused my invitations to visit me at home. They explained that they couldn't travel on the Metro with their one year old baby, because it is 'too dirty' and there are 'too many people'. When I questioned this, they elaborated on how they couldn't bear to bring their beloved infant into contact with all the aggression

and rudeness of the travelling public. Alexandra proceeded to relate a story of being recently reduced to tears after being shouted at for losing her balance. 'These people are so rude and boorish, how can I take the baby on the Metro?' If Alexandra and Vladimir were prepared to be explicit about Metro travel, my other informants were generally silent on the topic, unless pressed by me. When pressed, all agreed that, 'of course, it is *uzhasno*'. Indeed the usual silence of moving trains is sometimes broken by murmured litanies of '*uzhasno*, *strashno*, *kashmar*, or *sumashedshie*' (terrible, horrible, nightmare or insane), particularly when it is very crowded.

### **Who's Who on the Metro**

My initial inability to 'read' people from their appearance improved as I engaged my friends and informants in guessing games; these involved guessing who people were and what they were thinking. This game elucidated the criteria by which people 'read' one another (correctly or not).

#### ***'Biznesmen'***

One of the easiest categories to identify, was that of young men in 'business'. This 'being in business' is a loose concept and connotes all those who clearly don't depend for their living or sense of self on occupation in the state sector. Their style of dress was distinctly 'western', and business success could be 'inferred' from the extent to which this was successfully achieved. The first items of 'western' clothing acquired are the cheaper ones, tea shirts and sweat shirts in particular. More 'success' is denoted by the addition of western jeans (rather than Soviet or East European made ones), imported jackets (leather being the height of a certain kind of success). The final mark of the 'successful businessman' was the addition of western made shoes, trainers for the younger, more plebeian entrepreneurs, and leather shoes or desert boots for those with access to less widely available western fashions. With women, this categorisation is somewhat more difficult to ascertain. Although there are lots of women involved in 'business', being dressed in western clothes was no guarantee that it was the women themselves who were thus occupied. My informants were more likely to suggest that 'her boyfriend or husband must be in business' than that 'she must be in business' whenever we observed a well-

dressed woman. When asked to guess what these 'biznesmen' might be thinking, my informants invariably referred to 'trade, money making, and profits.'

### ***'Babushka'***

Another easily identifiable category was the traditional Russian babushka (literally grandmother). Necessarily old and female, she plays a major role in the categorisation of people. Recognisable by the well-worn character of her Soviet-made attire, the compulsory headscarf or woollen hat and woollen stockings, she is inevitably spoken of with affection: 'a little skinny humble babushka' ('malenkaya, tonkaya, skromnaya babushka'). Personally, I saw few babushkas who merited such paternalism. For the most part they looked extremely competent, managing heavy provisions in bags, in rucksacks or on trolleys, often with a small child or two in tow. The characterisation of babushkas as deserving and in need of 'protection' seemed faintly ridiculous as a frail disposition could not survive to such a respectable age in such circumstances. There are thousands of babushkas bustling about Moscow who could teach their grandsons 'in business' a thing or two about entrepreneurialism. Questions about what a babushka might be thinking were met with replies suggesting worries about pensions and money, followed by worries about one's children, grandchildren and their future material security.

### ***'The artist'***

Another easily identifiable type is the 'artist'. The adoption by some of beard and beret probably says as much about aspirations as talent, but here at least the message was conscientiously constructed. The beret is so un-Russian, except as a sign of 'artistry', that the wearing of a beret, especially by men over 40, inevitably evoked the opinion that the wearer was 'an artist'. Many of my companions opined that such 'artists' were doubtless concerned only with 'higher pursuits', 'disinterested in money', or 'unaware of current economic difficulties'. These opinions were occasionally delivered with more than a touch of irony.

### ***Beggars***

The appearance of non-Gypsy<sup>25</sup> beggars on the streets, near Metro stations, and in

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<sup>25</sup> Gypsies are generally ostracised, accused of being dirty, thieves and criminals. I never saw anyone give money to Gypsies, and was frequently reprimanded for doing so.

the underground passageways is claimed to be a wholly post-perestroika phenomenon. My informants generally agreed that the elderly and infirm were forced to beg because their pensions were inadequate, or because they had unacknowledged dependents (children or grandchildren), or because of an alcoholic in the family. Inadequate pensions are not infrequently the result of a bureaucratic failure: my neighbour Rosa said that without the help of her son, she would be forced to beg because 'they have lost the papers and I can't get my full pension'. There were many 'refugees' begging in the underground passageways, mothers with children crouched on the floor, with a small piece of cardboard explaining their predicament. Many of these have fled conflicts in the 'near abroad' (especially Tadzhikistan, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). Towards the end on 1993, it became not uncommon to see children begging on their own in the Metro, either in the passageways or occasionally on the trains. Many were the children of 'refugees', although I saw one very young girl, with a sign saying there was not enough food in the children's home. She was crying.

In the early part of my fieldwork, I only rarely saw anyone give any money to anyone. Later it became more common to see passengers give small change, especially to elderly or infirm beggars. It was much rarer to see anyone give to 'refugees' and some of my informants opined that they were really 'Gypsies' exploiting novel begging possibilities. Needless to say, all of my informants were aghast at the appearance of beggars on the streets, expressing anger at the draconian nature of 'shock therapy' (Julia, Lyuba and Boris, Galina, Maria, Katya) or at the incompetent implementation of essentially necessary policies (Sergei, Valeria, Yuri and Marina, Irina, Natasha and Igor). Sympathy was inevitably expressed towards the elderly and infirm, although sympathy for non-Russian refugees was more evident amongst my non-Russian friends than amongst the Russians.

#### ***'Poor and simple workers'***

The remaining 'groups' identified by my companions are less conclusive and somewhat less easy to categorise. One of these can be glossed as 'poor and/or simple workers' ('biednii/prostii rabochiki'). The men were poorly and often insufficiently dressed for the weather, with thin coats and worn shoes in lieu of boots. Their fur hats were old and somewhat mangy, their collars stained. The

most definite sign of their occupation was the gnarled hands of the manual worker. When sober, these men looked incredibly tired and dejected. When drunk, their dejection evaporates either in an explosion of slurred sociability or into the unfocused incomprehension of the very drunk. Very poor women look equally exhausted and dejected, but without the respite of the occasional alcohol - induced anaesthesia. They are equally poorly dressed, pale, drawn, haggard and old beyond their years. That these women remained patient with their children was little short of miraculous to me. Imagining what these people were thinking inevitably produced hypotheses such as 'how am I going to feed my family?'

### ***'Krutoi Sovok'*<sup>26</sup>**

The final 'type' identified in this game was the 'pure Soviet'. Adequately or even over-dressed in a mixture of Soviet-made and imported clothing, the women in particular had a particular presence. Even when of small stature, they seem big, and favour shoulder pads, brightly coloured, patterned jumpers often threaded with silver or gold or adorned with sequins. Their hair is often dyed and not infrequently back-combed into a 'bee-hive' reminiscent of the 1960's. Their make-up is elaborate and 'sharp'. In the winter they sport fur coats, fur hats, good quality, expensive boots and classic Russian scarves expertly wound around substantial necks and shoulders. Their male counterparts are less noticeable, being soberly dressed in dark clothes, or in expensive fur coats and hats in the winter. Both the male and female incarnations of the 'pure Soviet type' are recognisable by their attitude as much as by their attire. Their presence on an underground train is tangible, as their self-confidence stands in stark contrast to the eyes-down resignation of the other passengers. The women in particular are more likely to express their disapproval of noisy youths or drunks, with withering looks and audible mutterings of 'uzhasno'. They seem to have singular ability to appropriate seats on even the most crowded trains. Asked to imagine the thoughts of a 'krutoi sovok', responses varied with the political inclinations of the respondent. Where Sergei would refer to calculations as to how many 'presents' could be acquired in the course of their duties, Lyuba would suggest that they were worried about the falling value of their wages. Guessing

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<sup>26</sup>

'Krutoi sovok: I first came across this expression in a newspaper article. As it translates literally as 'steep dustpan', I was confused. My Russian teacher then explained that it means a 'real Soviet person'.

occupations mostly elicited suggestions that they were engaged in the upper echelons of enterprises, organisations and bureaucracies. Some of my informants would suggest, 'Definitely a party member'.

### **The Metro and Sociality**

There is an intimate relationship between the Metro and sociality. It functions both as a physical link between distantly housed relatives and friends, and as a frequent meeting place. Shelter from the weather combines with the taken-for-granted knowledge that both parties will travel by Metro to make Metro stations the locus of thousands of daily rendezvous. My diary is full of reminders to meet one or the other of my informants at eg, 'Pushkinskaya by the first carriage on the way to the centre on the Taganskaya - Krasnopresnenskaya line'. Indeed frequently, while I was waiting for someone, I would see others meet, greet one another, and sit down on one of the benches to chat, occasionally sharing a small snack unearthed from the depths of a copious shopping bag. I was told that people often meet for a short while in a Metro station, when they have not the time to visit each other at home (a more formal affair). In the absence of other spaces for casual sociality (eg, cafes where you can sit and have a small snack sheltered from the weather), Metro stations often provide the only alternative space for such informal encounters, especially in inclement weather. Indeed Sergei told me that in the winter, he often sits in a Metro station if he has free time between one occupation and another (eg, between work and a social visit), but not enough time to go home or visit someone else. However, it is important to emphasise that this is not a space for initiating social relationships. Verbal interactions are strictly restricted to asking directions, again without prelude or thanks (See Chapter 4.1).

### **The Metro and the Market**

With the liberalisation of commercial activity, Metro stations became the location for a wide variety of street trading activities. Although, the description that follows concerns the transformations observed at my local Metro station, the same applies to almost all the other Metro stations that I visited in Moscow. The differences were ones of degree rather than ones of kind.

## Outside the Metro Station

When I first visited Skhodnenskaya Metro station in September 1992, street trade was in evidence, both in the underground passageways leading to the ticket halls and in the area surrounding the steps descending to these passageways. During this initial period (autumn 1992 to spring 1993), traders sold a variety of goods either 'from the hand', literally holding a sample of goods on offer in their hands as they stood either above or below ground, or from makeshift tables or upturned fruit crates. There were also three previously state run kiosks.

## From the Hand

As long as the Metro was running there were people selling things from the hand. At its most restricted (early in the morning or late at night) there were always at least two or three elderly women selling vodka, beer, or cigarettes. At its most lively (Saturdays in spring and summer 1993) there were up to ten people selling vodka, beer, cigarettes, and 'privatisation vouchers',<sup>27</sup> as well as up to twenty people selling other items, often clothing. The goods for sale were either imported (often from Poland) or locally produced goods, bought at state or recently privatised shops and re-sold on the streets at prices roughly equal to the prices of imported goods. If this practice was initially possible because of the combined effects of continuing shortages and still relatively low shop prices, the decreasing disparity between shop and street prices has meant that such straightforward 'speculation' is now much reduced. This casual trade from the hand was still much in evidence in 1993, but has reduced in the subsequent period as a result of stricter controls.

The lively trade in 'privatisation vouchers' was explained to me by Sasha. He said that the initial sale of vouchers reflected preferences for the hard cash necessary to acquire sausage and/or vodka. Secondly, most people were unsure as to what they

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<sup>27</sup> A 'privatisation voucher' with a paper value of 10,000 roubles was given to every citizen of the Russian Federation. These vouchers could be bought and sold, or used to acquire shares in an enterprise in the process of privatisation (often used by workers to acquire a share of the enterprise where they worked), or 'invested' in one of the numerous 'investment banks' that were springing up all over the capital. Initially, many had neither understanding of nor faith in the value of these vouchers.

Photo 4.2.1

Women selling goods 'from the hand'





Photo 4.2.2

Buying potatoes from the backs of lorries



W W  
L E E Z

the day

were, how they could be used, what their real value was or might be. If initial trade reflected both preferences and uncertainties, later trade was often far more commercialised, with sellers offering vouchers for 7,000 rubles, for example, next to buyers offering 6,500. Sasha later told me that many pensioners were buying vouchers on the streets on behalf of kin who were trading in higher quantities on the emerging stock markets.

The table below indicates fluctuations in the value of privatisation vouchers between October 1992 and July 1993.

**Table 4.2.6** **Price Privatisation Vouchers**  
**October 1992-July 1993**

	Date	Value in Roubles	Value in US Dollars
1992	22 October	6,100	17.0
	30 October	4,800	11.0
	13 November	4,200	11.5
	2 December	7,900	20.0
	25 December	5,900	13.5
1993	22 January	5,500	10.0
	5 February	4,800	8.0
	5 March	4,500	6.5
	9 April	4,600	5.6
	7 May	8,400	4.2
	28 May	6,000	5.0
	11 June	8,400	7.0
	25 June	9,000	8.2
	23 July	9,600	8.8

Source: Boycko, Shleifer, and Vishny in Aslund (Ed.) 1994

### **From the Backs of Lorries, Upturned Crates and Collapsible Tables**

During the post-harvest period of early autumn 1992, there was substantial trade in mostly local fruit and vegetables from the backs of lorries (watermelons and potatoes), upturned crates and collapsible tables (small bunches of garlic, onions, beetroot, carrots, apples). Where the bigger traders were middlemen who had bought goods straight from the former state and collective farms, bypassing the state distribution network, the smaller traders were selling the surplus from their own

dacha plots. As the trade in fresh fruit and vegetables waned in the late autumn 1992, there were fewer lorries and more small traders selling pathetically small quantities of wrinkled apples. Winter saw the appearance of women selling salted cabbage, or more rarely, salted tomatoes and cucumbers. In the early period there were occasionally youths selling sweets, cigarettes or beer from makeshift tables, combining 'speculation' with the sale of imported goods.

### **Kiosks**

Where the signs over the three older kiosks indicated that they sold newspapers, tobacco and ice cream respectively, the liberalisation of trade and the privatisation of the kiosks meant that they were offering various other goods during the course of my fieldwork. The usual presence of tobacco and alcohol products contrasted sharply with the unpredictable supply of other sundry items (cassettes, tights, razor blades, shoes, tools, and detergents all appeared and disappeared from these kiosks). Poorly stocked, they contrasted with the dozen new kiosks which appeared outside the Metro station in April 1993.

### **The Street Market**

By spring 1993, the general consternation over uncontrolled street trade meant that people were being regularly evicted from these informal trading spaces throughout the city, although they often re-appeared a few days later either in the same location or at a short distance. In Skhodnenskaya however, a 'progressive' local authority decided to formalise instead of abolish the street trade. They paved an area around the entrance to the Metro station, licensed a dozen new kiosks, and installed a port-a-cabin as the 'market administration'. More permanent, shaded stalls appeared, and the area took on the look and feel of a proper market. The new kiosks were well stocked with a more defined range of goods (alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and a few sweets only), stacked in tantalising arrays. The small piles of fruit and vegetables from dacha plots sold from upturned crates, were complemented by colourful mounds of imported fruit and vegetables from more permanent stalls. On a Saturday afternoon, this market was often extremely busy, with the quotidian trade

Photo 4.2.5

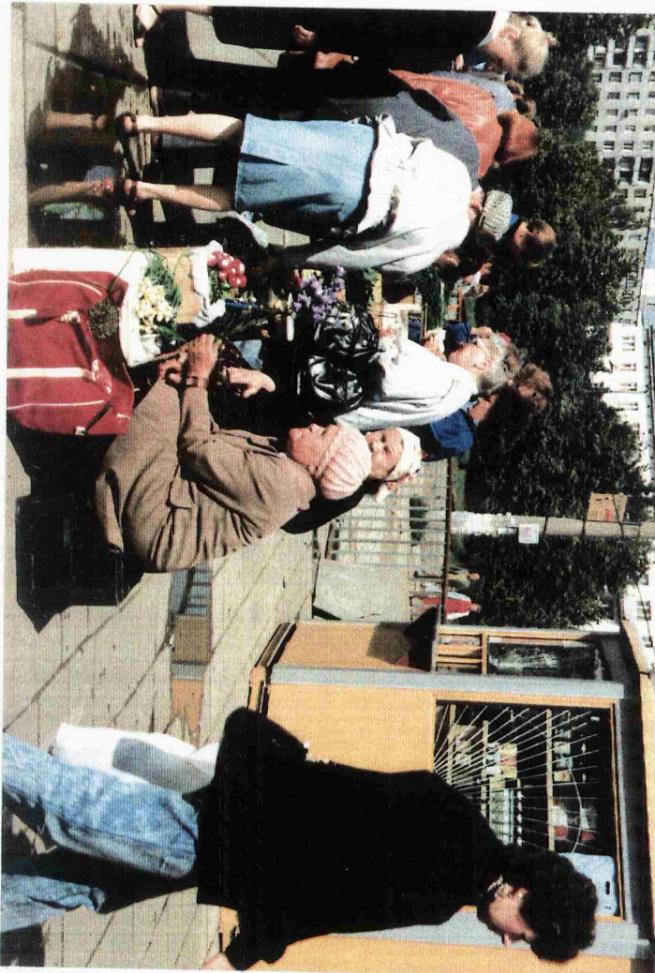
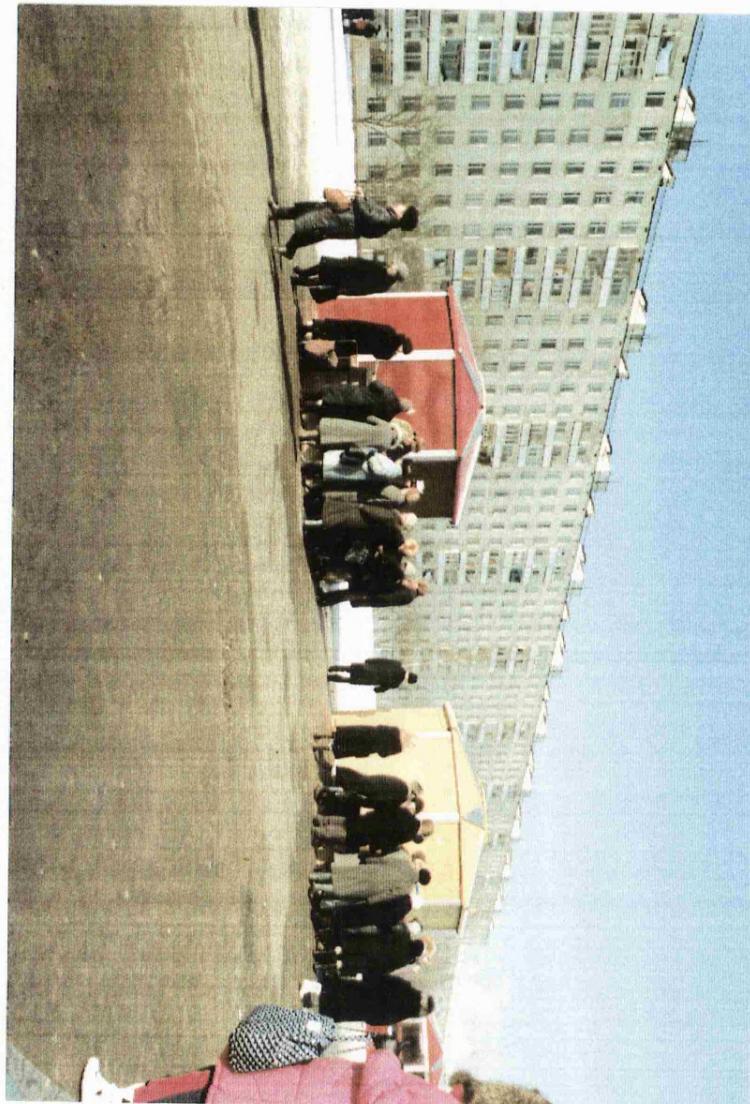


Photo 4.2.4



The street market around Skhodnenskaya Metro station

Photo 4.2.3





Photo 4.2.8

Informal street trade near  
Rechnoi Vokzal Metro station

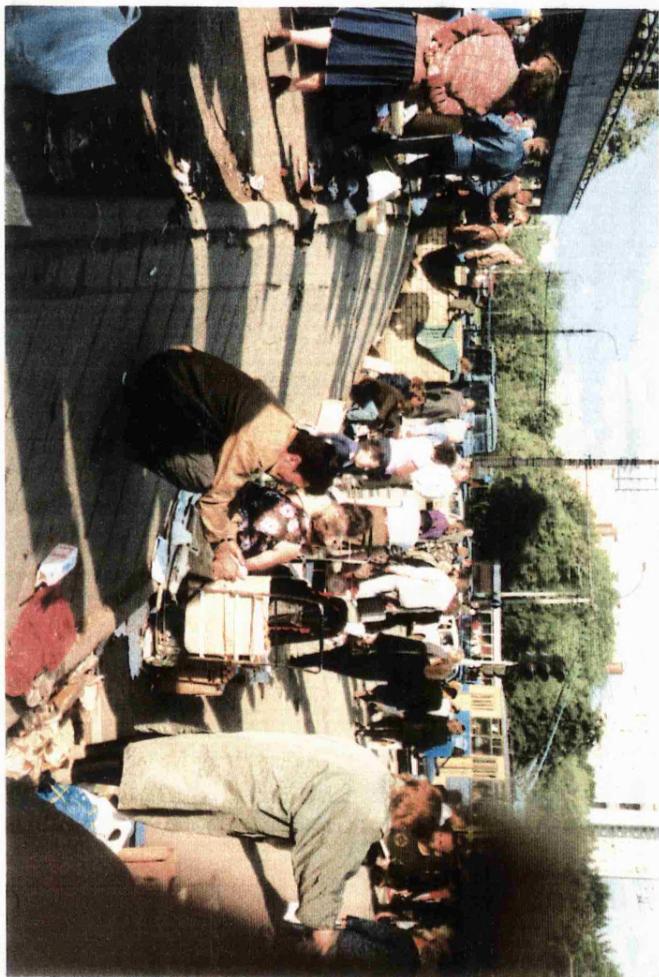


Photo 4.2.7

Noticeboard at street market

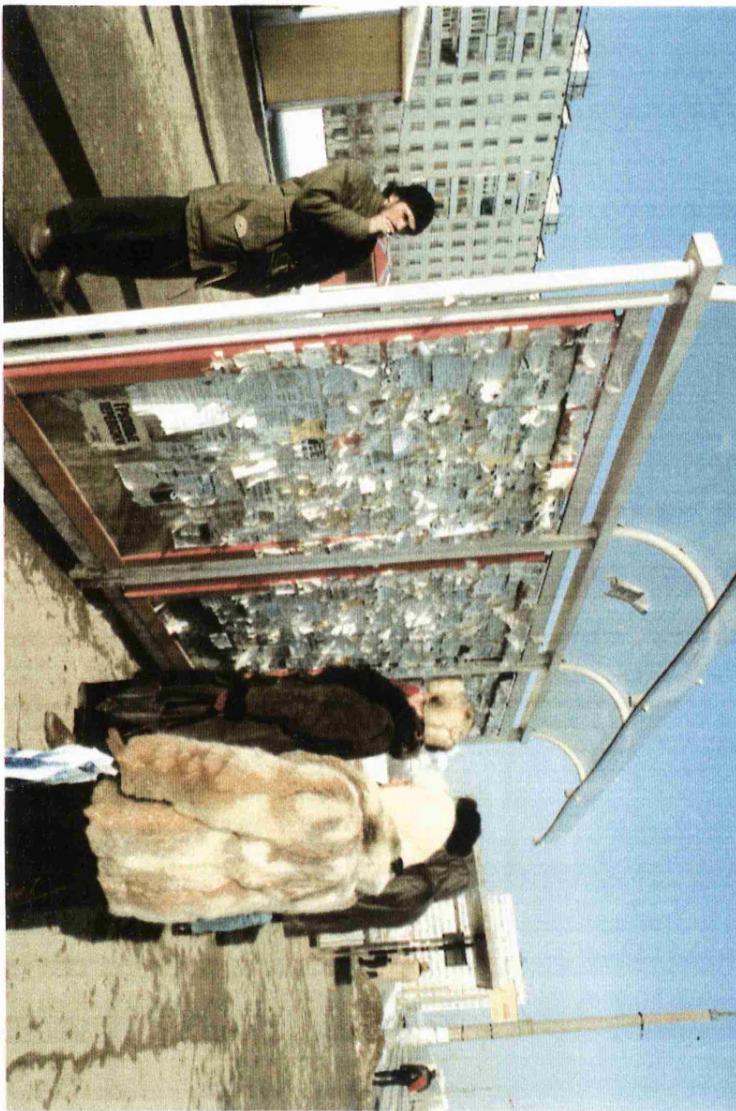


Photo 4.2.6

Colourful displays of fruit  
and vegetables at street market





in fruit, flowers, vegetables, alcohol and tobacco being expanded to include trade in clothing, dairy products, bread, and tools. This process of formalisation entailed some decrease in the sale of goods 'from the hand' as the 'market administration' demanded a fee for the right to trade (1000 roubles/day in May 1993). However, by distancing themselves somewhat from the paved area, or by placing themselves on the steps or in the passageways into the Metro station, unlicensed trade continued to flourish.

### **In the Underground Passageways**

As important as the development of a market in the area surrounding the Metro station, was the ubiquitous presence of traders in the underground passageways. Here, as elsewhere in Moscow, the combination of shelter (from the weather and from the casual observation by militia) and a constant flow of potential purchasers made these the ideal location for informal trade. The variety of goods on sale and the number of traders increased between September 1992 and early spring 1993, then began to decrease as controls were tightened and as traders moved out into the regulated market outside. At its peak, goods traded in the underground passageways included flowers, newspapers, books, ornaments, jewellery, clothing, astrological charts, seeds, and fresh bread. The most consistent trade in the underground passageways of both Skhodnenskaya and other Metro stations was in flowers, followed closely by trade in newspapers and books. That trade in flowers, newspapers and books was more extensively tolerated than trade in other goods is linked to the congruent signification between Metro travel and these goods. If the presence of newspapers and books is clearly linked to the practice of reading on the Metro, the presence of flowers is also linked to the common practice of giving flowers to the woman of the household being visited. Indeed, it seems likely that the flower trade required some accommodation between the Metro authorities and the traders, as the flower traders required water for keeping the flowers fresh. In Pushkinskaya station, the flower trade was tolerated in the ticket hall itself. I would suggest that the link between domestic sociality (to be discussed in Chapter 7) and the giving of flowers made the trade in flowers an exception to the general rule of anti-trade sentiments.

## Metro, Market and Meaning

We have discussed anti-trade sentiments in Chapter 3. In this section I want to discuss the ways in which the novel association between 'free trade' and the Metro changed the practice of using the Metro. In the first instance, the presence of traders created a novel visual environment. Instead of unadorned marble walls and constantly moving pedestrians, the passageways of the Metro stations were often lined with immobile traders, selling a wide variety of previously 'deficit' consumer goods either from the hand or from makeshift tables. Those selling from makeshift tables often managed to increase the height of their displays by hanging goods from makeshift hangars. If the original designers of the Moscow Metro stations were officially and overtly engaged in mass propaganda, the display of consumer goods in the Metro stations is similarly the clearest visual sign of a changing ideology. Thousands of travellers see posters of Arnold Schwarzenegger or doe eyed puppies displayed against a backdrop of Lenin in marble. The presence of small immobile crowds of buyers and sellers obstructs the free flow of traffic, and tempts the curiosity of all but the most 'anti-trade' traveller.

There was a pattern to people's orientation to traders on streets and in or around Metro stations. First the perception of a changing visual environment (appearance of stalls and traders), was concurrent with changes in the practices of moving around the city (experiencing obstructions and non-movement of the crowd). These physical changes in the environment provided opportunities for curiosity (stopping and looking), and sometimes the evolution of desire (for a new good). This was concurrent with thinking and evaluation often consistent with traditional (ie, Soviet era) ideology and values (trade is speculation and evil). 'Traditional' ideology combined with practical constraints (things are too expensive) to sustain anti-trader discourse and sentiments. Eventually, through repetition, the novelty began to wear off, and a 'one-off' purchase was made, often for a special occasion (perhaps a birthday gift), or 'I've needed a watch battery, for example, for ages: I found someone selling watch batteries in the Metro, so I bought one.' Further as prices for goods in formerly state shops increased to levels comparable to those for goods 'freely traded' (ie, on the streets, in the Metro and in commercial kiosks), avoidance of street (Metro, kiosk) trade on the basis of price differentials became less

Photo 4.2.11

Young girl selling artwork in the Metro station



Photo 4.2.10

Street trade outside Teatralnaya Metro station

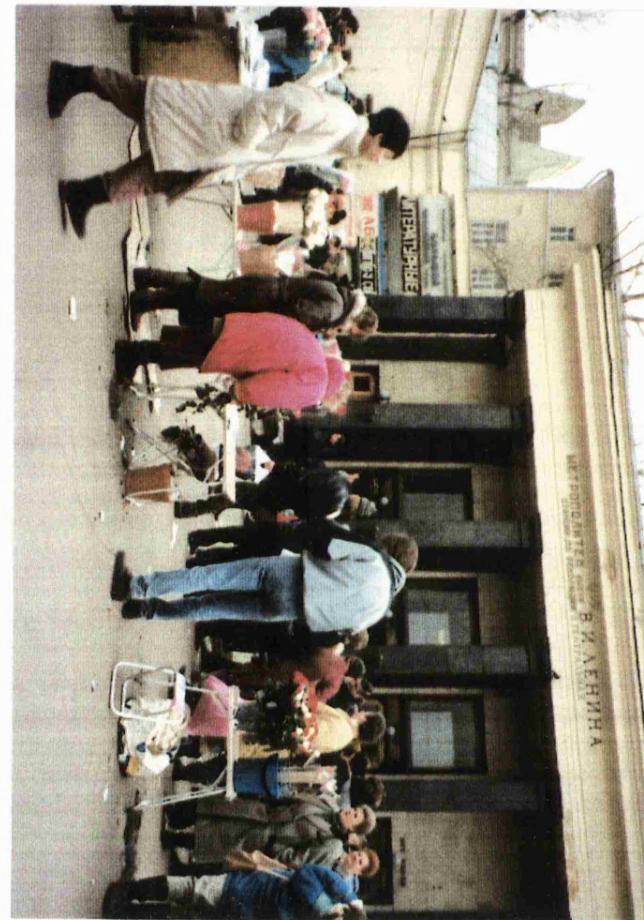


Photo 4.2.9

Forbidding trade in train station  
The sign reads:  
"All trade from the hand is  
forbidden on the station platforms.  
Fine - 5000 roubles"





meaningful. Towards the end of my fieldwork, it became increasingly common for one of my informants to show me something they had bought, and reply casually that they had bought in the Metro.

Another factor which characterised the emergence of the market in the Metro (and elsewhere) was the initial absence of predictability. When Maria needed to buy a birthday present for a friend, she decided to buy a wooden hair clasp, that she had seen being sold in the Metro. Neither she nor I could remember in which station we had seen these clasps, although we both knew that we had seen them on many occasions. On asking other acquaintances, most had seen the wooden hair clasps, but none could remember exactly where. If some of the above-ground street trade had a spatial logic (people selling things near shops which sold similar items), trade in the Metro was devoid of previously formed spatial cues. The utility of increased availability was decreased by both price and by the unpredictable location of supply.

The period 1992-1993 saw the merging of previously distinctive spaces and practices. New goods and new modes of exchange emerged in spaces and places previously associated with quick, functional and continuous movement. Although the principles of the market indicate the logic of trading in spaces where there is a concentration of potential purchasers, this contravened the earlier conventions of the interstitial spaces of street and Metro. Even though most shops have been privatised and in theory at least operate on principles similar to the principles underlying 'street trade', there remains a symbolic distinction between street (Metro/kiosk) trade and shops. I would suggest that at least some of the continued opposition to 'Metro/street trade' phrased in terms of 'they are all mafia', is connected to opposition to 'an activity out of place'. Policy makers recognise this and promises to restore order to the streets and the Metro are met with political popularity.

### **Knowing the Metro and Knowing the City**

In this final section, I want to examine the congruence between knowledge of the Metro and knowledge of the city. Knowledge of the Metro constitutes practical knowledge of the city, which is complemented by more cognitive models of history, or of maps. All of my informants carried a representation of the Moscow Metro

map in their heads. This was the result of constant use of the Metro, frequent view of Metro maps on the walls of the Metro and possibly the earlier unavailability of (portable) Metro maps. Whenever I asked where something was, the reply was immediately phrased in terms of **how to get there**, ie, go to such and such a Metro station, sit at the front/back of the train, followed by explicit directions as to which exits to follow. Further, constant use of the Metro for all journeys of any length, means that the (majority) non-car-owning population has no visual representation of the links or routes between given places, except those that are travelled underground. If certain parts of the city are well known (especially the locales of home, work and parts of the centre favoured for leisurely walks), much of the city remains unseen and unknown, in spite of perhaps frequent passage through given areas.<sup>28</sup> This constructs a specific combination of underground knowing and above ground unknowing. In the absence of neighbourhoods with socially distinctive characteristics (the exception being the distinction between the 'centre' and the micro-raions), people inevitably name their nearest Metro station when asked where they live or work.

If distances represent an opportunity cost in terms of decisions about certain projects, the relevant distances in Moscow are the number of stops and changes required to get there by Metro. If Sergei had managed to decrease the 'irrationality' of time spent travelling (by doing his calculations), I would suggest that this was both factor and product of his unusually wide social network. On the other hand, all of my informants seemed to take it for granted that they would spend on average two hours per day on the Metro (plus the added time necessary to get to and from the Metro station). As movement through the Metro system punctuates the day, the meaning of the city is strongly influenced by this frequent, taken-for-granted activity.

In a very practical sense, the city is the Metro system. It is where ideas about the rudeness and boorishness of the city's population are conceived as they push and shove onto crowded trains. It is where the state still exercises its control of the sale of tickets, as travellers kow tow at lowered windows. It is where the tension

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<sup>28</sup> Although this applies to all underground transport use, it is particularly salient in Moscow because of the heavy reliance on the Metro. In London for example, more people travel overground more of the time due to increased car ownership and use and to the possibility of traversing the city by bus.

between the Market and Communism is graphically represented as cheap posters obscure Lenin's profile. It is where you buy flowers for your lady friend, books and newspapers to absent yourself from the travelling public, and where all kinds of previously 'deficit' goods might be found. It is both a functional route for the accomplishment of tasks as diverse as earning money, acquiring goods and services, or maintaining social networks, and the convenient location of the social rendezvous. It is where the mood of the city is most tangible as people consume each other's emotions in angry proximity. It is also where traces of human concern are expressed as seats are given up for the elderly and infirm, the young, and the drunk. It is where people subconsciously keep track of changing social structures as new social groups of businessmen and beggars appear. It is the locus par excellence of participation in the life blood of the city.



## Chapter 5

### **The Changing Nature of Shopping: From Deficits To Inflation in Time, Space and Practice**

Shopping is a critical part of the experience of the city. The physical spaces of shopping, and the interactions they occasion, are consumed as much as the goods acquired. It is the locus of specific forms of anonymous sociality, which were and are deeply politicised in the FSU. As a daily experience, shopping is linked to the satisfaction of needs and, occasionally, of desires. The 'shopping moment' is a critical point of articulation between Soviet style distribution, new market mechanisms and their interpretation by social actors. The meaning of the market is constructed through the consumption of both goods and retail styles, or relations of consumption.

This chapter is concerned with the changing practices and meanings of processes of consumption. In Russia as in the west, industrialisation and the mass production of consumer goods has been associated with patterns of consumption and exchange which entail indirect relations between primary producers and consumers. This is often glossed as the emergence of 'impersonal' modes and relations of exchange. However, analyses of this transformation of consumption are often based on observations of the process in a western context. As this context is also one in which Capital and the Market are dominant forces, the 'impersonal' nature of exchange is simultaneously linked to the profit-seeking logic of the Market and/or Capital, and to the replacement of 'use value' with 'exchange value'. In this chapter, I want to examine the differences in processes of consumption in a context where industrialisation and the mass production of consumer goods has not been associated with either the Market or with Capital, and where 'use value' has remained ideologically dominant (until the 1990s). Contemporary changes in Moscow entail structural change in the consumer economy, and these changes are based on a shift to Market principles (emergence of middle-men/traders, seeking

profits or 'exchange value'). However, these structural similarities to capitalism yield surprisingly different cultural understandings of consumption, as goods, services and the social relations of consumption are interpreted through the lens of prior and current ideologies and experiences.

Further, I argue that emphasis on the indirect relation between producer and consumer in post-industrial, geographically dispersed and complex economies needs to be expanded to include examination of the (direct) relation between buyer and seller. To the extent that 'all exchange is social', it is the social interaction of the shopping moment that is critical to the construction of meaning of the goods, services, and processes constituted under the heading of 'consumption'. Comparing Soviet and western style shopping, we shall see that differences in the unseen structural differences in the logic of distribution are played out in face to face relationships between buyers and sellers.

This chapter is therefore about 'shopping'<sup>1</sup>, in order to define which aspects of consumption are being discussed, that is, the lived experience of shopping as a practical, daily activity. This choice is linked to the emphasis on practice throughout the thesis, and to the premise that meaning is the product of lived experience. The practice of shopping is where the population encounters new goods and services, and new retailing styles. As the site of 'appropriation', that is, of the shift in the status of a good from mass-produced object to personal possession and in its location, from public retail establishment to the private space of the home, consumption requires and constructs a link between immediate, individual needs and desires and unseen forces of production and exchange (see Carrier, 1990a & 1990b; Miller, 1987).

The relative absence of 'consumerism' in Russia will be discussed more fully at the end of the chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> I shall use the word shopping in this chapter as a generic term encompassing searching for, looking at or buying consumer goods. There is no direct translation in Russian, where people use 'kupat' or 'pokupat' (to buy) or 'begat pro magazinakh' to run around the shops.

## **Soviet style shopping**

Shopping during the Soviet period was characterised by 'defitsiti', the continuous shortages of both producer and consumer goods that attended the centrally planned economy. This phenomenon has been amply described and analysed elsewhere<sup>2</sup> and space precludes re-visiting the explanatory literature. A further explanation was recently suggested to me by a Russian economist who suggested that 'defitsiti' were caused by underpricing, in order to give people the impression of 'universal personal wealth' (that is, being almost always able to afford to buy plenty of basic consumer goods); he suggested that as shortages in the shops were mostly accompanied by plentiful supplies in people's refrigerators, there were no 'real' shortages.

Underpricing gave consumers the impression of ample disposable income whilst suggesting that there were soluble, technical problems associated with distribution. Whatever the reasons for observable 'defitsiti', what it is important to emphasise for our purposes here, is the extent to which 'defitsiti' and queuing were an absolutely taken-for granted part of the practice of household provisioning. The perceived shortages meant that much time was spent moving around the city in search of consumer goods and in queues once found. The purchase of goods as basic as light bulbs or soap could require travel to non-local retail establishments. As shopping was a more or less constant preoccupation, the expansion of forms of retail trade has important implications for the ways in which people's daily practices have changed (or not) as a result of the reform process. These changes in what people do and the meaning of what they do in terms of household provision, makes an important contribution to the construction of the new meanings of the city. This chapter begins with a brief look at changes in the time spent shopping, and continues with two case studies which describe the differences in experience which attend both 'Soviet style' and 'commercial' retail trade.

### **Time**

During the late Soviet period, much attention was paid to the 'irrational use of

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Kornai 1980, Feher F. Heller A. and Markus G., 1983, Furedi F. 1986, Jones Connor and Powell 1991, Nove A. 1986, 1990, Roberts and La Follette 1990, Schroeder G. 1984 and 1990, Skurski R. 1983, Khoruzhi G. 1990.

consumers' time', which was caused by persistent deficits of various consumer goods.<sup>3</sup> In terms of time spent in pursuit of consumer goods, the following tables give us an overview of estimates of time spent shopping, prior to the improved supply and increased prices of consumer goods subsequent to the January 1992 reforms.

**Table 5.1** **Time spent shopping, Russian Federation 1991**

	Men	Women
Hours/week	2hrs 13mins	5hr 7mins

Source: Narodnoe Khozaiistvo Russian Federation 1992

**Table 5.2** **Time spent shopping, Moscow 1991**

Hours/week	Men	Women
Shopping	9hrs	14hrs
Travelling to/from shops	4hrs	6hrs
Total	13hrs	20hrs

Source: Patrushev V.D., Karaxanova T.M., and Kushnareva O.N., 'Vremia Zhiteliye Moskvie i Moskovskie Oblastie' (The Time of Inhabitants of Moscow and Moscow Oblast), in Sotsiologicheskie Issledovanie No. 6 1992

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Dukarevitch E.A. 'Potrebitelskoe Povedenie v Usloviakh Defitsita' (Consumer Behaviour in Deficit Conditions) in Sotsiologicheskie Issledovanie no. 2 1987 p.66.

It has also been reported that Muscovites spent between 30 minutes and 1 hour extra per day travelling to shops either on their way to or from work or making special trips at weekends.<sup>4</sup> Rose reports that 60% of Russians queue on average five hours/week, whilst 30% of Russians (mostly pensioners) queue for up to 20 hours/week.<sup>5</sup> Estimates vary partly because of differences between Moscow and the Russian Federation as a whole. On the one hand, Moscow was always better provisioned with a wider variety of consumer goods. In many rural areas and provincial towns, smaller social and geographical contexts facilitated the flow of information (for example, If a supply of boots had been delivered to a given shop, news spread fairly quickly. In Moscow there was more hope of finding boots, but less access to full knowledge of supplies throughout the capital). The more frequent absolute absence of particular goods in rural and provincial areas meant that no time was spent searching. Further differences are related to whether time spent travelling to or from shops is included in estimates: this is difficult to quantify if people shop on their way to or from work or make detours en route to somewhere else. There is however no question that shopping during much of the Soviet period was characterised by the need to queue. Discourse is liberally sprinkled with contextual statements of the sort "I was standing in a queue the other day when.." The universal association between shopping and queuing was the product of both frequent shortages of consumer goods and of the practices associated with retailing which will be described in detail below.

My own data for the period August 1992 to June 1993 demonstrates the decreasing amount of time spent shopping by a selection of my informants. This data is meant to be illustrative rather than statistically representative. To my knowledge, there are not yet any more recent statistical figures on the time spent shopping. As my analysis is more concerned with changing practices and meanings within the shopping experience, rather than with statistical analyses of time budget surveys, I feel that the quality of that time is at least as salient as quantity of time involved.

<sup>4</sup> See Rukavishnikova T.P., Sapozhnikov A.M., and Khazova L.M. 'Moskovskie Pokupatiel' (Moscow Buyer) in *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovanie* No. 7 1990; Kuznetsov N. and Rukavishnikova T.P. 'Moskvichi v Plenu Defitsita: Panorama Tovarnom Krizisa' (Muscovites in Deficit Conditions: Panorama of the Goods Crisis) in *Vecherniaia Moskva* 11-12 September 1989.

<sup>5</sup> See Rose R. 'Divisions and Contradictions in Economies in Transition: Household Portfolios in Russia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia' 1992, pp. 12-13.

**Table 5.3****Hours per week spent shopping, 1992-3****(M = Male, F = Female)**

	1992	1993		
	September	January	March	June
1. (M)	4	3	2	1
2. (M)	9	9	5	4
3. (F)	8	8	4	3
4. (F)	14	13	11	9
5. (M)	5	4	2	1
6. (F)	12	11	9	7
7. (F)	6	5	3	2
8. (F)	10	9	7	5

The overall decrease ranges from 36% (No.4) to 80% (No.5); this difference is related to the ways in which changes in my informants' socio-economic positions affected changes in their shopping patterns. The decreasing disposable income of the former combined with her responsibility to provide for her husband and child to ensure that she still shopped around for the best value for money (instead of looking for 'deficit goods' as previously). The increasing disposable income of the latter combined with his increasing involvement in commercial undertakings to enable him to acquire most of his needs (especially non-food items) either from commercial contacts, or to rely on his mother or wife<sup>6</sup> for day to day shopping.

Most of the decrease in time spent shopping is related to the increasing supply of consumer goods in Moscow throughout 1993. This reduced both queues and the extra time spent travelling to non-local shops in search of deficit goods. The increasing prices of consumer goods further restricted the search for more expensive items (clothes, footwear and consumer durables) which had become unaffordable for most of my informants. Those that could afford to buy expensive consumer durables were more or less wholly engaged in commercial undertakings and would buy these through contacts rather than at retail outlets.

<sup>6</sup> His mother had recently retired, which gave her more time for shopping. His wife was not working as they had both decided that she would stay at home and look after their small child, since he could afford to support them.

## Space

In 1989 sociological research conducted amongst 7,000 Muscovites reported that although consumers 'preferred' to shop locally, constant shortages made this impossible: although local shops were generally reasonably well-provisioned in terms of day to day needs such as bread, the search for appropriate clothing and footwear in particular required trips to shops located locally, in other micro-raions or in the centre. One respondent noted,

How can you ask whether I prefer to shop in the centre or locally, when from day to day you can't find decent goods.

Another noted,

In order to buy basic, Russian made (otchestvennie) hand cream or low heeled house slippers, it is necessary to visit a minimum of five or six shops. Work it out yourself how much time I have to spend going from one shop to another.

Responses to the question 'Where do you buy 'deficit goods?' are given below.

**Table 5.4 Sources of Consumer Goods**

Source	% of respondents
State shops	93
Shops connected to enterprise where one works	38
Market <sup>7</sup>	18
Commission shops <sup>8</sup>	11
Cooperatives <sup>9</sup>	8
Hard currency shops	3
From 'Speculators'	19

Source: Kuznetsov N., Rukavishnikov V. "Moskvichi v Plenu Defitsita: Panorama Tovarnom Krizisa" (Muscovites and Deficits: Panorama of the Consumer Goods Crisis) reported in Vecherniaia Moskva, 11-12 September 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Market ('rynek'): these are the formal markets where state and collective farm workers could sell the surplus from their private plots.

<sup>8</sup> Commission Shops are second hand shops, trading in mostly clothes, footwear and consumer durables.

<sup>9</sup> Cooperatives refer to private cooperative enterprises legalised by Gorbachev.

By the time of my field work in 1992-1993, these 'traditional' sources of consumer goods were complemented by the appearance of a variety of new forms of retail trade and a far wider spatial distribution of consumer goods (see Chapter 4.1 and 4.2), including:

- i) street trade 'from the hand', or from portable tables,
- ii) commercial kiosks,
- iii) commercial shops (this includes the 'cooperatives' as above, wholly independent commercial retail shops, and commercial sections of state or recently privatised retail and commission shops).

However, in order to understand what the decrease in the time spent shopping and the expansion of spatial distribution of consumer goods might mean, we need to look at the process itself and at the changes that have occurred as a result of policy changes. I want to present two short case studies in order to give a sense of the ways in which these changes have created new meanings through the opportunity of novel practices.

### **The Recently Privatised/Former State 'Univermag'**

The first case study describes the socio-spatial context in which Natasha acquired a birthday present for her best friend Katya. Natasha had invited me to accompany her to the Institute, where there would be a small celebration. On the way to the Metro station, she said that she wanted to buy a present and that we would go to the univermag<sup>10</sup> on the corner to buy one. If I was slightly surprised that she had left this purchase until the last moment, she made no mention of this and clearly felt confident that she would find a suitable present. The process of buying was at the time (August 1992) little changed from Soviet era practices.

### **Outside**

This univermag was a large, two-storied, L-shaped concrete building with a paved

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<sup>10</sup> Univermag stands for universalnie magazin, which is similar to a department store, selling a wide variety of goods.

area within the corner of the 'L'. Approaching the univermag, the wide paved area between the univermag and the curb was occupied by about 40 people, mostly women, selling mostly clothing 'from the hand'. Natasha noted that these were 'spekulantie'.<sup>11</sup> On the paved area within the 'L', there were a few makeshift stalls, with people selling mostly foodstuffs or alcohol. Some of these were also 'speculators' whilst others were shop assistants selling goods also available inside. There was little or no difference in prices for goods sold outside by employees of the univermag, and I was told that the practice was adopted to enable shoppers to avoid the queues inside. The windows of the univermag were somewhat dusty, some wholly or partially curtained, occasionally displaying a faded painted sign saying 'skirts', 'shoes', 'electrical equipment' etc. often with a simple painting of a skirt, pair of shoes, radio or whatever. There was no display of actual goods available. The 'withholding' appearance of the 'univermag' itself (curtained, dusty windows, no display of goods) contrasted sharply with the appearance of goods and sellers outside the building, literally offering goods for sale and sometimes even quietly trying to attract a buyer.

### Getting in

Both of the entrances (to the food section and to the non-food section) were marked by pairs of swing doors, one of which was locked. This practice of locking the staggered swing doors was common throughout Moscow, throughout my stay. The result was inevitably to make ingress and exit more difficult, as those leaving collided with those trying to enter in unhappy competition for the restricted space. Getting in required either confrontation with other shoppers or, in smaller shops, waiting patiently in a queue to even get inside. These continuous blockages of entrances and exits reinforced the difficulty of access to goods. The daily problematics of ingress seemed to me to make for an embodied experience of struggle, marked by competition for physical space through the doorways and by aggressive relations between customers. Again this contrasts sharply with the appearance of goods on the street, and the absence of the need to negotiate the

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'Spekulantie are speculators who were engaged in the recently 'legal' practice of buying goods cheap in the former state stores and selling them at a profit outside. This practice was overtly condemned, and I never actually saw anyone buy anything, although shoppers would stop and look, ask the price, then move on.'

blocked entrances of state retail establishments.

### **Inside and the Spatial Classification of Goods**

Inside, the store was divided into sections, separated by low partitions. Each section was numbered and named by a faded painted sign hanging from the ceiling, indicating the kinds of goods on offer, eg, electrical goods, stationary, men's women's and children's clothes, sports goods, jewellery, toiletries, household linen, shoes, souvenirs and 'presents'. This classification was fairly standard in all the univermags that I visited in Russia.

Interestingly, the spatial classification denoted by the faded signs no longer reflected the range of goods that might be found in any one section. There were bottles of liqueurs in the toiletries section, clothes in most sections, and shoes in the stationary section. This destruction of the traditional classification of goods in space was the product of changes in economic policy in general and of the privatisation of this univermag in particular. My informant who worked as a buyer in this univermag (Lyuba) told me that each store buyer was responsible for acquiring goods for her 'section'. (Lyuba was responsible for buying for the sports section.) However, 'before', the job entailed acquiring the appropriate goods (eg, sports goods) from traditional suppliers (factories and bulk storage departments), relations with whom were set by planners. Although buyers could theoretically initiate new relationships with factories and bulk storage departments in order to improve their supplies, the range of goods was more or less standardised across the FSU. After privatisation, the buyers could buy whatever they liked, from whomever they liked, as factories and bulk storage departments could sell to whomever they liked. If these relations often continued through the inertia of established relationships, they were complemented by the novel experience of buying from 'free lance salesmen' working on behalf of new traders and importers. According to Lyuba, this hugely increased her workload, because:

- i) deliveries from traditional suppliers were no longer guaranteed;
- ii) there were risks dealing with unknown 'freelance salesmen';
- iii) the number of transactions had increased requiring an increased quantity of

- paperwork including approval by her 'nachalnik';<sup>12</sup>
- iv) prices had to be constantly negotiated (where they were previously fixed by the state);
  - v) buying required increased decision-making about whether or not to purchase the new goods being offered, at the price stated, and the attendant risks of making losses.

In spite of the increased workload, all the women I spoke to in this department expressed approval of the decision to privatise, the most salient reason being the increased sense of responsibility and participation as 'the univermag is now 'nasha' (ours)'.

### **At the counter**

Inside the univermag, customers have no direct access to the goods, which are displayed on shelves behind the counter, with smaller items visible inside the glass topped counters. The univermag was fairly crowded, with crowds to a depth of three to four people in front of some counters. Those at the back try and push their way to the front whilst those at the front try and prevent them. There is usually only one shop assistant ('prodavshchitsa'), invariably female, in any one section and they only ever deal with one customer at a time. They stay firmly behind the counter. Discussing the change from counter service to self service in shops in the US, Sofer (1965) notes,

The removal of the counter meant both a physical and psychological change. The shopkeepers ....felt particularly exposed.....The counter had, it seems, been a barrier behind which they had been able to defend themselves and assert their authority. It provided them with a private domain of space. It was evident that some of them found that in coming out from behind the counter they now had to operate as equals with the customers and see the transaction more from the point of view of the consumer.

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed I spent an afternoon in this buying department and observed Lyuba taking pen and ruler to 'create' order forms. The department was wholly run by women, some of whom were constantly on the phone or talking to salesmen who had come in, whilst others seemed to be completely unoccupied, hands on desks, waiting for five o'clock. All the women I spoke to agreed that their work load had increased substantially as a result of privatisation, whilst eyeing their idle colleagues with undisguised anger.

The retention of counters in Russian shops constitutes a physical barrier between customers and the goods on offer. The barrier ensures that sales assistant are mistresses of this privileged space, in control of the coveted goods by having them within their (sole) reach and right. When someone wants to examine an item more closely, they ask the 'devushka' (polite term of address for women), who will remove the item from shelf or cabinet, hand it to the customer, and watch hawk eyed lest they 'break or steal it'. Natasha was instinctively drawn to counters where there was already a crowd (the usual indication of there being something of interest), pushing her way to the front with expertise. Her ability to ignore the resistance of others was clearly part of the taken for granted habitus of shopping. We visited the jewellery counter, and then the sections for souvenirs and presents. Not finding anything to her liking in the latter we returned to the jewellery counter, where Natasha tried to attract the sales assistant's attention. Eventually she succeeded, and the young women sauntered over saying 'Da?' (yes). Natasha asked to be shown a small ring, which she thought was 'priatno' (nice). She showed the ring to me, asked my opinion and examined it carefully. All the while the sales assistant kept her eyes firmly on the ring, ignoring other calls for her attention. She soon lost her patience and snapped, 'Well, will you take it or not?' Natasha decided that she would, asked the price (150 roubles),<sup>13</sup> and at which cashier she must pay. The sales assistant replied, 'The third of course',<sup>14</sup> tossed the ring on the shelf behind the counter and turned her attention lazily to someone else, saying 'Da?'. Natasha and I then made our way to the queue for the third cashier, where we waited for about ten minutes. People stand very close together in queues lest a gap

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<sup>13</sup> At the time the exchange rate was about 180 roubles to the US dollar.

<sup>14</sup> 'Kanieshno' (of course) is used frequently in Russian, implying that the listener ought to know something, regardless of whether it was possible for them to know or not.

misrepresent the end of the queue. We eventually reached the cashier, a woman in her fifties or sixties, seated in her glass cubicle, slightly raised off the ground. In order to tell her how much she needed to pay, Natasha bent to speak through the small window in the glass partitions. Having stated the sum and tendered her money, the cashier issued her with her change and the till receipt without any eye contact whatsoever. The only word she uttered was the same 'Da', but her 'body language' expressed a mixture of anger, disdain, exhaustion, boredom, and arrogance. Armed with the till receipt, we returned to the jewellery counter. Again Natasha wrestled her way to the front, was told to 'podozhditie' (wait) until the sales assistant had finished with another customer. She then slowly turned to Natasha, took the till receipt, examined it closely (necessitated by the fact that it was and usually is very faint), jammed it down on a spike, and turned to put the ring in a box for her. She handed it to Natasha without looking at her or speaking. Natasha thanked her politely, and off we went.

In one sense this was an unusual expedition, as people shopping together are more likely to 'divide the labour' by 'double queuing'. When I went shopping with Galina one day she expertly directed me to stand in the queue for the cashier, while she queued for fruit and vegetables (not trusting me to accomplish this). She kept a careful eye on our relative progress as it was important for her to have placed her order before I reached the head of the cashier's queue (so I would know how much to pay). When this fails, it is common practice to let others pay ahead of you until your companion has been served.

I have described this event in some detail in order to attempt to give a sense of the

emotional atmosphere that is consumed every time a Muscovite enters a state or recently privatised retail trade establishment (at least once a day and frequently more often). The emotional aspects of relations between customers are characterised by tangible aggression and rudeness as they compete for entry, access to the counters or the shop assistants' attention. The attitudes of sales assistants and cashiers express cold disdain, boredom or outright anger, whilst the customers adopt the practices of the supplicant. The insufficiency of retail provisions and consumer goods combined to create a universal class of dependent consumers, in unequal power relations with shop assistants representing the power of the state to distribute or withhold the means of subsistence. Were the crowds and queues constituted by customers whose anger was directed at the structural causes of inefficient distribution (the state, the shop management, or even the shops assistants) instead of at each other, the sense of aggrieved solidarity might go some way towards ameliorating what is in effect a wholly unpleasant daily experience. As it is, there is no sharing or sympathetic discourse apart from an occasionally muttered 'uzhas'. On one occasion only, I saw a fellow queuer berate a diabolical cashier for being cruel to a young deaf and dumb customer (insisting that he use the abacus and refusing him a pencil and paper to write down how much he wanted to pay). What is important to note however is the extent to which this practice was wholly taken for granted by all of my informants. Queuing, dealing with anxious to angry fellow customers and sales assistants is an integral part of the experience.

### **Why are sales assistants and cashiers rude?**

It is extremely important to note that my own evaluation of this event was in no way

matched by Natasha's. She felt that it had been successful, in that it had not taken too long (about half an hour from entry to exit) and that the present was 'priatno' (nice), 'niedorogo' (cheap) and at least as important, had come from a state shop<sup>15</sup> and not from a 'kommercheskie kiosk' (commercial kiosk). As an early experience of shopping, I was shocked by the unpleasantness and aggression which marked the whole experience. Subsequent conversations with all of my informants revealed that they agreed that shop assistants and cashiers are almost always 'niekulturnie, gruboi' (uncultured, rude), but found nothing remarkable in this; a few remarked that they had heard that shop assistants in the 'west' are polite and smile, which they seemed to find somewhat absurd. When I inquired why all persons involved in selling anything to the public (including foodstuffs, non-food items, any kind of tickets, or services) were invariably aggressive and rude, I often received answers which indicated that the question was a surprising one. Lyuba and Marina suggested that people were tired and worried about the situation in the country, how they were to feed their families. Marina in particular noted that 'the Russians always express their emotions and don't hide them like westerners do. If they are unhappy, there is no reason to hide it'. People like Natasha and Galina simply suggested that it was a matter of class, saying 'these people are niekulturnie',<sup>16</sup> their behaviour 'uzhasno' (terrible), but predictable. In a long conversation with Sergei I suggested that perhaps the sales assistants were fed up because they were over-worked and under-paid (a nice liberal interpretation). He immediately launched into an explanation as

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<sup>15</sup> This univermag had in fact been privatised, but was still distinguished from the 'commercial shops' as it retained the overall layout and practices as before. The addition of imported goods was the only visible sign of its changed status. This applied to most of the other recently privatised state shops which continued to be referred to as 'state shops' (gosudarstvennie magazin).

<sup>16</sup> 'Niekulturnie' refers both to a lack of good manners and to a lack of Culture or education. The lack of the latter is commonly thought to explain the lack of the former. 'These people' (eti liodie) implicitly refers to those not of the 'intelligentsia', although non-Russians like Sergei and Valeria would say 'these people' to refer to the Russians as a whole.

to why I was completely wrong, saying

They're rude because they have power. They control whether you get a good piece of meat or a bad one, healthy potatoes or rotten ones. Sometimes they make people wait deliberately, they wait until there is a queue before they serve anybody. If they're rude, people are too frightened to complain. They often give underweight, so they can keep the excess to themselves, sell it to their friends, or for higher prices. They have absolute power and enjoy exercising it. It gives them pleasure.

When I asked why their managers didn't control this activity, he replied,

They (the sales assistants) pay them some of the money they make from these sales 'on the left'<sup>17</sup>

Olga told me

There have been three famines in this country. Many people remember that and that's why they beg, 'please devushka, give me a good piece of meat'. People are still frightened of not having enough to eat and the shop workers know that. That's why they're rude.

If my informants were able to give me reasons for the rudeness of shop assistants, it is important to note that this was prompted by my questions. It was not something that they found overly worrying. Indeed, one or two who had been to the 'west' (eg, Natasha and Maria) said that they found the smiling politeness of shop assistants 'strano' (strange) or 'nieobyichno' (unusual), whilst adding that such politeness seemed insincere. The most insightful explanation was offered to me by a young Russian anthropologist:

You must remember that people are producers as well as consumers. They can tolerate being treated badly as consumers, because this is compensated by their power and status as producers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Na Leva' (on the left) is a slang term for illegal sale or purchase of goods.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolai-SSorin-Chaikov, personal communication.

## Public Front Space : Hidden Back Space

Conversely, when I interviewed one of the sales assistants in my local bread shop, I asked her how she felt about the customers, if they were a problem or not. She replied very politely and with a smile on her face saying, "Oh no, we have very good relations with all our customers. Only occasionally a drunk will cause trouble". This response astounded me as only a few minutes before I had seen her shouting at a very aged woman telling her to get her money right and that she would not count it for her. This young girl professed to recognise me. Yet until then, although I saw her frequently, she had always either ignored me, or treated me with the same disdain as everybody else. I would suggest that the change in attitude was linked to my change in status from customer to visitor, and the change in location from front to back, as the pattern was repeated in all the shops where I conducted (or tried to conduct) interviews. As I tried to make my way to the back offices, I was obstructed, treated rudely, told that the shop director was out etc. When (and if) I eventually succeeded in entering the back offices as a visitor with an appointment to see the director, I was inevitably treated hospitably, offered tea, or even given a small gift. In the back of shops, relations between workers reflect a degree of bonhomie, which is totally absent from their observed inter-relations in the public areas, where they often shout angrily at one another.

### Signs

In most shops that I visited in Moscow, there were signs addressed to 'dorogie' (dear) or 'uvazhaemie' (respected) 'pokupatelie' (customers [literally buyers]). Some of these laid out the relevant rules and regulations governing the specific retail trade. Others said things like, 'Do not bother the sales assistant when they are serving another customer', or gave a list of the categories of person 'excused from queuing', ie,

- i) Heroes of the Soviet Union,
- ii) Heroes of Soviet Labour,
- iii) Participants in the Great October Revolution or the Civil War,
- iv) Invalids and Participants in the Great Patriotic War (WWII), and their dependents,

- v) Citizens who have received the following honours: 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Order of Glory, the Order of Glorious Labour, or 1st, 2nd or 3rd honour for 'Service to the Motherland in the Armed Strength of the USSR.

There are occasionally signs informing customers of the nutritional value of bread or eggs (with recipes), and not infrequently a sign over a free standing set of scales informing customers that they can 'check the weight' of their purchases. On the one hand, these signs acknowledge the extent to which queuing was taken for granted. On the other the effectiveness of the formal declaration of the rules regulating retail trade and protecting consumers seemed to me to be countermaned by the presence of the scales acknowledging common (and apparently grounded) worries about underweight sales. The written signs of respect (dear, respected customers) were wholly contradicted by the attitudes of staff. Even the signs giving nutritional information seemed to me to be extremely patronising, illustrated with childlike drawings. The implicit message of these signs (that the state was there to respectfully protect the people) was explicitly contradicted by the day to day experience of dealing with the state, represented by an army of bad tempered 'service providers'.

#### **Shops attached to Enterprises, Commission Shops and Hard Currency Shops**

I have only visited shops connected to enterprises on former state and collective farms, but could discern no appreciable major distinctions in general practice. Only the higher absence of goods and of customers with cash, makes for a concomitant decrease in queues. On one ex-collective farm visited in November 1994, I had to ask for what I wanted, pay at the cashier and return with my till receipt, even though I was the only customer in the shop at the time. Commission shops visited during the period of my fieldwork operated on the same principle and in the same atmosphere. The few hard currency shops that were open to the public in Moscow were generally less busy than the former state shops; again however, no discernible differences were noted in either queuing practices or in relations between sales assistants and customers.

## 'Having Relations' and Other Modes of Shopping

None of my close informants apart from Lyuba and Sergei seemed to have any intimate connections with shops or shop workers, which would give them access to preferential treatment in the allocation of consumer goods. Yet all agreed that people who 'had relations'<sup>19</sup> with shop workers enjoyed a certain advantage as goods in short supply would be kept for them. This was thought to further increase the problem of 'deficits', as well as being symbolic of the 'way the system works'. However, Lyuba always denied that she enjoyed any preferential access to goods as part of the perks of working in a univermag. Yet whilst I was in her office, all the workers (about 10 women) were given about 500 grams of butter. When I asked about this, she explicitly ignored my question whilst giving me a warning look. When I asked about it when we were alone, she claimed that she had paid for the butter earlier and that it had been delivered in order to save her having to queue for it when she was already very busy. I have no doubt that the quantity and quality of food and other consumer goods enjoyed by Lyuba and her family were the product not only of her employment in a 'univermag', but also of her husband's connections to military privileges and her son-in-law's increasing power and income as the nachalnik of a state transportation agency. They combined showing off their wealth with explicit denial of any special privileges.

Conversely, Sergei's relationship to Nadezhda<sup>20</sup> gave him (and me) special access to her brother's recently privatised fruit and vegetable shop. Although this shop was located at the other end of the Metro line from my flat and even further from Sergei's, we both felt that avoiding the unpleasantness of state shops warranted the extra distance. As we 'had relations' with the shop manager, we were allowed to pick our own fruit and vegetables from the store room at the back, whilst paying the going price. Our visits were always marked by sharing food and drinks with the

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the meaning of 'having relations' ('imeet otnashenie').

<sup>20</sup> Sergei referred to Nadezhda as his 'sister'. His mother and Nadezhda's mother were cousins and close friends. In childhood, Nadezhda had called Sergei's mother 'mother'. This relationship provided both Sergei and Nadezhda with important reciprocal resources. Nadezhda often provided cooked food for Sergei because he was an adult Caucasian male without a wife to 'look after him' as well as giving him access to good quality fruit and vegetables acquired in a pleasant context of sociality. Nadezhda had recently arrived in Moscow from Tbilisi, fleeing conflicts in Georgia and a worsening situation in the capital. Sergei provided her with moral support, especially when her husband later began an affair with another woman.

family, and often by the exchange of small gifts. The establishment of this relationship (in spring 1993) made me feel like a successful Muscovite.

### **State Shops Then and Now**

However, it is important to note, that most of my informants, most of the time, continued to acquire most of their consumer goods from either state or recently privatised retail establishments. Although queues grew shorter during the course of my fieldwork, and have continued to diminish, the same system of triple queuing was in operation in shops I visited during a brief visit as recently as May 1995. Similarly, I have been unable to discern any perceptible improvement in relations between customers or between buyers and sellers, although shop workers are more likely to look bored in the absence of customers.

So far I have described traditional Soviet style shopping, marked by queues, aggression, competition for space and the social relations of consumption as these are played out in the interaction between customers and between buyers and sellers. We can see that these practices reflect the logic of a consumer economy based on central planning. Distinctions between the aggressive public space of shops and the hospitable hidden back spaces indicate the significance of the distinction between sellers and buyers, producers and consumers. This trade off between the status of workers and the derogation of consumers confers a wholly distinctive meaning on the process of shopping. As a daily practical experience, shopping in the FSU constituted an embodied experience which wholly undermined the status of the customer/individual, and cast them in the role of supplicant. From the consumer's point of view, there was not and could not be any association between shopping and leisure or pleasure. This contrasts with the relations between buyers and sellers in a Market economy, where the pursuit of profit/exchange value is constituted in practices where the 'customer is king/always right, etc.' If relations between producers and consumers in any complex economy are impersonal, abstract or mediated (because of a complex division of labour), there are more salient distinctions in the direct relations between consumers and distributors. Where in market economies, there are differences in these relations depending on context (the impersonal relations of the supermarket versus the more personalised relations of the

corner shop),<sup>21</sup> relations between buyers and sellers in a consumer economy based on central planning are inevitably not just impersonal but demeaning to the consumer. The exception is where personal relations are established **outside** the retail context, to enable more social (pleasurable) processes of consumption. Further the shortages associated with central planning create competition between consumers, with a concomitant increase in anomic alienation. This links into distinctive modes of signification of things which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

## **The Emergence of Commercial Retail Trade**

### ***Space and Classification***

In preceding chapters, I described the contribution made by the appearance of commercial trade to the meaning of public space, particularly on the streets and in and around Metro stations. I discussed attitudes to trade, speculation, business and the 'mafia' and the uneven accommodation to the presence of various new commercial ventures and goods. As retail establishments make a major contribution to the 'spatial face'<sup>22</sup> of the city, these changed the visual environment of Moscow streets. In order to investigate the ways in which this environment was interpreted by local inhabitants, I want to describe the complex of intentions, criteria and emotion that attended another shopping expedition, again for a birthday present. I am suggesting that it is only through practical use of or interaction with the novel phenomena presented by a burgeoning market, that their meaning is constructed. It is important to note that these are not fixed meanings but meanings in the process of becoming. In analysing Maria's experience of this event, I hope to demonstrate the complex and contradictory nature of the real, felt processes that attend social change.

### ***Shopping in a Commercial Environment***

Maria wanted to buy a shirt for her semi-boyfriend for a birthday present. She had some savings from expenses for a trip to Poland, and had decided that giving him a 'kachestvennie' (good quality) shirt might further her cause in the pursuit of his

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<sup>21</sup> See Stone (1954) where 'impersonal' relations of exchange are transformed over time into personalised relations **within** the context of the corner shop (discussed in Chapter 2).

<sup>22</sup> See O'Brien L. and Harris F. "Retailing: Shopping, Society, Space" 1991:1.

affections. Unlike Natasha, Maria embarked on this search a good week ahead of the birthday. She first visited five or six 'state' shops (one within walking distance, the others at various locations in the centre), but had been unable to find anything adequately 'kachestvennie'. She decided then, that she would have to buy a shirt from one of the 'kommercheskie' (commercial shops or kiosks). She told me this with a mixture of resigned disdain (for 'commerce') and subdued excitement. This excitement was related to the opportunity to enact what she thought was a 'progressive' activity, thus impressing both me and (hopefully) her paramour (who was explicitly pro-reform, and pro-west). Her excitement was subdued by the (reasonable) fear that she would be unable to afford a 'kachestvennie' shirt from a commercial trader, and by uncertainty as to the outcome. Together we visited about six local 'kommercheskie' shops, two of which actually had men's shirts for sale. At one of these, the shirts on offer were locally made, and thus of the same quality as shirts in the state shops but at higher prices (the trade being therefore 'speculatsia'). These she (reasonably) refused, and professed to do so 'on principle'. In the remaining commercial establishment, there were a variety of 'importnie' men's shirts, which she examined closely, frequently asking my opinion, saying 'this one's nice', or 'do you like this colour?', or 'do you think Gleb would like this one?' After an hour of indecision, she said that she would look in some other 'kommercheskie' shops before making her purchase. Over the next two days, Maria continued her search for a 'kachestvennie' shirt, but without success. She said that she simply couldn't decide which one to buy, and that none of them were 'dostatochno kachestvennie' (good enough quality).

Maria clearly found the whole experience somewhat traumatic and related it with an unusual degree of animation. Our subsequent discussion revealed a number of key issues. Most relevant was her difficulty engaging with a new shopping criteria, which we might gloss as 'value for money', ie, a decision making process in which relative cost is weighed against relative quality and/or quantity. First, this difficulty was founded on her inexperience of dealing with a differentiated price structure (see table overleaf).

**Table 5.5****Price Variations in Different Types of Shop, 1993**

	GUM <sup>23</sup>	Commercial Shop	Commercial Kiosk	Hard Currency Shop
		(roubles)	(roubles)	(US dollars)
Boots	7500-9000(R) 21-28000(imported)	6000(R) 20-23000(imported)	6-7000(R) 10-16000(imported)	55-60(imported)
Fur coats	330-5000(R)	20-115000(R)	90-3000000(R)	540(imported)
Leather jackets	80-100000(imported)	65-90000(imported)	60-90000(imported)	140-300(imported)
Skirts	3500-6000(R) 5-12000(imported)	10-12000(imported)	4-6000(imported)	34-79(imported)
Evening dresses	10-18000(R) 15-50000(imported)	10-48000(imported)	125000(R) to 20000(imported)	30-66(imported)
Fur hats	12-30000(R)		10-15000 (R)	
Scarves	300-500(R) 1200-1800(imported)		500-750 (R) 300-3000 (imported)	12.5-15.5 (imported)
Gloves	1000-1200(R) 1500-5000(imported)	2700(imported)	1500-2500(imported)	

Note: (R) = Russian made; (imp) = imported

Source: Sovsednik, Feb. 1993

The exchange rate on one US dollar in Moscow at the time was:

**Table 5.6****Exchange Rate, rouble:US dollar, February 1993**

	Buy	Sell
Bank	600-655 roubles	568-745 roubles
Informal Exchange	640-650 roubles	680-690 roubles

Source: Argumenti i Fakti No. 5 Feb. 1993

The emergence of different prices was a novel complication for Russian shoppers; 'before', the price of shirts fell within a narrower range, than was the case after the liberalisation of prices in January 1992. Secondly, she was presented with a range of goods of varying qualities, but had insufficient experience to make the relevant

<sup>23</sup> GUM: Gosudarstvennie Universalnie Magazin (state department store).

evaluations. Although she had a rough idea in her head that she wanted a 'kachestvennie' shirt, she was unsure exactly what this meant, when actually presented with a range of shirts of differing materials, colours and packaging. This inability to make decisions when faced with a plethora of consumer goods has been remarked on by other westerners, shopping in the west with Russian companions. Thirdly, she was visibly disappointed, both by her failure to acquire the shirt (and possibly the hoped-for improvements in her relationship), and by her failure to cope with the commercial environment. She had been clearly looking to me for assistance, which I fear I failed to offer. Her disappointment was however tinged with a certain satisfaction, as she related that "in spite of going to all these 'kommercheskie magazini', I still couldn't find a really 'kachestvennie' shirt". If she was on the one hand unsure exactly what she meant by 'kachestvennie', she was also saying that the increased quantity of supplies had not made her life any easier. This event was used by Maria to justify her opposition to 'kommercheskaya torgovlia'<sup>24</sup> in general. Her reaction to the event evinces a not unusual combination of complex and contradictory attitudes. Her conservatism and opposition to 'torgovlia' were mixed with curiosity and a desire to appear modern and progressive. Her desire to impress her boyfriend was limited by her inexperience of making complex decisions about what 'kachestvennie' means when presented with a wide choice of unfamiliar goods.

Maria also clearly had a growing interest in the practice of shopping in and of itself. When we were together in Poland later in the year, she suggested that we go for a walk and see what there was in the shops (she would never have made this suggestion in Moscow). We wandered down streets lined with shops with elaborate window displays: Maria would stop and look, point out a pair of shoes (or other item) and ask me if I liked them, monitoring my reactions closely. It seemed to me that Maria was practising shopping, or performing an exercise in the formulation of desire. Later on during this same trip to Poland, we went together to a well-stocked supermarket, where I warned her of my intention to stock up on luxuries. Initially keen to help me collect a basket of goodies to take back to Moscow, she suddenly disappeared from the shop. When I joined her outside she was crying, saying,

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<sup>24</sup> 'Kommercheskaya torgovlia' : commercial trade.

It just reminds me of how badly we are treated. It's not only that there are all these nice things, but even the sales assistants are nice."

### Comparing the two case histories

There are a number of points that can be made by comparing the two events described. First it is important to note that although both women wanted to buy a birthday present, their motives were slightly different. Natasha wanted to buy a present for a friend for whom she had great affection; this was however a secure friendship, about which she had no doubts. She simply wanted to mark the occasion and the relationship with the giving of a small 'symbolic' gift.<sup>25</sup> Maria's motivations were somewhat different and not a little 'interested'. She was pursuing a relationship with the intended recipient of the gift, but was not really enjoying a great deal of success. Thus their criteria for choosing a gift was affected by their motives. Natasha was content to find a gift that was 'prietnoe' (nice), and 'niedoroga' (cheap): these criteria enabled her to make her purchase in the preferred environment of a 'state' shop. Maria's more complex motivations meant that her criteria were more demanding: she wanted something 'kachestvennie' (good quality), but also wanted the purchase to represent 'value for money'. Natasha's gift cost her 150 roubles (about 0.80 US dollars), whereas Maria's higher aspirations meant that she had been willing to spend up to 10,000 roubles (about 16.00 US dollars).<sup>26</sup> Where both explicitly preferred to purchase something from a state shop, Maria's higher criteria, her desire to appear 'progressive and modern' to her paramour, and her implicit desire to 'practise' commercial shopping lead her to the commercial sector. Although Natasha successfully completed her purchase in about half an hour, Maria was unable to make a successful purchase after a week of searching. Natasha had managed her purchase with only the smallest deviation from her path between home and Metro station, whereas Maria's search took her around all her local

<sup>25</sup> Russians often refer to gifts as 'chistie simvolicheskie' or purely symbolic. It seems quite possible that the emphasis on it being the 'thought that counts' is linked to the former impossibility of finding more distinctive gifts. This in turn is possibly linked to the practice of giving gifts that come from an appropriate category of 'gifts', rather than chosen as specifically suitable for a given individual.

<sup>26</sup> The difference is in part due to changes in the exchange rate. In August 1992, the time of Olga's purchase, the exchange rate on the dollar was about 180 roubles. In February, the time of Maria's purchase, the exchange rate was between 568 and 745 roubles.

commercial shops and into the centre. Thus in spite of being prepared to spend a much larger sum of money, in order to have access to a much wider range of goods, Maria was unable to accomplish her purchase, even though she spent more time and covered more ground in the search.

I would further suggest that where Natasha was happy to celebrate her friend's birthday with a 'purely symbolic gift', from the range on offer in a 'state' shop, Maria was trying to create a degree of intimacy by making a more personalised purchase. Both were 'doing something with a gift', but the latter was a more 'active' doing than the former. The gift of a 'kachestvennie' shirt from a 'kommercheskie magazin' would have embodied both more money, and more care and decision making, by having been accomplished in a more diversified consumer environment. There is a critical difference between the 'obligatory gift' whose content is pre-determined and the 'obligatory gift' whose content is a matter of choice. It was far easier for me to buy 'souvenirs' from the restricted range on offer in a univermag to bring to London, than to buy presents in Covent Garden to take back to Moscow. Choices encourage the giver to think about recipients as individually distinctive. That the absence of choices makes for a somewhat flattened conceptualisation of personhood is remarked on by a Russian writer who notes,

The absence of a market and the monopoly of producers accounted not only for a low level of consumption, but also for what may be called uniformity of the individual's requirements. And this inevitably leads to a certain one sidedness in the realisation of man's capabilities, doesn't allow for a person's creative potential to be entirely revealed. This one sidedness creates deformations in 'spiritual consumption.'

(Khoruzhi 1990:29)

Photo 5.1

A queue outside Galeries Lafayette in GUM





## **Not Consumerism but Curiosity**

Maria was the only person I knew who had made an explicit decision to purchase a specific item from a commercial trader. Indeed most of my informants professed to never buy anything from commercial traders, expressing a preference for making their purchases from 'gosudarstvennie magazin' (state shops). Conversely, there was a kind of general curiosity about the very variety of goods and the novelty of their being displayed especially in the open air. Wherever there were street traders, kiosks or well-stocked commercial sections in established shops, people would gather and gaze. Very early on in my fieldwork, I went one day to a local 'kommercheskie magazin', where a fairly wide variety of mostly imported goods were displayed as in the state shops (in cabinets or behind the counters). Inside the shop there was a silent queue of people following one another from one counter to the next, looking. The image was reminiscent of a group of well-behaved school children in a museum, somewhat bored, but looking dutifully at the exhibits. Indeed as the goods on offer were all far too expensive for these people to afford, they might as well have been museum pieces. Looking at the faces of the people in this crowd, I could detect no sign of pleasure, desire or longing, only of neutral curiosity mixed with resigned disappointment.

## **The Changing Meaning of a Crowd or Queue**

Whenever I was either on the streets or shopping (for basics) with any of my female informants, they would be instinctively drawn to any queues or crowds. However, it was clear that the presence of a queue or crowd could now mean either the presence of 'deficit' goods, or of comparatively cheap goods, or the novel presence of a wide variety of imported goods, previously available only to a select few and hidden from mass consumers. As supplies increased in the course of the year, overall 'deficits' decreased accordingly. However, it simultaneously became increasingly difficult for people to find goods they could afford. For example, meat was always available at the Central Market, but was extremely expensive, whilst (cheap) meat was not always available in the shops. As the price of meat rose, it became more consistently available in 'state' shops, but increasingly unaffordable. Many previously 'deficit' goods followed this pattern.

## The Market Stall and the State Stall

One of the most stark examples of the difference between Soviet style retailing practices and those of the emerging market was to be found in the Central Market.<sup>27</sup> At one extreme, there was one 'state' stall selling very poor quality fruit and vegetables, small, muddy and often damaged as well. These were contained either on shelves behind the counter or in the large wire trolleys in which they had been transported. The tripartite system of ordering, paying and returning with a till receipt to collect your goods was in operation. The sales assistants were as rude and unfriendly as in any state shop. The whole area exuded an aura of dirt, discouragement and discontent as bad tempered sales assistants tried to off load rotten goods and anxious customers tried to purchase the least bad quality produce. This was particularly salient when compared to the rest of the Central Market.

The rest of the stalls in the market were staffed almost solely by Caucasians, and was said to be wholly run by the 'mafia'.<sup>28</sup> The fruit and vegetables were however of good quality, displayed in colourful mounds, and there was much 'hawking', trying to attract custom, offering of lower prices ('just for you'), and good tempered haggling. The exchange of cash for goods was instantaneous, and not infrequently, an extra apple was thrown in. The produce on offer from the market stalls was however much more expensive than elsewhere.

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<sup>27</sup> The 'tsentralnyi rynok' was originally a market where members of state and collective farms could sell surplus produce from their private plots. The collective farm markets were known to offer better quality produce, if at higher prices than the state foodstores.

<sup>28</sup> The term 'mafia' is used to denote real organised criminal groups, but is also used more generically to refer to all 'blacks' (Caucasians) or to all traders.

The table below gives comparative prices in roubles for a selection of foodstuffs in February/March 1993.

**Table 5.7**

**Average Prices:Central Market Prices**  
**February/March 1993**

	Average Prices	Central Market Prices
Potatoes (1kg)	40	150
Cabbage (1kg)	40	200
Vegetable Oil (1 litre)	328	600
Beef (1kg)	595	2500
Milk (1 litre)	83	350
10 eggs	153	450
Butter (1kg)	1188	2000
Cheese (1kg)	1206	2500

Source: *Moskovskie Komsomoliets*, 27 February 1993, and *Argumenti i Fakti* No. 11 March 1993.

On the few occasions I visited the Central Market with friends, they would inevitably try and buy from the 'state' stall, because the goods were cheaper. If necessary to buy from the market stalls they would haggle fiercely, and occasionally accuse stall-keepers of 'speculatsia'. No one (except for Sergei) ever expressed appreciation of the better quality, more pleasing display, or seductive techniques of the stall holders. Although much of this disdain was connected to a general anti-Caucasian attitude, I felt that in a sense the anti-Caucasian sentiments and anti-market sentiments were flip sides of the same coin.<sup>29</sup>

Although this example demonstrates the extremes of distinction between state and market retailing, in general there was a more processual transformation as the styles of retailing diversified and expanded. The nature of display changed more quickly or more noticeably than did the change in interactions between buyers and sellers.

<sup>29</sup> One of the connotations of 'Caucasians' is a propensity for trade, followed closely by a propensity for criminal activity.

## Display

The display of goods underwent considerable change during the period of my fieldwork. Although the display of goods inside ex-state and commercial shops remains reminiscent of Soviet practices (everything out of reach), some shops, particularly in the centre, have begun to mount window displays with stacks of symmetrically arranged goods. Fashionably dressed dummies have started to peer out from behind clean shop windows. Where the shops in central streets (for example, Ulitsa Tverskaya) used to be indistinguishable from the sad distribution points in the micro-raions, many now resemble their counterparts in Paris or London. The up-market pretensions of these central shops have significantly transformed the meaning of the centre. Indeed Natasha recently told me of her feeling of increasing alienation, "I feel as if I have lost the centre. The shops are full of things I can't afford, really expensive things. I feel that I can't even go in any more." Further, the display of goods on open tables in the open air is a complete reversal of 'withholding' Soviet era retailing practices as described above. The visibility of goods has transformed the visual impact of many stretches of pavement. Similarly where some Soviet style kiosks had curtained windows, with only the sign saying, 'tabak' (tobacco), 'morozhenoe' (ice cream), or 'soiuzpechat' (newspaper stalls) indicating what **might** be on offer, the new commercial kiosks make increasingly visible attempts to show their wares in colourful displays. Indeed for a while one of the commercial kiosks near my flat hung speakers from the front and played music, in an attempt to attract custom. In late spring 1993, some kiosks were even displaying carrier bags which said, 'Thank you, Come again' (in English!).

## Changing relations between buyers and sellers?

Given the changing structural relation between buyers and sellers, one might have predicted that the changed positions of sellers (from employees of state retail establishments to vendors whose livelihood depends on sale) would be attended by changing interactions between buyers and sellers. I found it most disconcerting to discover that this was in no way the case. The chilly disdain with which sales assistants deal with the public in state distribution establishments continued to be wholly reproduced by vendors in privatised former state shops, in new commercial



Photo 5.2

These signs appeared in the windows of one of the local shops in Spring, 1993



shops and in both privatised and new 'commercial' kiosks. As vendors behaved according to a social grammar born of state monopolisation of distribution, so consumers also engaged in these inter-relations according to familiar patterns of behaviour.

Although this could be interpreted as a case of 'cultural lag' and/or as an instance of 'internalised' power relations', de-constructing this 'cultural lag' or 'internalisation' illuminates a critical aspect of the 'structuration process'. Focusing on the dichotomy between structure and agency or between structural forces and the embodiment or internalisation of those structural forces ignores the point of articulation, which is constituted by the face to face interaction between differently empowered persons or roles. Although the structural forces that endowed shop assistants with power and undermined the power of consumers have crumbled (with the demise of the state monopoly over distribution), the actual face to face enactments of that power relations persist. This indicates that the relation between structure and internalisation is neither simple nor direct, but mediated by the social grammar of exchange.

This grammar has both function and context. Such patterned behaviours (which may indicate unequal power relations between roles) function as a means of reducing 'the dangers of social unknowing' which characterise interactions between person unknown to one another. This is a critical aspect of urban social relations, where such anonymous interactions are common. Thus as a grammar, patterned behaviours persist in spite of the demise of the original structural forces which gave them shape. Shop assistants continue to be rude (as if they still exercised the power to withhold 'deficit' goods), and customers continue to act as supplicants (as if it were still impossible to acquire goods from structurally different<sup>30</sup> retailers or to put a particular shop out of business). 'Embodied' identities and 'internalised power relations' are the (direct) product of patterned, face to face interactions, where the power of the shop assistant is constituted by the supplication of the customer as much as by the state's monopoly over distribution.

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<sup>30</sup> That is, differently owned.

Secondly, these patterned behaviours have spatial referents. As noted above, the relations between buyers and private sellers in the context of the collective farm market ('rynok') are and always have been different from the relations between buyers and employees of state distribution points (shops, kiosks or state stalls in the 'rynok'). Where the former are characterised by 'trying to sell' the latter are characterised by 'trying to withhold'. These patterns may have structural 'causes', but they acquire a semi-autonomous force as they become part of the spatially contextualised grammar of everyday life. Thus exchanges which are located in a shop (state or privatised), or conducted through the low window of a kiosks are enacted on the basis of spatial cues, which evolved under structurally different conditions.

More interesting is the partial transposition of 'traditional' retail behaviour to informal street trade. On the one hand this is not as wholly consistent as the continuation of practices in familiar contexts: some street traders quietly try and attract customers by polite requests to look at the goods on offer ('smotritie, devushka' [look, miss]). Others stand passively behind their goods, answer questions with cold disdain and conduct transactions with little or no acknowledgement of their dependence on the consumer's purchase. This difference in styles of informal street trade is linked both to the presence or absence of a physical barrier between buyer and seller and/or to the nature of goods on offer. People selling goods 'from the hand' are more likely to try and attract custom than those offering goods from behind the barrier of table or stall. The sellers of foodstuffs are also more likely to try and attract custom, especially if these are the products of household production (making the exchange 'like' sales in collective farm markets, where peasants sold the surplus produce from their private plots). Thus only where the dependency on sale is a real, felt condition of the exchange are the relations between buyers and sellers altered from those familiar from state retail outlets. The absence of a physical barrier (sometimes) reflects the novelty of an equal exchange relation of inter-dependency. Where that dependency is an abstraction, no such transformation is evident.

In the mass markets of capitalist economies, it is assumed that 'power' rests with the consumer and that sellers compete for customers. This imbalance in power relations

generally means that shop assistants are polite to customers, as the hidden structures are played out in millions of day to day, face to face interactions. Carrier (1995) notes that from the point of view of the consumer, the 'appropriation' of mass produced goods, and their transformation from commodities to possessions is largely accomplished in one of two ways. Mass produced goods are transformed by further actions upon them (eg, the cooking of food), or, the relations between buyers and sellers are 'personalised', making the relation more like the imagined relations between skilled local artisan and cherished local customer. The personalised relationship in which the good is acquired is thus attributed to the good itself, facilitating appropriation. This process is recognised by marketing experts who advise on ways of personalising the transaction. Given that the relations between buyers and sellers are not in the process of automatic transformation as a result of the structural shift to a 'market economy', we need to examine how (and indeed if) Russian consumers transform mass produced goods, acquired in a wholly impersonal context, into possessions. I would argue that the absence of 'consumerism' in the FSU is linked both to the functional uniformity of mass produced goods and to the extreme asociality of the context of acquisition. This depletes the potential for the 'pleasure' traditionally associated with consumerism and the transformation of mass-produced objects into personal possessions.

### **Consuming Inflation**

If I noticed changes in the pattern of concealment and display of consumer goods and the barely noticeable beginnings of a new attitude towards consumers, my friends and informants either didn't notice these changes or they were subsumed under their anxiety about inflation. Indeed price rises were deemed the most worrying of domestic problems by 73% of the population in August 1991 and by 62% of the population in February 1992.<sup>31</sup> Given the low or even negative rates of inflation until 1990, the annual inflation rate of 2,509 % in consumer goods and services between December 1991 to December 1992<sup>32</sup> was a terrible shock.

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<sup>31</sup> Ryan M. 1993:218.

<sup>32</sup> IMF Economic Review 8, Russia Federation, 1993 p.88.

The tables below give some idea of rates of inflation between 1971 and 1994.

**Table 5.8**

**Percentage Inflation, 1971-1990**

	All Retail Prices	Food	Alcohol	Non-food
1971-1975	-0.1	0.3	0.4	-0.3
1976-1980	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.8
1981-1985	1.1	1.7	4.7	0.5
1986-1989	1.5	2.8	9.1	0.3
1990	5.6	4.9	2.5	6.2

Source: IMF Economic Review, The Economy of the Former Soviet Union in 1991, 1992 p. 58

**Table 5.9**

**Percentage Inflation, 1991-1992**

	All Retail Prices	Food	Non-food	Services
<b>Annual Percentage Change</b>				
1991	92.7	80.6	100.7	70.6
1992	2509	2003	2573	3258
<b>Monthly Percentage Change</b>				
1992	January 245	306	211	130
	February 38	20	48	87
	March 30	18	42	34
	April 22	17	25	31
	May 12	11	12	18
	June 19	13	12	39
	July 11	8	10	21
	August 9	6	10	11
	September 12	11	13	11
	October 23	26	20	29
	November 26	27	26	23
	December 25	26	27	19

Source: IMF Economic review 8, Russian Federation 1993 p.88

**Table 5.10****Percentage (Monthly) Inflation, 1993-1994**

		Overall CPI*	Food	Non-food	Services
1993	January	25.8	27.5	16.3	50.0
	February	24.6	24.6	22.7	32.0
	March	20.1	18.4	20.6	28.8
	April	18.7	16.2	17.8	40.0
	May	18.1	16.3	15.5	34.8
	June	19.9	22.8	16.5	17.3
	July	22.4	22.5	22.0	29.3
	August	26.0	22.2	18.3	49.8
	September	23.0	23.2	22.3	24.8
	October	19.6	18.5	19.3	24.3
	November	16.3	15.9	15.8	23.0
	December	12.5	12.0	11.6	15.6
1994	January	17.9	21.0	10.7	37.7
	February	10.8	10.8	8.9	21.5
	March	7.4	5.8	7.7	16.8
	April	8.5	5.6	7.2	31.8
	May	6.9	6.8	5.5	12.7
	June	6.0	6.0	5.0	11.4

\* Consumer Price Index

Source: IMF Economic Review 16, Russian Federation, 1994 p.73

If theoretically market economics and democratic politics go hand in hand as individuals acquire the power to exercise 'choice' in both their economic and political activities, it is questionable whether this translates into practice in the FSU. If the population has indeed acquired the 'power' to vote on alternative candidates at widely spaced elections, they have also theoretically acquired the opportunity to acquire a wide variety of consumer goods. However the increased **presence** of diverse goods is seen to be in direct proportion to an increasing **absence** of the means to acquire not only imported luxury or prestige goods but also basic, locally produced goods. Queues are shorter, and the need to travel far and wide in search of 'deficit goods' may be a thing of the past. On the other hand, Marina noted that "Before I had to run around the shops looking for 'deficit' goods. Now I run around the shops to see where things are cheaper." For most of the Russians I have met or spoken to, inflation is far more salient than the opportunity to vote every few years, or to read previously censored material. Even those that appreciate the positive changes (mostly members of the intelligentsia), are far more concerned with prices than with politics. Even Sergei who was the most pro-reform of all my informants, would unwittingly slip into plaintive conversations about inflation, then check

himself adding that he still preferred the present to the past. Conversations are regularly dominated by comparisons between the price of a given good 'before', last month, last week and now. Reactions range from fear and tears, through incredulity, to anger and the conviction of betrayal. In this context, it is highly unlikely that 'shopping' can acquire any of the leisure/pleasure connotations it has in the western context. Choice becomes meaningless if shop shelves fill with goods which remain as out of reach as before. Indeed the physical presence of unaffordable goods is often interpreted as an almost deliberate mockery. Indeed one of the most common phrases in Russia at the time was,

Seichas u nas vsio yest, no vsio doroga. (Now we have everything here, but everything is expensive.)

Given the practical importance of 'deficits' in Soviet culture, it is impossible to underestimate the importance of the novel experience of availability. There is however a cruel irony in the conjunction of the physical presence of previously 'deficit' goods, and their continued inaccessibility as prices forbid purchase.

Western style 'consumerism' is closely associated with the satisfaction of desires, above and beyond the satisfaction of basic (rational, functional) needs. It is often argued that these desires are not for things 'in themselves' but for that which they symbolise (membership of a social group, distinction from another social group, status, 'taste', prestige, and a plethora of finely grained aspirations and identities).<sup>33</sup> Whether we agree that these desires are the product of abstract forces of capital accumulation, creating fictions of desire and satisfaction through the continuous assault of media imagery, there is nevertheless a taken-for-granted assumption on the part of the average shopper, that the acquisition of things is pleasurable. I would argue that this pleasure is at least partly constructed by consumption of the aesthetics and social relations of the shopping moment, of the polite (or obsequious) behaviour of shop assistants, the aesthetics of display. The emphasis on 'rational consumption' of 'use values' in the ideology of the FSU combined with the absence of wildly

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<sup>33</sup> Much attention has been devoted to 'consumerism'. See for example, Appadurai (1986), Bourdieu (1984), Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), Douglas and Isherwood (1978), Featherstone (1990), Gullestad (1984, 1992), Lunt and Livingstone (1992), McCracken (1988), Miller (1983, 1987, 1988), Nava (1991), Stirrat (1982), Tomlinson (1990), and Willis (1990).

distinctive goods and with the apparent and experienced shortage of even subsistence goods, to sustain a functional attitude to things. Further the socio-spatial context of consumption precluded the possibility of transforming shopping into a means for the satisfaction of desire (as opposed to basic needs). Consuming deficits, dirt, disdain and distrust along with your cheap but damaged potatoes does not contribute to a cultural elaboration of the 'meaning of things'. Thus although there has been an explosion in the availability of goods in shops and on the streets, there has not been the predictable explosion of **consumerism**. I would argue that if inflation is an obvious cause for this surprising lack of purchase, the continued disdain of sellers for buyers is also a critical factor. This behaviour is no doubt the product of a lifetime's experience of being demeaned by the distributors of goods and services. If the Market necessarily implies the dependence of producers on consumers, this has yet to be actualised in contemporary Moscow. Even small entrepreneurs, dependent on the 'from the hand' sale of their jeans imported from Poland continue to exhibit traditional Soviet disdain.

In the next chapter, the focus shifts from the public spaces of street, Metro and shops to the private space of the self-contained household flat. As the 'destination' of consumer goods, I will address the question of process by which (some) mass-produced goods, acquired in an impersonal context are (or are not) appropriated to the projects of group identity, distinction or the creation of a cultural milieu.



## Chapter 6

### Not Creative Self-Construction through Consumerism and Choice but Cosy Commensality and Sincerity

In this chapter and the following chapter, I want to shift the focus to the interior, private, affective spaces, which acquire meanings from the conjunction of a number of critical factors. The meanings of the distinction between outside, public space and inside, private space are derived both from the flat as a physical space and from the activities and social relations associated with that space. This chapter discusses the physical space itself, within which the social relations of privatism occur. These latter will be discussed in the next chapter.

We have seen that the transition to a Market economy has been most forcefully apparent in the appearance of new goods, and of new sources of goods; this implies the emergence of 'choice'. Western theories of consumption (or more accurately of 'consumerism') are fundamentally based on examination of the operation of (creative or constrained) 'choice' as constitutive of the relation between people and things. What I want to examine here is the degree to which the mechanisms of 'choice' are applicable in contemporary Moscow. Do Muscovites 'appropriate' mass produced goods, and transform them into personalised possessions, by transposing them into a 'cultural milieu', which is itself constructed by personal possessions (Miller 1987)? Is there a conscious effort to 'appropriate' space owned by the state (Miller 1988)? Does shopping for household goods (especially furniture, fixtures, fittings and ornaments) constitute a process by which a distinctive cultural environment (a cosy home) is constructed (Gullestad 1984)? Do 'tastes' in Art reflect class distinctions which are repeated in differences in 'tastes' in hairstyles, food and domestic furnishings (Bourdieu 1986 English edition)? Do patterns of household consumption sustain collective identity and particularise household autonomy through conspicuous consumption and display (Stirrat 1989)? Theories of western style 'consumerism' are necessarily based on observations of consumption in contexts dominated by Capital and the Market. What I hope to elucidate in this chapter is the ways in

which different patterns of uniformity and distinction prevail in the FSU. These differences may cast some light on the structural relations between different political economies, consumption, and the construction of identity.

However, in order to examine the meaning of the flat as a physical space, we need to examine the complex of factors which contribute to meaning including:

- i) the process of acquiring a self-contained flat, and the historical roots of the structural shortage of housing;
- ii) the interior furnishings and decor: the conjunction of mass-produced objects, household mementoes, old or inherited furniture, and prestigious imported consumer goods;
- iii) the economy of shortage, 'hoarding' and never throwing anything away;
- iv) the relations between objects - order : chaos;
- v) the novel opportunity to privatise flats, to buy and sell flats, and the emergence of the notion of flats with financial value.

It should however be emphasised that meaning is the product of the factors listed above **and** of the social activities and relationships associated with the private flat: the distinctions are drawn solely for the purpose of conceptual clarity.

#### **Access to housing, housing shortages and the valuation of the self-contained flat**

In the absence of a housing market, the very acquisition of living space in a hostel, communal, or self-contained flat was dependent on the relation between the individual (or family) and the state, mediated through ones 'official right' to adequate housing, as well as more negotiable manipulations of a variety of unofficial means. The size and location of the family home were similarly subject to the tension between the right to shelter and the use of housing as incentive and/or punishment (Di Maio 1974:3). There were four 'housing funds' in the FSU: the fund of the local Soviets, the fund of enterprises and ministries, the cooperative housing fund and the fund of individually owned housing. The importance of

privately owned housing in Moscow was minimal,<sup>1</sup> until the right to privatise was initiated in December 1988. Urban housing in the FSU was acquired through one of three mechanisms:

- i) allocation by the municipal housing authorities;
- ii) allocation of enterprise or organisation built housing to employees;
- iii) the acquisition of a cooperative flat.

The table below gives some indication of the relative proportions of state (local Soviet, enterprise or Ministry), versus cooperative and self-build housing constructed between 1981 and 1991.

**Table 6.1 State:Cooperative:Self-build Housing, 1981-1991**

Years	State	Cooperative	Self-build <sup>2</sup>
1981-1985	80%	4.8%	6.2%
1986-1990	80%	5.4%	7.3%
1991	76%	4.8%	10.9%

Source: Narodnoe Khoziastvo, Russian Federation 1992.

Access to state housing was via application to the ISPOLKOMs (Committees of the City Soviets). Allocation took into account applicants present housing conditions (need)<sup>3</sup> and record of labour and other 'socially useful work' (merit). In theory, flats were then allocated on the basis of need and merit but all of my friends and informants agreed that 'merit' (the accomplishment of 'socially useful work'), was linked to 'having good relations with' persons in charge of making the appropriate

<sup>1</sup> 84.6% of urban housing in Russia was state owned in 1989. The small quantity of privately owned housing was often on the periphery, without infrastructure, and sited on land owned by the state (Vysokovskii 1993:275).

<sup>2</sup> Self-build housing was constructed using state credits. This was a practice far more common in rural areas than in cities, and was almost unheard of in Moscow.

<sup>3</sup> In order to be placed on the waiting list for housing, the applicant had to demonstrate possession of a resident's permit, and, in Moscow, that the household presently enjoyed less than 5 m<sup>2</sup>. per person (Vysokovskii 1993:280).

recommendations. Thus the shortage of housing sustained the use of the right to shelter as a means of social control; the allocation of 'prestigious housing' which included 'extra space' above the statutory norm was similarly politically dispensed (Di Maio 1974:124-125).

The other route to housing was via the Housing Construction Cooperatives. Banned by Stalin in 1937, they reverted to the local Soviets, accused of becoming 'privileged property owners'. The Housing Cooperatives were re-invented by Khrushchev in 1958. In 1962, the joint resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers offered state credits of up to 60% of the estimated cost of construction to housing construction cooperatives, with re-payment periods of 10-15 years. The emphasis was on enabling those with savings to invest in housing, and on the construction of similarly designed and constructed blocks of flats. In 1964 the down payment was reduced to 30% and the period of repayment increased to 20 years. Between 1962 and 1969, 17.3 million m<sup>2</sup> of cooperatively constructed flats had been built housing 700,000 families in the RSFSR (DiMaio 1974:186). Yet this still only accounted for about 6% of new housing. There were inevitable difficulties, as the bureaucratic requirements were complex, and the allocation of land and materials difficult to arrange. Construction agencies preferred building state housing, 10% of which was allocated to the builders. Standard designs were imposed, with the attendant problems of small rooms and poor quality construction. Although cooperatives had the right, indeed the duty, to manage and maintain their own blocks, this was often complicated by their forced reliance on state sector services. Given the return on their input, it is hardly surprising that only a minority had the stamina as well as the available capital to participate.

However, the 'ownership' of a cooperative flat had and has symbolic implications which seem to be at least as important as more concrete criteria. Three of the households that I visited regularly (Natasha's, Elena's, Sergei's) were housed in cooperative flats. Sergei's account of how he came to acquire a cooperative flat illuminates both the practical aspects and the more symbolic connotations.

When I divorced my first wife, I found myself with nowhere to live.  
Although some people continue to live together after they are

divorced, I couldn't do that. Whilst staying with friends and relatives, I tried to find private rented accommodation, but I couldn't find anything permanent although I rented a 'corner' (ugol) from a babushka for awhile. At the time, I probably could have tried to get a flat via my workplace. But I was working in a 'yashik',<sup>4</sup> and I knew that I couldn't carry on working there for much longer. I couldn't tolerate it. Instead, I borrowed money from my relatives<sup>5</sup> and bought a cooperative flat in Zelenograd (a Moscow suburb), near where I was working at the time. Then I left the job in the 'yashik', and started to work in an institute in Moscow. Travelling to and from work was difficult and took me about an hour and a half each way. So I sold my flat in Zelenograd and bought this cooperative flat. [Sergei still travelled on average over an hour each way to and from work.] This is a good flat, in a good area. It is an ecologically clean zone and the air is good.....Cooperative flats are usually better built and cleaner. You perhaps noticed that this 'podiezd'<sup>6</sup> is much cleaner than yours.

The right to live in a cooperative flat is associated with considerable prestige; this prestige is linked to the degree of independence from employers and/or the state enjoyed by cooperative flat residents, to the meanings associated with the ability to make the initial capital outlay, as well as to the perceptible advantages (eg, a cleaner 'podiezd', cleaner air).

In discussing her cooperative flat, Natasha emphasised that her parents had had to work extra hard, save money, and not take holidays in order to acquire their cooperative flat. Nadezhda Mandelstam makes the point succinctly "I only hope to die in my own precious little cooperative apartment. This is my one remaining wish, but I fear it may not be granted...." (Mandelstam 1989:361).

Perhaps the most salient aspect of urban housing in Moscow (as in other parts of the

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<sup>4</sup> 'Yashik': literally a drawer. This means a 'secret institution' where one's work was strictly controlled as well as one's social contacts, especially with foreigners.

<sup>5</sup> When I asked Sergei how much he paid for the right to take over this cooperative flat, he said he couldn't remember. When I asked how his relatives had managed to accumulate sufficient funds to lend him, he referred vaguely to 'savings'. (However, his step-father was a watch repairer, an occupation which is sometimes associated with access to precious metals such as gold. This is speculation on my part but seems illuminating.) I asked if he had managed to repay them, and he replied, 'not yet', although the initial loan was made some ten years previously. However, he also implied that because his family was from the Caucasus, their strong sense of family interdependence meant that they didn't expect him to pay them back, but to offer them whatever assistance possible when they needed it.

<sup>6</sup> 'Podiezd' refers to the entrance hall, stairs and communal areas in a block of flats. This was indeed true: the entrances to Yura's, Olga's and Valeria's flats were much cleaner than the entrances to other ordinary municipal flats, including my own.

former Soviet Union) is the overall sense of shortage, and of the struggles necessary to acquire a bare minimum of self-contained living space. The chronic shortage of housing gives a particularly poignant meaning to the private universe of the household unit. That housing was almost wholly allocated by the state, depriving the majority of any potential for individual resolution, seemed to me to increase rather than decrease the sense of achievement that attends occupation of a self-contained flat.

The reasons for the shortage of housing in the former USSR are many and the following is but the briefest outline of the most critical factors. First, the housing situation inherited by the early revolutionaries was disastrous. The 1912 census for St Petersberg reveals that there were on average eight occupants per flat (Sosnovy 1954:3-4); from 1912-14 the average living space per person was 7m<sup>2</sup> (Bolshaya Sovietskaya Encyclopedia 1930, vol XVIII:146). The latter figure is an average and masks huge differences in individual living space and the absence of basic sanitation, running water and central heating in much of the accommodation. One of the first acts of the new revolutionary government was a re-distribution of available housing. The 1918 'Decree on the Abolition of Private Ownership of Urban Real Estate' enabled the authorities to confiscate the property of 'non-productive members of the population'. This decree improved the living conditions of 500,000 persons. Buildings with more than five flats were 'municipalised', and in towns with populations exceeding 10,000 the right to build was restricted to local authorities (Di Maio 1974:8). In the period immediately after the Revolution and during the Civil War, the housing situation deteriorated further. Reasons include weak municipal management, a plethora of competing housing committees with conflicting ideas about allocation, neglect of maintenance and absence of capital repairs or investment. Block suggests that Moscow 'lost' up to a quarter of its housing fund in the first five years after the Revolution (Block 1951:12-13). Although rents were frozen in 1919, and abolished altogether in 1921, they were re-established by the 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) in 1926 in an (inadequate) effort to fund necessary repairs (Di Maio 1974:11). Under the NEP, various strategies were employed to encourage private investment in housing, and to encourage tenants to maintain residential buildings. These efforts bore little fruit as those with capital to invest were too few and too wary to make any significant impact. When the NEP was

abandoned in favour of the Five Year Plans, responsibility for housing was again assumed to be the sole prerogative of the state and its agencies. As Stalin increased his hold through the 1930's, the 'housing crisis disappeared from government pronouncements' and was replaced by references to 'housing closeness' (Molotov in *Pravda* 16.3.39, quoted in Di Maio 1974:15). The mass drive for industrialisation during the first, second and third Five Year Plans reduced by half the ratio of investment in housing : total capital investment.

It is impossible to underestimate the effect of this deliberate neglect. The more critical the shortage the more desperate the population to acquire housing by any means possible. Indeed there are endless stories of tenants 'denouncing' their neighbours in order to acquire their space. "The most important thing in life for any Soviet citizen is his tiny bit of living space. No wonder so many crimes have been committed for the sake of it." (Mandelstam 1989:361). True or false, the severe competition for housing made a substantial contribution to deteriorating neighbour relations (see for example, Kotkin 1993:184,191, on Housing in Magnitogorsk).

World War II brought a further reduction of the housing stock, with 6,000,000 buildings reported damaged and 25,000,000 made homeless (Di Maio 1974:15). Although there was some housing construction under Stalin, the efficient construction of quality housing which was relevant to the demographic profile of the Soviet household was never a priority. Stalin's 'interest' in architecture ensured that architectural styles reflected his preference for a 'Russified' classicism, all columned facades with suitable revolutionary embellishments ('Stalin vampire style').<sup>7</sup> Further the low priority assigned to housing construction entailed a diminished development of the entire construction industry, with fewer architects, builders, and a poor development of building material production and distribution. Many flats built during the 1930's and 1940's were three and four bedroomed flats, too 'large' for the average family. As a result, several families were housed together in single self-contained flats (Bater 1980:99-100). By 1950, average living space had been

<sup>7</sup> The desire to win the favour of the leader was sometimes more important than the design and construction of homes for the population. There is a story in 'Children of the Arbat', which refers to a building with two facades. When the architect presented the 'alternative' designs to Stalin, he simply expressed his approval. Not daring to point out that the designs were for alternative facades, the architect instructed the builders that the building was to have both facades. (Anatoli Rybakov 'Children of the Arbat' 1989).

reduced to 3.98 m<sup>2</sup>, barely 40% of the 'hygienic standard' of 9m<sup>2</sup> adopted by the early revolutionaries. Stalin's death in 1953, and the eventual emergence of Khrushchev as leader marked the end of the deliberate neglect of housing in the former Soviet Union.

In 1957, the 'Decree on Developing Housing Construction in the USSR' marked a new dawn in Soviet housing policy. There was a commitment to 'eliminating housing shortages in the next few years'. The 1956-1960 Five Year Plan envisaged a 100% increase in new housing, and indeed from 1956-1960, 150% more housing was constructed in the USSR than from 1917-1955 (Di Maio 1974:20). Enterprises and trade unions were allowed to use a proportion of their funds for the construction of housing and a greater proportion of the state's capital expenditure was allocated to housing. The 'Grand Design Seven Year Plan' agreed at the 21st Congress of the CPSU<sup>8</sup> to invest 375-380 billion roubles in housing, an increase of 80-83% over the previous plan (Di Maio 1974:24). Along with the official announcement that the Soviet Union was now in the phase of transition to communism, Khrushchev vowed that every family would have an apartment, not a room but a self-contained apartment. This was to be achieved through increased investment and through industrialisation of housing and the adoption of standardised housing design.

The change of direction in the design of housing was by no means unchallenged. Although Khruschev claimed that "we are not against beauty but we are against opulence" (cited in Danin 1961:10-15), the move towards economical and standardised buildings was accused of 'cosmopolitanism' and of assimilating "the faulty ideas of Corbusier....who reduce the artistic tasks of architecture to the display of technical properties and the aestheticising of reinforced concrete structures and supplant the ideological graphic content of architecture with a formalist combination of concrete and glass panes" (Ganenko in CDSP<sup>9</sup> XII no.22:27). Nekrasov (Literaturnaya Gazeta 1960 cited in CDSP XII no.22:27) counters this accusation with the notion that the rejection of Corbusier in 1931 was itself 'a bourgeois trend'.

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<sup>8</sup> CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>9</sup> CDSP: Current Digest of the Soviet Press.

In the end the formalists won, and huge numbers of concrete panel apartment blocks were erected throughout the Soviet Union. Hundreds of millions of square metres of living space were built throughout the 60's and 70's. At the 23rd Party Congress in 1966, it was reported that ca. one half of the country's population had moved into new or improved housing between 1956 and 1966 (Di Maio 1974:28). Brezhnev announced that the volume of housing construction was to increase further from 1965 to 1970, and although plan targets were not always met, the volume of housing increased dramatically.

Commitment to improving the housing situation resulted in the construction of the huge 'micro-raions' which surround every Soviet city. Contests were held for the design of an experimental micro-raion in south west Moscow. The typical micro-raion was to cover 20-40 hectares, with a population of 8-10,000 housed in hostels (for single people), or in 4-5 story blocks of flats (families with children). Initially the height of blocks of flats was restricted to 4-5 stories to eliminate the need for lifts (the infamous 'pyatietazhhnie'). In theory, services were to be located as near as possible, according to frequency of recourse to different services. Day nurseries were to be no more than 200 m. distant, schools no more than 500 m. Communal services such as laundries, dining rooms and small shops catering to daily needs (eg, bakeries) were to be no more than 100-150 m. distant, whilst other shops and services were to be available at mini-shopping centres 900-1,300 m. distance from the farthest resident (Di Maio 1974:58-59).

However the provision of resources for individual and collective consumption has continuously lagged behind the construction of housing in the micro-raions. There are a number of reasons. First, housing was often constructed by enterprises, ministries and government agencies in order to attract, keep and reward necessary labour.<sup>10</sup> However, once housed, people were unlikely to give up their accommodation because of the inadequate provision of services, as there was little chance of acquiring housing or improved services elsewhere. Once the need for local labour was satisfied by the provision of housing, resources were diverted

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<sup>10</sup> Here, the concept of labour as a resource in the planning of the national economy is comparatively abstract, or disconnected from the notion of labour as embodied by real, individual bodies with real individual needs. Indeed the concept 'labour force [strength] or fund' ('trudovaya cyl or fond') is still used.

elsewhere: the subsequent needs of the individuals who constitute the 'labour force' were of less account. Secondly, the construction industry was rewarded with bonuses (including a proportion of the housing built), for the construction of housing, but had less interest in the construction of 'trade points' (di Maio 1974:61). Finally, even in cities like Moscow with a 'General Plan' and a fairly powerful City Soviet, competition between the City Soviet and diverse enterprises and Ministries meant that there was no single authority with sufficient power or interest, to ensure that the overall plan of the micro-raions was fulfilled. As noted in Chapter 4.1, there is evidence of the original plans in the layout of the micro-raions: there are kindergartens, schools and bakeries within walking distance, 'mini-shopping centres' at reasonably spaced intervals. Yet the quantity of 'trade points' remains insufficient to meet the demands of an intensely populated micro-raion. Shortages and complex shopping procedures (triple queuing, absence of pre-packaging) further reduce the utility of these services (see Chapter 5).

Soviet housing policies reflect some of the ideals of revolutionary social planning, with the emphasis on collective rather than private activity. However, the provision of housing in the capital is as much a result of the problems as of the ideals. Where the urban housing problems of the early post-revolutionary years were 'solved' by enforcing multiple-family occupation of the spacious flats of the displaced bourgeoisie, the subsequent emphasis on industrialisation left the provision of housing far down the list of priorities. Consequently there is and has been a continuous shortage of housing in Moscow. There have been endless efforts to improve the situation. Housing construction under Stalin was characterised by the design and building of expensive neo-classical apartment blocks, whose glorious facades were aimed at gaining favour with the great leader. After Stalin's death, there was a move to more standardised designs, and quantity took absolute preference over quality. Thus the huge bulk of housing in Moscow was built to standardised designs in the post-war period, and a huge majority of the population lives in the micro-raions where such housing was erected. Yet the history of housing shortages and the highly publicised efforts to achieve the provision of one flat per family has lead to the extreme valorisation of the self-contained flat.

The following comparisons give some idea of relative size: Figures are of m<sup>2</sup> per person

**Table 6.2**

**Average Housing Space (per person)**

Region	Living Area	Total Area
Urban FSU	9.2	14.3
Russian Federation	14.5	
Urban Russia	9.8	15.3
Eastern Europe		18-26
Western Europe		28-35
United States		51

Source: Vysokovskii 1993:279. Total area includes hallways, kitchens and bathrooms; living area includes only rooms.

### **Layout, interior furnishings and appropriation**

Housing policies, housing shortages and the absence of a housing market have resulted in mass-produced housing.

Although the fact of uniformity in the provision of housing is evident to everyone who has cast eyes on the towering constructivism of the micro-raions, there were distinctions in the evaluation of living spaces. In talking about their flats or those of their friends and relations, my friends and informants would refer almost exclusively to numbers of rooms, size (in precise square meters), location (in the centre being the most prestigious, near a Metro station being advantageous), or the quality of the area (an ecologically clean zone, with clean air). However, it is important to note that these evaluations and distinctions are made, not on the basis of aesthetics, differences in design or on the basis of personal or class based differences in 'tastes' or preferences, but on the basis of evaluations ranged along a monosemic hierarchical spectrum. As can be seen from the sketches (Appendix 1), apart from size and number of rooms, the layout of flats exhibits a certain structural uniformity.

If there is little elaboration of distinctive meanings in terms of the location or

attributes (layout, design) of the flat itself, we might expect that the process of 'constructing a distinctive cultural milieu [a home]', might shift to the spaces over which the individual/household exercises more or less total control. As 'preferred' size and location are not always realisable, we might expect interiors to reflect preferences and differences. First, I want to describe the 'meanings' of different interior spaces (rooms).

### **The entrance hallway**

It is through this space that the transition is made from outside to inside, from public to private space. This transition is inevitably marked by the practice of taking off outside footwear and donning slippers provided by the household for visitors. People remove their outdoor clothes (coats, hats etc.), and many of my friends would completely change their clothes on coming home. This practice had both practical and symbolic connotations. On the practical side, removing outdoor footwear was explicitly aimed at not traipsing dirt everywhere. However, a friend of mine once remarked, 'I don't know why we always take off our shoes, even if its dirtier inside than outside'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, changing clothes is explicitly about keeping clothes clean for work, or 'going to the centre'. However, I always felt that the process of changing clothes and footwear were equally about marking the transition, not just from one physical environment to another, but from one social or emotional environment to another. The removal of meticulously ironed clothes and the donning of looser, more comfortable ('udobno') attire symbolises the transition to a more relaxed environment, where unguarded behaviour is sheltered from the critical eye of the public. As Giddens notes, "The zoning of the body seems in most societies to be associated with the zoning of the body in time-space in the trajectories of the days within locales" (Giddens 1984:129). Changing clothes, posture, expression, ways of moving and speaking all characterise the transition from public to private space. Again there is a kind of feedback mechanism which ensures that the transition to private space is the cue for changing body praxis: reciprocally, it is the change in body praxis which constitutes the meaning cued by the particular space.

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<sup>11</sup> He was referring affectionately to the state of his mother's flat, which was in complete chaos.

Hallways are also often very cluttered and crowded with outdoor clothing, cupboards and furniture for storing household goods.

### The main room

The main room is the most transmutable space (especially if it is also the only room). It is often alternatively a bedroom, used daily for family meals and leisure (especially watching television), occasionally for entertaining guests, or for working at home (this would apply mostly to some members of the artistic or intellectual intelligentsia).<sup>12</sup> The practices and processes of entertaining guests will be discussed in the next chapter; yet this practice informs the ways in which the main room acquires a more public character than the other room(s).

Almost always crowded with furniture, every main room I have been in has at least one (often two) wall units with a mixture of glass fronted shelves, bookshelves and closed cupboards. On the visible shelves are displayed things which express the household's values and personalities. Most households display books, mostly classics, occasionally books in foreign languages. Often favourite books are turned so the cover is facing outwards (rather than with spines only showing). Almost all households display their good china and glassware in these units, often demonstrating their status by displaying a number of china 'services'. Galina was clearly delighted when I asked her about her 'services', one of which she had inherited from her parents, one she had bought abroad (in Bulgaria), and another that had been brought back to her by her husband from Yugoslavia. Best china services are used rarely and exclusively for guests and mark both respect for the guest and exhibit the household's hospitality.<sup>13</sup> Sofas that convert to beds and contain hidden storage space underneath are also ubiquitous. These are usually covered with patterned rugs or textiles. Ornaments are profuse and although often mass-produced, further inquiry usually demonstrated that the object had some more personalised

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<sup>12</sup> Vysokovskii suggests that although theorists suggest that the home is a model of the universe, the image of the universe thus represented in the Soviet Union was one of chaos, mixing people and activities "with no discernible logic" (Vysokovskii 1993:282-283).

<sup>13</sup> Hospitality within private spaces is highly valued. Indeed, Russians love to be told they are the most hospitable people in the world. My Caucasian friends often pressed me to confirm that they were more hospitable than my Russian friends. Hospitality in official circles is highly competitive, and an expression of both power and refinement.

meaning: either a souvenir from a holiday (especially abroad), or a present from a friend or family member. Galina in particular also emphasised that she had inherited some of her ornaments from her parents, that they were 'old' and 'valuable' (in financial terms).

Distinctions between households are cued by two main factors. First, the presence or absence of 'old' or beautiful (ie, not Soviet mass-produced) furniture; second, the presence or absence of objects associated with abroad, and/or imported consumer goods.<sup>14</sup> Although these signs may have been in evidence throughout the flat, their symbolic potential was heightened in the main room, again because of the likelihood of the presence of guests in this space.

Both Natasha and Katya expressed their love for old things ('Ya lioblio starie veshie'), although this love was wholly disconnected from any contemplation of the potential financial value of old objects. Neither of these women expressed any opinion about the aesthetic value of their 'old things': I understood them to mean that their preference for 'old things' was linked both to an affection for a 'Russianness' associated with the pre-Revolutionary past, and to a disregard for appearances, associated with dedication to higher pursuits of the mind and/or soul.<sup>15</sup> Galina (as noted above) and Valeria were somewhat more interested in the monetary value of their 'old things': Galina was explicit about the possibility of selling some of her possessions in order to supplement the decreasing value of her pension. Valeria was more likely to express her love of 'beautiful things', or her need (as an artist) to be surrounded by beautiful things. However, she was also keen to tell me that her 'beautiful things' had been very expensive, and that she had worked hard to earn the money to buy them; this was closely tied in with her self-identification as a member of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, and with **not** sharing a Russian disregard for wealth, aesthetics and display.

The presence of objects associated with abroad, be these photographs of foreign

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<sup>14</sup> The presence of imported 'tekhnika', or electrical goods such as tape recorders, televisions, video recorders is especially relevant as a sign of the household's financial standing, and/or of connectedness to the world beyond the borders.

<sup>15</sup> Both were initially historians, saw themselves as 'real intellectuals' (in contrast to their opinion of many of their colleagues), and increasingly explicitly religious.

friends, small 'mass produced' souvenirs or expensive imported 'teknika'<sup>16</sup> was another way of distinguishing otherwise uniform interiors. Natasha, Valeria, Galina, Sergei, Maria and Vladimir all had photographs of foreign friends prominently displayed, often facing outwards from behind glass-encased shelves. This was significant in comparison to the relative absence of photographs of other friends, although many also had photographs of kin, especially their mothers. Along with souvenirs or other inexpensive imported artefacts, the display of these objects seemed to me to signify an important evaluation of contact with the outside world. This can only be appreciated against a background of isolation: where many members of my network had long been avid consumers of foreign news, media and literature, actual face to face contact with foreigners was restricted until the loosening of controls in the late 1980's. For intellectuals in particular, the possibility of integration in the wider world of their particular discipline was one of the major (and increasingly the only) benefit of the reform process.

In contrast, Julia and Mikhail's flat was characterised by the presence of 'kachestesvennie' (good quality), 'otechestvennie' (literally 'of the fatherland', ie, Soviet made) furniture and of expensive imported 'teknika'. In contrast to others who mostly disregarded any comment I made about their furniture, Julia was eloquent on the quality of her wall unit, how much it had cost at the time of purchase and how impossibly expensive it would be now. Mikhail spoke knowledgeably of the better quality of their Sony television and video-recorder, and if Julia never seemed to use the imported 'teknika' in her kitchen, she ensured that they were prominently displayed in their original boxes. There were considerable contradictions in this household's values and self-representations. Mikhail would complain bitterly about labour discipline, drunkenness and his low wages (\$30.00/month). Julia would fret about rising prices, and worry about how she would clothe her young daughter. Yet during the period of my fieldwork, there was consistent evidence of a secure financial standing. When they were burgled and lost not only their own expensive 'teknika' but also a borrowed video camera (reportedly worth \$2,000), they were remarkably calm (indeed their mood seemed comparatively cheerful). Not long after the burglary, they bought a car. Although Julia had asked

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<sup>16</sup>

'Teknika': household electrical equipment.

me (in June 1993) to send her shoes for the baby, I later learned that they had taken a cruise around the Mediterranean in the summer of 1994. In a sense the conjunction of imported 'teknika' displayed on the shelves of their 'kachestvennie, otechestvennie' wall unit reflected the skill with which they combined explicit expressions of common Russian complaints about reform, and adaptation to the possibilities of income generation in market conditions.

It is perhaps important here to note that the meaning of 'imported goods' as signs of either wealth or of connectedness to the world beyond the borders is undergoing considerable change. On a recent (spring 1995) trip to Russia, the almost complete absence of Russian products on the shelves of most shops was accompanied by (new) frequent expressions of the better quality of Russian products. On the one hand, the wide availability of expensive 'imported goods' reduces their distinctive potential. On the other, 'imported goods' are increasingly associated with the negatively valued profits of trade (largely believed to accrue from importing), 'speculation', and the 'mafia'.

### **The kitchen**

The kitchen is in many senses the heart of the flat. The meanings of the kitchen are derived from its association with the storage and preparation of food, informal commensality, (ie, drinking, smoking and 'kitchen philosophy'), kinship in both biological and metaphorical senses, women and motherhood. During the period of my fieldwork, the inherited uncertainties of the centrally planned economy combined with contemporary inflation to maintain a fear of food insecurity. One of the main topics of conversation amongst my friends was food: finding food, the rising cost of food, conserving food, growing food, tasty food, and the consensus that 'We like to eat' ('Myi liobim kushat'). Kitchens are the most important space in terms of food storage and preparation. The presence of stored food combines with the practices by which it is transformed (cooked or conserved) to make the kitchen a space of security. 'To have a full refrigerator' has connotations not only of food security, but also of the skilled accomplishments of household providers (usually women), and of the ability to feed guests at a moments notice. It is a mark of household status as a fully socialised unit.

Further, sociality is marked by commensality, and who eats with whom where is a reasonably good index of social relations. If the feeding of guests at a formal occasion (eg, birthday celebration) starts in the main room, it often ends with guests crowded around a small kitchen table, nibbling remainders of the main meal, drinking toasts, smoking,<sup>17</sup> and indulging in 'kitchen philosophy'. This idiom refers to conversation that is open and honest, where people feel free to express their opinions, whose meaning can only be understood in contrast to its absence on other contexts. It is not the topics of 'kitchen conversation' that are important, but the openness with which privately held opinions can be confidently expressed. Close relationships (of kinship or friendship) are marked by frequent visits to one another's homes, inevitably involving the consumption of food; the stronger the relationship, the more informal the commensality, and the more likely it is that it is performed in the kitchen. Thus the kitchen is imbued with a sense of close, social relationships, that are either kin or friendship (for a discussion of friendship see Schlapentokh 1989:170-177).

Finally although the kitchen is not a strictly gendered space, it retains connotations of traditional female roles, of domesticity and of motherhood. If men frequently appropriate the post-prandial kitchen table, I would suggest that the space is preferred because of its associations with kinship, which in itself is significantly feminised. The relation of trust par excellence in Russia is the idealised relation between mother and child, and the image of the mother is of one who feeds and puts her children's needs before her own. By placing itself in a ideologically specific space, 'kitchen philosophy' shares the connotations of trust implied by a feminised kinship (this is discussed further in Chapter 7).

### **Other rooms/bedrooms and privacy**

In two of the flats that I visited on a regular basis, the second room was used exclusively as a bedroom, and was therefore 'out of bounds' to visitors. This implies a certain avoidance of spaces associated with sexual relations. In other flats,

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<sup>17</sup>

People rarely smoke in their main rooms, partly in order to keep the air clean, especially if it also serves as a bedroom. In warm weather people smoke on the balcony. Often, if smoking does take place in the flat, it is only in the kitchen.

second rooms are often both bedrooms (sometimes conjugal bedrooms) and used for other purposes (eg, as a study or studio),<sup>18</sup> and no such avoidance was evident. Vysokovskii (1993) suggests that the 'disintegration of natural domesticity' is reflected in this confusion of spatial logic, as the home 'should' reflect the 'cosmos'. I would suggest however that although there is a strong 'public:private divide' at the threshold of the private household flat, there is evidence of collapsed distinctions between individual (sexual) and social reflected in the collapse of spatial distinctions **within** private space (ie, the absence of strong distinctions between the privacy of the sexually charged bedroom and the outward orientation of front rooms). Simple shortage of space requires abandonment of interior space privacy. People never talked about sex (although many of the women I knew loved to discuss romantic love), and sexuality seemed to have disappeared not only from discourse, but also from space. Beds are necessarily disguised as settees. The need for sexual privacy was in a sense the stumbling block of early post-revolutionary architects and planners. Although all other aspects of 'bourgeois family life' could conceivably and architecturally be 'collectivised', private sleeping areas for married couples were inevitably retained in the plans of even the most revolutionary designers (see eg, Bliznakov 1993:113-118).

## Privacy

One Russian author suggests that "In the beginning, privacy as a concept was directed mostly against outside interference -from the state, colleagues and neighbours - in family life, but gradually this concept started to pertain to those **within** the family" (Schlapentokh 1989:182). This may be comparatively true as the author has preceded this statement with a discussion of the lack of privacy afforded by communal flats, and the condemnation of privacy inherent in Soviet propaganda and practice. However, there seemed to be little of the almost obsessive defense of personal privacy commonly found in the west. The use of the main room for sleeping often means that some family members are without a private space of their own. Further visitors who have stayed later than the last train are frequently invited

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<sup>18</sup>

Valeria slept in her main room where she kept her grand piano, but more often used the upright piano on the other room for composing. The second room in Igor's flat was both bedroom and a studio where he painted.

to stay the night and visitors from outside Moscow are welcomed for as long as necessary. No one ever complains about the pressure these visitors make on already limited space. The only practice I noted which related directly to the problematic lack of privacy was the way in which people would close the door from a populated room into the hallway if they were going to use the toilet. One person I knew would turn on (or up) the radio as well as closing the door. This was always done with a certain amount of embarrassment and those present would politely pretend not to notice.

### **From deficits to inflation re-visited: consumption, hoarding and interior spaces**

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the transition from deficits to inflation in terms of effects on the processes of consumption. In this section, I want to discuss the ways in which both of these cultures of consumption (which encourage hoarding), contribute to the use of the private flat as a space in which scarce goods are stored. This will lead into the next section where I discuss the relation between objects in terms of order: chaos.

As the household constitutes a consumption unit, household space reflects the consumption practices of that unit. Given that people were worried about shortages during the Soviet period and are worried about inflation in the current climate, the acquisition of goods (primarily food, but also other household necessities) acquires a specific poignancy. The taken-for-granted notion that things are difficult to get, encourages people to hoard whatever they can find/afford. During periods of shortage, the classic Soviet housewife would buy ten boxes of washing powder whenever she came across a supply. When she should find washing powder again, she would buy another ten boxes, even if she had consumed only four of the previous ten. These stores of washing powder had to be accommodated in the household flat. Given the unpredictability of supplies, no single non-perishable good was exempt from the impulse to acquire and store, either for future use or for sharing with other households (especially those of close kin) or for exchange.

In the current climate of inflation, there has been a massive shift to household subsistence production, even amongst urban populations. During the period of my

fieldwork, both Lyuba and Olga were engaged in full scale household production and conservation of especially fruit and vegetables, grown on their dacha plots. Both women were proud of the fact that their households were self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables, and that they didn't have 'to run around the shops'. However, the fruits of their labours had then to be stored throughout the winter months. Both used their balconies as winter cold stores. The massive distribution of state land that has occurred since 1990 means that over 50% of all urban households now have access to a plot of land. The proportion in rural areas is nearer 100%.

The need to store large quantities of goods combines with the comparatively small size of household flats to create spaces which felt crowded and cramped to me, but felt cosy and secure in the midst of relative plenty to their occupants.

One of the most noticeable features of all the flats I visited was the ways in which the occupants resolved the contradictions between the relative shortage of storage space and the need to store relatively large quantities of things. Only the spacious prestigious flats of Galina and Valeria were endowed with large dedicated storage spaces (see sketches). Other flats relied on a combination of built-in cupboards and the acquisition of furniture providing storage space. At least one wall unit with shelves and cupboards is to be found in every flat. Sofas that convert to beds which also have storage space underneath are equally ubiquitous. Balconies are extremely important as storage space, providing a cold store for preserved fruit and vegetables, a space for storing bicycles and gardening tools, or the plethora of containers, bottles and jars that make food preservation possible. Many people enclose their balconies (Lyuba) to provide a frost free storage space. In Sergei's one-roomed flat the corridor had a false ceiling, with storage space above. It was clear that the contradiction between small flats and the need to store relatively large quantities of goods was acknowledged by architects (built-in cupboards, false ceilings) and by furniture designers (multi-purpose furniture with storage space).

In a sense the term 'hoarding' fails to capture the full meaning of the practices denoted. I noticed that people not only 'hoard' supplies of non-perishable foodstuffs and potentially useful household goods (soap), but in fact almost never throw anything out except for some food wastes (eg, potato peels). Plastic bags, bottles

Photo 6.2

Balconies: note that some are enclosed

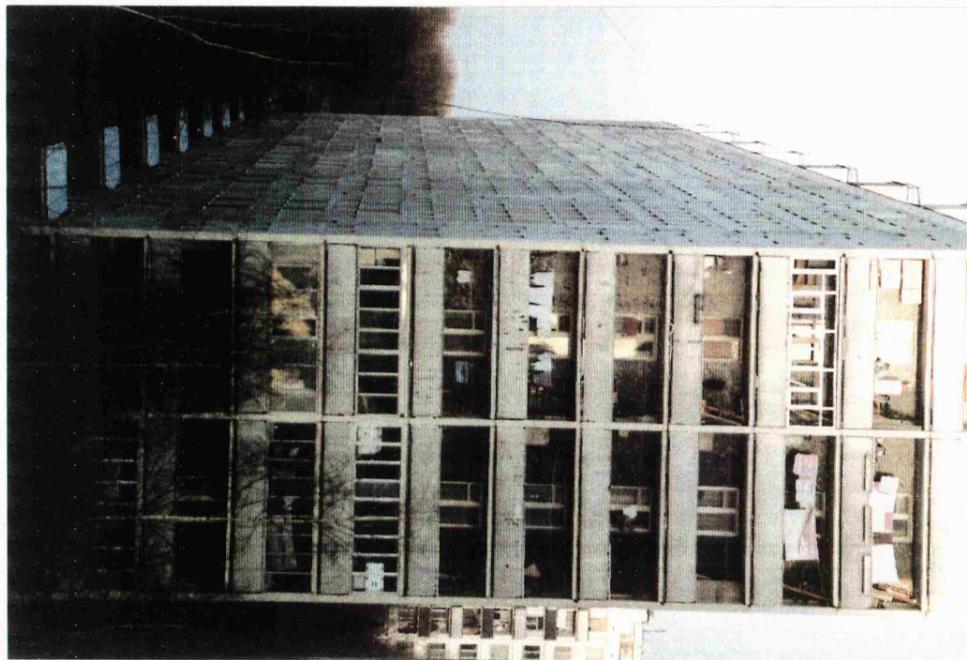
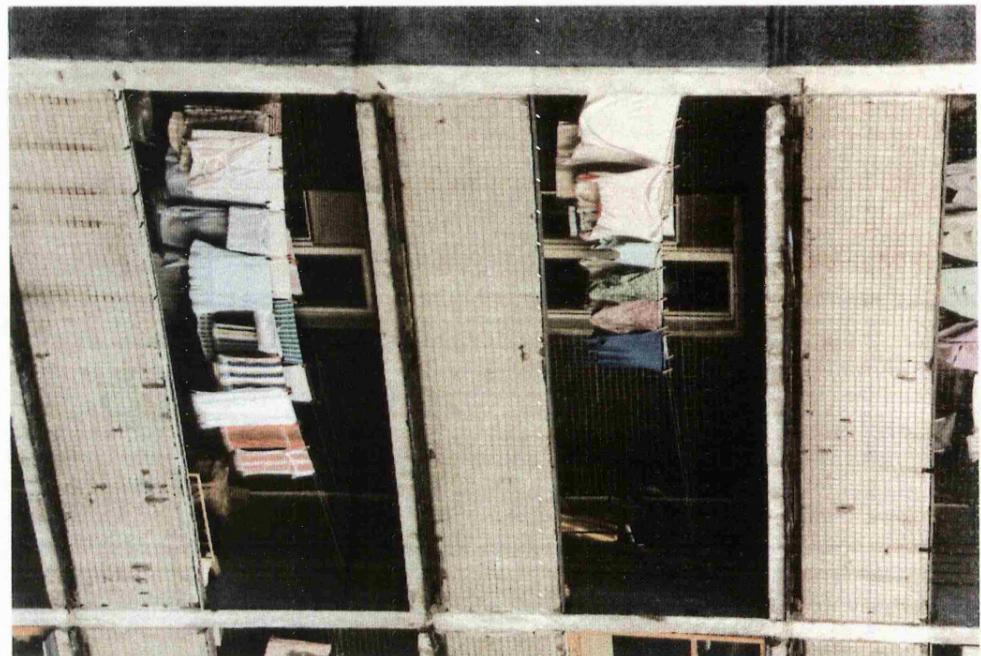


Photo 6.1

Balconies





and jars are washed and re-used; even the waxed cartons in which milk and keffir (a kind of liquid yoghurt) are sold were washed and retained by Olga for planting seedlings to be transplanted to her dacha later in the summer. Those with dacha plots (Olga and Lyuba) even washed and dried tea leaves and eggshells for use in their gardens: these also had to be stored throughout the winter months until needed. Empty bottles are kept either for household use or to return for cash.<sup>19</sup> Similarly some friends of Maria's still kept large quantities of old newspapers.<sup>20</sup> Sergei explained to me why people also keep all electrical equipment, even if it is beyond repair: 'this is because it is 'brak' [slang for poor quality Soviet made goods], especially 'teknika' [electrical equipment]. All teknika is kept in case the parts can be used to keep other pieces working'. Both Galina and Olga had drawers full of various medicines, some of which were out of date, but kept in case they were unable to get what they needed when in poor health. In the flat that I rented (which had admittedly become a storage space for the whole family), I found boxes with short pieces of string or wire, various electrical components, nuts, bolts, nails and screws, pills in bottles without labels, ancient worn slippers, endless clean folded rags, clothing, enough household linen to serve a hotel, hundreds of empty jars of various sizes, three complete dinner services, dozens of saucepans, batteries, toilet paper, light bulbs, soap, sewing materials, non-working electrical equipment (including three televisions), a variety of tools, writing materials, and a small box full of broken watches and clocks. Although various members of the family called around on a fairly frequent basis, only once did Sasha come around specifically to look for a particular tool.

The notion that people never throw anything out was reinforced when I called around to help Katya pack. It became clear that she had not thrown anything out since she had moved into the flat some ten years previously. As well as her own things she had boxes of things belonging to people she had not seen for ten years,

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<sup>19</sup> This was not a simple process as not all drink shops will accept empty bottles, and those that do, only do so at certain unpredictable times. I spent several hours one morning trying to return bottles, only to be told that "Myi nie primiamev sevodnia" (we are not taking [any] today). When I eventually gave up and put them in a rubbish container, they were immediately collected by an elderly woman who expressed her gratitude at my 'gift'. Returning bottles has become a means of supplementing inadequate pensions as well as being a means of acquiring the cash for a bottle of vodka.

<sup>20</sup> Maria explained why her friends kept these huge piles of newspapers. Apparently in the past, it was possible to exchange a certain weight of newspapers for books. Although this was no longer possible, she said that her friends 'didn't know what else to do with them'.

might never see again, but which she was keeping 'just in case they ever want it'. She had not only kept every piece of paper and empty envelope she had ever received, but packed it all and moved it to her new abode. Whilst we were packing, she would show me some object, acknowledge its complete non-utility and then toss it carelessly in a box for moving to the new flat. When I asked why she was taking these completely useless things with her, she said "I can't throw anything away. They're my things. What else can I do with them." Although she agreed in principle with my suggestion that she throw out the things she really neither needed or wanted, she couldn't quite bring herself to do it, even though she found it difficult to explain why.

### **The relation between objects: order : chaos**

One of the most significant distinctions between interiors was the extent of order or chaos that prevailed. Although intuitively, it would seem that the imposition of order requires more input than the proliferation of chaos, it seemed to me that the more chaotic households were actually quite 'consciously constructed'. Of the households that I visited on a regular basis, five were conscientiously chaotic. One of these was Natasha's. It was clear that the interior of the flat was largely a reflection of Natasha's persona, in which her daughter and husband were more or less passive participants. It was Natasha who would remark on the chaos, occasionally apologising half-heartedly for the mess, but making it clear that she approved of it. Her daughter occasionally participated in these remarks, adding that 'we haven't got the time to do housework, it's not interesting'. Igor never offered an opinion on the state of the flat and seemed to be happy to accept Natasha's preference for chaos. I did however suspect that, left to his own devices, he might have preferred a bit less of it. The idea that 'they didn't have the time to do housework' was clearly a household myth, as Anna often sat for an hour or two in the afternoon, doing nothing, playing patience, watching television. Similarly Natasha admitted that she was working less and less at the Institute, and that the longer she went without pay the less inclined she felt to do so. Igor was the only member of the household to be truly involved in full time work which required his absence from the flat for most of the day, five days a week. That none of them ever seemed to do any 'housework' seemed to say more about choice than about time available.

Another 'chaotic' flat belonged to my friend Katya. For the first half of my stay she was still living in a room in a communal flat in the centre of town. This room was crammed with furniture and housed a piano, a heavy old dresser, several chests of drawers, a wardrobe, a book case, a round table, several chairs, a sofa bed and a fridge. There was just enough room to manoeuvre between the furniture. All the shelves were filled to overflowing, cupboards and drawers were stuffed to capacity and every horizontal space was covered with icons, ornaments, photographs, papers and books. To some extent the chaos that reigned in Katya's room was explicable by the lack of space; she lived, worked and prepared food in this room, using the communal kitchen for cooking and washing dishes and the bathroom for washing. All the rest of her activities were conducted in this crowded space. About half way through the year, this communal flat was 'bought' from the residents by some young 'estate agents', who agreed to re-house the families in self-contained flats. They eventually offered Katya a one roomed flat in a prestigious block in another part of the centre. However, even six months after she had moved, there were still cardboard boxes full of things piled up in the kitchen. Some had been opened and the contents rifled for a can opener or a saucepan lid. Once found, the box remained open for future rummaging. When I had been to visit Katya after she had been in her new flat for a month or two, Natasha asked me if things were any more orderly. When I said that they were much the same, Natasha expressed the opinion that it would always be like that with some pleasure. She was satisfied and linked the chaos of Katya's living conditions with the fact that she was 'kind, hard-working and always helping people' (these characteristics were intended to distinguish Katya from the rest of the population).

The other 'chaotic' flats that I visited were less well known to me. One was inhabited by my friend Misha and his mother Dima. Misha told me that when he had returned from a long trip abroad he had spent days cleaning up the flat, but that it was almost impossible to make any real impact because of all the things his mother hoarded. His mother was a very dynamic paediatrician, who was involved in setting up a sanatorium for children. This took up all her time and energy and she really had no time for housework. Although Misha felt it necessary to 'apologise for the mess', his mother's apology was pretty half-hearted. She seemed confident that I would understand that she had better things to do than clean house. Again the

chaos was as much about the incredible quantity of things stuffed into available spaces.

The other two 'chaotic' flats I visited were inhabited by 'artists'. One was the home of a friend of Maria's, which she shared with her two adolescent children and a variety of semi-transient musicians and artists. This was a huge flat by Soviet standards, and had at one time been a communal flat. As the other residents had been re-housed, the tenancy of the whole flat had reverted to Anna. Here again, the furniture was all 'old', inherited from a pre-revolutionary age. Indeed when I offered the opinion that a certain huge heavy dresser must be worth a lot of money, Anna replied with a convinced 'Niet', adding that it was very old (this implying that it was without monetary value). She just said that she preferred old furniture. This I understood to have two, linked meanings. One was about a connection to pre-revolutionary values and ideas, and implied a negative evaluation of Soviet ideology and practice. The other was more a statement about rejecting crass materialism. By 'making do' with old furniture, she was expressing her preference for the more 'spiritual' or 'artistic' pursuits. Indeed I attended several 'home concerts' in this flat. These were straight out of the pages of a 19th century Russian novel, with young women playing classical music, or singing, followed by tea, cakes and 'conversation'. The concession to the present was the passing of a hat 'to collect money for a grand piano'.

Similarly the other 'chaotic' flat that I visited with my friend Maria was also an ex-communal flat whose other tenants had moved on. It was also huge and untidy, inhabited by a Russian folk music specialist, his wife and their two small children. Here again there were books and old newspapers piled everywhere, clothes, toys, food and sheet music in happy profusion in and on every available space. This couple were totally engaged with finding, recording, learning and singing 'real', 'old', Russian folk music. Again there seemed to be a strong connection between an identification with the (pre-Soviet) past, old furniture and chaotic relations between objects. In their 'front room' stood a huge heavy dusty old dresser, and in common with the wall unit in more modern flats, it housed their 'special china'. In this case however, instead of immaculate tea sets and highly polished glasses, there were a variety of old, ornate and dusty decanters, tea pots and serving dishes.

I would suggest that there is a kind of resistance being played out in these chaotic interiors. The emphasis on order in Soviet Russia is tangible and pervasive. If you ask someone how they are, they often reply that everything's orderly ('vsio v'pariadkie'). Things being orderly is synonymous with everything being OK, fine. Order is enforced and/or encouraged in thousands of small ways, and there are few concepts more frightening to people than the notion of chaos and disorder. Yet there is a kind of Russian (not Soviet) identification with chaos. This is evident in the oft repeated observation, 'that you cannot understand Russia, you can only believe in her' or in the frequent assertion that 'it is impossible to understand anything in this country'. These phrases are always pronounced with a mixture of pride and despair, like a mother discussing a loved but wayward child. Both Katya and Natasha had been historians before they became ethnologists and their brand of ethnology was distinctly of the 'study of the pure primitive' variety. Maria's friends' musical interests ranged from the classical to traditional Russian folk. Thus in four of the five households, there was a distinct orientation to a pre-revolutionary Russian past, which was played out in a chaotic/intellectual/spiritual/artistic environment, opposing the orderly materialism of Soviet ideology. In some sense this interior chaos served as a form of resistance.

In contrast, both Galia's and her daughter's Julia's flats were paragons of cleanliness, order, and newness. Although this achievement was remarkable enough for a woman with a mobile baby, it was extraordinary for her mother who worked full time, had an hour trip each way to and from work, spent many weekends working at the dacha, gardening and/or preserving fruit and vegetables, and whose husband had been programmed never to do housework. Both were two roomed flats, Julia's slightly smaller than her mother's. In Galia' flat there was a profuse display of china and glasses in the display cabinet of the wall unit, all symmetrically arranged with the tea cups nesting in a circle on stacks of saucers. I only ever glimpsed the bedroom, but noticed a large double bed covered with a frilly, shiny flowered bedspread. All the wallpaper, carpets and soft furnishings were patterned. Galia's kitchen was small, but with an enclosed balcony. Dishes never remained unwashed for more than a few minutes.

Julia's flat was similar to her mother's in its symmetrical displays, but the range of

objects displayed reflected the markers of success of another generation. Along with the china and glasses were displayed expensive, imported electrical equipment (see discussion above) and toys- occasionally, Margarita would be given one of these toys to play with for a few minutes, after which it would be replaced in its original position. They had a video as well as a gleaming Sony television on a special table which also housed a symmetrical display of video-cassettes. Similarly the audio cassette player was prominently displayed on a shelf with a cassette holder. In the kitchen there were a number of imported appliances strategically placed on shelves, still in their boxes. Although I was a frequent visitor, I never saw Julia actually use any of these appliances.<sup>21</sup>

Julia's and Lyuba's explicit attention to household management was in distinct contrast to Natasha's, Katya's, Dima's or Anna's. This seemed to me to reflect different orientations to the concept of order. Where the former spent considerable effort in the maintenance of household order, the latter were more implicitly engaged in a form of practical resistance to the 'rational, functional, materialist ideology' of Soviet life. If the former were in a far more secure social and economic position, they also had a more 'modern' interest in maintaining (or improving) their material surroundings; the latter eschewed such interest in favour of values related to the more distant past (pre-Revolution), Russian literature, arts, and spirituality.

### **Privatisation and the novelty of economic value of a Moscow flat**

The right to privatise flats was initiated by a decision of the Council of Ministers of the USSR in December 1988. The passing of the 'Law on the Privatisation of the Housing Fund of the RSFSR' on 4 July 1991 established the right of resident families to receive 9 m<sup>2</sup>. per family plus 18 m<sup>2</sup> per family member, free of charge. Those occupying less than the 'norm' were to be compensated and those occupying more than the 'norm' were to be required to pay. Details were left to municipal governments.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The practice of collecting and displaying imported goods without ever actually using them is also discussed by Vysokovskii (1993:284).

<sup>22</sup> See Ruble 1995 for a discussion of housing privatisation in Yaroslavl.

During the period of my fieldwork, there was much confused concern with the novel possibility of 'privatising' the household flat. However, inquires amongst my informants frequently failed to illicit any coherent explanation of how you privatise your flat, why you should or should not, or what it means 'privatizirovat'.

Similarly, letters to the newspapers revealed considerable confusion about what privatisation might mean ('Can you privatise a room in a hostel?' 'Can you own several flats?' 'Who owns the attic and basement?' 'Can you privatise a cooperative flat? or a communal flat'). Eventually, people settled on a core meaning, ie, that privatisation means having the right to sell your flat and to buy another.

Privatisation was virtually free, with a small fee levied to cover administrative costs.<sup>23</sup> Cooperative flats in fact could be privatised, also for a minimal fee, but using a somewhat different administrative procedure. If all of my informants eventually did 'privatise' their flats, all claimed that this had little real meaning for them as none had any intention of selling or moving.

The initial ignorance of the economic implications of housing privatisation can be illustrated by the following story. Initially, my friend Katya lived in a filthy, crowded 'komunalka' (communal flat) in a rather beautiful building facing Patriarshkie Prudie. Some young real estate dealers offered to re-house the tenants of this flat in return for vacant possession. (Their intention was to renovate the flat and rent it to foreigners). Katya was given the choice between a two-roomed flat in a concrete-panel built block in a micro-raion or a one-roomed flat in one of the wedding cake buildings in the centre (in the building which houses the Hotel Ukraine). The young men also offered to buy her a new refrigerator and a new television, if she would agree to move. Although she was happy to move, Katya was unable to decide between the two offers. She wanted a two-roomed flat but dreaded having to travel on the Metro, to which she had a particular aversion.<sup>24</sup> She asked my advice as well as that of others. When I first pointed out the economic implications of having even a smaller flat in a prestigious building in the centre, she looked wholly bemused. When I explained that 'if she wanted to, she

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<sup>23</sup> The fee quoted in January 1993 was 1400 roubles (\$3.88). Argumenti i Fakti No.1 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Katya's dilemma was based on the contradiction between the common evaluation of flats on the basis of size and number of rooms (which she shared), and her idiosyncratic aversion to travelling by Metro. When she canvassed the opinions of others, they inevitably encouraged her to opt for the two roomed, larger flat.

could sell it or rent it sometime in the future for more money than a two roomed flat in a micro-raion', she found it almost impossible to believe that value could be attached to anything other than size. She also kept repeating that she didn't want to sell it or rent it, ignoring the hypothetical nature of my suggestion. She eventually moved into the wedding cake, but for several months afterwards complained that the 'rebiata' (the lads) had not yet given her a refrigerator. It was only after about three months that she mentioned, casually, that she also had no papers for the new flat. Clearly, as far as she was concerned the refrigerator was more important than verifying her legal entitlement both to occupy the flat and to the private ownership of the flat (consistent with giving up her right of residence in the 'komunalka'). She did eventually get the paperwork sorted out (although she was even then none too sure of its legality).

Several months later however, she began to acknowledge the possibilities presented by ownership of this flat: she explained to me in detail how she might rent it out in order to raise the money for a field trip. She had phoned around several agencies, and was beginning to be concerned with renting to the highest bidder. What is interesting is the very steep learning curve that Katya, like many others, had to climb in order to recognise the economic importance of housing privatisation.

In contrast, Valeria discovered early on that having a spacious, well-furnished flat in a prestigious location (off Tverskaya St.) was a potential source of income. From early 1992, Valeria had been sub-letting her flat for short periods of time to an Italian doctor, who was frequently in Moscow on business. She would vacate the flat for the period of his stay (staying with various friends), and was charging him \$30.00 per day.<sup>25</sup> During the time I was in Moscow, she also established relations with an organisation, which put her in touch with short term visitors who preferred a flat to staying in hotels. Although she was never quite sure of the precise state of her finances, Valeria estimated that she had made nearly \$2,000.00 between June 1992 and June 1993, simply from sub-letting her flat. (Average monthly wages for the period were about \$65.00 or ca. \$780.00 p/a.) Further she was able to 'invest' this capital in various business deals, lending capital at an agreed monthly rate of

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<sup>25</sup> When I spoke to Valeria in August 1995, she told me that she was now charging \$70.00 per day, because 'everything is unbelievably expensive and everyone is charging higher rents for flats'.

interest of about 100%.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, my landlords, who had been charging me \$50.00/month until January 1993, approached me somewhat sheepishly to increase the rent to \$70.00, making references to inflation, and to the high rents charged in the centre. They also asked (as a favour) if I could give them six months in advance, so that they could build a small house on their dacha plot and avoid high rates of interest from commercial banks. (As a favour, I conceded.) A friend of Galina's also told me that she and her two children had moved in with her mother, in order to rent out their central two-roomed flat for \$200.00/month. She said that she had to resort to renting her flat in order to survive as her wages were being paid less than regularly.

In January 1993, *Argumenti i Fakti* ran a full page article, explaining the various forces that affect the prices of flats. The whole tone of the article reflects the novelty of the subject. For example, it reports that the value of flats in the capital varies according to their 'characteristics', ie, whether it is a 'komunalka' (communal flat), a 'Khrushchevki' (flat in a five storied block without lifts), or in a 'Stalinskie khoromi' (Stalin mansion). Location (in the centre, in an ecologically clean zone, near a metro station) is another factor, as is whether the building is built of brick or of concrete slabs.

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<sup>26</sup> Valeria would lend her money to 'friends' in business, who made generous promises of 100% interest/month but rarely fulfilled them. However, she was (almost) always repaid eventually and with substantial interest, even if it was never quite as high as initially promised. This information was gleaned from hints and suggestions, as she would never answer any direct questions about her financial dealings. Only when she 'lost' \$5,000.00 (a 'friend' had invested it for her unwisely), did she reveal the actual extent of her risk-taking. She was fairly clear about the notion of risk, and played off her dotty image with a sometimes shrewd business sense.

Prices reported are as follows:

**Table 6.3**

**Purchase Prices (flats), Moscow, 1991-2**

		US Dollars	
		1991	1992
<b>Average flat prices</b>			
one roomed flat	(19-20m <sup>2</sup> )	4-6000	17-19,000
two roomed flat	(27m <sup>2</sup> )	15,000	25-28,000
three roomed flat	(46m <sup>2</sup> )	20,000	37-45,000
<b>Better quality flats*</b>			
one roomed flat		10,000	25-30,000
two roomed flat		20,000	45-55,000
three roomed flat		25,000	70-90,000

\* ie, 'flats with kitchens of at least 8 m<sup>2</sup>, and separate rooms of at least 16 m<sup>2</sup>'.

**Table 6.4**

**Average Monthly Rents (flats), Moscow  
as at January 1993 in US dollars**

one roomed flat	70-130
two roomed flat	150-220
three roomed flat	300-500
top rent for a three roomed flat	1,300

More recent conversations with Muscovites (spring 1995) reveal that there is an increasing recognition of the economic potential of owning a flat (ie, of having privatised one's flat) in the capital. Natasha's daughter's boyfriend has apparently sold his mother's flat, and 'invested' the proceeds in 'business'. Similarly Maria's ex-boyfriend has sold his flat, moved in with his mother and 'invested' the proceeds. People can tell you that it is impossible to rent even a one-roomed flat in a Khrushchevski for less than \$200/month, or that flat purchase prices in the centre are being counted in six figures in US dollars. Given the decreasing value of wages and high inflation, initial disinterest in the 'meaning of privatisation' is yielding to recognition of occupying a source of potential wealth. This recognition of course varies with the extent to which this potential can be realised in practice. For those

who intend to stay in the city, there is little profit in selling a flat, only to have to buy another.<sup>27</sup> However, it is clear that for the younger and/or more mobile sections of the population, the possibility to release the capital tied up in a flat is tempting. The possibility of letting one's flat provides Muscovites with a certain measure of financial security.

The development of a housing market in Moscow is beginning to influence a more distinctive evaluation of different areas within the city. If location previously was evaluated on the basis of the prestigiousness of the centre, the distance from any Metro station or the purity of the air, a small map produced in the same article in *Argumenti i Fakti* reflects the growing economic expression of these geographical preferences. If the centre or south west Moscow were formerly considered to be 'khoroshi raion' (good areas), they are now also beginning to be more expensive areas.



Similarly, "Delvoy Mir" (Business World) reports on emerging distinctions in Moscow housing space prices. (Note that regions are denoted by the name of the nearest Metro station - see Chapter 4.2)

<sup>27</sup> I have however heard rumours that Irina and Andrei have sold their two roomed flat and bought a three roomed flat, confirming my premonition of their upward mobility.

**Table 6.5****Purchase prices of flats, by Moscow districts, 1993****price per square metre in US dollars**

Region	Total space	Living space	Building category
Kievskaya	2,000	2,970	brick
Kropotkinskaya	1,420	2,430	brick
Okhotnyy Ryad	1,330	1,870	brick
Smolenskaya	1,300	1,880	brick
			frame & panel
Universitet	1,060	1,940	brick
Mayakovskaya	1,000	1,520	brick
Taganskaya	1,000	1,410	brick
Sokol	980	1,310	brick
Krasnyye Vorota	980	1,630	brick
VDNKh	980	1,580	brick
	720	1,120	frame & panel
	520	890	panel
Park Kultury	940	1,430	brick
	880	1,260	frame & panel
Sukharevskaya	960	1,820	brick
Aeroport	970	1,330	brick
Kutuzovskaya	1,000	1,270	brick
Alekseyevskaya	940	1,510	brick
Profsouyznaya	930	1,400	brick
Sportivnaya	920	1,290	frame & panel
Serpukhovskaya	920	1,470	brick
Tverskaya	900	1,670	brick
Bagrationovskaya	890	1,480	brick
Dinamo	890	1,470	brick
Baumanskaya & Semenovskaya	880	1,360	brick
Ulitsa 1905 Goda	870	1,630	brick
Shabolovskaya	860	1,120	frame & panel
Yugo-Zapadnaya	850	1,400	frame & panel
Oktyabrskoye Pole	850	1,200	frame & panel
Leninsky Prospekt	840	1,510	brick
Paveletskaya	830	1,360	brick
Proletarskaya	820	1,420	frame & panel
Rizhshaya	800	1,000	panel
Yasenovo	800	1,370	frame & panel
Shchelkovskaya	800	1,220	frame & panel
Kantemirovskaya	790	1,170	frame & panel
Tulskaya	790	1,080	panel
Vykhino	770	1,070	panel
Tekstilshchiki	620	880	panel
Tsaritsyno	620	1,020	panel
Ryazanskiy Prospekt	610	1,050	panel
Skhodnenskaya	590	990	panel
Kakhovskaya	560	800	panel
Petrovsko-Razumovskaya	520	1,000	panel
Novye Cheremushki	520	920	panel
Perovo	510	640	panel

Source: Delovoy Mir, 8-14 November 1993, 8 reproduced in Karasik T.W. (ed.) 'Russia and Eurasia Facts and Figures Annual' Vol. 19 1994

# МОСКОВСКИЙ МЕТРОПОЛИТЕН



1995-1996 BRITISH JOURNAL OF POLITICS

Горьковская — Тверская  
Проспект Маркса — Охотный ряд  
Площадь Свердлова — Театральная  
Калининская — Александровский сад  
Дзержинская — Лубянка

Площадь Ногина — Китай-город  
Нироевская — Чистые пруды  
Колхозная — Сухаревская  
Шербаковская — Алексеевская  
Ленино — Царицыно



In one sense, Harvey's description of late nineteenth century Paris could be applied to Moscow of the 1990's.

Parisian property was more and more appreciated as a pure financial asset, as a form of **fictitious** capital whose exchange value, integrated into the general circulation of capital, entirely dominates use value".

(Harvey 1985:82, bold mine)

In Moscow, however, I would question whether the possibility of realising 'exchange value' is synonymous with the **domination** of 'use value' by 'exchange value'.

Whether this potential 'exchange value' is operationalised or not is at least partly a matter of choice, releasing capital which can be invested elsewhere. Some (young entrepreneurial types) choose to sell their flats (or those of their kin) and take the risks. Others can supplement an inadequate income through renting their flats. As property has been more or less equitably distributed amongst the population and has not been subject to prior accumulations of capital (the bourgeoisie, landed gentry etc. of nineteenth century France), I would argue that as a lived experience, this transition has liberating, as well as exploitative effects. On the one hand, the occupancy of a flat in a desirable area, now has financial as well as 'prestige' connotations, absent at the time of allocation. There is therefore a certain element of 'chance' and of course of risk, in the potential for exchanging a flat for liquid cash. On the other hand, there is no doubt that some people's ignorance of the potential value of their flats is exploited by the unscrupulous.

Harvey also decries the attendant 'pulverisation' of space, that attended the re-construction of Paris:

That Paris was more spatially segregated in 1870 than in 1850 was only to be expected, given the manner in which flows of capital were unleashed to the tasks of restructuring the built environment and its spatial configuration....Much of the worker population was despatched to the periphery...or doubled up in overcrowded, high rent locations closer to the centre.

(Harvey 1985:95)

In the 'socialist space' of Soviet Russia, workers and intelligentsia alike were also banished to the periphery or doubled up in communal flats in the centre. There may

have been relatively little distinction between the housing of the privileged and that of the masses (compared to comparable distinctions in the west), but everybody lived in proletarian 'housing closeness'. Further with regard to the segregation that followed the restructuring of Paris, we might query the distinction between 'segregation' and the geographical identification of 'neighbourhood or local community'. Although there was very little residential segregation in Soviet Moscow, on the basis of class or ethnic identity, there were also no neighbourhoods or 'local communities', as these are fondly imagined by critics of the pulverisation of space by capital.

The absence of neighbourhoods as communities in Moscow was closely linked to the absence of a housing market, housing mobility or the ability to choose where to live. Whereas,

In most western cities, the zoning of cities into neighbourhoods with markedly different social characteristics is strongly influenced by the operation of housing markets

(Giddens 1984:130)

Given choices, most people tend to choose to live near their place of work, near friends or relatives, or near to those with whom they share some kind of interest (eg, ethnic group).

However, as Vysokovskii notes, 47% of respondents in Tver couldn't answer a question about whether they had the opportunity to choose where to live. He concludes that the respondents

have developed no idea within themselves about what they might prefer for a living environment. ... When people have no vested interest in the urban environment...then there is no urban environment to speak of

(Vysokovskii 1993:287-288)

As economic classes emerge, I would predict that these will become imprinted on the urban landscape as 'prestigious' areas are monopolised by those with economic means. This will be a total reversal of the former situation. If certain apartment blocks were 'reserved' for different elites during the Soviet period, there was only

the weakest link between area and income. Indeed the presence of many old 'komunalkas' in the centre often meant that some of the poorest members of Soviet society lived in some of the most prestigious areas (if in the least prestigious conditions). As housing mobility gains momentum, there may well be a 'segregation' or 'pulverisation' of space, but there may also emerge neighbourhoods where co-residents share some form of interests or identity, be these economic, ethnic, or occupational. It will be interesting to see what if any other kinds of interest groupings also imprint themselves on the urban landscape. Will Leninskie raion become the Islington of Moscow? Will 'polluted' Proletarskie raion become the Hackney?

### End remarks

I expected the interiors of Moscow flats to represent the 'creation of a cultural milieu' through the 'appropriation of mass produced objects' and their transformation 'from commodities to possessions' (Appadurai 1986; Bourdieu 1984; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Douglas & Isherwood 1978, Gullestad 1984, 1992; Miller 1987, 1988). However, the literature on consumption in western contexts proved to be of heuristic utility at best. The basic assumption that people creatively use 'things' to express identity, distinction or aspirations is based on a very western style of expert consumerism. Where things are not only mass-produced (as in the west), but also mass-produced by the state, the resultant relative uniformity of material objects reduces their potential as distinctive markers. If we focus the lens of our attention on the flat itself, its layout and furnishing, uniformity prevails over distinction. Most of the objects that occupy space in a Moscow flat have not been chosen from amongst a mass of other objects, with differing styles, colours, ethnic or historical connotations. The mass-produced household objects of the FSU are overwhelmingly 'modern', practical, differing conceptually only in the quality of their construction.<sup>28</sup> In an economy of shortage, the very act of acquisition requires time, energy, contacts and expertise. There is little space within

<sup>28</sup> The main criteria of distinction between for example, otherwise identical wall units is whether or not it is 'kachestvennie' (of good quality). The positive connotations of 'kachestvennie' objects are their functional durability. Although 'kachestvennie' objects may be somewhat more expensive, and may express a certain status of the owner, these are fairly simple hierarchical distinctions. There is no sense of a more elaborate personal distinction, except perhaps of competent household management.

the economy of consumption for the elaboration of personal idiosyncrasies through the symbolic acquisition of objects. I saw little evidence of 'appropriating the state' as in Miller's 1988 discussion of the reconstruction of council house kitchens in the UK (although see Vysokovskii 1993:284).

Where distinctions are expressed in material form, it is in the display of smaller objects, photographs of foreign friends, souvenirs, china services, favourite books announcing the characteristics of the household by facing out into the room. The careless arrangement of objects in space, the heaps of papers topped by an empty teacup constitute a statement of resistance to prevailing norms of orderly, rational household management. Differences in 'tastes' in Art do not necessarily translate into differences in 'tastes' in household furnishings. Where in the FSU, the former are critical markers of the distinction between the 'intelligentsia' and the rest, the households of the intelligentsia are not marked by the expression of different personalised aesthetics (except in terms of a relative disregard for appearances [order]). As far as appearances are concerned, Natasha's flat was very like Rosa's.

However, the space of the self-contained flat is consonant with particular kinds of social relations and with an emotional atmosphere of warmth, hospitality, friendship, kinship, commensality and the free exchange of sincerity. These meanings are immanent in the space, and they are constructed in spite of rather than through the consumption of mass produced objects; where the Moscow flat differs from the Norwegian housewives' (Gullestad 1984) is in the reduction in distinctive means for constructing a 'better' or 'different' kind of home. Here Douglas's (1978) almost quantitative analysis of the relation between 'class' and consumption has heuristic value. Reduced diversity of things reduces the diversity of markers in a 'live information system'. The messages of (personal/household) distinction and status are restricted in the absence of suitably distinctive markers. Here the spatial uniformity of size and layout is linked to a relative collapse of the distinction between 'front stage' and 'back stage' parts of the house.<sup>29</sup> Frequently, there simply isn't enough room in a flat to sustain the privacy and distinction of private 'back stage' parts. We can see the operation of both conformity (ubiquitous wall

<sup>29</sup> See Lorna Weatherill (1988) for a discussion of the more significant changes in 'front stage' versus 'back stage' patterns of consumption in 17th and 18th century England.

units) and distinction (presence : absence of foreign 'contact' [photographs or imported video-recorder])(Stirrat 1989), but not the elaborate creation of distinctive meanings through the consumption of finely grained diversity. It seems that there is a structural feedback mechanism in operation. An overall absence of diverse goods, stifles the formation of elaborate systems of signification embodied in a diversity of objects (or of 'fetishised commodities'). Objects 'without meaning' cannot be desired. The appearance of a diversity of objects on Moscow streets has not (yet) been accompanied by the stimulation of desire, because there are no culturally relevant meanings to attach to these objects. Things can be 'necessary' (a refrigerator or a bed-settee), useful (a can opener), or personalised (gift, photograph or souvenir); they cannot mean 'I love art deco' (with all the associated connotations), or 'I hate 1950's modernism'. Things and space can express a certain position in a hierarchy (more rooms, better quality wall units, ample 'services'), but this hierarchy is conceptualised on a single plane. You can have a better (bigger) flat, or live in a better region (centre, clean air), but within the hierarchy of better to worse flats and regions there is almost no lateral or horizontal conception of difference, that is played out in the 'construction of a personalised cultural milieu'. 'Use value' predominates.

In a depressing indictment of 'domesticity as anti-hero', Vysokovskii concludes:

...the lack of any hope for improved housing or choice according to preference, the dissatisfaction with present apartments and buildings; the lowering of expectations for one's living environment to a mediocre level of comfort; the oppressive uniformity of surroundings, apartments, furniture. These and many other elements essentially lead to one point. There is a terrible crisis in the design and construction of mass housing, a crisis fostered by the ideals of socialist equality and fairness. Housing in the Soviet Union was unprecedented in its alienating effect, in its uniformity, and in its desirability, yet it is inherently deeply de-humanised. Just living a day to day existence in such an environment amounts to a life long crusade consuming colossal amounts of effort, mental energy and time. There is scarcely enough of these commodities within the majority to lay a veneer of warmth and humanity atop the concrete slabs of identical box apartments sufficient to create what might be called domesticity.

(Vysokovskii 1993:284)

If I empathise with Vysokovskii's pessimistic assessment of the potential for personalised domesticity in contemporary Russia, on the grounds of architectural, planning and economic constraints, I would also argue that domesticity in contemporary Russia is a product not only of its environment, to which inhabitants remain studiously blind, but also of the relationships and affections which attend the meeting of friends and relatives in the family flat. Consistent with a widespread disregard for appearances, the Russian household constructs its private domesticity through evanescent commensality and conversation. It is a domesticity of the spirit (of 'dushi'), symbolised by personalised toasts and the consumption of 'strong spirit'. In the next chapter, I will turn to the practices and meanings surrounding private commensality and the consumption of 'strong spirit' (vodka), and its implications for the construction of private social worlds. This is largely meaningful against the backdrop of rudeness, instrumentality, alienation, and suspicion that pervades the outside space of the public world. Schlapentokh (1989) stresses the growing importance of 'privatism' as the locus of sincere personal inter-relationships in post-Stalin era, as 'collectivism' became synonymous with corruption and deceit.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Private Space Leisure and Agency Kinship and Friendship Commensality and the Consumption of 'Strong Spirit'**

This penultimate chapter is concerned with the description and analysis of the practices and meanings associated with the private space of the self-contained household flat, as these are enacted through the ideal and the quotidian relationships between kin, friends and guests, and through specific forms of consumption. The meaning of the private self-contained flat is tinged both with the continuous presence of its inhabitants (most often close kin), and with the memory and traces of friends, guests and visitors with whom the regular inhabitants have shared food, drink and conversation. To the extent that the meaning of the space is constructed by the nature of the relationships associated with it, being in this space is an essential factor in the realisation of those relationships. Much of the chapter is concerned with the analysis of highly valued private space commensality, when kin and friends gather to eat, drink and converse. The consumption of alcohol (especially vodka) in this context is symbolically important and I conclude with a discussion of the consumption of vodka, as a substance which 'stands for' particular ways of being and sociality.

The discussion is also concerned with the tension between individual intention or agency and the patterned behaviour of participants. On the one hand, the collection of friends and kin around the table, conversing and consuming commensally, symbolises the epitome of open and sincere social interaction, where people 'can be themselves', trust their interlocutors, and express their innermost thoughts and feelings. The connection between private commensality and trust or honesty is ideologically opposed to the imagined distrust and dishonesty which is thought to

characterise public space interactions and relationships. As actions in the public universe beyond the walls of the private flat are constructed as constrained by a determining structure incarnate, actions within those walls are characterised as subversive, expressive and individualised, to the extent that they are protected from the public gaze. On the other hand, the critical practice to which this ideal pertains ('kitchen philosophy' with guests) is linked to the wider structure in various ways. These include the ways in which structurally determined public concerns provide the focus for supposedly intimate, private criticism. The structure of action, consumption and discourse on these private occasions reveals an uncanny resemblance (patterning/repetition) in diverse social contexts. Finally the symbol of subversive consumption (vodka) has a long indigenous history, where the interests of the state collide surprisingly with the desires of a disaffected citizenry.

Private space commensality, or 'having guests', is a particular form of leisure activity, sharing certain characteristics with other forms of leisure activity. These include their timing (outside of working hours), being freely chosen, and characterised by pleasure. The social relations of leisure are generally characterised as being freely chosen relations of trust and affection.

A brief discussion of other spaces and forms of leisured sociality will be followed by a more focused discussion of private space commensality. The spatial location of leisure activities can be conceptually divided into three separate arena:

- i) public spaces (theatres, cinemas, concert halls);
- ii) 'za gorod' (outside the city, in the woods and fields of the surrounding countryside);
- iii) private spaces (the self-contained household flat).

Leisure activities in public spaces are comparatively passive and asocial. Although people attend concerts, plays and films together, the nature of the event precludes active sociality and conversation. During the intervals (especially at the theatre or at concerts), there is a formalised practice of strolling through the foyer, in quiet commentary of the performance. There is no conversation between strangers and eye contact is avoided. The 'pleasure' that attends this kind of leisure activity is heavily imbued with the educational and status value of the consumption of 'high

culture'.

Leisure outings 'za gorod' are valued as opportunities for informal sports (especially cross-country skiing and volleyball), exercise and fresh air. Like 'going for a walk' (see Chapter 4.1) these outings share some of the privacy of leisure activities enacted within the bounds of the private flat, as trees, movement and distance sometimes shelter participants from the gaze of others. Groups are careful to keep a respectable distance between one another, although occasionally a crowd will gather to watch a game of volleyball. Although all of my day trips 'za gorod' were with one other person, I was told that organised outings 'za gorod' of a group of friends are common during the summer months.

### **Absence and avoidance: public space commensality**

A critical aspect of the spatial location of leisured sociality and commensality in Moscow was linked to the relative absence of bars, cafes and restaurants during the period of my fieldwork. During the entire period of my initial fieldwork, I only ever found three cafes in Moscow, where it was possible to sit and consume a small snack. Dining halls ('stolovaya') which served basic if unappetising meals were more common, but not a space for pleasurable social commensality. Other small cafes were to be found but these were without seats and were clearly designed to provide functional access to a quick drink and a small snack: they were not spaces for social consumption. Significantly, only friends who had spent considerable periods of time in the west shared any of my pleasure in attending these establishments, or even knew where they were. Whenever I suggested visiting one of these cafes to one of my other friends, they either conceded reluctantly or flatly refused. Initially I thought that these refusals were linked to the relative expense of food and drink. When I did persuade any of my friends to accompany me to a cafe, they were invariably unusually silent, consumed their food and drink, and were impatient to leave. There was clearly no pleasure for them in being in the company of strangers. When on one occasion a group of young traders engaged us in conversation, my companion was polite but curt and became visibly irritated at my enthusiasm for prolonging the conversation.

In the west, there is little distinction between leisurely, casual eating and drinking with friends at home or in a pub, bar, cafe or restaurant. In Russia, this distinction is meaningful. According to informants' accounts, eating in restaurants was either formally arranged ahead of time in order to celebrate a specific occasion (birthdays or weddings in particular), or, an occasion when co-workers (specifically men) conducted the 'real politik' of office or factory. Although clearly considered to be 'pleasurable', references to eating in restaurants were often imbued with a certain formality, and with a desire to impress me with the speaker's former wealth, status and prestige. None of my friends and informants could afford to eat in restaurants during the period of my fieldwork. Further, eating in restaurants simultaneously lost its prestigious connotations as the practice became associated with the conspicuous consumption of the nouveau riche and the 'mafia'. An informant told me that:

"Decent people don't eat in restaurants. Only the mafia eat in restaurants."

However, the contemporary avoidance of public commensality is also linked to the evaluation of what constitutes a pleasurable leisure activity. On a more recent trip to the FSU I asked whether it might be a good idea to transform a disused social club on a former collective farm into a cafe or discotheque. My informant replied,

That wouldn't work. Nobody would go. For us work was collectivised, so we don't want to spend our free time with other people. We prefer to spend our free time at home.<sup>1</sup>

Whence the meaning of the private flat?

In the preceding chapter, I referred to the ways in which the meaning of the private flat is a product of its acquisition, its value as a scarce resource, and of relatively uniform size and layout tinged with personal touches. I emphasised the inadequacy of western models of consumption for reading the meaning of the private flat from an analysis of its decor, furnishings and objects. Although these factors do 'say something' about the meaning of a particular private flat, I suggested that the poignancy of the private flat is more meaningfully associated with the social

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<sup>1</sup> See also Shlapentokh 1989 for a discussion of the increasing 'privatization' [in the sense of tending towards privacy and away from collective activity] of Soviet life.

relations and social practices uniquely associated with this self-contained space.

## **Kinship**

First and foremost, the private flat is the space of kinship (of the family 'semya'). If early revolutionary family policy predicted the eventual demise of the family as an institution, subsequent policies have recognised both the efficacy of the family as a major socialising institution and the utility of strong family ties in controlling the behaviour of individuals (see Shlapentokh 1989:34). Thus state support for the family has combined with the allocation of one flat per family to create a coherence between the institution of the family and the space it occupies. All of my friends and informants either lived alone or with members of their immediate nuclear family (spouses and children).<sup>2</sup> Three lived near their mothers (Natasha, Julia, Sasha). Kin and very close friends are by far the most frequent visitors to the family flat; in many cases they are the only visitors.

## **Idealisation of the Mother:Child Relationship**

Perhaps the most powerful symbol of kinship in Russia is that of the relationship between mother and child. Mothers are ideally givers of life and providers of food; they are selfless and prioritise the interests of their children above all other interests. This ideal is reflected in the frequent and sentimental toasts offered to 'our mothers', where even the most hardened apparatchik will become dewy eyed with remembered affection. The ideal of motherhood is of absolute devotion, unconditional love, support and indulgence towards her offspring. The unconditional love of the mother for her child should ideally be reciprocated, and indeed the (not uncommon) instances of breach of filial duty are universally condemned. This idealised relationship is borrowed in furtherance of more nationalistic ideals where the country is referred to as mother as in 'Rodina-Mat': the country that feeds and cares is like a mother. This sentimental metaphor also imports the duty to love and respect one's mother into the relation between citizen and state: as son is to mother so citizen is to

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<sup>2</sup> The exception to this was Katya who lived in a communal flat during the early part of my fieldwork. She then also moved into a self-contained flat on her own.

state.<sup>3</sup> However, in spite of partially successful attempts by the state to appropriate some of the connotations of the Mother, the value of the relation between mother and child is largely based on its ideological opposition to instrumental, public space social relations (relations of production, distribution, relations to the state). Where the mother:child relation is absolute, unconditional and predictable, the relations between the individual and undefined others are contingent, conditional and unpredictable.

The maternal ideal is strengthened by its extension to the babushka (grandmother - in practice often a maternal grandmother). As most women of child-bearing age have been engaged in full time work throughout the history of the FSU, it was often babushkas, who fulfilled the maternal/domestic/child-care role on a daily basis. This practice served to strengthen the relation between mothers and daughters and to feminise notions of kinship and domesticity.

If Soviet era policies encouraged the full participation of women in the 'socially useful labour force', it did little to encourage the full participation of men in domestic labour. Soviet rhetoric promised to relieve women of the burdens of domestic labour through public provision. However, these either failed to materialise or were eschewed in preference for keeping domestic activity firmly within the private territory of the family.<sup>4</sup> Domestic labour was and is largely undertaken by women. When men do make a significant contribution to household labour, it is often in the realm of household repairs, or searching for scarce goods.

#### The Ambiguous Nature of Paternity

The feminisation of kinship is further reinforced by the ambiguous nature of paternity and masculinity. It seems to me that this ambiguity is linked to the demise of traditional 'patriarchal' roles in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia. Deprived of their status as sole bread winners, or as owners/controllers of the means of production, I suspect that many men find it difficult to construct an adequately

<sup>3</sup> For a full discussion of 'Mother Russia' see Hubbs J. 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Bliznakov quotes a report by Ginzburg in 1928 which states that, "...most of the families did not eat in the common dining room. Instead they took their food from the canteen and ate in the privacy of their small apartments". (Bliznakov 1993:117)

masculine identity in the face of full female employment and continued female dominance of the domestic sphere.

This ambiguity is reflected in a consistently high divorce rate, in which the custody of children inevitably goes to the mother. As early as 1934, there were 37 divorces for every 100 marriages (Hoskings 1985:213). Although policies aimed at strengthening the family were adopted in response to falling birth rates from the mid 1930s, the contemporary divorce rate has surpassed that of the anti-family 1930s.

**Table 7.1** **Comparison of marriages and divorces, 1980-1991**

Year	per 1000 population	
	Marriages	Divorces
1980	10.6	4.2
1985	9.7	4.0
1990	8.9	3.8
1991	8.6	4.0

Source: Narodnoe Khoziaistvo Russian Federation 1992 p.106

High rates of male alcoholism<sup>5</sup> and male life expectancy between 9.6 (1988) and 11.5 (1979-1980)<sup>6</sup> years less than female life expectancy also contribute to the somewhat contingent role of men in domestic life. Whether cause or consequence, the male suicide rate is four times higher than the female suicide rate; between the ages of 25 - 39 it is seven times higher.<sup>7</sup>

All of my informants talked about their mothers and fathers in significantly different ways. It is extremely rare in my experience for toasts to be offered to fathers, although they are frequently offered to 'our parents' or more frequently to 'our

<sup>5</sup> Estimates vary wildly from 1.5% of the population with clinically diagnosed alcoholism or alcoholic psychosis (Ryan 1993:146) to 80% of all adult men being 'heavy drinkers' (Tong 1995:219).

<sup>6</sup> See Ryan M.1993:140.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Narodnoe Khoziaistvo Russian Federation 1992 p.117.

mothers' or to 'our beautiful women'. All of my informants were fulsome and eloquent in their praise for their mothers, emphasising how they had worked hard to feed, clothe and teach them in difficult conditions. Only Valeria and Katya were also full of praise for their fathers: Valeria's father had been imprisoned but had refused to 'confess' to the false accusations made against him; Katya's father had been a well-loved local doctor. Others told me quietly that their father had been an alcoholic, or had left or died when they were small. Even Julia and Natasha who seemed to have good relationships with their fathers reserved their explicit praise for their mothers. Comparing expressions of respect for fathers versus mothers, it becomes clear that where affection for the father is conditional upon his behaviour, affection for the mother is taken-for-granted, as mothers are more likely to be deemed to have fulfilled their role with exemplary dedication.

However, the association of a feminised kinship with the space of the private flat should not be taken to mean that the household flat is an **exclusively female, 'gendered'** space. The household flat may have subtle female/maternal connotations but both men and women are paying tribute to an ideal principle rather than enacting a strictly gendered practice. Men as well as women construct the ideal relation of mother:child, and associate this ideal with a particular space. The association between unconditional maternal love and the security of the private flat does not necessarily imply a concomitant derogation of men or paternity (although it reveals a certain ambiguity as noted above). The ideal mother : child relation and its attendant space are elaborated in opposition to the public spaces and relations dominated by the state. If a preference for structural symmetry indicates that the state must therefore be masculinised, it is a masculinity in which both men and women participate as a consequence of their public identities and actions. Personally I feel that insisting on a structural symmetry is misleading: the sober and loving husband and father, the trusted friend make as important a practical if contingent contribution to the safe intimacy of the private flat as the maternal ideal.

If the continuous presence of kin within the confines of the private flat imbues it with the connotations of unconditional support associated with ideal kinship, the intermittent presence of friends also makes an important contribution. In a sense the intermittent presence of friends, either specifically invited or as a result of an

impromptu visit, reveals a more active process of meaning creation and maintenance. Where the presence of kin is to some extent a taken-for-granted 'given', the presence of friends results from the intended choices of either host or visitor. Creating and maintaining friendships is an active process, which requires an investment of time and energy as a matter of intention. The family's evening meal is de facto an expression of conventional kinship, which in practice may or may not be operationalised in mutual affection and support. The meal shared with friends necessarily reveals the active operationalisation of friendship, which is analogous to ideal (but not necessarily practised) kinship.

## Friendship

Non-kin relations of affection are epitomised by the notion of friendship ('druzhba'). Galina explained the hierarchy of relations to me thus:

An acquaintance (znakomie [m] znakomaya [f]) is just someone you know. Sometimes acquaintances will become friends, but they are not friends yet.<sup>8</sup> A 'priatel [m]' or 'priatelnitsa [f]'<sup>9</sup> is not a real friend, but someone you know and like. A 'priatel' might be someone you work with and like, and you might invite them to guests sometimes. A friend (drug [m] podruga [f]) is someone you have known for a long time. You can trust a friend and ask them for help. A friend is like a brother or sister.

In his discussion of friendship, Shalpentokh notes that

....friendship, as well as less intensive relations such as comradeship, can be treated as manifestations of collectivism (or at least its initial forms)... However, official ideology and the most sophisticated writers, such as Galina Andreleva (1980) repudiate (usually implicitly)

<sup>8</sup> I noted however that the term 'moi znakomie (or maya zakomaya)' was often used to refer to relations closer than that implied by the literal definition. Sometimes it is used as we use the term 'mate' in English, or to underestimate the intensity of the relationship. Cross-sex amicable relations were likely to be understated as there are sexual connotations to cross-sex references to 'moi drug' or 'maya podruga'. Referring to my close (male) friend, I was told that I should not use 'moi drug', but that 'moi znakomie' was fine and would be understood as a possible understatement.

<sup>9</sup> I can find no way to translate 'priatel'. Galina, for example, always used the term 'priatel' or the feminised 'priatelnitsa'. She seemed to be implying that the relationship was amicable and reliable but somewhat formal, without the easy intimacy of friendship. Sergei described a former female colleague as his 'priatelnitsa': he was very fond of this woman, and was always willing to assist her. However he always treated her with a somewhat formal respect, and indeed still addressed her with the more formal 'vyi'.

any identification of friendship with collectivism because the latter involves the interactions of many people. Friendship, in contrast, is normally dyadic and a personal, even private, type of relationship, closer to the individual than to the collective. Moreover, in the Soviet context, the collective pre-supposes the existence of external control, which endears it so to the mentality of a Soviet apparatchik.

However, the essence of friendship is the rejection of the idea of intervention or control by any third party.

(Shlapentokh 1989:171)

In Moscow, friendship is a comparatively scarce resource, which acquires an increased value from its scarcity. As noted in Chapter 1 my friends' are most often drawn from the circle of current and former colleagues, former co-students, and very often share profession/occupation and/or ethnic identity. The duration of friendships is often a key to their strength. In describing his best friend, Sergei emphasised their long shared history, and the ways in which they had helped each other over the years. This help ranged from moral support in times of trouble (Sergei's divorce, Vladimir's mother's long illness), practical assistance (lending each other money, sharing accommodation), access to each other's social and professional networks (putting in a good word with a 'nachalnik' who was friends with another 'nachalnik' to get a job), to more prosaic help like buying 'some slide holders for Vladimir', when Sergei happened to find some. These two friends rang each other at least once a day, and met two or three times a week. Most often Sergei would visit Vladimir and Alexandra at their flat as they felt that their small child restricted their mobility (see Chapter 4.2). In talking about his friend, Sergei would praise his intelligence, goodness, and talent and would express anger at any wrongs he had suffered (specifically being excluded from a now successful circle of artists, of whom he had once been a leading member).

In terms of the construction of meaning of the private household flat, the frequent presence of friends creates a strong association between the values associated with the relationship and the space itself. As noted above, the association of friendship and private space may be of greater import, to the extent that relations with kin may or may not achieve the ideal in practice. As 'freely chosen relationships', relations with friends necessarily and by definition achieve a synonymy with the ideal. In an

urban context without 'local communities', friends must make active decisions to meet in the absence of opportunities for unplanned encounters.

### **'V Gostiakh' : private space commensality**

To the extent that friendship must by definition be actively constructed and maintained, the means of this construction reveal more intimately how this process actually works. Throughout Russia, private space commensality is the key to the establishment of amicable relations and one of the most consistent means by which friendship is maintained.

The hierarchy of relations (from acquaintances to friends and kin) reflects the hierarchy of events that fall under the aegis of 'having guests'. At one end of the spectrum there is the rarer and more formal gathering for eg, a birthday celebration, which include kin, friends, and maybe 'priatelie' (or even 'znakomie' in their 'understated' form). At the other end of the spectrum, there are the more frequent, informal unplanned visits by friends.

#### **The more formal occasion**

Participation in numerous private occasions of commensality revealed a certain structure or pattern in the proceedings. A number of features are repeated regularly, if not with the strict order that characterises formal ritual. These include:

1. ***The reason for the gathering - a birthday or the celebration of a national or religious holiday***

These are the three most common reasons for inviting guests to a fairly formal, pre-planned celebration. All of the birthdays of my close informants were marked by inviting friends and kin 'to guests'. Politically neutral, birthdays provide an opportunity both for enjoyable commensality and for celebrating the individual qua individual. More politically interesting was the criteria by which my close informants selected which national holidays to mark with a celebration. Where during the Soviet era, national holidays were often the occasion for both public and private carousing, many of these are now more or less ignored by state and citizen

alike. I was told that before the demise of the Soviet Union, both November 7 and May 1 were occasions for huge public celebrations with parades and fireworks, often complemented by gathering of friends and kin in a private flat. My friends all expressed uncertainty as to whether these dates would be celebrated or not during 1992-1993. In fact both were rather low key affairs, marked more by large-scale nationalist/pro-communist demonstrations than by public celebration. None of my acquaintances marked these eminently Soviet holidays with a private celebration, and none would agree to accompany me to the centre to see what would happen. On the other hand, holidays such as International Women's Day (March 8) and New Year were cause for widespread public **and** private celebration. In general, the criteria seemed to be the continued celebration of 'apolitical' symbols, and the slow demise of attention to revolutionary anniversaries.

Private celebrations to mark a religious holiday were popular amongst a group of friends who sang in a choir in a church in northern Moscow. What was interesting was the selection of a religious date as the excuse for a party, although little if any attention was paid in the course of the proceedings to the religious reason for the gathering. In content these gatherings were like those for birthdays or the celebration of national holidays, and Maria's preparations for a Christmas celebration paralleled Julia's for her daughter's birthday (see below). It seemed to me that this group of young people were turning their allegiance and attention to a Russian religious tradition in the vacuum left by the demise of atheistic Soviet festivities.<sup>10</sup> However, if the early Bolsheviks developed explicit policies for replacing traditional religious ritual with more appropriately revolutionary themes,<sup>11</sup> the reverse is happening in a more ad hoc and sporadic fashion.

## 2. *The preparation and offering of specially prepared foods, symmetrically arranged and served on special china*

More formal commensality requires substantial pre-planning, in order to acquire desired foodstuffs. The following case study gives some idea of the effort involved.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a growing but far from universal tendency (see Tong 1995:222-223).

<sup>11</sup> See Von Geldern 1993 for a description of Bolshevik festivals.

On the occasion of her daughter's first birthday, Julia and her family were fully engaged in preparations a good week in advance. The flat was cleaned from top to bottom. Her mother ensured that she had sufficient conserved fruit and vegetables from her own supplies, as well as acquiring an impressive piece of lean beef. Her husband acquired a wide range of vodkas, champagne, liqueurs and imported cigarettes. The best china was carefully washed ready for use. Film was bought for both still and video-recording of the event. Julia and her mother spent two days doing nothing but preparing the food for this event. The first course consisted of four different kinds of 'salad',<sup>12</sup> pickled fish and vegetables and cold meats. All of these were beautifully and symmetrically arranged on the best china. The second course consisted of quantities of roasted pieces of meat and a mountain of boiled potatoes. This was followed by a large cake. All of this was accompanied by copious quantities of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Although marking the first birthday of a child is important in Russia, it was eminently clear that the event was as much about demonstrating the household's status through impressive hospitality as it was about Dasha. Indeed in the course of the evening, both Julia and her mother frequently asked me if my other friends were capable of such hospitality ('gostepriimstvo'), or whether people in the 'west' had such a feast on birthdays. Given that there were only eight adults at the table,<sup>13</sup> the quantity of food was clearly excessive and our inability to finish it all was cause for much self-satisfied complaint.

### 3. *The range of toasts*

As one course follows another on these occasions, so too does one toast follow another. There is always an initial toast of a full glass of vodka, to be drained in one by all present (only children and alcoholics undergoing treatment are forgiven participation). On the occasion of a birthday, the toast will be offered to the health ('zdarovie'), happiness ('schastie') and success ('uspiekh') of the birthday person. On other occasions, the first toast is often to the meeting of friends ('za vstreche druzia') or to new friends (frequent when I visited anyone for the first time). In the

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<sup>12</sup> These 'salads' consisted of minutely chopped pieces of meat, fish, and vegetables in different combinations.

<sup>13</sup> Julia, her husband, her mother and father, her husband's mother and father, an old friend of her father's and me.

earlier part of the evening, subsequent toasts will be offered to our mothers and/or parents ('za nash materie/raditelie'), with fulsome gratitude. These are serious expressions of respect especially if the parents of any of those present are deceased. If applicable, there may be a special toast 'to those who are no longer with us'. Absent friends are also often toasted. In the course of an evening, toasts are inevitably made (often more than once) 'to our beautiful women' ('za nash krasivie zhenshchine'), or specifically, by name, to the hostess. As the evening proceeds, toasts alternate between the rather informal raising of glasses, uttering 'to you' ('za vas'), or 'to your health' ('za vash zdarovie') and long, maudlin toasts to someone's mother or to love or to health with long explanations as to why mothers/love/health are the most important things in the world. In the course of these lengthy toasts guests often lift their glasses, then replace them on the table, patiently waiting for the speaker to finish. Mostly, men will drink vodka throughout the evening. It is however acceptable and in a sense more proper for women to switch to champagne or wine. The first and last toasts however are always accompanied by the draining of a full glass of vodka, by all present. As a core symbol of commensality, the consumption of vodka will be discussed more fully towards the end of this chapter. Suffice for the moment to note that as it is not acceptable to drink alcohol except on the occasion of a toast, all the participants become increasingly drunk together.

Avoidance of increasing inebriation (by clandestine sipping instead of draining the glass) causes much explicit consternation. Those who try to abstain may be accused of not respecting either the speaker or the subject of the toast. Sometimes this accusation is phrased in terms of the abstainer thinking 'he's too important to drink with us'.<sup>14</sup> Conversely the willingness to drink with people is deemed a sign of both respect and of personal strength. If I was initially shocked by the complement, 'you are a good drinker', I eventually understood that being a 'good drinker' is synonymous with a valued form of sociability.

#### 4. *The processual relaxation of language, including 'body language'*

As can be seen from the description of toasts given above, the formal toasts of the earlier part of the occasion eventually give way to either vague references 'to you'

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<sup>14</sup> This problem was never encountered on occasions of private commensality, but is not unusual at more public formal occasions. Refusing to drink with someone (overtly or covertly) is a sign of mistrust.

or to long monologues on the importance of mothers/love/health. Similarly the entire style of conversation changes from the slightly embarrassed and stilted encouragement to eat, or polite enquiries about one's work or family. During the early part of the meal, the conversation is more general and all listen whenever one person is speaking. As the meal progresses, people tend to begin long private conversations in twos or threes. All pay attention and drink whenever a toast is formally announced, but numerous small private toasts are offered and drunk between co-conversants in between. Straight backs and avoidance of body contact between participants in the early stages yield to more relaxed body postures, more emotional expression, and more physical contact between those present. Arms are draped over the backs of neighbours' chairs, and conspiratorial hands are gently placed on the forearm of listeners, as the speaker looks the listener straight in the eye. This increase in physical contact accompanies the increasingly trusting and confessional tone of the conversation. I have a vivid memory of sitting, arms entwined between the Chief Economist and the Veterinarian on a collective farm as we all tearfully agreed that life was hard for women everywhere.

##### **5. *The shift from main room to kitchen***

Often the gathering shifts into the kitchen in the course of the evening. Although there are practical reasons for this shift, usually to do with the possibility to smoke without leaving the party, it also symbolises that a certain state of inebriation and camaraderie has been achieved. This is explicitly recognised in the phrase 'kitchen philosophy', which refers as much to the style of kitchen conversation as it does to the content. The connotations of the kitchen are the product of the proximity of food and the afterglow of its preparation, the association with the ideal of motherhood, feeding and kinship, and of the kinds of conversation associated with 'kitchen philosophy'. 'Kitchen philosophy' connotes ideas freely exchanged, taboo topics addressed, sincerity, emotional expression, and above all the notion that the participants can be trusted not to repeat any contentious views expressed. The space of the kitchen is soaked in risky, half-remembered conversations; the risk (real or imagined) of denunciation adds a poignancy to these memories and a sharper edge to the friends who spoke, listened and earned the trust of their hosts. If the threat of denunciation has become a thing of the past, there is nevertheless an affection for 'kitchen philosophy' which is likely to long outlive its functional necessity. Every

Russian I have met refers to 'kitchen philosophy' with a wry smile. As will be seen below true friendship is marked by immediate invitations to sit in the kitchen.

#### 6. *'Kitchen philosophy' and the predilection for certain topics of conversation*

As people's networks of friends are relatively small (see Chapter 1), it is highly likely that all one's friends will be invited to a semi-formal occasion. This much reduces the possibility to gossip about common acquaintances. Indeed, one Russian acquaintance of mine remarked that he was shocked to find that westerners' most common topic of conversation was absent friends, their relationships, etc.

Below are some examples of 'kitchen philosophy'. This is necessarily a restricted selection, but has been chosen in order to shed some light on both the subjects and the manner of their telling. 'Kitchen philosophy' is often a plaintive discourse.

During 1992-1993, these conversations often started with what was of most concern to people: rising prices and inadequate or unpredictable incomes, rising crime, corruption, and tirades against traders and the 'mafia'. Daily experience of rising prices was reflected in the sheer quantity of discourse on the subject, and many conversations were little more than interminable price comparisons. 'Explaining' inflation became the idiom through which differing political and economic interests and understandings were articulated. In the absence of a stable explanatory paradigm, it is in the course of these conversations that reality is literally socially constructed. For example, one speaker would claim that rising prices are the work of 'speculators', aided and abetted by corrupt officials. If all agree, then a consensus is achieved: a consensus which has foundations in communist rhetoric, and in experience of the corruptibility of (Soviet) officials and which justifies both anger at personal impoverishment and the conviction that people are always betrayed by those in power. If, however, someone suggests that traders have a right to make profits because they 'take risks' or expend time and energy on buying and selling, a discussion on whether the quantity of effort warrants the level of profit will ensue. Given that often, no one present really knows the quantity of time and money costs or profits, the topic may either be relegated to the 'don't know' category, or be resolved by force of argument on one side or the other, or stall with the repetition of opposing view points. (eg, 'speculation is criminal' in confrontation with 'profitable

trade is natural'). Often Russian condemnation of profiteering traders, was laced with anti-Caucasian and/or anti-Central Asian sentiments.<sup>15</sup>

In kitchens throughout the FSU the opinion that 'before was better' ('ranshe byl lushche') resounds as often as the whistle on the tea kettle. Almost all of my informants, except for Sergei and his friend Vladimir, would frequently slip into an unfavourable evaluation of the present compared to the past. If someone pointed out that the past was not as rosy as they claimed, reminding people of shortages, censorship and the long history of corruption, most would concur or even express embarrassment at having fallen into agreement with the 'common view'. The most frequently invoked image of a better past was that of a time when the refrigerator was always full, and guests could always be fed. The present was conversely loathed as a inflation reduced many people's potential for 'feeding guests'.

Another favourite topic of conversation is a graphic description of the folly and corruption of one's 'chief' ('nachalnik'). Sergei's tale of the ongoing conflicts with his 'nachalnik', which culminated in his losing his job, was retold in the kitchens of his friends and relatives throughout the winter of 1993. For some time Sergei had been treading a fine line between appeasing both his immediate superior at his place of work and the acknowledged expert in his particular field, and trying to out-maneuvre them. He would hint that he was getting important results, but 'politely' refuse to share either methods or results. They in turn would make him promises of support, but were holding out for some hard evidence of success. This tug-of-war had reached a dead lock by the winter of 1993. Sergei (apparently rightly) didn't trust the promises of support, and continued to work in isolation. He needed to publish, but said that he would be unable to publish in Russia without their support; he was convinced that their support would entail 'sharing' the results (and the credit) with his competitors. The price of their assistance was the risk of publication, without acknowledging that the work was originally his.<sup>16</sup> His friends would interpret the events related in terms of the nachalnik's or the expert's jealousy, their

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<sup>15</sup> Caucasians (Georgians in particular) were often characterised as natural traders/merchants, greedy, and/or as natural criminals. Similarly Central Asians were often characterised as naturally violent. Although members of my network never expressed any anti-semitic opinions in my presence, all claimed that such sentiments were rife throughout Russian society.

<sup>16</sup> This had apparently happened in the past.

desire for power ('vlast'),<sup>17</sup> their own stupidity, or their corruption (the 'expert' had recently promoted his unintelligent son-in-law). When Sergei went to a conference in the States without his nachalnik's permission,<sup>18</sup> he was promptly sacked upon his return. Predictions that such rebelliousness would be rewarded with professional internal exile were borne out, as Sergei's efforts to find another laboratory consistently met with failure. Trying to leapfrog the structural obstructions of the Russian academy, Sergei was still trying to make direct contact with publishers and potential employers in the west when I left. However, this was proving difficult without 'institutional support', as western institutions failed to understand the reasons for his isolation. This story provoked commiseration, assurances of Sergei's superior intellectual and moral abilities, and promises of support.

Further, whenever someone needed an official document or permission, there were lengthy stories about obstruction, inefficiency, and corruption. When Misha applied for a new 'foreign' passport, he was shuttled from one office to another: in each office they told him that they didn't have the passport and that he should go elsewhere. Finally in exasperation, he refused to move until he was given his passport. The official denied all ability to assist him, denied knowing where it was etc. It was only when Misha threatened to report him to his superior (not a common strategy amongst most of my friends), that the passport miraculously appeared from the official's desk drawer. This story was told and re-told as listeners commiserated and complained about the universality of the practice of deliberate obstruction ('they just want to demonstrate that they have power over you'). Misha often accompanied this story with one about trying to buy stamps in the post office. The woman behind the desk denied having any stamps. When Misha got angry and threatened to summon her boss, she 'miraculously' found some stamps in her desk drawer. He would conclude these stories with the opinion that such obstructions continue at least partly because everyone allows them to. 'Most people just accept it, but if you get angry and demand your rights, or threaten to report them, they sometimes (not

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<sup>17</sup> In this context the desire for power ('vlast') connoted the simple desire to obstruct a colleague in an inferior structural position. Whenever I questioned this motive, I was roundly accused of not understanding the way Russians 'love to exercise their power'.

<sup>18</sup> In theory, this permission was required to ensure that all publicised results had been approved by a higher professional authority. It was a matter of consensus that this 'rule' was generally applied in order to steal intellectual property.

always of course) cooperate.'

Interestingly, both Sergei and Vladimir wholly disagreed with this tactic. Both claimed that it was far preferable not to engage in argument with 'these people' as,

that is what they want you to do. They want to demonstrate their power and by arguing they can [demonstrate their power]. If you get angry, you're behaving just like them. It is better to remain polite, even if it means that you don't get what you want.

This is linked to the notion of being 'cultured' ('kulturnye'), where status (profession, being a member of the intelligentsia) is linked to 'good manners'. Again, the emphasis is on practice or behaviour as marks of social distinction (and possibly linked to the absence of more fetishised marks of status and distinction - see Chapters 5 and 6).

These tales of getting around bureaucratic obstructions often combined with descriptions of harsh treatment by shop assistants, bus drivers or even by fellow passengers or shoppers. Alexandra in particular, would relate a story of rude treatment with tears in her eyes, culminating in the expression of the wish 'not to die amongst such people'.

My Caucasian friends were fond of explaining to me 'what's wrong with the Russians'. Valeria's succinct evaluation was as follows:

They like to suffer. A friend of mine once said that the worse things get the happier she is. Can you imagine? They are intrinsically jealous, and hate the success of others. They will do anything to ensure that no one is better off than they. The worst thing is that they [the Russians] are all deceivers ['obmanchikie']. They have been lying for so long, they can't tell the difference any more between the truth and a lie.

Interestingly, I have heard all of these opinions also expressed by Russians, of all kinds of social backgrounds; the only difference is that they often say 'these people' with a sweep of the hand towards the world at large. However, some Russians I have met have expressed similar opinions and been explicit about referring to

particularly **Russian** traits.

On the occasion of Sergei's birthday gathering, his step-father recounted the story of his arrest and exile to Siberia at the age of eighteen, to a silently respectful audience. All of those present except myself had heard this story many times, but were keen that I should appreciate both the irrational cruelty of the Soviet system and the courage and endurance of the old man. At one point his wife turned to me and said,

When you go home Louise, tell them that we are good people. Our government is full of evil and stupid people, but we are good people. We only want to live a normal life. We don't want to fight with anybody.

At the close of this tale, a solemn toast was offered to all those who had suffered and died, 'at the hands of their own government'. Most of those present had tears in their eyes. Valeria then recounted the story of her father's heroism, and the suffering she and her mother and sister had endured during the time of his imprisonment. It was a matter of consensus that, 'everybody has a similar tale to tell; everybody has a relative who was imprisoned or killed'.

On the other hand, these litanies of complaint and self-criticism were often underwritten with an implicit pride in the irrationality of the system, in their ability to tolerate an intolerable situation, or in the renowned incomprehensibility of Russia. Only a truly perverse sense of humour could refer to itself as a slave or the perpetual victim of deceit, and express a contorted pride in living in the 'worst' possible political, economic and social environment.

'Kitchen philosophy' is ideally characterised by the practice of making explicit that which is implicit. It is a matter of consensus that 'everybody knows and knew what was wrong', and that the explicit acknowledgement of this basic tenet became institutionalised in 'kitchen philosophy'. As such, the space itself articulates the free and unadulterated expression of individual thoughts, experiences, desires and intentions.

## **Friendship, impromptu visits and private space (especially kitchens)**

In a sense a good friend is synonymous with someone who will visit uninvited, and be immediately seated in the kitchen. As noted above the kitchen has strong connotations of safety and privacy derived from associations with motherhood, feeding, kinship, and inebriated, commensal, 'kitchen philosophy'. Consequently, conversation with friends is synonymous with 'kitchen philosophy'.

Only very close friends of long standing will phone one another and invite themselves to visit. This is literally phrased as 'I have a desire to come to you as a guest ('U menya yest zhelanje prikhodit k tebye v gostiakh'). On arrival, the visitor is welcomed and immediately ushered into the kitchen. Initially people would say to me, "You don't mind if we sit in the kitchen? We Russians prefer to sit in the kitchen." Once the friendship was established, the question was dispensed with. Visitors are always offered tea and very often something to eat, ranging from a full meal (at any time of the day) to a small snack (often prepared between the initial warning phone call and arrival). Close friends don't need to always drink vodka together, although a small glass symbolising friendship may be drunk.

## **Vodka**

The development of friendship is often interwoven with a history of mutual inebriation. Dyadic drunkenness symbolises a relationship of trust, which is then developed through practices of concrete mutual help and support. In this final section I want to examine the symbolic associations of vodka with identity, resistance, trust, spirit, friendship, and the ways in which the consumption of vodka articulates with privacy and truth.

First a few lines from Alexander Kaletski's 'Metro' (1986):

'It's better to die drunk than to live sober', goes a Russian folk saying and it's better not to mess with people who have such folklore. ....the sensitive ones, who wake up with a hangover every morning out of love for their country,....

(pp. 252-253)

Or:

Vodka is the basis of life in Russia - what else could fill the yearning emptiness of the Russian soul? For vodka you can be killed; for vodka you should also be pardoned.....Vodka is sacred.

(pp. 254-255)

And finally:

'Can you trust him?' Toilik whispered.  
'I think so. I heard that he changed a lot after his trip to the Sudan, but he's still one of us.'  
'Is he a good drinker?' Toilik asked.  
'The best!'  
'Then you can trust him.'

(pp. 270-271)

These few extracts encapsulate much of the mythology that attends the Russian passion for vodka.

I want to start with a very brief overview of mid-range anthropological theories about the consumption of alcohol cross-culturally. This is followed by a quick resumé of literature which attempts to explain the particularities of the consumption of alcohol in Russia. Interestingly, whereas the general anthropological literature on the consumption of alcohol often stresses its function, literature which specifically concerns the consumption of alcohol in Russia, addresses its pathology.

In Mary Douglas's (1987) collection of papers on alcohol consumption in different social contexts, the emphasis is either on the ways in which consuming alcohol creates and maintains social groups, or on the distinctive symbolic significance of different beverages. Gerald Mars discusses how inclusion/exclusion from a significant socio-economic group is reflected by participation/non-participation in drinking groups in Newfoundland and in Soviet Georgia. Ngokwey shows how gender differences are played out in relation to ideas and practices relating to palm wine. Thornton and Calabresi discuss distinctions in the consumptions of different alcoholic beverages as concurrent with distinctions between 'spontaneous, day to day' and 'sporadic or ritual' celebrations. Other papers reflect on the role of alcohol in the 'alternative economy' (Crump, Levine, Mars and Altman).

More interestingly, the papers by Bott and Gurr discuss the ways in which the consumption of alcohol is linked to the construction of an 'ideal world' as is the consumption of tea amongst elderly Jews discussed by Hazan. Antze uncovers the religious nature of Alcoholics Anonymous and suggests that it is this very religiosity which accounts for its success.

The papers in a book edited by Gefou-Madianou (1992) centre on the role of alcohol in the construction of gender, particularly in Mediterranean societies. Even where women 'drink like men', the authors argue that in a sense such exceptions prove the rule (van Nieuwkerk on Egyptian female entertainers and Papagaroufali on Athenian feminists). The construction of male solidarity through communal consumption of alcohol is a recurring theme throughout the papers, as is the element of competition which sometimes runs parallel to 'egalitarian' male solidarity (see also Mars and Altman on Georgian feasting in Douglas 1987).

In contrast, analyses of 'Russian drinking' start from the premise that the consumption of alcohol makes the real individual consumer drunk, ie, alters his or her perceptions, consciousness and activities in very real ways. There is almost no reference to its function or sociology. Russian drinking is assumed to be pathological, a culturally specific form of escapism.

Efforts to 'explain' Russian drinking habits adopt one of two approaches: either a historical, political economy approach or an attempted psychoanalysis of the pathology of the Russian soul. The history of vodka inevitably starts with its pre-history. Where the consumption of low-alcohol mead, kvass and beer can be traced back to pre-Mongol Rus and the Kievan empire, Pokhlebkin dates the earliest distillation of vodka in Russia between 1440 and 1480 (Pokhlebkin 1984:96), although it was not until the middle of the 19th century that it was commonly referred to as 'vodka'.<sup>19</sup> Pokhlebkin suggests that by ca. 1478 the government had established a 'de facto' monopoly on the production and distribution of distilled grain spirit. From the 15th to the 20th century the political economy of vodka reflects a cyclical pattern of opposing interests. It was:

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<sup>19</sup> 'Vodka' is the diminutive of 'voda' (water), ie. little water.

the state's thirst for revenue as much as the peasant's thirst for forgetfulness, that made vodka so important at both the national and the local levels of Russian life

(Smith and Christian 1984:300-301).

State revenues from the sale of vodka were important from as early as the 17th century, reaching 20-40% of state income by the mid 19th century. Although the means for ensuring these revenues have varied from state monopolies, to licensing of 'liquor farms', to taxation of 'free production and trade', the state was and is heavily dependent on revenues from the sale of vodka. The 1914 ban on the production and consumption of vodka was partially rescinded by the Bolsheviks as early as 1919, with full legalisation of production and sale of vodka following in 1925 (Tarschys 1993:9). From about 1927 to the early 1980's, it has been estimated that 11-13% of the state's revenues have been derived from the sale of vodka.

Yet the problem of 'public morality' was never far from the attention of church and state. Prohibitions on the illegal production and consumption of various alcoholic beverages, including vodka, by different categories of persons at various times or in certain places have followed one another with elaborate complexity. Concerns about 'public morality' have, more recently, been accompanied by statistical analyses of the economic costs of widespread drunkenness, through decreased labour productivity, absenteeism, and the social and economic costs of family breakdown, crime and rehabilitation. Figures vary, from Treml's 1928 assessment of the costs of alcohol consumption to the Soviet economy of 4.3% of GNP, to 8-9% in 1980 (Treml in Horst Herlemann ed. 1987:162 and 159). Some analyses argue that costs of alcohol consumption "might be four times as high as the government revenue from alcohol" (Tarschys 1993:15). Working from Soviet statistics is notoriously difficult, but the conflict of interests remains. Although the interests of the state for revenues, and in pre-revolutionary times of producers and merchants for profits, required an expansion of the vodka economy, the problem of 'public morality' required restriction of that same economy. Yet on a more pragmatic level, the across the board demand for vodka, has always won the day. Even during the short periods of prohibition or restricted production and sale, consumption has remained at least partially independent of legislation. Samogon (moonshine) production rushes to fill the gap left by closing state monopolies. Although the quantity of samogon

production never approaches that of the official sector, it is sufficient to ensure that the 'problem of public morality' is not resolved by official prohibition. Thus the loss to state coffers is not offset by reduced public drunkenness, and the prohibitions and restrictions are again removed.

Shifting the focus from the state to the village, Smith and Christian suggest that by the 19th century, the earlier practice of 'drinking to oblivion' only on specified 'ritual' occasions had broadened to include a wide variety of events. Vodka had become:

the basic ingredient of all celebrations, of church festivals, family celebrations and so on. It was also a sort of seal on ceremonial. Vodka was drunk when a deal was made or a bargain struck. And vodka was used to maintain networks of patronage and to manipulate village politics. It was widely used as a medicine and an anaesthetic, and it could be quite ruinous

(Smith and Christian 1984:316)

Further, vodka was frequently used as payment for labour, and was widely preferred to money, which was considered foreign or 'German'. That such work parties were more 'parties' than 'work' did little to increase production. They note that consumption was 'always' to excess and that young and old, men and women partook at every possible opportunity. Vodka became a necessity, and was found in homes where there was no bread (Smith and Christian 1984:316). It also 'bought votes' in village elections. In many cases, ritual drinking continued into daily life, "a particularly ruinous confusion of festive with workaday routines, which appalled contemporary moral and social reformers" (Smith and Christian 1984:323).

Although the litany of social ills reported in the social history of vodka consumption, inevitably refers to the 'peasantry and/or the working class', depending on the date, heavy drinking was never the sole prerogative of the poor. From its earliest introduction to Russia, the monarchy, the gentry, the merchants and the intellectuals all shared the peasants' predilection for vodka. Indeed it could be argued that one of the reasons for the continued failures of restrictive measures was the unwillingness of the powerful to reduce their own intake.

Segal's 1987 examination of 'Russian drinking' in pre-revolutionary Russia seeks to explain its pathological nature. He notes that:

It is very easy to show that the Russian style, especially the social style of the Russian lower classes of the second half of the 19th century, and the 'alcoholic style' had something in common

(Segal 1987:243).

This style is rooted in a kind of psychological 'dissonance', or complex of contradictions. It includes self-destructiveness, emotional immaturity, angry dependence, unpredictable mood shifts, boredom, and guilt. Ambivalent relations to authority are played out in shifts between dependency and rebellion, passivity and aggression, collectivism and individualism, universalism and xenophobia. He seeks out the roots of these characteristics in geography (expansiveness and fear of isolation), in political and economic history (serfdom and the peasant communes), in the breakdown of the patriarchal family, in the stress between 'original Slavic sensualism' and 'Orthodox ascetic ideals and sex taboos' (Segal 1987:252), and in child-rearing practices (swaddling, too early self-reliance combined with restricted autonomy). He suggests a link between food insecurity and drinking, and elaborates on a Freudian analysis of the Russian psyche 'arrested' at the 'oral stage of development'. He elaborates on the political economy of vodka and its roots in the fiscal policies of the state, as noted above. Not least he reminds us that as alcoholism creates social problems, people turn to alcohol as a learned response to dealing with these selfsame social stresses. Following contemporary trends in genetics, he suggests that the intense history of alcohol consumption in Russia might indeed produce more biological tendencies to alcoholism.

Segal also makes an interesting attempt to move from the production of individuals prone to alcoholism, to the production of a nation so prone. He suggests that the introduction of grain spirits to Russia at a critical 'adolescent' stage of her development to nationhood has resulted in an 'immature' inability to deal with alcohol. Alcohol remains 'displeasure-reducing' rather than 'pleasure-enhancing' (Segal 1987:312). Although far-reaching in the range of its references, Segal's attempt to 'explain' Russian drinking practices remains both illuminating and somehow unsatisfactory. On the one hand he assumes a kind of universalism both

amongst Russian drinkers and amongst alcoholics, eg, 'borderline personalities'. If Segal's attempt to unpick the threads that weave the Russian soul draws fruitfully on history and literature, his references to the universal applicability of Freudian developmental psychology are less than successful.

### **Whose function? Whose pathology?**

As substance, vodka is idealised as a combination of qualities: it is pure/clean ('chistie'), strong ('krepkie'), simple ('prostoi'),<sup>20</sup> and above all a **Russian** drink. The ability to drink 'strong spirit' is symbolically linked to 'having a strong spirit', and the weakness of foreigners (especially the French) is linked to their preference for weak drinks like wine. In comparison to the teetotal Gorbachev, Yeltsin was deemed a proper Russian man ('muzhik'), 'because he likes to drink'. Perhaps most salient is the widespread consensus that 'in vodka veritas': he who has drunk does not lie ('obmanivat').

### **Function?**

Although the notion that 'in vino veritas' is common throughout alcohol-consuming cultures, it achieves a particular poignancy in Russia. This poignancy is derived from the equally universal assumption that appearances and/or soberly spoken words are deceptive. Interpretation of the words or actions of people in their public guise, is steeped in suspicion of deception ('obman'), sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. One can only speculate on the roots of this conviction, which must at least partly be related to the ever widening gap between rhetoric and reality in Soviet life.<sup>21</sup> Given the conjunction between belief in the honesty of the drunk and suspicion of all others, the passion for vodka makes perfect sense.

As a 'trust-creating substance', vodka also acquired an instrumental function in the

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<sup>20</sup> 'Prostoi' has stronger positive connotations than it does 'simple' in English. These connotations refer to a simple idealised Russian peasantry and are opposed to the notion of complex ('slozhno'). 'Slozhno' is often used to refer to difficult people and situations.

<sup>21</sup> The discrepancy between rhetoric and reality is noted as a cause of the continued 'alienation' in the post-perestroika period (Tong 1995). See also Glazov (1985) who describes the normalisation of dual thinking in post-Stalinist Soviet life, and who also notes the association between drunkenness and speaking the truth.

construction of social relations. The 'second economy'<sup>22</sup> on which central planning was intimately dependant, was largely a network of social relationships symbolised by shared consumption of vodka. 'Significant others' are often referred to by the term 'someone I drink/used to drink with', ie, a specific type of social relation, one in which trust is ensured by the symbol of mutual exposure that attends drunkenness. Such relationships were the conduits for the exchanges of goods and services throughout the Soviet period. Further, vodka was and is the currency for a wide variety of 'informal' exchanges of goods and services,<sup>23</sup> and is often preferred to money. It seems to me that the use of vodka as a 'restricted medium of exchange' in these informal (and previously illegal) exchanges lends the connotations of trust to an otherwise risky undertaking. This more 'instrumental' pattern of drinking to cement relationships located in the public sphere (work, political, or economic relationships), was in a sense, 'borrowing' the connotations of ideal social relations, rooted in private space commensality.

#### **Pianstvo<sup>24</sup>**

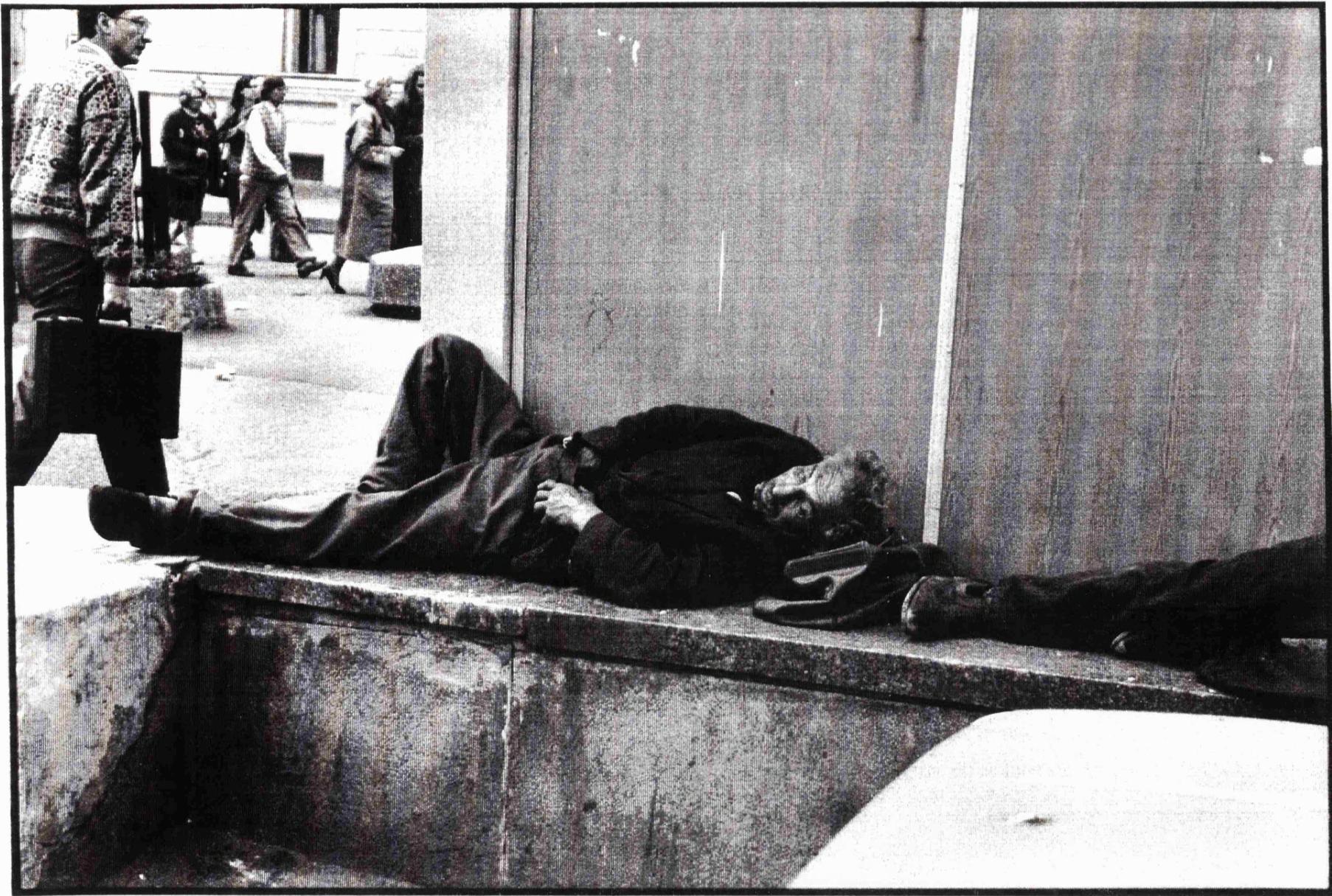
However, all over Moscow, but particularly around Metro stations and in underpasses, there are groups of men communally consuming alcohol, day and night. Sometimes a woman or two is also present. The most common tipple is beer ('pivo'), which is available everywhere, cheaper than other alcoholic drinks, and although weaker, strong enough to get the drinker drunk eventually. There is some age bias with youths tending slightly more towards the consumption of beer and older men tending slightly more towards the consumption of vodka. Yet young men also drink vodka, as older men also drink beer. Often the two are combined. They stand in pairs or small groups, passing the bottle back and forwards, and my observations suggest that the drink is shared equally. Where young men tend to drink boisterously, talking and laughing 'too loudly', especially if there are any young women present, older men tend to quiet garbled conversation. The conversation of both groups are often punctuated by sudden outbreaks of angry

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Grossman 1977, Katsenelinboigen 1977 and papers in Clark (Ed.) 1983.

<sup>23</sup> See Hivon (1994) for a full discussion of vodka as medium and currency of exchange on a collective farm.

<sup>24</sup> 'Pianstvo': drunkenness.



337

Photo 7.1

The Consumption of 'strong spirit'



shouting, occasional brawls, and/or sudden outbreaks of tears and sentimental displays of affection. They take little notice of passers-by and passers-by take little notice of them. They get very drunk, that is, with unfocused vision, slurred speech, inability to walk straight, etc.

As they wend their separate ways home, some fall asleep on the Metro, buses or trams. Fellow passengers regard them with a mixture of (physical) disgust and (humane) sympathy in varying proportions. On one occasion I sat next to a drunk on the Metro, whose head kept falling onto my shoulder. As I shrugged him off, he would jolt awake, then fall asleep again, letting his head fall onto the shoulder of the woman on his other side. She would shrug him off angrily, and the whole procedure was repeated. There are often men, lying 'dead drunk' in underpasses, on the pavement, or in the bushes in all weathers. Not infrequently these men are corpses by the time the sun rises. On the housing estate where I lived, I frequently saw a young woman who lived in the same block, trying to persuade a man (I presume her husband) to come inside. Although she was of small stature, she was clearly experienced at manhandling this much larger man in a state of complete physical disability. Through a combination of shouting, pushing, pulling and cajoling she would eventually manoeuvre him into the lift. My (naive) offer of assistance was angrily rejected.

This street drinking is often distinguished by the speed with which the alcohol is consumed. Whilst waiting for a train on a station platform one freezing morning at 7am, I watched three men consume a half bottle of vodka and several bottles of beer in the 15 minutes we waited for the train. They were instantly drunk and presumably off to work at that hour of the morning.

### **Pathological alcoholism or 'male solidarity'?**

This kind of purposeful street drinking is a distinctively male occupation, which would suggest that it is at least partly a means of expressing 'male identity and solidarity',<sup>25</sup> of resistance to female domination of the domestic domain. To the

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<sup>25</sup> See papers edited by Gefou-Madianou 1992.

extent that the domestic environment has strong female connotations, and that there is some 'female resistance' to 'male drunkenness', all-male drinking in the home may cause domestic conflict.<sup>26</sup> (This is not to say that it never occurs, or that women always have the power to forbid domestic drunkenness, but that when they do exercise control of the domestic domain, men end up drinking on the streets.) In contemporary Russia there is a strong contradiction between a semi-suppressed ideology of 'male dominance' and the combination of rhetorical and practical aspects of 'equality between the sexes'. This makes it impossible to assert 'male dominance' in contemporary Russia in any comprehensive sense. Thus getting drunk with a group of men on the streets may be a form of resistance to the perception or reality of female domination (or at least of female insubordination), and avoidance of 'feminised' space, the private flat. On the other hand the congruence between the ideology of vodka and (feminised) kinship indicates a more complex engendering: by drinking, men aspire to ideals that are strongly reminiscent of the relations of kinship, which is itself both ideally (the Mother:child relationship) and practically (women and housework/childcare) feminised.

### **And Sociality**

It is extremely rare to see anyone drinking on their own, which suggests that drinking retains its symbolic link to sociality, even for the more pathological consumers. I have often seen two men with a bottle accost a third and invite him to make up a threesome. I did not get the impression that the third was always known to the others. Such casual interaction between strangers would be unthinkable without the intermediary of the bottle, and the assumption that the invitation would be welcome. The invitation to share a bottle provides an acceptable means to social contact. It is a chicken and egg question whether men are sociable in order to drink or that they drink in order to be sociable, given the ideological interdependence of the two. However, the state being finally achieved is not one of friendly camaraderie, but more one of asocial oblivion; in Segal's terms it is more 'displeasure reducing than pleasure enhancing'. Although 'getting drunk' does involve a phase of sociality in the course of consumption, the end result is an almost

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<sup>26</sup> Alcoholism is certainly linked to domestic violence.

complete inability to be 'social', to speak, to focus on the world, to negotiate the crowd. Complete drunkenness means complete isolation.

It seems clear that there is a connection between the positive attributes of vodka consumption and the pathology of abuse. On the one hand, vodka is pure, strong, Russian food for the soul. Its consumption denotes open sociality to the extent that 'in vodka veritas'; this in turn lends faith to its use as the idiom and currency of non-state exchanges and relationships. The proper Russian 'muzhik who can drink', demonstrates both his masculinity and his strong spirit. When it is used in moderation or 'symbolically', it creates a feeling of trust and camaraderie. Yet it is these very positive attributes which lend it to abuse, and the eventual unfocused isolation of the very drunk. In general, people are remarkably (to me) tolerant and even affectionate towards the very drunk. Many of my friends would point out a drunk trying to help his even more drunk friend with a sympathetic smile.

Venedict Erofeev's epic saga 'Moskva-Petushki' (1990) depicts the tragic attempt of a drunk to get from Moscow to Petushkie. He spends all his money and loses the present he was taking to his woman friend; he gets stalled in a cycle of drinking to get drunk and drinking in order to be able to function with a crippling hangover; he describes not remembering the day before and the disorientation of waking in an unfamiliar corner of the city. Even if the majority of Russians don't drink to such excess, they all recognise the familiar tragedy. It is a part of a cultural understanding of drinking, as disoriented isolation. The price of brief sociality is often enduring alcoholic psychosis.

### **Sobriety**

Over the last two years (1993-1995), I have come across a number of examples of a different evaluation of sobriety. All have been in a sense 'real Russian men ('nastayashie muzhikie'), eg, chairmen or directors of former state and collective farms, big men, hard working, committed to both the land and their members. Some have been 'former alcoholics', who can avoid drinking with impunity (possibly as a result of already having proved their ability to drink). Some simply state that 'I don't drink' ('Ya nie vyipiu') in a manner that brooks no argument. Others are

more surreptitious. For example, at a formal lunch on a collective farm, I noted that the chairman was filling his own glass from an already open vodka bottle, whilst ensuring that everybody else's glasses were filled from the newly opened bottles. I eventually realised that he was drinking water. When I asked him about it in private the next day he said, that because he often has to entertain guests, he would have to drink all the time, and would never get any work done. It is becoming not uncommon for reform-minded, entrepreneurial types to be explicit about avoiding constant consumption, and/or to condemn drunkenness (eg, Julia's husband Mikhail). It seems that for some participants in the new world of Russian capitalism, success requires rationality and a clear head, not the hazy warmth of mutual inebriation.

In spite of public opinion to the contrary, Joyce (1992) suggests that Gorbachev's anti-alcohol policies did have some effect. Between 1980 and 1989 production, the percentage of family budgets spent on alcoholic beverages, and sales all decreased. (Joyce 1992:108-109). He notes that worktime losses decreased by 5 million man days between 1985 and 1988. Similarly, the table below reveals a decrease in registered cases of alcoholism and alcoholic psychosis between 1987 and 1990.

**Table 7.2** **Alcoholism and Alcoholic Psychosis**  
**1980-1990 per 100,000 population**

All cases registered	
1980	1458.4
1985	1953.6
1986	1980.5
1987	2008.6
1988	1999.9
1989	1886.8
1990	1790.6

Source: Ryan M. 'Social Trends in Contemporary Russia', 1993 p.146.

Referring back to the interpretations of alcohol consumption offered in the literature, we can see that although there is a sociology (groups of friends and kin in the privacy of the flat, a form of male solidarity), and a functionality (instrumental drinking, vodka as currency) to Russian drinking patterns, there is also a long political and economic history (fiscal revenues to the state) and an anomie in the realisation of identity (the patriarchal 'muzhik' who becomes alcoholically,

helplessly childlike). If Segal noted a contradiction between 'original Slavic sensuality' and 'Orthodox asceticism', this is being complemented by a contradiction between an engrained passion for vodka drinking and new emphases on economicistic sobriety.

### **Concluding remarks**

Vodka is the idiom through which people construct if not 'ideal worlds' at least 'ideal social relations' of trusting warmth. Even dangerous, 'public' spaces (the streets or the underpasses, public restaurants or banquets) can be made safe and 'private' by the consumption of vodka. Similarly, some of the 'effects' of drinking vodka can be achieved in private space, to the extent that the space is imbued with traces of past commensality. Little or no vodka need be drunk to achieve a state not of inebriation, but of analogic mutual trust and affection. The state of drunkenness is a private space and behaviour in a private space shares the positive qualities of drunkenness.

In this chapter, I have tried to give a sense to the inter-relation between certain kinds of social relationships (kinship and friendship), certain spaces (the private self-contained flat), and the practices and ideology of consuming vodka in company.

There is a process of feedback and analogy that connects these phenomena.

Drinking constructs ideal relations of trust and intimacy (friendship); the private flat is where kin and friends gather to commensally consume and converse in a particular kind of 'kitchen philosophy'. By analogy drinking anywhere and with anyone re-constructs this ideal world, if only temporarily. These ideals need to be understood against the backdrop of other kinds of social relationships (work relationships, relationships with representatives of formerly state dominated organisations - from shop assistants to bureaucrats), other spaces (anywhere outside the private flat) and other socio-psychotropic states (sobriety and attendant suspicion), as these have been described in the earlier chapters of this thesis. The ideological construction of agency has social, spatial, and substance referents.

Though these be patterned, they are symbolically opposed to the outside world of over-determination, where the other cannot be trusted, and where the apparent cannot be believed.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Alienation and Post-Soviet Urban Culture**

In this concluding chapter, I want to draw together some of the theoretical issues that have been addressed in this thesis. First, I want to reiterate the theoretical logic which informs the more concrete comparative conclusions, and which is closely linked to the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1984). I have tried to avoid positing a determining social structure which translates seamlessly into social action, discourse and ideology, whilst elucidating the ways in which powerful social forces infect and influence the practical, diverse, day to day experiences of the population. Individual social actors interact with these powerful social forces via social practices and interpretations which are themselves the product of a shifting tension between conformity and resistance, nostalgia and an occasional optimism, subject to variable levels of knowing and unknowing. The explanandum of this thesis is the social process (or structuration process) by which, in which, and through which meanings are constructed: these meanings are the product of the engagement/disengagement of social actors with their political, economic, ideological, moral and social environment, and of their not always consistent interpretations of aspects of that environment. The spatial emphasis in this thesis is based on the premise that it is the perceptual stimuli of the spatial context of social action that trigger reactions, interpretations and the construction of meanings. In this process, face to face interactions with known and unknown others are a critical component, as these produce and reproduce embodied and internalised meanings and identities. The interactive moment constitutes the process whereby meanings are constructed on the basis of a 'shared social grammar' of inter-relating. These are spatially connoted by the privacy of 'kitchen philosophy', or by the localised consumption of public emotions in shops, on streets or on the Metro.

In order to understand any social formation (structure, system, action), we need to articulate how the urban social universe, comes to have meaning for its inhabitants.

In small 'face to face' communities, social actors enjoy far greater confidence in their knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the actions of others. If, in any social formation, there are 'differences' in the interpretation of the social universe (eg, women having different interpretations of the core values of a society, or the lower classes/castes offering a different explanation for the causes and processes of their oppression), they nevertheless share an awareness of the values, hierarchic principles, and ideology that inform social action. Intra-social variations are variations on a dominant paradigm, but it is a paradigm that is well-known and indeed sometimes constitutes a boundary outside which it is 'impossible to think'. Further, people know one another's history, fortunes, social relations and can 'predict' the behaviour of known others with the confidence that comes of quotidian familiarity. In cities, the basic premise of social life is the impossibility of knowing more than a fraction of the other members of that social universe, or of predicting the actions, knowledge or interpretations of others with the same degree of confidence as her rural cousin (see for example, Simmel 1950, Wirth 1938). In the absence of confidence in a shared universe of values and meanings, we need to wonder at how social actors imagine their social universe as they negotiate a path between relative certainty, degrees of familiarity and ignorance. The complexity of social life in 'dense and heterogeneous' cities re-problematises the questions of 'social structure', 'social system', 'social action' and the construction of meaning. Where the division of labour is complex and segmented, it is impossible for the individual to even pretend to a grasp of how all the parts fit together. Understanding urban culture is further problematised in a situation of substantial social change, where the appearance of new social phenomena upsets the traditional balance between knowing and unknowing. Yet city populations do manage to live side by side with unknown others, accomplish tasks, coordinate their actions and negotiate this mysterious universe with surprising skill. Meanings do emerge, but are subject to doubt, inconsistency and contradiction.

Although a city might constitute a single conceptual socio-spatial entity , eg, 'Moscow', this is an abstract concept. It may be easy enough to denote the signified by reference to a map, indicating the boundaries, or even to elicit a number of shared connotations ('the best place to live in Russia; where there is the 'highest level of cultural development'; a concentric, feminine, or Asiatic city; different

from Voronezh, St Petersburg, or New York). These are however gross parameters, articulated in particular contexts. The lived-in city is not an abstraction, but a series of paths and places, some intimate (the locales of 'home' or 'work'), some familiar (the route to work, the local shops), some glimpsed (a micro-raion on a one off visit). The cognised city is an amalgam of the known and the unknown, where the intimate knowledge of your own kitchen is complemented by a navigational competence, a knowledge of 'how to get to Liubertsy', although you have never been there. Part of the taken for granted meaning of living in the city is an awareness of unknowing, which persists whether or not this unknowing is specifically problematised.

History is relevant, to the extent that it is of interest and/or practically imported into the process of meaning formation. If it goes without saying that any object of social enquiry is the product of history, this tells us nothing of the degrees, shading and extent of historical impact on the day to day lives of inhabitants. Some of the history of a city is spatially embedded in stone, brick, glass and concrete, providing mnemonic reminders of the mysteries of history; yet the meaning of these reminders cannot be predicted from a simple observation of their presence. We have seen the distinction between the 'invisibility' of 'kitsch' revolutionary symbols in the Metro and Sergei's use of the city's architecture to teach me the city. The historical forces that shaped the Metro, the Kremlin, or the high ceilings and windows in Brezhnev's son's flat are sometimes ignored, sometimes avoided, often taken-for-granted, and occasionally brought into focus. Much of the history of the city is lost in the forgotten lives, aspirations and intentions of powerful and powerless alike. In between these extremes are the scraps of history gleaned from school and guide books, personal memories and the stories of others. Examination of the ('deep and hidden') forces of the long *duree* has an important role, but does little to elucidate the lived meanings of their effects. If 'capitalism' or 'communism' necessarily create 'different cities', it seems to me epistemologically preferable to examine that difference as it is lived by participants, whose differentiated engagement in social, economic and political processes contribute to the specific and not always predictable operationalisation of those large scale forces.

On the other hand the dimly acknowledged forces that shape a city's architecture,

layout, monuments, and icons limit and define that which is available to the interpretations of social actors, if not the variable meanings they construct. The taken-for-granted backdrop of daily movement through the city may be consciously ignored, but nevertheless forms the limits of socio-spatial consciousness. Movement between centre and periphery is movement between different kinds of symbolic environments. Where the bricks and stone of the centre attest to competing historical forces of pre-revolutionary imperialism, Orthodox religiosity, and the elaborate signification of the 'Glorious October Revolution', the concrete panels of the peripheral micro-raions attest to the bleak, hard, constructivist functionalism of the post-war period.

If we want to understand the meanings of the city, we need to explore the entire complex of perceptual, conceptual, emotive and interpretive lenses through which the city is filtered, in order to arrive at a point where we can posit a valid urbanism. The temporal-spatial continuity of the city as an entity only acquires meanings (its tones, styles or flavours) through being lived in. Given the impossibility of a confident mental or intellectual grasp on the city (too much is unknown), or of describing the social structure of the city in a way that does justice to its heterogeneity, we need to conceptualise a much more partial, contingent and elusive object of enquiry, that can be 'known' in different ways and at different levels. This partial, contingent and elusive form of knowing is fundamentally based in practical, day to day experience. In its lived-in vitality, the city is the context of social practices, which are themselves the product of individual intention (subject to knowledge and constraint), unintended consequences, institutional projects of production or politics, conformity, resistance and the polysemic interpretations of participants.

As context, the city is perceived through the senses. Sights, sounds, smells and the sensory experiences of heat, cold, body contact and isolation are consumed as the inhabitants move around the city. Much of this perception goes unnoticed through long familiarity or disinterest. However the perceptible qualities of the city are the fundamental stimuli which trigger behaviour or signify where one is in time and space. Even or especially when this context is conceived as the taken-for-granted backdrop for social action, it provides cues and clues to appropriate behaviour (eg,

Metro etiquette). If it is stretching the point to suggest that it is the gaze of Lenin's profile that induces travellers conform to a standard of behaviour on the Metro, there is a sense in which an embodied ethic of surveillance prevails. Lenin may be dead or even redundant, but many aspects of urban (public space) social practice reproduce practices born of the fear of denunciations and informing.

If the city is a particular perceptual space, with its own layout and icons, it is also a social space. The logic of moving around the city is organised on the basis of social relations of production, consumption and exchange, relations of fear and affect, and of anonymity. Deep and hidden forces of the long *duree* may construct the structural qualities of those relationships, but as lived relationships they are experienced with poignant immediacy. Spatially removed from one another, each field of social action has its own emotional tone: the tangible angst of the Metro traveller, the anger of the shop assistant, the wary worker, the relaxed return home. Moving around Moscow, the population moves into and out of these distinctive emotive zones. If Goffman (1959) was concerned to elucidate the communicative aspect of impersonal, urban social relations, I would suggest that this discourse is an emotive one, expressed in scowls, glares, the frightened knit of eyebrows, the hunch of shoulders, and in the exhausted blankness of a tired face. City dwellers consume the emotional expressions of others as they move around the city, and, adjust their own emotional emissions in a process of uncanny emulation. The result is both one of particularised emotional spaces (different emotional expressions at home or in the shop), and one of meaning creation through the sharing/mutual consumption of emotively expressed attitude.

It is through this emotional lens that the city is interpreted in its more cognitive or discursive treatments. If the idealised city represents the apex of aspiration ('the highest level of cultural development'), the lived in city is discursively described as 'uzhasno', 'strashno', or a 'sumashedshie dom' (horrible, terrible or a mad house). This contradiction is in part at least constituted by the opposition between a 'cultured' city and an urban population universally characterised as 'uncultured' ('niekulturni'), and 'rude' (gruboi'). The polysemy of 'cultured' (appreciation of High Art, good manners) is ripped apart by daily experience.

We can never predict how people will conceptualise or interpret what they perceive (although there are numerous urban analysts who entertain such pretensions), without paying specific attention to the practical interpretations of those perceptible qualities. If an armchair analyst could posit the 'meaning' of the iconographic symbols of the Moscow Metro, s/he would miss the critical explanandum. For me it is not the straight reading of space as text that is of interest. It is the interplay between the 'intended meanings' of textual space, the perceptual environment, emotionally charged social spaces, partial and contingent interpretations, abbreviated discursive treatments and practical engagement, which together constitute a meaningful whole. This whole in turn reproduces emotions, interpretations discourses and practices in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop.

### **Soviet Urbanism**

In order to elucidate the particularities of Soviet urbanism, I want to examine the concept of 'alienation'. Although alienation has been posited as a universal factor of urban culture, there are differences: examining alienation in the (post) Soviet context offers important clues to the distinctive nature of Soviet urbanism.

Discussing 'Mass Alienation Under State Socialism and After' Tong suggests

that mass alienation has developed into a pattern of behaviour that is harder to transform than the political and economic institutions that originally created it.

(Tong 1995:216)

Tong offers a number of possible concepts which contribute to the meaning of 'alienation':

powerlessness (the doubt that one's behaviour can affect the distribution of personal and social rewards), meaninglessness (an inability to understand the forces that shape one's personal and social affairs), normlessness (the perception that norms have lost their regulative force and that socially unapproved means are necessary to achieve one's goals), and estrangement (the rejection of commonly held values)

(Tong 1995:216)

Alienation has been posited as an inevitable aspect of urban living by writers from Durkheim to Harvey; the 'causes' of the 'alienation of urban life' emphasise one or the other of two sets of factors.

### **Alienation and the 'dense, heterogeneous segmented and impersonal' nature of urban life**

First, 'alienation' is deemed a product of living in a 'dense, heterogeneous, segmented and impersonal' (Wirth 1938) environment, where secondary (ie, anonymous) contacts outnumber primary (ie, personal) contacts, where the mass of others are unknown (and therefore potentially 'dangerous'), where social life is compartmentalised into locales of 'work', 'home', 'leisure', 'neighbourhood' or 'interest groups', whose networks overlap partially, if at all. The high level of 'unknowing' that characterises urban life contributes to 'alienation' as the individual loses confidence in her social (economic, political) understandings and competence.

This 'alienation' is partly compensated by a number of social processes:

- i) the development of social practices which reduce the dangers of proximity to unknown others (eg, the 'cooperative maintenance of public privacy' (Milgram 1970);
- ii) the development of stereotypes, which enable people to 'read' one another with sufficient (ie, good enough) accuracy;
- iii) the increased social tolerance for individuality, creativity and eccentricity;
- iv) the development of new forms of sociality (voluntary, interest groups).

In Moscow, only the first of these processes resembles those familiar to analysts of western urban culture. In Moscow as in London or Chicago, there are norms of behaviour which reduce the 'danger' of proximity to unknown others (particularly norms of avoidance). However, I would suggest that these superficially similar norms of avoidance behaviour are accompanied by significant differences. In London, it is possible to exchange a few words or a smile with unknown others, in the expectation that the overture will be reciprocated with a smile or a few words. In Moscow, this is much less acceptable, and any overture is usually met with

silence, looking away, or a cold and uncomprehending regard.

Stereotypes which enable people to 'read' one another are a common feature of western urban culture. This is however closely linked to two complementary aspects of western urban culture. First, it is linked to the plethora of 'signs of identity' provided by consumerism; second, it is linked to taken-for-granted notions of individual difference. These two factors are closely inter-linked. They are also relatively absent in the FSU as the absence of an ideological commitment to individual difference combines with an emphasis on use value to restrict the 'proliferation of signs' which enable the development of symbolic stereotypes. This is discussed further below.

Participation in 'voluntary interest groups' becomes a critical factor in the production of identity and/or status and prestige (Wirth 1938) in western urban social processes. I would suggest that the development of 'voluntary interest groups' plays a more important role: voluntary interest groups not only provide individuals with a supplementary source of 'identity', but are a forum for 'intermediate' social interaction, located between the intimate social spheres of daily familiarity (eg, home and work) and the anonymous social spheres of streets and public transport. The absence of 'intermediate' social spaces and social groups in the FSU is a critical factor in the construction of (alienated) Soviet urbanism. I shall return to this theme below.

### **Alienation and Money, Market and Capital**

Secondly, 'alienation' is deemed a product of the unseen forces of the money economy, the Market and Capital. Weber, Simmel and their descendants defined the city as the locus of trade and commerce, and attributed contingent developments in social and political activity to the dominance of the logic, rationality and practices of impersonal, mediated exchange. Money relations are 'completely internalised' (Simmel 1950). M:C:M exchanges dominate the Market, as exchange value replaces use value. Capital accumulates and the entire socio-spatial web of the city can be reduced to Marxian analyses of how Capital creates a wholly alien city centre, inner-city ghettos, and leafy middle-class suburbs, 'pulverising' space in a proliferation of

abstract private property relations (Lefebvre 1974), rationalising time and annihilating spatial distanciation in the search for efficient profits (Harvey 1989), motored by 'growth coalitions' (Gottdiener 1985), where consumption classes compete for resources (Castells 1978). At one level, all of this is of course valid, as the money economy, the Market and Capitalism dominate the cities of 19th and 20th century Europe and North America. But the money economy, the Market and Capital increasingly dominate much of the globe, from metropolis to under-developed periphery. The operations of the money economy, the Market and Capital are of course evident in cities, and in a different way from their operations in the 'rural hinterland'. At another level, Capitalism dominates, therefore all social, economic, political and spatial systems can be reductively analysed by reference to the ever-increasing reach of Capitalism. Capitalist cities are indeed under the pall of Capital, but all urban social phenomena cannot (or should not) be reduced to what could be construed as a tautology.

As noted in Chapter 2, Marxist analyses of urbanism are particularly interesting in conjunction with an examination of Moscow. It is as 'dense, heterogeneous, segmented and impersonal' as the cities scrutinised by western authors; its economy is equally dominant, but it was not an economy dominated by the Market or Capital.

There is often a confused logic which underwrites neo-Marxist discourse, which conflates money exchanges with Capitalism, money exchanges and the Market, and the Market with Industrial Capitalism. These terms are used almost interchangeably to explain the 'alienation' that characterises urban life. Money exchanges are 'rationalised and impersonal'. The Market is the forum for the mystifications of commodified labour, and the expropriation of surplus value, which creates 'alienated' workers. The logic of Capital accumulation exercises its power over the time and space of the city as it determines 'alienated' relations of production, distribution and consumption. The value of a comparative perspective lies in the insights it yields into just such dangerous conflations. We need to untangle some of these conflations.

## Money exchanges

Money has a number of potential functions, which may or may not be present in any given economic situation. Money is:

- i) A means of exchange: as a means of exchange (in all or in restricted spheres of exchange) money enables indirect exchange, ie, it releases the parties from the necessity of finding a direct barter partner in the same space-time.
- ii) A store of value: as a store of value, money enables the value of a good alienated<sup>1</sup> in one context to be 'stored' and redeemed at a later date. This value is guaranteed by a social consensus (See Humphrey 1985 and 1991 for a discussion of the emergence of barter when faith in money disintegrates).
- iii) A unit of account of value: the growth of money economies evolves into reference to quantities of value, in money terms. Although money is here an abstraction, is it more of an abstraction than any other sign which 'stands for' some other kind of value? Given that in a small local market, the (money) values of things reflects the values of supply and demand, adjusted for imperfect information (as in any market, including 'direct' barter), is this abstraction more alienating or impersonal than other codes of value (eg, is the designation of economic value by money more abstract or opaque than indices of aesthetic value, or religious value?).

## Money and Capitalism

Although we can trace the threads that have created the conflation of money and Capital (not least of which is their conflation in common language), this is misleading (although Harvey is careful not to conflate the two). A money economy is possible without Capitalism, but Capitalism is not possible without a money economy. This indicates that there is a process by which a money economy is transformed (or not) into a Capitalist economy. In the 'west' this process has been amply and rigorously investigated, and can be glossed as the shift from C:M:C exchange to M:C:M exchange. Money as a means of exchange, a unit of account and a store of value is a necessary but not sufficient condition of this transformation

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<sup>1</sup> This is of course a different sense of 'alienation' than that which applies to alienated persons. In this sense a good or object is alienated when it is permanently given away, sold or exchanged.

(accumulated wealth could be 'saved' or 'consumed'). Further, as most people's 'money' comes from engagement in the (Capitalist) economy, as wages or dividends, and as the 'money of wages' can be transformed into 'Capital' (by buying shares, a factory, land), the (real) 'alienation' that comes from living in a socio-cultural environment determined to some extent by the uncontrolled and uncontrollable logic of Capital accumulation, is conflated with the impersonal, abstract, or fictitious relations of money exchanges (be this exchanges for goods or labour). That money (profits) accrue to Capital(ists) as a consequence of these money exchanges (the commoditisation of labour and objects of consumption)<sup>2</sup> does not however mean that money and Capital are synonyms.

### **Money and the Market : the Market**

Again, we need to examine more closely the different meanings denoted and connoted by the term 'Market'. First there is the 'marketplace', a bounded time-space nexus where people come together for the purposes of exchange; the marketplace provides the conceptual stereotype for markets more extended in time and space. Secondly there are the markets extended in time and space such as commodity markets, markets in land, labour or capital, which may be official, informal or 'black'. Thirdly, there are the bundles of practices and criteria (market forces) that characterise the operation of the marketplace: barter or money exchanges, price setting mechanisms (haggling, supply and demand, cost plus markup). Fourth, there are the 'Market economies', a term which is sometimes used to signify capitalist economies. Finally we have the 'Market' of advanced global capitalism.

### **Money and the Market**

Money relations facilitate efficient exchange, ie, they are a factor in the workings of the small face to face markets (means of exchange), or market exchanges extended

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<sup>2</sup> If money releases the exchangers of things from the need for co-presence in time and space, so wages (money for labour) releases and expands the potential for exchange. Those without a goat to exchange for a sheep can offer labour in lieu; the donation of labour need not be reciprocated by labour but by other agreed recompense (goat or money to buy a goat); the recompense for labour (wages) can be exchanged elsewhere in time and space than the workplace (releasing the worker from reliance on the employer's 'payments in kind').

in time and space (means of exchange and store of value). Price setting mechanisms in the market are accounted in money terms (means of exchange, store of value and unit of account). However, barter markets can exist without money exchanges. Where the confusion arises is in the conflation of C:M:C markets and M:C:M markets. Sometimes the operation of this improved efficiency results in accumulation of profits, which become the 'purpose' of the exchange (from C:M:C to M:C:M). and enable the profiteer to accumulate Capital, which entails increased power over further economic transactions as well as the political and social context in which those transactions take place. On the other hand, if the existence of markets or the Market is facilitated by money exchange, money exchange can exist without the market (as in the FSU). Although money in the FSU was a means of exchange (for labour, goods, services in a complex economy where goods and consumers are removed in time and space), a unit of account, and a store of value, these money exchanges could not transform from C:M:C to M:C:M relations, with the attendant potentiality for the development of accumulated Capital. Again, money exchanges and the Market are closely related but not synonymous.

### **The Market and Capitalism**

The various levels and meanings of the term 'market' were described above. We can see the connections between the small face to face market, where exchanges become facilitated by the introduction of money, and the extension of those markets in time and space. This extension might develop from C:M:C trade (and traders) into M:C:M trade, with the attendant accumulation of Capital (by capitalists), which may be invested in ownership of the means of production (if it is neither saved or consumed). Again however, markets, and market forces both pre-date (in time and space) the penetration or development of industrial capitalism. Only some incarnations of the 'Market' are synonymous with Capitalism.

Thus we can see that the congruence of 'money exchanges, the Market and Capitalism' is the result not of necessary, but of contingent processes. Further, we need to examine the supposed determination of money, the Market and the Capitalism in the development of particular types of 'alienated, impersonal, economicistic and rational' social relations and of 'blase metropolitan personality types'.

There is nothing intrinsic to the nature of money exchanges themselves which makes them uniquely impersonal, or rational. Indeed direct barter exchange between persons unknown to one another can be equally impersonal and rational.<sup>3</sup> Money simply facilitates exchange by releasing parties from the need to find 'an exact opposite' in time and space. Various forms of money have been identified in small (isolated) non-industrialised societies and the use of money certainly pre-dates industrial capitalism (see eg, Dalton 1967, 1982, Firth 1967, Codere 1968). Persons who exchange with one another may or may not be known to one another, with or without the mediation of money. Economic exchanges are evaluated on the basis of both economically 'rational' (is this good of equal or greater value than the good I am offering?) and social (can I trust the seller?) evaluations (see Hart 1986 for a discussion of the two aspects of money).

Although money is critical to the development of 'indirect exchange', this does not necessarily imply that 'all money exchanges are therefore alienated, impersonal and rational'. Further, exchange between familiar, local producer and consumer, is not 'impersonalised' by the use of money as mediator.

If there is a certain 'rationalisation' imposed by the use of arithmetic in economic evaluations (of things, labour, time, and space), it is a fallacy to suggest that this rationalisation is subject only to the use of money, the dominance of the Market or the logic of Capitalism. The technological requisites of industrialisation and the attendant complexity of the division of labour require rationalisation of time and space, a universal means of exchange, store of value and unit of account. This again is clarified by looking at the FSU, where the use of money (but neither the Market nor Capital) combined with industrialisation and an increasingly complex division of labour to encourage an almost obsessive 'rationalisation'.

More interesting are the bizarre relations of determination postulated between the Market and impersonal alienated social relations. The argument is that the Market (unspecified) encourages rational, economic and de-personalised relationships. If we are discussing global, electronically transferred capital markets, between abstract

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<sup>3</sup> Barter exchange is of course not necessarily impersonal and rational: see eg. papers in Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (Eds.) 1992.

entities, fine. However, there are aspects of marketplaces, market practices and market forces in the economic functioning of many historically and geographically removed societies, which were not industrialised capitalist. If the heavy hand of unseen forces weighs heavily on the 'alienated' pawns whose destinies are determined by the strategies of Capital, this does not indicate that all 'Market relations' are alienating.

Money exchanges enable social actors to exchange with one another, to the extent that they share 'trust' in the value of the money mediating the exchange. This 'trust' is linked to a loosely defined consensus as to how money prices relate to values in the Market (eg, through the balance between supply and demand). This enables persons previously unknown to one another to enter into an exchange relationship. These (new) exchange relationships are potentially 'social'. If some hard-line Marxists might argue that the bustling marketplace is a hotbed of alienation, anomie and impersonal abstract exchange, we might question whether exchanges are only to occur between those known to one another, in sharing and balanced reciprocity of like for like. It is a commonplace of anthropology that reciprocity (exchange or trade) is a mechanism for creating social relations of interdependence. Relations with unknown others can take one of three routes: avoidance, warfare or exchange.<sup>4</sup> Given the asociality of the first and the second, we are left with the third. Thus money exchanges enable the development of markets, which are themselves the forum of exchange, ie, **for the creation of social relations**. Indeed I would argue that the proliferation of money exchanges and therefore of markets decreases alienation by enabling unknown others to exchange with one another.<sup>5</sup>

Further, the 'impersonal exchanges of the marketplace' are often personalised over

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<sup>4</sup> This notion was first suggested to me by Jonathan Parry, personal communication.

<sup>5</sup> Gell in Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (eds.) 1992 suggests that it may be the logic and experience of economic exchange (trade, barter) which provides the prototype for more 'social' exchanges (of women, gifts, etc.) in Melanesia. This is an insightful reversal of Levi-Strauss's suggestion that it is avoidance of the incest taboo, which fosters the 'exchange of women', and which provides the prototype for subsequent forms of exchange and reciprocity. This seems to me to be intuitively important as the trust-creating force of exchange would be superfluous to intra-social exchanges (of eg. sisters). In order for exchange to create trust (a social relation, interdependence) there must be a sense in which this was previously absent.

time (see eg, Stone 1954 and the ethnographies cited in Chapter 2).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in examining the 'alienation' of economic actors in the FSU, we can see not simply parallel, but exacerbated alienation, in the absence of legitimate horizontal exchange, ie, in the absence of the 'Market'. Exchange relationships in the FSU were mediated not by the 'Market', but by the state: the (anonymous) relationship between shop worker and customer could not be transformed into a personalised relationship (over time), because the shop worker and customer were ranged in hierarchical relations of dependence on the state, with no element of horizontal interdependence. If (sometimes) exchange relationships in capitalist contexts are depersonalised because a shop worker is a lowly employee of a faceless multi-national, this is not universal (because of the diversified/competitive nature of the marketplace -large and small producers, traders etc.). In the FSU, the absence of diversity and attendant competition (the state monopoly on production and distribution) wholly precluded the development of horizontal relations of **interdependent** exchange. Further, I would argue that this is not a contingent consequence of wholesale state control of the means of production and distribution, but a necessary result of monopolistic structural forces. What is more interesting, is the ways in which these structural forces are experienced, on a daily basis, by Muscovites as they shop for their daily bread or buy a Metro ticket. This alienation is not an abstract property of these daily exchanges, but a real felt quality of specific inter-personal relationships, created and maintained by the absence of the interdependencies associated with the Market.

Finally the logic of increasing Market efficiency is consistent with the development of various forms of credit, ie, of **trust**, combined with socially approved mechanisms for limiting abuse. However imperfect the operation of Markets where credit is the currency, they are nevertheless founded on assumptions of fair play, and of reciprocal interests in maintaining credit-worthiness (else the whole system collapses). The unstable relation between Market exchange, credit and trust in post-Soviet Moscow will be discussed below.

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<sup>6</sup>

For example, Cressey 1932, Whyte 1943, Liebow 1967, Hannerz 1969.

## Market: Money: Capital versus Money : Planning

In the FSU, we had an urbanised, industrialised (complex), modernised, and rationalised society, but one that eschewed the Market (in almost all its forms),<sup>7</sup> as it strove to create a polity without the dominant abstraction of Capital, and attendant phenomena: 'alienated and exploited' labour, or 'fetishised commodities' satisfying the 'false desires' of a mystified population. The table below sets out some of the critical distinctions:

Money and Market and Capital	Money and Central Planning
Consumers drive production	Planners drive production
Competition between producers	Competition between consumers
Exchange value and Diversity of distributors Consumer = dominant	Use value and State distribution Consumer = dependent
Exchange value and Diversity of goods Needs and desires Aesthetics Consumerism Social diversity Symbols multiply	Use value and Restricted range of goods Needs An-aesthetic Rational consumption Social Uniformity Symbols stagnate
Diversity (individualism) Interest groups	Uniformity (collectivism) Atomisation
Private property and market allocation Housing mobility Segregation/neighbourhood Access : ownership	Collective property and state allocation No housing mobility No segregation/neighbourhood Access : bureaucracy

## Production : Consumption

As has been noted throughout this thesis, one of the critical distinctions between the Soviet, centrally planned economy, and that of the market-driven, Capitalist economies of the 'west' is the different force and meaning of production and

<sup>7</sup> The exceptions were the legal kolkhoz markets ('rynek'), the operation of extensive informal 'market type' mechanisms (patronage, bribery, corruption, informal horizontal exchanges between enterprises), and doubtlessly a 'black' market of wholly illegal exchanges.

consumption, of producers and consumers. Where consumption drives the market economy (however 'false' consumers' desires in a hyper-reality of signs without signified, constructed by immersion in the symbols and imagery of the mass media (Baudrillard 1968), production drives the Soviet-style economy.

This should indicate that 'producers are alienated' in Capitalist, market-driven economies, but not in socialist planned economies. Again, if we take a Marxist definition of alienated labour (appropriation of the surplus value of labour, competition between workers for wages, jobs) we find that in the FSU, the surplus value of labour was also appropriated, not by Capital but by the state (representing the 'whole people'); whether we regard 'alienation' to be an abstract factor of appropriation of surplus value or a factor in the development of a real felt emotional state, there is little difference between the alienation of a worker in a socialist, collectively owned enterprise and the alienation of a worker in a capitalist owned multi-national corporation. Similarly in the FSU, there was competition between workers, not for jobs (policy of full employment), but for favour and patronage.<sup>8</sup> Indeed the impossibility of producing outside the state sector (except in the micro-production of the private plot), increases the alienation of workers through restricting job choices. A complex Market economy (of which the Capitalist market is one variant) permits and encourages diverse spheres of production (state or nationalised industry, multi-nationals, but also a diversity of smaller businesses of production, service and trade). If employment in nationalised industry or in multinational conglomerates implies substantial 'alienation', employment in a small business, or self-employment implies a comparative increase in self-determination and the intimate inter-dependence in the workplace, ie, decreased 'alienation'.

Further, as we have seen, the shortages of consumer goods in the FSU contributed to the alienation of consumers, who became supplicants at state distribution points.

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<sup>8</sup>

In both cases, workers compete for scarce resources: in the Market, by competition for (scarce) money and jobs; in the FSU by competition for (scarce) useful connections. If the good things in both cases are grossly comparable (a car, a summer house or a holiday abroad), the different routes (money or connections) do not indicate different driving techniques (competitive instrumentalism).

## **Exchange Value : Use Value and Distribution**

Where in Market economies, there are a plethora of media for the exchange of goods, services, land, labour and capital, in the FSU, these exchanges were all channelled through the state distribution network. Indeed, in order to avoid the development of M:C:M exchange value (and attendant accumulation of Capital), trade for profit was criminalised. Centralised planning of production and distribution was consistent with the logic of use value, highly rationalised and functional. If there is a postulated de-personalisation, alienation and rational instrumentalism attributed to the mechanisms of the Market (or to the abstract unseen forces of Capital), the exchange of money for goods and services in the FSU was not just impersonal, but anomically, aggressively alienating. Further this alienation was not an abstract property of face to face relationships, visible only to the x-ray vision of the analyst, but a real, felt property of the day-to-day interactions in shops and queues throughout the FSU. If the western consumer is 'always right', this is linked to the interdependency between producers/traders and consumers, which is a product of their mutual autonomy as they engage in horizontal relationships of reciprocal exchange. In the FSU, these were not 'exchange relationships' (of horizontal reciprocity between interdependent, autonomous economic actors), but hierarchical relationships between powerful rationing distributors and powerless recipients.

The logic of rationing was however frequently subverted by distribution/sales 'na leva' (to the left); although these were linked to socialised exchange relations between, for example, shop assistants and their 'friends', these socialised interpersonal relationships increased the alienation of the mass of consumers and contributed to a distributive culture of corruption.

## **Exchange value : Use Value and Diversity : Uniformity**

Competition (for exchange value) between producers and traders in industrialised market economies, is associated with the production of an increasing diversity of consumer goods. In the FSU, the absence of this competition and the dominance of production by the state planning agencies combined with commitment to 'use value' to restrict the range of goods and services on offer. The 'needs' of the population

(or for the reproduction of the labour force) were decided by experts, plans drawn up, goods produced and distributed according to the demographic profile of area or region. The emphasis on use value and on needs, results in the production and distribution of uniform and functional goods. Even if we disregard the derogation of (bourgeois) aesthetic sensibilities, the absence of a diversity of consumer goods creates an 'an-aesthetic' visual environment. Further, the absence of 'consumer choice' and of dependence on 'demand', contributed to an ethic of production whose products often failed to provide even a modicum of 'use value'. Soviet produced goods acquired a reputation as 'brak', ie, the dysfunctional products of Soviet industry.

### **Consumerism and Rational Consumption**

The consumerism that is associated with exchange value driven Market Capitalism is associated with three styles of interpretation: first, consumerism is the sign of profit driven commodity fetishism, where consumers consume 'pure signs', as they succumb to the seductions of media images and advertising (Baudrillard 1968). Secondly, there are patterns of consumption, which reproduce sociological categories of gender or class (Appadurai 1986, Douglas and Isherwood 1978). Here sociological determinants override the logic of 'choice', as 'personal choices' in the marketplace of consumption faithfully reflect class relations of production (Bourdieu 1984). Thirdly, there is a creative consumerism of emulation and aspiration, (Miller 1983, 1987, 1988, Gullestad 1984, 1992, Tomlinson 1990, Willis 1990), where consumer goods are 'appropriated' for the 'creation of a cultural milieu'. This process refers both to the construction and maintenance of 'structural' groups and identities (of eg, class or gender), and to the expression of ludic creativity and aspirations.

As we have seen there is little evidence of 'consumerism' in the FSU as rational consumption practices continue to dominate shrinking household budgets. This is linked as much to an absence of a notion of individual difference as to an absence of distinctive social groups, which might inspire emulation. Even amongst the 'nouveau riche', aspiring consumerism takes the form of highly conspicuous consumption of the simple insignia of wealth (BMWs, fur coats, Sony video

recorders etc.).

### **Exchange Value : Use Value and Economic Classes**

The economic classes of Capitalism are ranked in terms of control of Capital (production classes) and in terms of disposable income (consumption classes). In the FSU there was no potential for economic classes based on differentiated control of Capital but some restricted differences in disposable income and in access to scarce goods through other means (control of allocative power,<sup>9</sup> contacts, patronage, or corruption).

### **Exchange Value : Use Value**

#### **Diversity of Goods : Uniformity of Goods**

#### **Social Diversity : Social Uniformity**

In Market-driven Capitalist economies, the diversity of goods is complemented by a social diversity, in terms of finely differentiated economic classes (of production and of consumption), of political orientation, of ethnic affiliation, and of 'interest groups' (environmentalists, train spotters, and the many hued distinctions of youth culture). In the FSU, not only was economic diversification stifled, so too was diversification along any of the lines noted above. The absence of informal social groupings in the FSU was both politically motivated (to forbid the potential organisation of resistance) and economically enabled by a deficit of signs. If the development of stereotypes facilitates the perusal of a city crowd, reducing some of the dangers of social unknowing, this is largely operationalised by the adoption of the diversified insignia of social membership. Social diversity and symbolic diversity are mutually enabling. The symbolic uniformity of (restricted, functional) goods in the FSU reduced the quantity of distinctive symbols available for signifying group identity, and reduced the social intelligibility of unknown others. This is a significant factor in the multiplication of alienation in situations of anonymous proximity.

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<sup>9</sup> See Verdery 1991.

## Individualism and the 'Kollektiv'

It is often suggested that the logic of Capital accumulation, exchange value, the Market and the stimulation of desires contributes to increasing individualisation, and by association to alienation and asocial anomie,

In the FSU, individualism was subsumed under the abstract notion of the 'kollektiv', not a real social group with shared interests (of whatever hue), but 'the state of the whole people'<sup>10</sup> ('obshchenarodnoe gosudarstvo'), undifferentiated and indistinct, whose common interests are decided for them. The desires of individuals and of social groups smaller than 'the whole people' were therefore associated with 'false desires', and by proxy with 'exchange value, profiteering and exploitative capitalism'; as such, 'false needs' were suffocated before they were conceived. However, the absence of the signs of individual distinction is simultaneously an absence of the signs of identity, of membership of a distinctive social group (middle class, punk, Sloane ranger, or crusty youth.)

Analysts of Market urbanism suggest a connection between the multiplicity of signs (consumer goods), the segmentary nature of urban social processes (division of labour, dominance of money exchanges enabling a disconnection between production and consumption, multiplicity of social identities) and the fracturation of identity which characterises the post-modern. In the FSU, identity is also 'fractured' but along different fault lines, and for different reasons. On the one hand there was sometimes a much closer identification between production and consumption, as various goods and services (housing, health care holidays, as well as food and consumer goods) were accessed via work related relationships, rather than through money exchanges in the Market. Yet the dominance of assumed corruption in the allocation of these goods and services precluded the development of a cosy, sociable identification. Where in the 'west' this fracturation refers to a rich diversity of both chosen and imposed identifications (with economic classes of production or consumption, neighbourhood, political orientation or interest group) in the FSU it refers to the simpler, but stronger, opposition between public and private identity. In

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<sup>10</sup> See Churchward in Sawyer M (Ed.).

the absence of finely grained social diversity (interest groups, intermediate social spaces and the signs of diversity), urban citizens shift between their public, functional, institutionalised roles (as producers or consumers) and identities, and private familial roles and identities. The Soviet citizen experienced this fracturation not as identification with diversified social identities, but as a more straightforward split between the 'not me' of public role and the 'real me' of private relationships. The 'not me' connotations of public identities (as worker or consumer) are again linked to the absence of any form of choice in the public sphere.<sup>11</sup>

### **Private Property : Collective Property**

### **Market : State Allocation**

Lefebvre (1974) suggested that the 'private property relations' of Capital are responsible for the 'abstract pulverisation' of urban space. This concept implies its opposite, 'real, whole' urban space. In order to examine the relation between 'urban alienation' and 'private property' we need to look more closely at the relation between the 'choice' offered by the (private property) market, and 'rational distribution' (state allocation). On the one hand we have the 'segregated ghettos' of Capitalist urban spaces, where unseen market forces create a spatiality based on economic classes (inner city working class slums, leafy middle class suburbs).

These urban spaces are indeed more 'segregated' than in the FSU, where the intelligentsia live next door to manual workers in identical flats in the micro-raions, or in 'kommunalkas' in the centre. State allocation of housing meant that there were no slums and no leafy suburbs in Moscow. Although there were particular blocks of flats allocated to members of various prestigious groups (composers in the Dom Kompositorov, high level apparatchiks in guarded buildings) and a plethora of mechanisms for subverting the 'rational allocation of housing' ('contacts' being more useful than the fulfilment of the criteria of 'need or merit'), these nevertheless did not contribute to a spatial 'segregation' of the city as a whole.

On the other hand, the absence of 'spatial segregation' resulted in the absence of spatially constituted 'neighbourhoods or communities'. Where Market forces shape the socio-spatial segregation of cities, this is the product of two distinct mechanisms.

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<sup>11</sup> Numerous observers of formerly communist societies have commented on this split, including Glazov 1985, Shlapentok 1989, Tong 1995 and Verder 1991.

On the one hand, choice is linked to economic means, and it makes no sense to speak of the choices of the urban poor, whose poverty severely restricts their housing choices. They are indeed 'segregated' in urban ghettos. On the other hand, where there is an active low-rent housing sector, even the poor can choose 'which slum to live in'. Even here there emerges (if only sometimes) a sense of neighbourhood, based on shared ethnicity or shared oppression. For those with the economic means, choice becomes increasingly possible. The 'spatial segregation' of Capitalist cities reflects not only economic classes (rich versus poor) but also a plethora of other social identifications which are played out in space. Areas of cities become associated with the characteristics of their inhabitants (the artists quarter, China town, the suburb of stereotypical middle class aspirations, the borough of champagne socialists etc.). In Moscow, the a priori absence of choice precludes the development of neighbourhoods based on shared identities and interests (be these the shared interests of the oppressed or of the powerful). If the Market forces of Capitalism create segregated urban ghettos, they also enable the development of neighbourhoods and local communities. If urban spaces shaped by the Market segregate rich and poor, Italians and Jews, artists and immigrants, urban spaces shaped by 'socially just rational allocation' are segregated and isolated at the level of the household. Where there can be no choice as to where one lives, there can be no preference for or identification with a particular locale (See Vysokovskii 1993). Shortages of housing ensure that households strive for a restricted range of functional advantages: a few extra square meters of living space, a flat near a Metro station. The very concept of 'preferred neighbourhood' is almost without meaning.

Another aspect of the 'pulverisation of space' by 'abstract private property relations' is the 'proliferation of boundaries'. This creates differentiations in terms of access. There are 'privately owned' spaces, and these are 'out of bounds' to non-owners. If this concept is applied to housing, then we might question whether it is private property relations themselves which are critical. Restricted access to 'domestic space' is linked not only to private property relations but to notions of domestic privacy, which vary both between and within cultures, both Capitalist and non-Capitalist. In small intimate (mostly rural but occasionally urban) communities in the 'west' there is an idealised notion of people wandering in and out of each other's houses, of unlocked doors and of free neighbourly access, although this is often

restricted to some 'parts of the house'. Thus it is not the boundary of 'private property' that is critical, but the boundary of 'private domestic space', and the defence of private space is not restricted to 'privately owned domestic space'. We have seen that in Moscow, private space is, if anything, a more closely guarded haven of domesticity, with access restricted to kin and closest friends. In the absence of intermediate social spaces (discussed below), there is a critical opposition between public and private space, with a concomitant strengthening of the bounds of private space.

If we shift our gaze to the boundaries of 'public space', we find a curious inversion. Although bounded by private property relations, the open and inviting shops of the Market compare favourably with the problematic ingress to the state distribution points of the FSU. Where the former explicitly try and draw the public in (in order to profit from their custom), the latter implicitly express an uninviting stance (the staggered locked doors, queues, withholding aspect). In the FSU, this restricted access applies not only to shops, but to all dispensaries of goods and services. Access to many public buildings (eg, local authority administration buildings) requires that the entrant acquires a 'propiska' (a pass) or an official invitation, or that someone with rights of access accompanies the visitor (making themselves responsible for the visitor's access, behaviour etc.). Even on distant collective farms, access is often restricted, if only by the symbol of a gate monitored by a bored and alienated 'kolkhoznik' (collective farm worker). Thus, the absence of 'private property relations' does little to guarantee free and unrestricted access to 'free social space'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the FSU bureaucratic mechanisms combine with bureaucratic paranoia to create a 'proliferation of boundaries'. All sorts of 'collectively owned spaces' bear witness to an almost obsessive 'proliferation of boundaries'. Along the coast in a Black Sea resort, the beach is divided every hundred meters or so with rusting iron fences, as even the spaces of leisure are restricted to 'members of the military staying at the Red Star Sanatorium' or to 'members of the miners' trade union staying at the October sanatorium'. Thus it is not only or necessarily the abstraction of private property that creates the proliferation of boundaries, as boundaries proliferate with equal enthusiasm in the

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<sup>12</sup> This potential alienation of socialist space was noted by Harvey 1989:198.

absence of private property. A character in Kaletski's 'Metro' exclaims, "Oh! Mother Russia! a country divided by fences" (Kaletski 1985:347).

This critique of Marxian analyses of urbanism has been based on a comparison of Capitalist urbanism and Soviet urbanism. We have seen that much of the 'alienation' attributed to urban populations in contexts dominated by Market forces and Capital, exists in a sometimes exaggerated form in Soviet Moscow, ie, in a context where neither Capital nor the Market predominates. There are similarities and differences.

Both London and Moscow are the product of their industrialisation (and attendant increasingly complex division of labour), urbanisation (rural - urban migration),<sup>13</sup> and of modernisation/rationalisation. Yet these structurally similar processes have been occurred under diametrically opposed political and economic structures and logics : Capitalism, based on Market principles, and Communism, based on Central Planning.

In both contexts, city populations are 'dense, heterogeneous, and segmented'. These characteristics are universal to cities and are a product of urbanisation (rural - urban migration), regardless of political and economic orientation. Industrialisation and urbanisation are linked processes throughout the world, first in the cities of the developed 'west' and latterly on a global scale. Industrialisation and urbanisation are linked to an increasingly complex division of labour, which accounts for the segmented nature of urban life, and contributes to the 'fracturation' of urban identities. Domesticity, labour, and leisure are often segmented in any city (Capitalist or otherwise) and identities commensurately fragmented.

This complex division of labour requires increasing rational forms of organisation (modernism), in order to coordinate the intricately inter-linked parts of the whole. This includes the rationalisation of time and space (so that heterogeneous individuals and institutions can coordinate their activities in time and space), and the growth of money exchanges to facilitate the complex exchanges necessary to industrial

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<sup>13</sup> Soviet urbanisation is described in detail in Medvedkov 1990.

production, distribution and consumption in a complex social context [indeed in any socio-economic context more complex than subsistence economies]). Thus it can not be solely or even principally the dominance of money exchanges, the Market or Capital which fosters functional, rational modernisation, but the complex division of (urban) industrialised labour that requires rationalisation, the segmentation of daily life and the fracturation of identity.

However where Market forces intrude on these linked processes, we sometimes find an explosion of trade, of C:M:C and maybe M:C:M exchanges, competition between producers, diversification of production, distribution and consumption, the emergence of economic classes and of other diversified interest groups, all signalled by distinctive relations to the Market as producers and as consumers. Increasing 'individualism' is linked both to anomic alienation and to individual freedom, a tolerance for eccentricity, and to the emergence of novel and increasingly 'fractured' forms of identity. To the extent that the logic of the Market is based on propulsion by demand (the individual consumer), s/he is logically free to choose not only which objects and services to consume (from the diversity on offer), but which identities to adopt, ie, what to do for a living, where to work, where to live, play, and with whom to associate. I am not claiming that this logic is seamlessly transformed into practice (there is ample evidence of constraint, not least by Market forces themselves), but that the logic underwrites a notion of individual rights, differences, aspirations and mobility. The notion of the sovereignty of the consumer (however 'false her desires'), is strongly linked to notions of personal autonomy. More importantly, the Market itself caters not only for **individual** 'wants', but also for the **social** needs/desires of the population. If people want to eat together or play sports together, the entrepreneurial predilection for profits will provide the pub, cafe, restaurant or sports centre.

Where there is no Market (ie, Soviet Moscow), the State and its agents (that is, the State Planning Agency) make all economic decisions on behalf of the 'whole people'. Their individual 'needs' are decided for them (how much housing space is the minimum hygienic norm, how many kilograms of meat are needed to reproduce a male manual worker or a retired babushka). There are no M:C:M exchanges, and no profiteers competing for the custom of consumers. Goods and services are

rationally (if inefficiently) rationed on the basis of functional need, and choice is a concept without content. Diversity is restricted, not only in terms of goods produced but also in terms of social diversity. There are no economic classes (of production or consumption), just the 'whole people' with comparatively uniform characteristics. There is no space for the development of individual or group differences, desires, aspirations or mobility. Not only are individual consumer choices stifled by the absence of the Market, so too are the social choices, of where (and with whom) to live, work, or play. It is perhaps this last which is most critical.

As 'the social relations of production' are prioritised in Marxist Leninist ideology, all other, public space, social relations verge on the insignificant. The 'social group' par excellence is a labour collective (at varying levels from the 'whole labour force' to the smaller work brigade). This 'scientific' definition of the proper constitution of social relations also affects the specific shape of Soviet socio-spatiality.

Throughout the period of my fieldwork, I was obsessed with the absence of locales for the enjoyment of active, public space leisured sociality (pubs, cafes, restaurants, clubs, sports centres), but suspected that this was the personal disappointment of a dedicated flaneuse. On reflection however, I suspect that this disappointment has deeper roots. I would suggest that these locales (cafes, sports centres etc.) play an important role in the formation of urban social consciousness. Even if (as is usual) people attend these establishments with known others (eg, friends), they provide an opportunity for people to observe one another at leisure, ie, engaged in chosen activities with chosen others. If behaviour in institutionally intended projects (eg, work) is constrained and directed by institutionally required roles and functions, behaviour in leisure contexts is an expression of individuality, of 'one's true self', to the extent that leisure activity is consonant with choice. The opportunity to observe others as they chat with friends in a cafe is an important source of social information, especially in cities where the private lives of others are otherwise hidden. Snatches of conversation overheard, and observations of sociable interactions yield important insights into the social fabric of the city.

Discussing the emergence of 'flaneurs' in 19th century Paris, Wilson notes that

This special form of public life was played out in a zone that was neither quite public, nor quite private, yet which partook of both: the cafes, the terrasses and the boulevards...

(Wilson in (Eds.) Watson & Gibson, 1995:63)

In Soviet Moscow, there was a comparative absence of these intermediate locales for active, social, public space leisure, and therefore an absence of opportunities for observing one's fellow Muscovites at their leisure, 'being themselves'. As Muscovites could only observe one another at work (under institutional constraints), in shops (where they competed with other customers for access to rationed goods), in the silence of the Metro, or in passing on the streets, they could not with confidence predict what other people were really like, when they were acting as individuals with choices. Combining this absence with an absence of 'interest group stereotypes', marked by distinctive styles of consumption, makes for an illegible social whole. If my friends could identify the babushka, the 'artist', the poor worker or the 'krutoi sovok' on the Metro, they could not elaborate with confidence a more finely grained or diversified reading of their fellow travellers. Playing the same game with friends in London evinces long and elaborate imaginings as people expertly (if no doubt sometimes wrongly) read the signs of social identity that are provided by 'consumerist' diversity. However false the desires and identities being expressed, the symbolic richness of this Underground tapestry increases confidence in social knowing.

The absence of 'voluntary interest groups' in Soviet Moscow is again a key to the construction of urban alienation and unknowing. This is linked to the absences noted above. With only official, state-controlled venues for the enjoyment of shared interest, only officially sanctioned 'shared interests' were awarded use of public space. For example, as sport is officially sanctioned as the means of maintaining the health of the workforce, there are sports centres in Moscow. However, these are not easily accessed by members of the public. Their use is either reserved for 'official sportsmen', or for those who can produce a doctor's certificate saying 'they need to swim for health reasons'. This is linked to the strength of occupational identity noted in Chapter 3 (to be a [professional] sportsman), and to the derogation of

individual decision-making (only an official could allocate the right to swim). Further as official 'clubs' were controlled by state employees, access and use was as problematic as acquiring train tickets, light bulbs, or stamps; the ideal of equal rights to leisure facilities was sorely contradicted by the entrenched logic of rationing. If the absence of more 'politically oriented' interest groups can be explained by reference to state paranoia, I would argue that the absence of 'interest groups' in general is linked to the absence of a social space between collective, institutionally dominated, public life and atomised, familial private life. This increases social unknowing and the suspicion and mistrust that characterises Moscow social discourse.

If we take one aspect of the Market, ie, the horizontal exchanges of money, goods, services and labour, we can see that as a principle, the Market assumes both a level of individual autonomy and a measure of trust-enabling interdependence. Where there is a modicum of choice and competition, there is a functional interdependence between producers, traders and consumers. Where these relations are dominated by eg, the state, this interdependence de-materialises, as each individual depends on a dyadic relation to the state (in practice to one of the state's representatives) for access to food, housing, work, leisure facilities, health care, education, transport and funeral services. 'Inefficiency' is intrinsic to Central Planning (in theory and in practice), and contributes to chronic shortages, and poor quality of goods and services. Where the interests of the state are in its own glorification (through industrial growth or military prowess), the needs of citizens are reduced to the lowest common denominators of use, function and utility.

This foray into the unseen forces of the long duree has been a necessarily brief and cursory comparison of the differences between the urbanism of Market-driven Capitalism and that of Centrally Planned 'Real Socialism'. As Moscow leads the way in the transformation of the FSU from Centrally Planned Real Socialism to Market-driven Capitalism, we might expect the observed differences to indicate the likely direction of change.

## Social Change and Post-Soviet Urbanism

Consumption has been a critical concept to this analysis. On the one hand I have suggested that urban populations consume a variety of meaning-filled spaces as they move around the city. These meanings are the product of practical experience, ie, of 'consumption' of the physical environment (streets, squares, monuments, buildings), of knowing and unknowing, of intentions and constraints, of the different socio-political relations of production, distribution and consumption, of fear and affect, of intimacy and anonymity. Much of the 'meaning' of the city derives from the real, felt emotional tenure of spatially distinct social relationships (angry shop assistant, exhausted Metro traveller, loving child etc.). The meaning of the experienced city is therefore an amalgam of the above, where seeing the revolutionary symbols that decorate the Metro combines with memories (the places and relationships one has left), intentions and/or constraints (the places and relationships one is approaching), knowledge (how to get from A to B), unknowing (proximity to anonymous others), emotions (one's own and others) and with the embodied practices which constitute engagement in the city (avoidance behaviour on the Metro, queuing in shops, bending to buy tickets, distinctive social behaviours appropriate to patrons, bosses, colleagues, friends or kin). The 'politics' of the city are consonant with knowledge based on rumour and assumptions as much as on 'facts', with the emotions engendered by unequal power relations at work or in shops, and with the embodied experience of avoidance. This latter takes on a particular form in the FSU, where the concentration of power at the centre, was made possible by the "pervasive 'privatization of the means of coercion, which ....were made available to everyone through the mechanism of the denunciation" (Verdery 1991:426 referring to Gross 1988 and 1989). Even with the demise of institutionalised denunciation, the cultural assumptions it engendered remain active.

In order to characterise 'post-Soviet urbanism', we need to re-iterate how the 'transition to a market economy' is perceived and interpreted by real social actors. The 'transition to a market economy' provides new opportunities for consumption, both of 'things' and of new meaning-filled spaces and forms of exchange. This transition only becomes real with the appearance of traders on streets and in underpasses, new commercial kiosks and shops, offering new goods and services.

The interpretation of these new social phenomena is the product both of real, experienced interaction with those phenomena and of exposure to the reactions of others, communicated as much by the silent language of emotion as by abbreviated expressions of discontent.

The appearance of 'plenty' in a context of traditional 'shortage' is both welcome 'now we have everything' ('seichas u nas vsio yest') and unwelcome 'but everything is expensive' ('no vsio doroga'). As we have seen, the unmediated emotional reaction to trade outside the state distribution network is one of antagonism. This is because:

- i) people are trading out of place, on the streets, in the Metro, causing 'disorder' and 'dirt';
- ii) there is no control of free trade, (anyone can do it, without training, ie, without the commitment that constructs a congruence between occupation and identity, controlled by the state);
- iii) the goods are 'too expensive' for ordinary people, and only the 'Mafia' (in its widest sense of people engaged in trade) can afford to buy anything;
- iv) people are making profits from trade, which is not 'real work'; these profits are therefore illegitimate.<sup>14</sup>

This 'consensus' is widely shared. At an immediate (or unmediated) level, trading out of place is 'disorderly' or 'dirty' because it represents a change from the traditional spatial organisation of distribution and consumption. 'Private' entrepreneurs appropriate 'public space' (streets and underpasses) for what is conceived of as their own interests (profits). The traditional categorisation of goods in space crumbles as shoes are sold alongside cigarettes, in kiosks marked 'ice cream'. The de-professionalisation of distribution represents an affront to the traditional social order of distribution (through state networks): anyone can do it and their activities are not 'controlled'. Thus derogation of 'free trade' is linked to a fear of change, and to the challenge to the traditional spatial and social order of distribution and consumption, which is interpreted as chaos ('khaos').

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<sup>14</sup> Tong also notes the confusion between entrepreneurialism and crime (Tong 1995:228).

Further the high prices of commercially traded goods exclude many members of the population from engagement in new consumption opportunities. They can neither buy the new goods nor engage with private traders in non-state relations of exchange. This deepens most people's practical alienation from the Market. With little understanding of Market price setting mechanisms (supply and demand, or cost plus mark-up), high prices are deemed the product of conspiratorial greed by government and/or traders, as 'conspiratorial greed' is the traditional discursive explanation for any evidence of economic distinction.<sup>15</sup> Finally the Market itself is criminalised, by ubiquitous use of the term 'Mafia' to refer to all those who engage with the Market (as traders, entrepreneurs or consumers). This 'criminalisation' reflects the depth of aversion to the moral economy of free trade.

Further, the social fabric of the FSU was characterised by the absence of free, horizontal, equal exchange (trade) relations between economic actors. As all relations of production, distribution and consumption were regulated by the state, there was neither need nor opportunity for developing relations of mutual economic interdependence. This absence has particular implications for the ways in which post-Soviet Capitalism is developing. The discourse of traders and entrepreneurs is liberally laced with references to being deceived by trading partners. In order to minimise the risk of 'deception', there are two possible solutions: either maximise the use of trusted friends and kin, or resort to violence. However, as post-Soviet Moscow is undergoing change in a direction that had been described throughout the history of the FSU as one of naked greed, dog eat dog competition and cruel survival of the fittest, unleashing Market forces is often conceptualised and enacted in ways consistent with the Soviet era characterisations of Capitalism. Thus the instrumentalisation of friendship sometimes signals the demise of the trust that characterised that friendship. In the absence of an established moral economy of fair trade, the use of violence increases. If many individual entrepreneurs acknowledge that doing business in such a context is 'costly', there is little they can do to

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In other words, as economic distinctions during the Soviet period contradicted official rhetoric (ie. they were not in practice based on fair evaluations of need and merit) they were deemed the product of conspiratorial deceit, corruption, etc. Therefore any evidence of economic distinction (high prices that only a few can afford) are also evidence of deceit and corruption.

pre-empt the development of 'corrupt markets'.<sup>16</sup>

However, many early Capitalist formations are characterised by the costly absence of a moral economy of fair, free trade, which diminishes as 'illicit profits' are transformed into 'legitimate investments' (which require a stable business environment). As the distinction between the state sector and the commercial sector is rapidly dissolving, the establishment of Market relationships will evolve, although it remains questionable whether these will evolve from relations of assumed deception into relations of assumed trust and interdependence. In the absence of a working banking sector, much Russian business is conducted on the basis of Capital accumulated by individuals, who 'invest' together. This involves much risk and the extension of tentative trust. Although there are numerous tales of deception, profits are high enough to warrant the risk, and not all business deals are characterised by deception. As trust/credit acquire (financial) value (cheaper than violence, reduced information costs), the Market may become less corrupt.

Social change expresses itself in the adoption of temporal comparisons. Much of contemporary discourse in Moscow is phrased in terms of 'before' ('ranshe') and 'now' ('seichas'). The time 'before' alludes to an undefined past, 'before perestroika/Gorbachev'. This past is rosified as it is imported into the present. If in some contexts, people remember the past of endless shortages, queues, or of the fear and oppression of an earlier epoch, much of the contemporary past is rosified as a way of talking about the present. The present is a time of hovering on the brink of an unknown future, whose beginning bodes ill. If the advent of 'demokratsia' was initially welcomed, the experience of 'demokratsia' has been constituted by real and relative impoverishment, novel and genuine economic insecurity, the emergence of new social classes (the 'Mafia', 'biznesmen', and beggars). The past may have been imperfect, but it was predictable, and there were familiar routes for circumventing obstacles. In the absence of consumerism, the past was also more consistent, as the production of use values satisfying needs, remained constant, or at least unmarred by violent changes in the images of changing fashions. If the present is 'uzhasno', the future for most is deeply worrying; the most pessimistic forecast famine and civil

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<sup>16</sup> Tong also discusses the relationship between alienation and the development of 'corrupt markets' (Tong 1995:227-230).

war, whilst the more optimistic foresee a continued deterioration of order and a descent into chaos.

It has been suggested that the 'culture of alienation' in the FSU is so deeply rooted that we can expect only the development of 'corrupt markets' and 'unstable democracy' (Tong 1995). This alienation is linked to subversive notions of human nature fostered by the contradictions of real socialism, where the 'dispensation of social justice' was characterised in practice by real and rumoured greed and corruption. This consistent contradiction between official rhetoric and applied policy resulted in an extreme form of alienation, where words and appearances were consistently and increasingly known to be 'deceptive'. As Sergei once said,

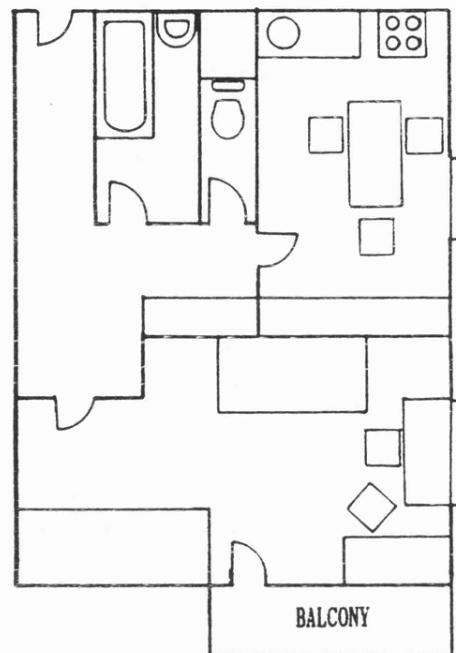
Don't talk to me about fairness ('spravedlivost'). I know all about fairness...it leads to lies, deception ('obman') and corruption ('koruptsia').

On a more positive note, although the FSU is in a state of political and economic chaos, it is also a space in which people are embracing new opportunities to 'speak their minds'. The traditional opposition between public space discourse and private space discourse is dissolving rapidly, as people loudly voice their discontent. In this context, the demise of Orwellian bi-lingualism may mean that a modicum of social trust will develop as words regain their meanings. If it is practical everyday face to face interactions which are the critical point of structuration, then the increased transparency with which people interpret the words and actions of others, may signal a concomitant decrease in specifically Soviet-style alienation.

## **Appendix**

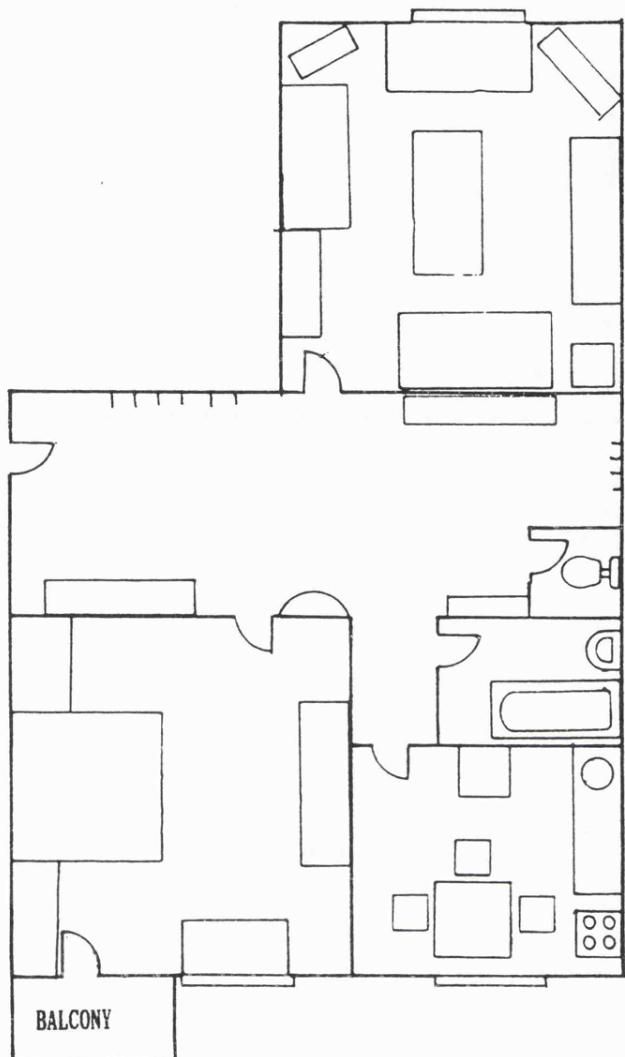
### **Flat Layout Diagrams**

- i. Sergei's flat
- ii. Natasha, Igor and Anna's flat
- iii. Rosa and son's flat
- iv. Vladimir, Alexandra and Svetlana's flat
- v. Olga and Maria's flat
- vi. Julia, Mikhail and Margarita's flat
- vii. Lyuba and Boris's flat
- viii. Valeria's flat
- ix. Galina's flat



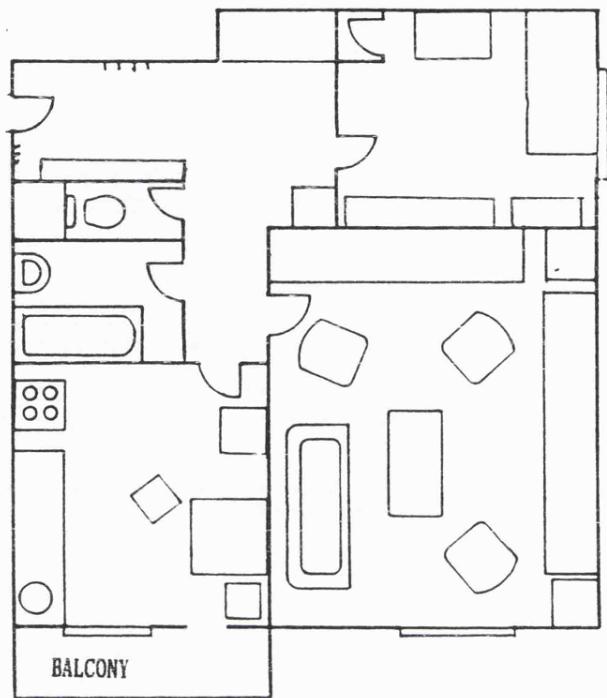
**SERGEI'S FLAT**

i. **Layout Diagram of Sergei's flat**



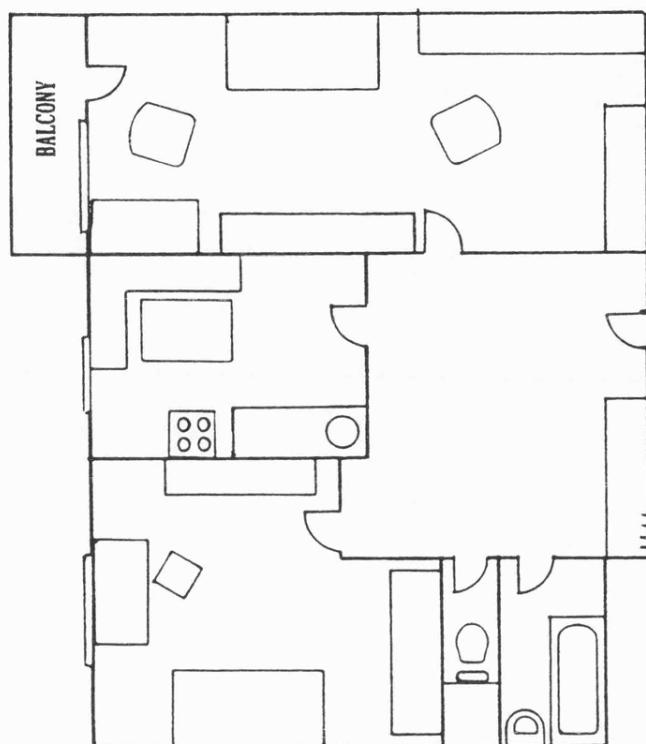
NATASHA, IGOR & ANNA'S FLAT

ii. Layout Diagram of Natasha, Igor and Anna's flat



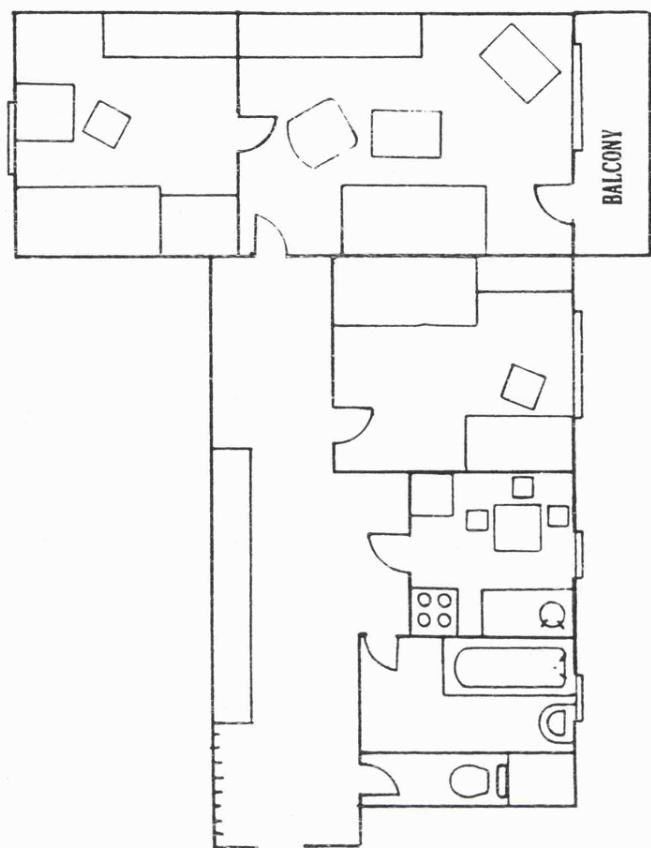
ROSA & SONS FLAT

iii. Layout Diagram of Rosa and son's flat



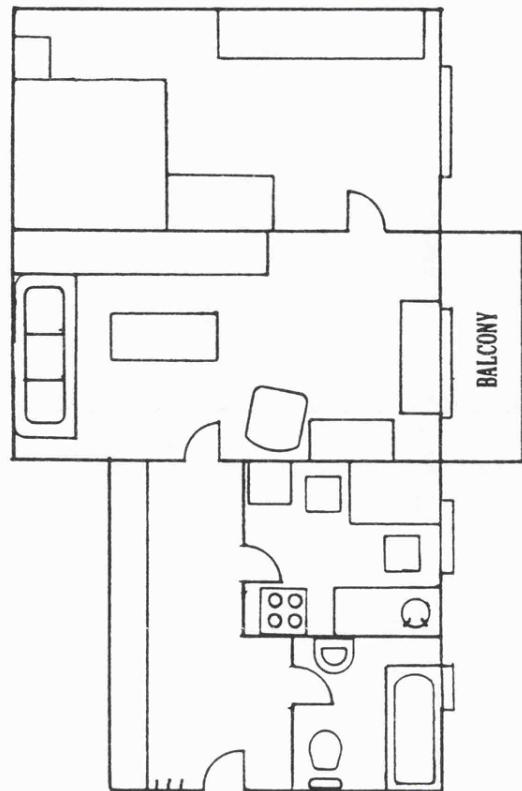
VLADIMIR, ALEXANDRA & SUETLANA'S FLAT

iv Layout Diagram of Vladimir, Alexandra and Svetlana's flat



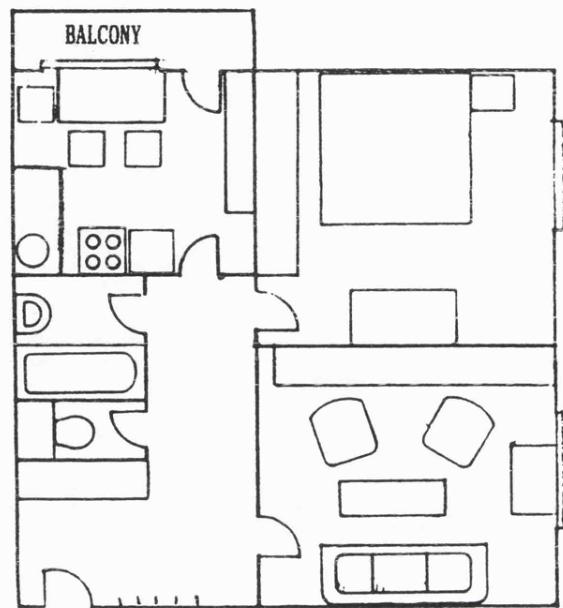
OLGA & MARIA FLAT

v. Layout Diagram of Olga and Maria's flat



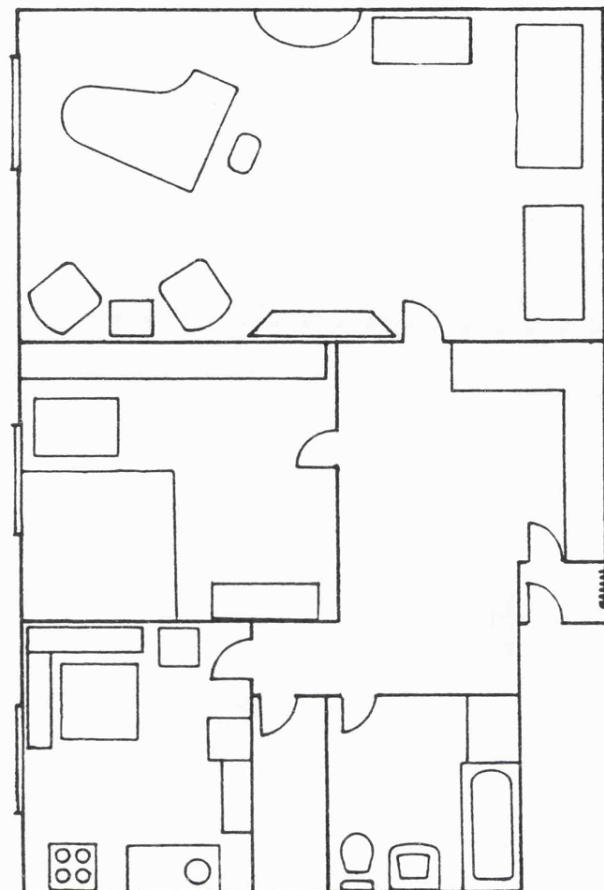
**JULIA, MIKHAIL & MARGARITA FLAT**

vi. Layout Diagram of Julia, Mikhail and Margarita's flat



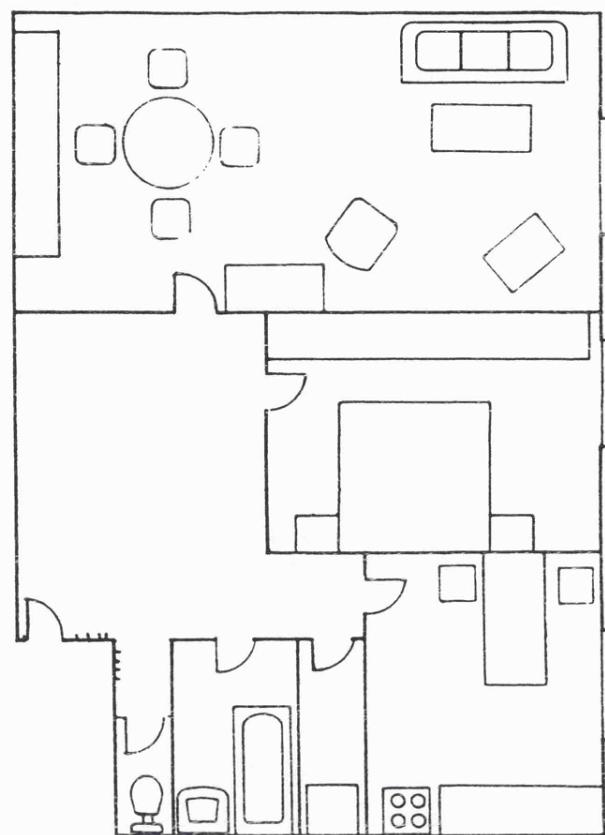
LYUBA & BORIS FLAT

vii. Layout Diagram of Lyuba and Boris's flat



**VALERIA'S FLAT**

viii. **Layout Diagram of Valeria's flat**



**GALINA'S FLAT**

**ix. Layout Diagram of Galina's flat**

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