

**ARE WE HAVING FUN YET?**

**RUSSIAN HOLIDAYS IN THE POST COMMUNIST PERIOD.**

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Exactly a month ago, October 7, Russia witnessed a communist - trade union protest rally demanding the payment of wage arrears and resignation of President Yeltsin. In Saratov the rally got greetings from the governor Dmitry Ayatskov, both the most reformist and the most eccentric of modern Russian regional leaders, the first one to introduce land privatization in his region and the one who after the meeting with president Clinton said in his teleinterview that he envies Monica Lewinski. It is also worth noting that Ayatskov was among those few members of the Russian political elite whom Yeltsin once described as his probable successor.

Ayatskov started his speech to the crowd of angry village schoolteachers and workers of military plants with the cheerful exclamation "Happy Holiday" ("S prazdnikom!"). When asked by the astonished protesters what the Holiday was, he immediately replied that the day of retirement is a real holiday for any person. Obviously he meant Yeltsin's retirement. The rhetoric and semantic implications of this *ad hoc* replica are worth analyzing in detail because they provide an insight into some aspects of the cultural - political situation in modern Russia that most probably have a long history, but became especially important in the situation of the present day ideological turmoil.

First of all, Ayatskov's remark was made to establish a sort of informal connection between him and the protesters. He was addressing a rally that consisted supposedly of the people nostalgic for the good old Soviet time, in the manner that a traditional Soviet leader would speak to the participants of a May 1 or November 7 demonstration. An official holiday was then the only possible reason for a mass gathering and while the crowd would pass by the tribune established for the regional leadership, the first secretary

of the party committee was supposed to start his speech with a greeting pronounced in a specially recognizably warm communist timbre: "Happy Holiday to you, dear comrades" ("S prazdnikom vas, dorigie tovaritschi").

Most definitely a protest ceremony under red communist banners and portraits of Lenin and Stalin really resembles the traditional Soviet Holiday. (The October 7 rally was also held under blue trade union flags totally unknown during the Soviet period, but the proportion of both colors in Saratov is extremely difficult to assess. A 15 second newsclip shown on Moscow TV was predominantly red, and a low quality black and white photo in the local newspaper did not provide any hints.) It is even possible to say that in a way a mass demonstration *is* a holiday for participants as it breaks the usual routine, brings people together with those who share the same feelings allows to view oneself as strong and important in direct contrast to one's actual social insignificance. As a participant of democratic rallies of the perestroika period the author of this paper can testify to the accuracy of these psychological interpretations. But the most important part of this festive feeling is its divisiveness. It's *your* holiday that should bring fear and despair to *them*.

By explicitly turning protest into holiday Ayatskov tried to take the teeth out of it. He showed to the crowd that he as a representative of the powers that be participates in their action and eventually they have nobody to protest against. In that way he reestablished the traditional vision of the mystic unity between the leadership and the masses which lay at the heart of the symbolism of Soviet demonstrations ("Partia i narod ediny".)

Ayatskov was not the only governor to participate in the October 7 protest. In fact, the Kremlin officially recommended this type of behavior to the local authorities. The deputy head of Yeltsin's administration said on the eve of the demonstration before the event that by taking part in the rally the governors can prevent social disorder. However, some of the governors, especially those belonging to the "power party", ignored the event while the others, mostly from the so called "red belt", marched in the ranks of the protesters, readdressing their anger in the direction of Moscow and showing that they were together with their electorate in their fight against the Kremlin and the "antinational" ("antinarodnyi") regime. Ayatskov, standing in the traditional party style on the tribune, chose his own way. He attempted to appropriate the rally and transform it from a symbol of division between the authorities and the nation into a demonstration of their unity.

No less interesting is the interpretation he gave to the proclaimed holiday. By congratulating the members of the meeting with the news of Yeltsin's retirement, he assured them that the crucial aim of their action had been reached. He flattered the demonstrators, telling them that their common appeal for the resignation of the hated president marked at least symbolically the end of his political career. But again his choice of words twisted the meaning of the message and gave it totally different implications. Ayatskov spoke not about the "resignation" of the president, but about his retirement, thus making it not an ultimate defeat of an ousted politician, but a happy ending of a successful political career. Pensioners clearly constitute the majority of all communist rallies. These people spent all their life in exhausting and non-rewarding labor and the day of retirement was really a long-awaited holiday for them. And definitely it was their

own personal, even intimate holiday. So, according to the Saratov governor's logic, the day of Yeltsin's retirement could be considered a holiday both for the president himself and for the crowd demanding his resignation. Somehow street protesters were invited to participate in Yeltsin's private holiday. Thus, the traditions of imperial Russia, when celebrations of the royal family were regarded as national holidays were again revived.

To top off this complex constellation of meanings it is worth mentioning that the day of protest, October 7, was previously a short lived Soviet holiday. It replaced December 5 as Constitution Day after the new and the last Soviet Constitution was adopted in 1977. This coincidence acquires its own importance as the whole concept of the Holiday elaborated during this short and casual conversation between Saratov governor and the protesting crowd is in a complex way related to complex transformations of these concepts during late Communist and post Communist periods.

The importance of the national holiday for reaffirming the ideology and self-identification of any state was realized a long time ago. In fact rulers understood it much earlier than the scholars did. Great social changes, especially revolutionary ones, always bring with themselves fundamental changes in the system of holidays. As Paul Ricoeur put it, "reenactment of the founding events is a fundamental ideological act. There is an element of a repetition of the origin. <...> Can we imagine a community without the celebration of its own birth in more or less mythical terms?"<sup>1</sup> The classical example of the whole new system of holidays established by the French Revolution is discussed in the famous works by Mona Ouzouff and Lynn Hunt. Bolsheviks in 1917 were mostly

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<sup>1</sup>Ricoeur Paul Lectures on Ideology and Utopia. - Columbia Univ. Press, N. Y., 1984, p. 261-262

pupils copying the experience of their French predecessors.<sup>2</sup> The revolutionary holiday as devised both by French and Russian ideologists was meant to create a new nation, bridging the gap between the official state holiday and the private one, uniting the body of the nation in the act of mass participation in joint celebration. Mikhail Bakhtin in his “Works of Francois Rabelais and Popular Culture of the Middle Age and the Renaissance nostalgically revived this utopian vision of a holiday in the 1930-s”.

As a witness of the revolutionary carnival, Bakhtin tried to capture the spirit of it in exile in northern Kazakstan, where he was working as a bookkeeper. The exiled bookkeeper, cut off from the rest of the country and the nation in a remote village, produced a utopian vision of the totality of the nation joining together in carnival laughter. Bakhtin's ideas of the carnival were justly criticized by the specialists, in the same manner as French academics criticized Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Bakhtin critics showed that the medieval carnival was not so much a protest as the reverse side of the official culture.

Nevertheless, it was not historical adequacy, which was important in these theories. When Bakhtin's book was published in the 1960-s it appealed both to Soviet and Western readers, because it seemed to give to them adequate, though in each case totally different clues to their own political - ideological surroundings.

The Western leftist intellectuals saw in Bakhtin the voice of the socially oppressed. His analysis of the carnival culture expressed a shift in the interests of the scholars from the ”high culture” to the cultural practice of the oppressed classes and their

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<sup>2</sup>Ни. Ёεάάάδā Ё. Βεϋε νεiάεiα δāάερεθεε. - Ёτοιαiάνεεε παρδiεε, άη. 2, i., "i.ā.ē.", 1997.

semi-conscious protest. Bakhtin's carnival, as read by Western intellectuals of the period, also reflected their own interpretation of the Parisian 1968 uprising as profoundly carnivalesque. To a Russian mind, Bakhtin's carnival meant something very different. Bakhtin wrote about the degeneration of an official festival in the post-renaissance era. He insisted that carnival celebration and carnival space broke into asymmetrical spheres. One of these spheres is the space of the official celebration, the state holiday marked by the official dogmatism transforming popular festive spirit into the promotion of the official ideology. The other sphere is the private celebration and personal and family holidays that are local, individual, familiar but still keep a vague remembrance, subconscious remnants of the old carnival freedom, of that utopian golden age of carnival.

By the time Bakhtin's book came out of print the splendour and terror of the Stalinist ceremonies of the 1930-s were replaced by the boredom of official celebrations of the late Communist period. So for the Russian public of the Brezhnev period (so called "gody zastoia") this opposition of official and non-official, private and ideological reflected not so much the world of late medieval Europe as the reality of the late communist Soviet Union, where individual life with its joys and festivities was totally and hopelessly divorced from the official ceremonies. Still, the relations between these two kinds of celebrations never consisted of protest, opposition or even indifference. In order to explain real tensions between official and non-official celebrations, we can use ideas exposed by Michel de Certeau in his "Practice of everyday life". Certeau wrote about the tactics of the weak in their eternal fight with the strong, that is, to appropriate what is proscribed for them by the powerful, and use it for their own ends for individual

pleasure, relaxation, fun, and ultimately to triumph over the strong. Certeau wrote about American Indians assimilating Christianity brought to them by the Spanish, and making out of it something absolutely different from the original.

Thus, the way the Soviet people appropriated official celebrations may be described by the metaphor coined by Certeau. They lived in them as in a rented apartment, which they furnished with their own desires, wishes, experiences and beliefs.<sup>3</sup> For example, March 8, Woman's Day, the holiday of official socialist feminism, was widely celebrated in the country, but in the special carnival manner. In the patriarchal Russian society, where all the household duties are performed by women, this was the only day in the year when the roles were changed. Men did the cooking and the cleaning. March 8 was also the celebration of sexual license, which was definitely not the official meaning of the holiday.

It is also important that Woman's Day is preceded by two weeks by the official celebration of the foundation of the Soviet Army: February 23. Before perestroika the national fear and aversion towards military service did not yet acquire the dimensions it has now. Still it won't be an exaggeration to say that an overwhelming majority of young Russian men would do their best to escape the Army. Still February 23 was celebrated as Man's Day which was regarded as a sort of preliminary stage of the March 8 celebration. In schools girls made presents for boys, expecting them to be much more generous two weeks later. During this initial ritual boys were referred by the girls as "our defenders" ("nashi zashchitniki"), though, unless especially ill-hearted, they would sincerely wish their male classmates to avoid the service.



The same thing happened with May 1, officially the day of international solidarity of the workers. I do not think that a single person celebrating the holiday remembered the beating given by the Chicago police to a group of workers that was the official reason for the holiday. It was the spring celebration that coincided with the season in which the trees in Russian cities started to blossom and was semiofficially called in newspapers the Spring Holiday. The popularity of this Holiday was also due to the fact that May 1 was celebrated (without any reference to Worker's Solidarity) long before the Revolution.

Even the November 7, the day of the October revolution was used in the same way. It became a sort of family celebration, with traditional dishes, in a way sort of parallel to western Christmas which was banned from the calendar. I think any Soviet citizen would easily remember "seliodku pod shuboi" ("herring under the fur coat") and olivie salad. It is interesting to note that during the celebration of the New Year, by far the most popular holiday in the Soviet Union, the traditional official speech by the General secretary of the Communist party was used as an alarm clock of sorts. The end of the official speech marked the time when the nation would start pouring champagne into the glasses to begin drinking with the last strike of Kremlin wall clock.

That was the traditional Soviet technique of appropriation of the given conditions described by Certeau. The political symbols were privatized and domesticated. This appropriation took the revolutionary fervor and ideological lustre out of the system of holidays and made out of it a conservative structure stabilizing the rhythm of the year cycle.

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<sup>3</sup>Certeau Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. - Univ. of California Press, Berkeley Los Angeles London, 1984, p. XXI

However, after the collapse of the empire, holidays of new Russia did not prove popular enough either for national celebration or for the described technique of semi-privatisation mentioned above. Democratic Russia did not have real holidays. This situation was due partly to the lack of traditional continuity necessary for effective celebration, partly to the lack of confidence in the overall political arrangement established by the government and mostly to the absence of coherent vision of the country's national identity to support the celebrations..

Thus, the majority of Russian population is blissfully unaware what they are celebrating on June 12 the Day of Russia's independence chosen by new authorities as the Foundation Day. The only reply you can in the best case get from any Russian citizen is that this was the day of the first elections of the President of Russia in 1991. This answer is definitely wrong as the elections themselves were specially arranged June 12 to mark the first anniversary of the Declaration of the Russian Sovereignty adopted by the first Congress of the People's Deputies of Russian Federation. This fact is now deliberately downplayed by the opposite sides of the present day Russia political spectrum. Both the authorities and the communist opposition, that regards this day not a holiday, but as a day of national tragedy, are reluctant to mention the fact that Russia's independence was launched by the communist majority of the Congress later dissolved by Yeltsin. What is even more important is that this foundation act did not presuppose Russian independence at all, but rather meant the radical increase of the power and prerogatives of Russian government within the Soviet Union.

The level of confusion about this holiday can be well seen in the ceremonial procedures that most usually combine excessive use of the word *Russia* and an appeal to

Russian patriotism with elements of religious ritual and aesthetics of a traditional party concert. The most striking example was the ending of 1994 ceremony, when after the performance of a female folk dancing group and a military chorus ("krasnoznamennyi khor") an icon was brought to the stage of the Kremlin Palace of Congress. The public mostly consisting of the members of the old communist elite was totally unaware of how it should react and finally the whole hall stood up and started the wave of applause ("burnye, prodolzhitel'nye aplodismenty"). I do not believe that any soc-art artist could ever have invented this purely conceptualist performance.

The real Foundation days of new Russia, August 19-22 fared even worse. Rapid disappointment in reforms and the predominance of nostalgic feelings made this event unacceptable as a national holiday to the majority of the population. Even the liberal intellectuals who view themselves as the adamant supporters of reforms tend to downsize the dimensions of the August revolution. The main theme of TV broadcasts and newspaper articles commemorating the events of August 1991 is: "That was the day when we all were deceived." The only semiofficial celebration connected with this events is so called a day of national flag on August 22 when skateboard rollers are permitted to skate in Red Square during the rock concert.

Thus, the main resource for national holidays in Russia is the revival of the old religious holidays and the renaming of the Soviet ones. For example February 23, the former day of the Soviet Army and Fleet is now officially known as the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, May 1, previously the Day of Solidarity of Working People, is now the Day of Spring and Labour and even the day of the October Revolution was named by President Yeltsin the day of National Agreement and Reconciliation.

Here we may witness the important reversal of roles and attitudes towards these holidays. Present authorities are capitalising on the Soviet popular tradition of privatisation of official holidays while the opposition obviously tries to repoliticize their meanings. It's worth comparing the rhetoric of the last addresses to the nation issued on the eve of February 23 by the President and the leadership of the communist party. Yeltsin started his holiday speech admitting that there are a lot of problems in Russian army, but he plans to speak only about good things.

"The coming holiday is traditionally ours, male ("muzhskoi"),- he said. - To defend your Motherland, your home, your family is a duty of a real man. For many years we connected this date with the birthday of the Red Army, but our military history started long before that - since the foundation of the Russian State itself." It is obvious that February 23, however historically inadequate this statement may be, *is* the birthday of the Red Army. But Yeltsin deliberately uses here the traditional perestroika rhetorical cliché: "the truth was hidden from us for a long time, but now we know." The long hidden truth this time happens to be a deep-rooted national tradition lying behind a communist holiday.

However the group which will staunchly refuse to accept the newly discovered truth is also specially mentioned in the speech: "Special honors will be given to the veterans and participants of Great Patriotic War. We have a great respect for the feelings of those people. For them it's not *just* (italics are mine) the holiday of the Defender of Motherland, but a glorious 80 year jubilee of our army and fleet. On the eve of this important date I warmly congratulate you dear veterans. I wish you to spend this day pleasantly in the company of your old battlefield friends." The President ends his speech

with holiday congratulations and a wish "to have a good day off",<sup>4</sup> thus dividing the concepts of holiday ("prazdnik") as a national event and a day off ("vykhodnoy") as a chance for personal relaxation given to a citizen by the holiday.

During the Soviet period the traditional explanation of the celebration by an ideologically sceptical person would be: "I don't care what holiday it is, but it is a day off for me". Yeltsin expressed the same idea much more explicitly in his address on the 80th anniversary of the Bolshevic revolution when he expressed his belief that for the majority of the nation it's just a day off when they are going to make their winter supplies and "prepare sour cabbage" ("kvasit' kapustu"). His speeches reflect the vision of the nation divided into two unequal parts. One, militantly ideological, consists mainly of old people for whom old holidays are still sacred. The second one, representing the majority of the nation, appreciates these holidays mostly as days off and good possibility to prepare sour cabbage. The ideological minority, according to the rhetorical strategy of the president's addresses, is to be respected and politely invited to join the majority around the table. One can argue that this vision mostly reflects the course and the outcome of the 1996 presidential elections.<sup>5</sup>

It is no wonder that the rhetoric of the opposition is radically different. While the style of Yeltsin's addresses is explicitly personal, the opposition leaders prefer the samples of old party novoyaz. "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the presidium of the People's Patriotic Alliance of Russia

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<sup>5</sup>The tendency to privatize national holidays is naturally brought to logical conclusions by commercials that imbibe even "the red days of the calendar" with consumerist values. "Dear men, - wrote one of the newspapers on the same old 80th anniversary of the Red Army. - You like to undress women. We like to dress men. Therefore come to the sale of men's clothes devoted to the day of the Defender of the Fatherland.

congratulates you on the 80-th anniversary of our country's armed forces. RKKK ("Workers and Peasants Red Army) created in the time of the great break ("na razlome vremion") had inibed the best traditions of the Russian army."<sup>6</sup> One can immediately recognize here the style of the good old "Adresses of the Central Commitee of CPSU to the Soviet Nation"). Those documents published before national holidays in bold letters in party newspapers were totally unreadable and actually never meant to be read. By using the recognisable language of power new communists want not so much to make their slogans readble and exciting as to stress continuity, to show that the party is still there and still in command. However, this strategy as again we could see during the 1996 campaign is defeatist and may even be consciously defeatist. The Communist leadership knows that the kind of appeal which they try to revive works only with the least socially active and diminishing part of the population - the elderly people. The party address on February 23 is published in the Communist newspaper near the poem: "Stay alive, veterans". The author of the poem insists that while the elder generation is alive there is still hope for Russia.

When communist authorities tend to change the stylistic register and to use more emotionally appealing rhetorical figures they also appropriate the old paradigm, but shift from the Brezhnev tradition to Stalin one."What Hitler could not do was done by the so called 'democrats.' Russia is defeated and robbed. Compatriots, Brothers and Sisters, let's not allow the country to perish. Let the images of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War inspire you for the resistance to antinational forces, for the defence of our Mother Russia.

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<sup>6</sup>Ніааоñеау Ѓінñеу, - 1998, 21 оаадаеу.

Happy holiday to you, dear comrades".<sup>7</sup> First Stalin's speech to the nation after the beginning of the war with Germany obviously serves as a pattern for this address. Evidently this militant, though second hand, rhetoric has the same highly official tenor of an absolute moral and political authority speaking to the nation.

Even on the occasions of the religious holidays the official communist rhetoric retains this intonation of ultimate righteousness.

"On this glorious day we encourage Russians to believe in the future resurrection of our Motherland. Russia will come to life again, by our faith, our labor and the prayers of our stewards ("pastyrej")"<sup>8</sup>, - wrote Ryzhkov and Ziuganov on Easter day.

Thus, Christian Easter is in a way substituted by the neopagan worship of Mother - Russia. In this perspective communist leaders position themselves at the same time as those who are in need of a spiritual leadership of the priests of the Russian Orthodox church and as those whose ambitions are to be the stewards themselves.

So the reaction towards holidays today in general reflects the state of general confusion about the the country itself its relation to its own history and culture its perspectives and goals. While the opposition uses the holidays as slogans for national mobilisation<sup>9</sup>, the authorities actually aspire for national demobilisation. One type of political rhetoric traditionally appeals to the nation as whole without paying the least attention to the individual, the other one paradoxically belonging to the government

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<sup>9</sup>The hated holidays of the new regime are treated by opposition in the same way: "This day is not the holiday. It is the day of our sorrow, the day of mourning, the day of weeping", - writes the editorial of the main opposition newspaper about June 12. ("Ñíàáðîñèàÿ Ðíññèÿ", 1998, 10 èþíÿ) The opposition leaders could reasonably argue about the real historical meaning of the so called "Declaration of Russian Sovereignty" or treat the event and the celebration as something totally irrelevant as the majority of the nation does, but

makes no attempt to constitute the nation. Evidently the gap is filled by new initiatives, and new types of unconventional holidays.

The most spectacular example of these efforts was demonstrated September 5-7 1997 when Moscow celebrated its 850th anniversary. This was the first truly national holiday in decades and decades. It is estimated, and I can testify to these assumptions and calculations, that more than three million people celebrated outdoors. Last time Moscow had seen such a crowd was in 1953, when thousands of people were killed in the crush during Stalin's funeral. For the first time in the memory of the most of the people the official celebration coincided with a popular one.

Traditionally the choice of the day for national celebration is defined by the national foundation myth. Usually, the cosmos created this day some time ago is opposed to the chaos that reigned before it. When American people celebrate Independence Day, they assume that the time before independence was a sort of a dark age from which a nation gloriously emerged on July 4. During the imperial period in Russia the main holiday was the day of accession to the throne of the ruling monarch. This accession was thus made to signify the beginning of the new era, urging subjects to forget about the previous reign. The ideological message of the celebration of the October Bolshevik revolution during the Soviet period was the same. Evidently the same can be said also about the celebration of the independence of Russia on June 12 that we discussed above. This is true not only of political holidays, but also of religious ones. When we celebrate Christmas or Easter, we assume that the time before Christ or before his resurrection is over. The holiday divides the time in two and rejects one part of it.

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they prefer to accept the official interpretation, enforce it and reverse the judgement to negative. It is highly possible, though, that their



By choosing the foundation of the city as the day of the national holiday, we actually minimize this rejection. Celebrating it, we do not actually reject anything. We only give an incentive to other localities to search for their own foundation myths. And the wave of local celebrations is now spreading right across Russia. Historically, the anniversary of Moscow is an absolutely invented date since nobody knows when Moscow was actually founded. The first mentions of Moscow in historical manuscripts are dated in April and the celebrations took place in September. Nobody really cared about history, mythology was much more important.

During the anniversary festivities the unfortunate history of Russia full of tragic experience and horrible human losses, was somehow transformed into an uninterrupted Golden age. We saw several theatrical representations of national history in which it was shown to consist exclusively of good guys. The old Russian princes were good guys - Moscow Mayor even came to the celebration in an costume of an old Russian prince. The Moscow tsars, who beheaded those princes, transforming feudal Russia into an absolute monarchy, also were good guys, especially Ivan the Terrible. His image was projected on the wall of the Moscow State university during the laser show by French composer and engineer Jean-Michel Jarre.

Peter the Great, who hated Moscow, and switched the capital to St. Petersburg hoping never to come back, was also a fantastic guy and a monument to him was erected in Moscow and officially opened during the celebration. The Petersburg emperors were also very nice. The Communists who overthrew the emperors and shot the last of them with his family were also O.K. All the TV-sets during the celebration were filled with

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ideologists are also ignorant about the true foundation event and believe that the country is celebrating Yeltsin's election to presidency.

neo-Soviet retro, songs about Lenin, and Stalin and friendly meetings in Moscow during the old happy Communist days. After that it was no wonder that the democrats who ousted the Communists were also very nice. The festivities were officially sponsored by President Yeltsin, and appropriate honours were given to him during the ceremony. So, everything was always fine, and there was no contradiction between different historical periods and historical heroes.

One can remind me of the European tradition, where we see neighboring monuments to Charles I and Cromwell, neighbouring streets named after Robespierre and Louis XVI. But in Europe this sort of neighborhood means the acceptance of the dramatism of history and mutual forgiveness. The new Russian way of celebrating is exactly the opposite. The actual message of it was to obliterate the dramatism of history. Many new old churches, including the biggest cathedral in the city, cathedral of the Christ the Savior, were constructed in Moscow to replace the ones demolished by the communists. These absolutely brand new cathedrals are meant to look exactly like their predecessors which were built from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The ideological goal of this remake is to create an illusion that the demolition never happened. We have to believe that all these buildings were always present, that nothing bad was ever done to them.

One of the interesting results of this extremely intensive rebuilding and remaking of objects that were obliterated, is that even the real historical buildings and sites completely lose their authenticity and uniqueness. We see the newly erected churches of the 16th and 17th centuries in Red Square and start to doubt whether Kremlin or St. Basil's cathedral are really here since the 16th century and to suspect that they were also

recently build by the Mayor of Moscow. That way history loses its narrative logic.

Eventually when there are no bad guys in history, history stops to exist and becomes an assemblage of historical relics, of beautiful-looking things from the past, which can only serve as a sort of decoration for some performance. In a way new Red Square and other old new parts of Moscow became a gigantic installation specially made for the festivities, though they probably they may stay for a while after the festivities are finished.

As mentioned above, the wall of the Moscow State University, this biggest symbol of Stalinist Russia, was used as a screen for the laser projection of Jean-Michel Jarre. The building became a part of the installation. In the same way Kremlin wall became just a theater decoration for the performance of "Our old capital", the big ballet performance staged by Andrei Mihalkov-Konchalovski a former Soviet cinema celebrity living now in US.

It is interesting to follow the functional changes in the images of the two basic Moscow squares. First of all, of the Red Square, which used to be the symbol of the imperial might of the superpower, with all the parades, tanks and rockets marching over its stone. Near to it was the biggest square in Moscow, the Manezhnaya, an enormous empty place which during the perestroika period became the center of the social activity. It was then the symbol of the nation brought back to political life. The demonstrations of hundreds thousands took place in this square. Now Red Square is limited by the newly build ancient gates, and it is no longer possible to drive a tank onto it.<sup>10</sup> In the same way,

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<sup>10</sup>Just recently radical communist leaders applied for a permission to hold a political meeting on Red Square on November 7. They argued that while it is possible to have rock concerts and carnival performances ("balagany") there, it must be also allowed to have people's gathering ("narodnoe sobranie").

Maneznaya is completely filled with a new building of the new Moscow Trade Center, which is topped by a cupola, the traditional symbol of Russian architecture.

It is worth noting that the symbol of the new epoch is a trade center. But this trade center does not tower over the city like in New York, it is build under the city, like Stalinist metro stations symbolizing new proletarian culture. This trade center is build and decorated in a historical manner. The lowest level of it is loosely styled after 17th century Moscow architecture, the middle level - under 18th and 19th century, the upper level - after the 20th century. History is again used as a decoration for trade which is a new way of life. So no more imperial might. No more political demonstrations and meetings, no more political activity. The nation tired of its imperial responsibilities and political storms, can relax.

One of the reconstructions which is extremely typical and grotesque at the same time, is the reconstruction of the Neglinka river. This river was once flowing in the center of Moscow. Then it was put into the drainage system, and disappeared from the surface. Now we see the sort of pseudo-Neglinka decorated by the tiny bronze sculptures of the animals from the Russian folk tales. When these horrible monuments were built, there were a lot of objections that this strange creatures are too close the eternal fire at the grave of the Unknown Soldier. But actually one cannot say why they should not be so close. The wars are over, we won all of them and now it is the time for relaxation and recreation.

The main day of the festivities was marked by the enormous procession marching through the whole city. It was led by the Mayor in the big old Russian boat. Then there were the representatives of the different districts of Moscow, then from the different

regions and provinces of Russia. Then came the elephants, and the Scottish pipers. In imperial Rome, such processions signified different sides of the world conquered by the might of the ceazars. In Moscow, which as we know is the Third Rome, this procession had a different meaning. We saw all the countries of the world sending us their goods.

It is not meaningless that Moscow's Mayor and the most likely would-be president of Russia, is short, bald and fat. He exemplifies good sense as opposed to the unrealistic and unearthly dreams and utopias of the old age. Evidently his Mussolini-type nationalistic aspirations and utopian vision of a country "capitalist labor and socialist distribution in a complete democracy" do not contradict this image. As we know from Clifford Geertz' article, common sense is a "cultural system". In a way, he is performing Sancho Panza as governor, and as we all remember, Sancho Panza was the best governor ever. During the performance on the Red Square, near St. Basil's and the Kremlin walls, two folk heroes were fighting a Hollywood dragon specially made for the event. One of them was Ivan the Fool, the main carnival figure and the embodiment of Russian soul. The other one was Saint George, the religious symbol of Moscow. They were both together. The official, the dogmatic, and the private, the carnival one. Definitely they represented two sides of the same coin.

It is often assumed that consumption is something opposite to spirituality. But this is not the assumption one should take for granted. Consumption, at least as we saw it in celebrating Moscow, was the way for the nation to assert its immortality. It is exactly the sort of immortality which was denied to Russia by so many risks of physical annihilation during the great terror, the civil war and the last world war, during periods of immeasurable human losses.

We saw that the consumer society arrived in Russia, but it was legitimated by the history of the Russian empire, and by the Eastern Orthodox church, by history and religion. At the end of the celebrations we heard the speech of the Mayor who addressed the Patriarch and the President who were present at the ceremony. But, the final word belonged to most popular pop singer of Russia: Alla Pugatshova, the Russian Madonna. This time she played both madonnas, the American singer and the original Madonna. After the Mayor's speech she came to the stage in the snow-white dress leading a baby, and sang a song in which Moscow was called a prophet and a Messiah. After that, she blessed the audience making a cross with her hand and the fireworks began.

It is clear that this nostalgic search for the "invented tradition" is not limited to Moscow celebrations. Russia is trying new holidays as new clothes trying to establish new identity. Last week the country witnessed the celebration of the 80th anniversary of comsomol together with the restoration of the pioneer organisation and the 100th anniversary of Moscow art history. Next year we expect Pushkin bicentennial and later the millenium holidays. As it is only natural to imagine the deeper country falls into the crisis the more desperate and explicit the longing for the holidays become. It is still difficult to say what Russia is going to celebrate in the twenty first century. But there is already strong evidence that in order to be successful a holiday has to be deeply postmodern combining orthodoxy, communism and consumerism or transforming the protest rally into the joyful celebration of the retirement of the President who never intended to retire.

Next day after the rally Governor Ayatskov again appeared on TV. He said that he was misunderstood and he never meant what the whole country heard him saying.

However, he chose not to explain what he really meant. Who cares. Probably this is exactly the carnival freedom Bakhtin wrote about.