Moscow

Karl Schlögel

Translated by
HELEN ATKINS
accompanied by violence, yet which has now successfully avoided falling back into internecine conflict. In this it is something of a miracle.

Like all the world’s large cities, Moscow is a great instructress. It turns its inhabitants into citizens who, like the populations of other great metropolises, have a masterly individual capacity for surmounting crises. In the Cold War era Moscow was distant, almost unreachable, barricaded behind bureaucratic obstacles. It was the command centre of the Eastern bloc, a dot on the Cold War map, a capital in a divided world, shielded by an Iron Curtain. Now, as an open city, Moscow has rejoined the community of great metropolises and re-entered the horizons of Europeans. Moscow is no longer a destination only for organized group travel or the tourism of delegations and politicians. The visitor experiences the most remarkable of all adventures here in the capital city of Eurasia: the adventure of time. He constantly has before him the double image of Moscow, as the setting for the dramatic history of Europe, especially in the twentieth century, but also as a place where the future is being fashioned, so to speak, before our eyes.

Karl Schlögel, 2005

Prologue: The eye of the beholder

Moscow as a place where the most famous views of the city, constantly reproduced, block your vision – The dual functioning of the eye and the strange coexistence of two points of view – How a reading eye might overcome this.

Speaking of what he calls ‘essayism’ in his novel The Man Without Qualities (Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, 1930), Robert Musil remarks, quite rightly, that although the term ‘essay’ has sometimes been translated into German as Versuch – a mere ‘attempt’ – an essay is by no means something tossed off casually, or simply an offshoot of a scholar’s more serious work. That would indeed be an underestimation of the essay. For this is not just a matter of creating a portrait of an unfamiliar city. Whenever we follow a trail of evidence into the past, we are also on the trail of ourselves, and the unfamiliar world that we encounter only becomes intelligible as we bring our understanding to bear on it, and use our knowledge and perception to take us beyond what is visible on the surface.

So it is with the picture that we have of Moscow and this attempt to draw a new one. It may not always have been the case, but at present it seems that the same images are served up to us over and over again, differing only in their technical quality or a different choice of camera angles from those used in the previous collection or the one produced by the rival publisher. There is no real change of perspective: the same subject recurs endlessly, slightly varied and retouched. Stereotypes have become established; coffee-table picture-books are laid out resplendently in bookshop displays, and hardly anyone notices that there is a layer of dust covering the magnificent photographs before the books are even distributed. Such stereotyped pictures are often like those reliefs that you sometimes find on war memorials, or well-loved sculptures in museums, where every visitor runs a finger along a groove or over a curve, just to prove that
he has been there, and the surfaces are visibly worn as a result of these continual, if fleeting, acts of homage. Impelled to give vent to their enthusiasm, people pay little heed to 'Do not touch' signs.

Something of the same kind happens to pictures of cities. Sharp contours are reduced to a vague impression, maze-like complexity is simplified to a few main outlines, the sharply etched image of a detail becomes a blurred snapshot. These pictures, ever the same but always slightly corrected or retouched, prevent us from knowing the city. Instead of showing it to us, they steer us past it. So any newcomer to Moscow has first of all the considerable task of clearing his mind of the visual clichés derived from brochures and guidebooks.

This is certainly not the fault of the photographers — neither the foreign ones nor those working for the country’s own big state publishing firms. And there we note the remarkable fact that even in the sphere of photographic clichés the coexistence and rivalry between the Soviet Union and the West are reflected. In the picture-books produced by the Soviet state publishers such as Avrora or Progress, the city’s radiance shines from the present back into the past, and Moscow in its very latest, modernized form is seen as the culmination of its development. History has, as it were, amassed the material out of which, with inexorable logic, modern Moscow has emerged. There is no room here for interruptions or obscurities. How extensively and how adequately the past is represented, how hazily or with what depth of focus, depends on how it is viewed in the light of the present.

Foreign producers of such volumes have very different preoccupations. They want to show what is ‘different’, ‘unfalsified’, ‘genuine’, as opposed to what is doctored or tidied up — the truth as opposed to Potemkin sham. But the outcome, as often as not, is a charming but false apprehension of the city, based less on its substance and the life of its citizens than on a personal notion of ‘authenticity’. This is reactive photography that rarely goes beyond recording the history that has been preserved in stone. However, with photographers who follow the dictates of their own eye, stalk the fleeting subject like huntsmen and capture the passing moment, and are practised in deploying the power of an eye uninfluenced by prescriptive guidelines, the results are amazing, and are indeed achieved neither by the eye alone nor just by camera technology, but by the photographer’s individual skill with the lens. Here, as ever, it is the exception that proves the rule, as witness Henri Cartier-Bresson’s book of photographs from the early 1950s.

Our picture of Moscow is by no means one-sided: on the contrary, it is the product of two perspectives, that of the city as it chooses to present itself, and that of the visitor from abroad, observing it with a greater or lesser degree of interest and commitment. Only in rare instances has such a visitor learned to see Moscow in a way that is both lively and detached, spontaneous as well as historically aware and knowledgeable.

This may be seen as yet another illustration of the divided world, here taking the form of a divided viewpoint. I realize that at first sight this proposition seems far-fetched. And, after all, there have been images of unsurpassed precision: I am thinking here of Arthur Miller’s book on Russia, with pictures captured by the unerring eye of Inge Morath (In Russia, 1969). And of course I am also thinking of Walter Benjamin’s ‘portraits of cities‘ and his Moscow Diary. However, those images and impressions belong to an almost prehistoric era of travel to Moscow, and are of greater interest to literary scholars than to travellers able to follow in their footsteps today.

There are thoroughly prosaic reasons why visitors to Moscow have come to adopt a standardized visual approach to the city. One of these is that, despite all the advances in tourism (though this still caters largely for organized group travel), and despite increasing involvement in international commerce and the huge number of visiting political and cultural delegations, Moscow is not a place where visitors can easily wander about at will. They have little spare time at their disposal, their arrival and departure are not things that can be arranged casually, and they do not just decide without further ado to stay at a given place. Visitors follow certain itineraries, not because these are prescribed but because they enable them to traverse this vast city in the little time they have available and to form some sort of impression of it. They quite naturally confine themselves to the principal thoroughfares and grand vistas, which undeniably constitute a part of the reality of Moscow as a city — there is probably not another city of this size in the world that has been subject to such centralized, top-down planning and construction. But even if one acknowledges these effects of organized tourism, this still does not fully explain why an image of the city that is not, in fact, its true image has become so firmly established.

Anyone planning to write about Moscow needs to take account of the city as a tourist phenomenon and define his own position in relation to it. It may safely be assumed that our way of looking at the city
Soviet leaders on the speakers’ platform of the Lenin Mausoleum.

has been greatly influenced in the past two decades by market forces – by the wishes of foreign publishers and the interests of a tourist industry that encourages the production of certain kinds of images. It can be equally safely assumed that editors and publishers in Moscow want pictures and books that capture not only the ‘beauty’ of the city and the ‘Soviet’ element but also what is ‘authentically Russian’, and all in handy-sized volumes and at affordable prices. The required blend of ingredients is predictable almost before an outline has been submitted for one of these publications: the Kremlin Wall in winter, and autumn leaves on the boulevards, but also the Palace of Weddings and housing estates built in the 1960s and ‘70s; the babushka sitting on a chair outside her front door; Michelangelo’s David from the Pushkin Museum; a fine shot of Maya Plisetskaya on the stage of the Bolshoi Theatre; a snowy winter scene with chess players on a park bench; some photographs of the subterranean splendour of the metro stations; politicians’ heads, mostly wearing homburgs or fur hats, lining the balustrade of the Lenin Mausoleum; a colourful picture of the May Day parade, with a lot of red everywhere and masses of multi-coloured paper flowers; and, of course, churches and gilded domes.

Visitors to the city are amazed at how well they already seem to know it even if they have never been there before. The feeling of unfamiliarity that is normal on arrival in a strange place is lacking. They notice this after a few days, and cannot quite explain why the sense of the unknown that so often heralds forthcoming discoveries either fails to materialize at all or is so minimal that some local ways of doing things merely strike them as slightly different: the doorman checking you at hotel entrances; shops staying open until nine o’clock at night; all the streets constantly being swept with short-handled twig brooms; the extreme slowness of waiters to come and serve you – while the absence of advertising has an almost physical impact.

Slowly but surely we become aware of a strong urge to escape the thrill of the charming pictures in our minds. It might be supposed that this urge would be strengthened, reinforced, by our contacts with foreigners who have been living in Moscow for some time. But, remarkably enough, this is not so. Foreigners who have settled in and become acclimatized seem to lose their capacity to resist the allure of superficial reality, and what was once new to them becomes commonplace, what they once found challenging changes in the course of time into their everyday ambience, and many of them clearly become impervious to anything impacting on their senses. This is partly because many – too many – of the foreigners have brought their own world with them to their new environment; too many of them stay – partly out of necessity, but partly because it is more congenial – in their own world, in the diplomats’ flats on Kutuzovsky or Leninsky prospekt, in the apartment blocks where the correspondents and journalists have their homes, or in the offices of the business community. Obviously they have built up an extensive network of contacts and sources of information and there is a whole culture of reciprocal invitations, parties and small gatherings, in which they can live a quasi-extraterritorial life. In the case of diplomats, moreover, there is normally a prohibition against having contacts with local people, which admittedly does not necessarily prevent them from taking their own steps to make this alien territory their own. It goes without saying that members of the foreign community, particularly the diplomats and journalists, do have Russian friends and acquaintances, in fact good form and their own professional standards more or less require it. The visitor is all the more bound to wonder why precisely people of this type – who, despite their isolation, have the inestimable privilege of being on the spot and able to observe everything with their own eyes – have not been seized by an irresistible urge to sweep away the clichés and stereotypes, even those that are most firmly established.

Living in Moscow as a professional observer, correspondent or journalist should surely bring with it an awareness of the city’s high-profile position: at the heart of the Eastern bloc’s great power, at the intersection of two worlds and two cultures and in a place with a turbulent history extending right up to the immediate present. And yet little of the flavour of this setting or of Moscow’s exciting aura as
the scene of historic events comes across in the daily fare provided by the news media. The atmosphere of the city which is both the source and the subject matter of the reporting becomes lost in the grey uniformity of agency reports. It seems to make no difference whether these originate in Washington, Tokyo or Moscow itself, and one should not underestimate the power of the daily reports from or about Moscow in the papers or on the evening television news to influence public perception. The political commentator’s shorthand formula or brief assessment has the very same fault as the travel agent’s brochure, though only the latter is mocked for it: both of them purvey information and ideas of Russia from which the endlessly colourful and unruly character of reality has been erased. Above all, the media convey the suggestion that Moscow is a city like any other, albeit with a few peculiarities, and they often leave one with the impression that Moscow is essentially a history-free zone.

The strange absence of history from such reporting cannot simply be attributed to the nature of the mass media and of journalists, for whom the present is everything and the past and future count for nothing. Nor can it be put down to a lack of the kind of historical and analytical material that normally underlies any piece of reportage. It seems rather that commentators in this country consciously suspend their interest in history so as to avoid having to deal with the burden of the past.

Russia-watching has a history of its own, but history at present is being deliberately ignored and sidelined rather than actively examined. Every change in the international climate has resulted in a shift of perspective, with inevitable reshuffles among the foreign postings. Now that a line seems to have been drawn under the disagreeable past on both sides – Stalin, Hitler, the Cold War – and many dynamic advocates of détente and coexistence have been appointed to the press offices, there is a sense of having been liberated from the oppressive weight of history.

However, the suppression of history is not the sole prerogative of commentators of this kind. Among conservative observers too there has been a failure of perception for a different reason: the conviction of having been right all along has made them blind to much of what has been really happening. The shock felt over the attack on a Europe that had grown old and continuing delusions of superiority have, in different ways, prevented observers from fully recognizing the emergence of a new civilization. Commentators on both sides have their complementary ways of approaching history and of avoiding it. The same ambivalence can be observed in the way the present is treated: while a report on the Orthodox Church’s Easter vigil purports to show a resurgence of religious faith, this effect is cancelled out by an account of a Vysotsky concert which suggests that young people have become too materialistic to have any use for the churches. All reporting from Moscow seems to evince this ambiguity of perspective, this stance of simultaneously accepting two contradictory points of view. The fact that in this city we find it so hard to get firm ground under our feet could be a pointer to one of two things: that we have stopped, or almost stopped, regarding Moscow as a part of our own cultural heritage, or that we no longer have the capacity to see it as such because we have lost any precise sense of our own cultural background. What a city signifies to us, actually or potentially, is perhaps clearer when we are in Beijing or Abu Dhabi, surrounded by a totally different world, be it one of bafflingly polite ceremonial and the exotic elegance of jade, or of fabulous riches appearing apparently out of nowhere in the midst of the desert sands. The city’s meaning is less clear when we are in intermediate or transitional zones, on the margins where Europe merges into something else or is so encircled by a multitude of other influences that we cannot quite identify what there is about it that reminds us of home. Moscow is evidently a place of this kind, not only a centre but a membrane allowing two continents to diffuse into each other.

However, there is also another reason which has nothing to do with us, and that is the absence of history from Soviet public life itself. Such an assertion must at first sight seem startling, for there is hardly another country in the world with such a full and elaborate calendar of special days commemorating historical events, anniversaries and jubilees, starting with the Battle of Kulikovo Pole and including Borodino, the salvos fired by the battle cruiser Aurora, Stalingrad, and the first manned space flight. Yet this extraordinary number of official celebrations of the past has always been the sign of a problematic relationship with history. The intention is evidently to heal the violent rupture with the past by providing a huge quantity of carefully selected reminders of history. But beneath the bandage the wound has not healed. It needed daylight and fresh air rather than the tinctures prescribed by a procession of different physicians.
Nevertheless, a historical awareness of the city has survived in various fragmentary forms, despite imposed or self-imposed amnesia. It survives, first of all, as memory – the recollections of a host of individuals about how things used to be – and also as knowledge, of what happened where. The material for the reconstruction of the major and minor dramas enacted on the vast stage that is Moscow lies scattered in thousands of shards and splinters. It is handed down within families, it can be found in books that have long since ceased to be topical or have been deliberately withdrawn from circulation, it is recorded in official encyclopaedias, but also in small newspaper items. Unpleasant truths find a place to hide in texts that are out of the way, insignificant, not meant for keeping. History is written afresh by each generation, and so a subject that one thought had been exhaustively treated and disposed of, may, with a new light turned on it, take on quite a different aspect. With each new generation history, especially the most recent and most personal, is spoken of in a different tone of voice. Long before there is any radical change in the general line, the bibliography or the footnotes start to convey a message of their own; an interlinear translation or a subjective comment tucked away inside the main argument comes to be more illuminating than the main text.

Something similar happens with a city like Moscow. At first the stranger is presented with an image, a text. The text can be skimmed, and even this gives some pleasure. But on closer reading you find yourself pausing over particular passages, troubled by inconsistencies of content or style. And this is where a kind of decoding exercise begins, and as each new surface is revealed further layers become visible beneath it, in a never-ending process. ‘Look at the world rationally and it will look rationally at you; the two things are reciprocal’; this maxim of Hegel’s holds true when one undertakes such a ‘reading’, even in times of well-founded scepticism about rationality in the context of history. If, as you look at a city, you are on the alert for clues to its history, it will reveal a good deal about itself. And even if the only outcome were to be the realization that intimacy with this city has eluded you, the attempt would still have been worthwhile.

1 Starting with the surface

The city as a geological deposit and a quarry –
The ambivalence of modernization and of ground clearance.

All the buildings in this city have a sense of inevitability about them. Perhaps this only strikes one more forcefully here than elsewhere because it was not the earlier Moscow, consisting of an endless sea of wooden houses, that became a city, but the Moscow built of stone: only at this point did its history begin, a history that from then on no great fire and no conqueror could touch.

Here, more than anywhere else, each class has left its imprint on the city’s successive architectural styles. No frenzy of uncontrolled urban building has hemmed in, eroded or swallowed up the representative buildings of different eras. There they stand as ever, highly visible, uncompromisingly solid, discordant. First the ‘nests of gentlefolk’, the aristocrats’ town residences, impressively sized yet built with a strong feeling for proportion and domestic comfort, and each enclosed by its surrounding wall – country estate houses transposed to the city. Next, a touch of urbanity in the aspirational metropolis of Russian capitalism around 1900. And after that, mightiest of all, carving up the skyline and impossible to ignore, Stalin’s giant constructions set out like the points of a star on the ground-plan of the city. The Moscow cityscape has something of the beauty of a stone quarry when you view it as a whole, without fixing your attention on any one part of it such as Red Square, Staraya ploschad or a section of Strastnoy bulvar. The enormous massif of the city’s built landscape reveals the deposits laid down over the centuries. The strata are clearly visible in their varying shades of colour. There are projecting sharp edges of harder stone, whilst other, softer layers have been worn down, weathered, washed away. The eye is lulled
by an endless sameness, not to say monotony, and then suddenly confronted with bizarre, contrasting formations.

Why does Moscow in particular suggest the analogy of a quarry? Perhaps it is because the corridors that have been cut and are still being cut through the city are more obvious than elsewhere, since even clearances here are planned on a large scale and carried through with the full force of centralist authority. The ‘General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow’, a strategic plan that was followed, and augmented, from 1935 onwards, gave rise not only to vast construction projects but also to demolition, naturally on an equally grand scale. The wounds that this inflicted on the city took a long time to heal and the scars are more obvious than in other cities. In the West, business people operate at their own risk; businesses have to flourish to continue running and frontages must be well maintained as an outward sign of a healthy turnover. Hence the constant rapid transformation of our towns and cities, which are dominated not only by the fetishes of advertising but also by the power of private initiative. As a consequence, anything old is more likely to disappear under the varnish of continual modernization. But in Moscow – and many will have seen the same thing in Prague or East Berlin – whole streets and districts still survive in their original state, untouched by modernization, redevelopment or restoration. In Moscow we come face to face with our own past, preserved not, in the main, because it is held dear, but simply as a result of stagnation.

Russian capitalism, a latecomer among its rivals, brought to the city the vitality of a class only just starting to make its mark, and the beauty – tending to extreme showiness, a sense of inadequacy expressing itself through excess – of Russian art nouveau. Moscow gives the impression of being a haven of art nouveau, though perhaps only because it is easily recognizable here and contrasts so starkly with the grey, standardized type of building that has been dominant for many years. Foreigners who complain about the monstrous size, anonymity and other ‘abnormal’ features of this city are all too well aware of this, and deliberately seek out those areas where it first became a city and where a traditional urban ambience has survived – the side streets of the Arbat, the district around Kuznetsky most, the old Kitay-gorod, or ulitsa Kropotkinskaya and ulitsa Metrostroevskaya in the south-west. Moscow possesses streets and districts that have preserved all their original character, with
balconies, wrought-iron gateways, staircases and interiors that prove that beauty truly took hold in the city and was not just something tried out experimentally. These buildings have never fallen out of use, which is why their very shabbiness retains an air of dignity. Even today they have not become mere museum pieces. Travellers to Moscow are familiar with what used to be the finest hotels in town – the National, the Metropol or the Tsentralnaya – but, as I have said, there are whole rows of other buildings that preserve the atmosphere and contours of an age that attempted to soften the harshness of a hard-working, hectic city existence by returning to a decorative style of architecture that incorporated exotic motifs and adorned gables with broad friezes and panels of mosaic. Bank buildings that adopted a new discretion about their association with money, villas whose owners and architects were seeking a reconciliation with nature even before nature in Russia as a whole was subjected to the din of machinery, theatres where presenting performances in an intimate space was always more important than social display – unlike the Bolshoi Theatre, these were not primarily arenas for the aristocracy to see and be seen in. This Moscow of around 1900 still exists as a substantial layer of the city’s architecture, and it is almost impossible to imagine the meagre residue that would exist today if the plans drawn up in the late 1920s for the rational restructuring of the capital had in fact been carried out.

Why does this turn-of-the-century Moscow not figure more in our mental image of the city? Perhaps, like the nineteenth century, it has been largely forgotten. But, as we know, a revision of this situation is currently under way.

A visitor new to Moscow is often quite uncertain about the age of some buildings: does such and such a house date from the ‘early days’ or the post-Constructivist period? Can one really confuse art nouveau with Stalinist pomp? But there are more links between the styles of the 1910s and the 1930s than, with our awareness of the doctrinal background, we might at first be prepared to admit. One thing is common to both, namely the attempt to aestheticize people’s everyday surroundings – though the premises underlying this aim, and the outcomes, were certainly very different. There is undoubtedly a connection between William Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement and the demand in 1930s Russia for life to be made more aesthetic.

Though of course aware of the debates about the supposed ‘inherent connection’ between the Stalinist and the fascist aesthetic, the visitor discards this notion, at least for the time being, as lacking any historical basis. How about a line reconstructing the true genealogy, which would include both Vladimir Tatlin and Ivan Zholtovskiy of the St Petersburg Academy? A better historical case could be made for this than for that other link that people have been making for so long.

The architecture promoted by Stalin fed on everything else, even on what it superseded and abolished: the ornamentation of art nouveau, the Palladianism of the St Petersburg Academy, the boldness of the Constructivists with their blend of Bolshevism and Americanism. Other factors that helped to shape this architecture were, of course, Stalin’s dominion of a Soviet Union that embraced many nationalities and races and needed a new style; his unbridled power over its citizens, who were to be reduced to mere pinheads; and the supremacy of the regime as the state contractor and universal landowner, now in a position to stamp its will on the city as a whole for decades to come. Who would dare to claim that the strong hand of those days is not palpable everywhere in Moscow? Vast thoroughfares slicing through the city like airport runways, wide boulevards instead of shady avenues, high-rise buildings (which are not, however, skyscrapers) with ornamental elements brought together from all points of the compass. Who dares argue that they have not stood the test of time? The Moscow of today would not be complete without those ‘wedding-cake’ towers, so often derided and so bemusing to the foreign visitor. It is the buildings of that period, the 1930s and ’40s, that still give the city its character, and not the isolated experiments of the 1920s and early ’30s, scattered around the city but always overshadowed by the generation of buildings that succeeded them. Moscow without its Stalinist buildings is inconceivable: everything that followed had to be visually subordinated to them. Even the imported architecture and the façades borrowed from elsewhere – those of the Mezhdunarodnaya or Kosmos hotels, for instance – somehow manage to relate to them. In the shadow of these Stalinist cathedrals it is difficult to develop an independent style, unless it be that of the unambiguous, mass-produced buildings that are to be found in their hundreds of thousands in the city’s suburbs.
2 High-rise buildings

A city of high-rise buildings, not of skyscrapers —
The silhouette of a bygone era, defined by churches
and bell-towers, resurrected in a problematic
but understandable form.

New York is the city of skyscrapers. Moscow is the city of high-rise buildings. What gives Moscow its characteristic appearance, strikingly different from that of any other city, is not St Basil’s Cathedral or the view towards the Kremlin but the way that the entire area occupied by the city is visually articulated by the seven high-rise towers. From wherever you look, your line of sight will always end with one of these monumental buildings (illus. pp. 24–5). If you come as a visitor from the direction of the airport, your first sight of the city will be the topmost spires of the apartment block on ploschad Vosstaniya; the same is true if you arrive at the Belarus railway station. When you come by train from Leningrad, the city greets you with a view of the Hotel Leningradskaya; when you arrive at Kiev Station, with the pinnacles of the Hotel Ukraina or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Smolenskaya ploschad. Equally, if you start out from the centre, whichever direction you choose, one of the high-rise towers will always be looming up on the skyline. Looking from ulitsa Gertsena you see the block on ploschad Vosstaniya, or from prospekt Kalinina the Hotel Ukraina. The Old Arbat is overlooked and shaded by the Foreign Affairs Ministry tower on Smolenskaya ploschad. If you stand on one of the bridges over the Moskva, then far over to the east, where the Yauza River joins the Moskva, you will see the apartment block on Kotelnicheskaya naberezhnaya out on the eastern horizon, while in the opposite direction the furthest visible point will be the Ukraina, or the University on the Lenin Hills to the south-west. Alternatively, if you come out of the Kirovskaya metro station (through the entrance designed by the Rationalist architect Nikolai A. Ladovsky), what confronts you is the high-rise block on Lermontova ploschad.

Better still, travel round the outer ring and you will immediately understand the rationale for the positioning of these high-rise buildings. Standing on Smolensky bulvar you have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to your right and the Hotel Ukraina across the river to your left, and then further round the ring, again on your left, the ploschad Vosstaniya apartment block. Following the semicircle round to the north of the centre you find yourself once again encircled by the Hotel Leningradskaya, the Transport Ministry on Lermontova ploschad, and in the south-east the apartment block on Kotelnicheskaya naberezhnaya.

Travelling round the southern semicircle, you can make out the turrets of the University in the distance. Best of all, choose one of the public holidays when the city is illuminated and the celebrations are rounded off with fireworks, and go up to the viewing platform on the Lenin Hills. From there you can look down on the city as though it were a town planners’ model, and you will see that the structure of the city is directed outwards and is inexorably defined by those seven towers. They stand in exposed, dominating positions, just as castles were formerly built on strategically advantageous sites: on raised ground (the University), on peninsulas formed by bends in a river (the Hotel Ukraina), at the meeting of two rivers (the Kotelnicheskaya naberezhnaya block), at a gateway to the city (the Leningradskaya, which stands on a square that has the termini of
High-rise building on Smolenskaya ploschad, project design by V. G. Gelfreikh and M. A. Minkus, 1948.

Hotel Ukraina, project design by A. G. Mordvinov, 1948.

High-rise building on ploschad Vosstanija, project design, architects M. V. Posokhin and A. A. Mndoyants, 1948.

High-rise building on Lermontovskaya ploschad, project design, 1948, architects A. N. Dushkin and B. S. Mezentsev.

Hotel Ukraina, project design by A. G. Mordvinov, 1948.

Project design of Hotel Leningradskaya, architects L. M. Polyakov and A. B. Boretsky, 1948.

High-rise apartment building on Kotel'nikovskaya naberezhnaya, project design by D. N. Chechulin and A. K. Rostovsky, 1948.

Moscow State University (detail), architect L. V. Rudnev, 1948.
three railway routes), or along a line of fortifications (following the outer ring: Lermontova ploschad, Smolenskaya ploschad, ploschad Vosstaniya). What is inevitably a somewhat laborious account here in print becomes perfectly plain as soon as one looks at a relief map of the city.

However, the seven monumental buildings do not stand alone. They have offshoots throughout the whole city, lesser structures that cannot rival them in rank, height or splendour, but which could be their children: the Hotel Pekin, for instance, on ploschad Mayakovskogo, or the mighty gateway between ploschad Gagarina and Leninsky prospekt, or a multitude of buildings on ulitsa Gorkogo. In a word, the seven giants form a kind of gravitational centre, each holding together a particular district and drawing it closer, giving it a distinctive face.

Collectively, it is these seven buildings that give the whole city its face, as attractive or as ugly as any other face. It is quite wrong to dismiss the high-rise towers, which people like to refer to as examples of the wedding-cake style, as an exotic element — they are too firmly implanted and absorbed into the city’s structure for that. It is wrong, too, to shrug them off, in the way that people do, as simply the relics of a bizarre era. A more interesting as well as more honest response is the admission by Muscovites, and by non-natives who have lived there for some time, that without these buildings — whatever one may think of them — the city would be faceless, colourless, even indistinguishable from any other. What is very revealing is the inconsistency shown by people who make fun of the architectural style but would in fact give a great deal to live in one of the flats — sadly unattainable to them — in those solidly built blocks.

Any newcomer to Moscow will inevitably, I think, make these high-rise buildings the starting point of his attempt to form a picture of the city, and will probably not get very far. He will soon turn instead to the classical ensembles that he can make something of: the Kremlin, the neo-classical Old University, the art nouveau villa by Fyodor Shekhovtsev or the Vesnin brothers’ Workers’ Club for the Likhachev automobile factory. There he has architectural forms that he can understand, which fit into a familiar frame of reference. But he will inevitably be drawn back to those buildings that have made the city what it is today — a city that owes its distinct visual character to the General Plan of 1935 and the implementation of the reconstruction programme, and that of course includes these seven buildings, which were erected following a 1947 resolution of the Council of Ministers. The face of Moscow is that of a city built in the 1930s and ‘40s; there are many modifications in detail, but the fundamental layout and the significant accents that determine the essential shape of the city, including its core, remain fixed.

These tall buildings are not skyscrapers but vysotne zdaniya, or high-rise buildings. The distinction is significant, because the 1947 resolution expressly stated that there was no intention of imitating the silhouettes of Manhattan, Chicago or Detroit. These were to be ‘original works of architecture which should not be a repetition of the kind of multi-storeyed structures found in other countries’. Just as Manhattan was seen as the symbolic embodiment of capitalist architecture and town planning, so these buildings were to give expression to the new Soviet way of life. There were to be no districts plunged into permanent shade, no streets reduced to dark gullies between tall houses, no uncontrolled proliferation of building, no boldly functional elevations. Instead, the high-rise buildings were to determine the development of Moscow as a whole, to act as landmarks articulating the city. As individual buildings, they were to block neither sun nor wind, and to be not merely functional but also beautiful.

This leaves the modern observer, standing at the foot of these gigantic creations, all the more baffled. What is one to make of a language of architectural forms that crams the vocabulary of different stylistic periods and cultural groups together in a single building? How does one cope with towers crowned with superstructures that
are neither Gothic nor derived from a cathedral in Kazan? How can crenellations borrowed from the Kremlin wall be reconciled with realistic sculptures? What is a larger than life-sized sculpture of workers and peasants doing above the vehicle entrance to a block of flats? And anyway, what is the point of having an arched entrance in the style of the Leningrad Building of the General Staff if it only leads to a back yard? Whatever could have prompted an artist and architect to unite in a single building elements of the Italian Renaissance and of Russian fortresses, the bizarre turrets of Tatar architecture and the solid round columns of Moscow Classicism? And what could have led him to fit out the vestibule of a hotel built in the second half of the twentieth century with heavy oak carvings and panelling in the nineteenth-century neo-Gothic style, with bull’s-eye windows and roaring lions, even if – or perhaps because – the lobby leads to nothing more than a lift with heavy wooden panelling of its own? What inspired him to create a magnificent staircase which only leads up to the hairdressing salon? What meaning is to be found in the ceiling painting of a sumptuously stuccoed room which depicts, on the vault of its trompe-l’œil heaven, modern aeroplanes and a young man with a bicycle, along with flute and harmonica players, surrounding a Greek temple? What is the connection between a bicycling Young Communist and a Greek temple, or a flying machine and a flautist? And what is the sense of a building the size of a palace – the apartment block on Kotelnicheskaya naberezhnaya – containing, for the most part, only two-room flats? Or of a hotel in which only 22 per cent of the total floor space is available for accommodation, and a mere 7 per cent for the gastronomic side of the enterprise? Why does it need four lifts when each floor has no more than fifteen rooms? And why, to cap it all, are the rooms (which in any case are very small, often less than 110 square feet) set at an angle to the building? Just for the sake of the external appearance?

The construction of these buildings is said to have been a personal initiative of Stalin’s. When it came to judging their merits, his successors made it easy for themselves – far too easy. Predictably, they invoked the empty formula of the dialectic of form and content, arguing that the form of these structures contradicted the content, that a hotel was a hotel and not a neo-Gothic museum, that an apartment block was an apartment block and not a palazzo, and so on. What they failed to do – as always – was to draw the barb of the Hegelian-Marxian aesthetic, which would have been too painful an operation. For according to that aesthetic, form has its own truth, and there is an integral relationship between form and content. But what, then, is the truth of the form in this instance?

Criticism of these forms focused particularly on the financial aspect, and the architects and engineers responsible were unsparesingly confronted with the figures. A single one of the apartment blocks cost as much to maintain as several ‘normal’ ones put together, while it was only in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building on Smolenskaya ploschad that the provision of office space had been successfully maximized. But the most damning criticism of all was that a country whose population was crammed together in those residential districts that had escaped the ravages of the war, and in particular a city that was bursting at the seams, could afford such profligate use of valuable materials like stone, concrete, cement, steel and marble.

By discrediting the style and its architects – especially the supreme architect, Stalin himself – the new planners opened the way for their own building policy, namely the construction of vast residential districts in the outlying areas and the development of mass-produced blocks of flats with standardized living accommodation for millions. Pioneering as it was in its way, this policy nonetheless suffered from a lack of ideas and the absence of any ambition beyond the most basic fulfillment of function, whether for housing or office space.

It is always curious to see how a later period applies its own ideas and values when judging and sometimes condemning an earlier one, because of course the planners in 1947 knew exactly what they were about. From the outset the overspend was allowed for in their calculations; they did not want to create featureless districts of mass housing or interchangeable office blocks. The arguments of the later critics would only have been justified if there had been a viable alternative at the time. But it was 1947, a year when the full extent of the destruction caused by the war had become obvious, a year of hope that the war’s paradoxical effect of greater contact with the outside world might continue, but also a year when the course was being set for isolationism, the campaign against cosmopolitanism, and a wave of chauvinism that was no longer the response to a threat from Nazi Germany. The following year, 1948, saw the condemnation of the ‘bourgeois formalists’, the ‘decadents’, and the ‘lackeys of Western Europe and bourgeois culture’, and the hounding of writers and intel-
lectuals — especially Jewish ones — and of party members spared in earlier purges. That year marks the birth of a new patriotic self-image. Henceforth there was to be no doubting, not only that Russia was capable of anything she chose to do, but that the progress of mankind was inseparable from Russian, or rather Soviet, achievements, whether in genetics, rocket technology, philosophy — or architecture.

Moscow’s high-rise buildings, which were not to be — were not allowed to be — Manhattan-style skyscrapers, represent an act of polemical self-assertion, which inevitably had something compulsive and desperate about it. How else can one explain the extraordinary accomplishment of putting up seven such buildings within four to six years? It was the final initiative of a system that had exhausted itself but still found the strength to stamp its mark on the city for all time. Only the very last of the buildings, which was to have bound the city’s future for ever to the name of its overlord, was not realized: the Palace of Soviets, which was to have stood at the spot where lines projected from the seven buildings intersect.

However, if the architecture of these buildings had been wholly informed by ideology and not by their practical purpose of providing space and splendid interiors — in other words, had they not been designed to be useful — then by now they would be ruins or simply, as someone said to me in the Hotel Leningradskaya, ‘architectural monuments’. But they are not. As far as I can judge by my own observation, the University on the Lenin Hills is a well-functioning machine for the production of science and ideology: so far, the building is doing its job. More than 6,000 people — students, research assistants and professors — live in this building with its long, hotel-like corridors and its apartments, complete with toilet, shower room and entrance lobby, concentrated in one block. Here, under a single roof, students have everything they need for their work and their daily lives: several cafeterias — even these, of course, have marble-clad columns and massive chandeliers — a photographer, a hairdressing salon, a shoe repairer, grocery shops and snack-bars, not to mention sports halls, concert and music rooms, a cinema, function rooms of various sizes, a swimming pool, and on each floor a common room with a television set. The central tower, which is capped with a gilded spire, accommodates the bright and airy lecture theatres, libraries, study rooms and the entire university administration. The building is huge, it is true, but considering that it is a town in itself it is surprisingly rational in design and not a tiring place to be in. Its layout is clear and logical from the point of view of its separate sections and functions, though the residential part is anonymous and less easy to find one’s way around in. However, in general it is the accommodation of choice: where else would you find such a high standard of building, the luxury of a single or double room, and a cinema, swimming pool and shops all under one roof? ‘Knowledge is power’ is the thought that the building seems to convey, particularly on special dates on the calendar when it is illuminated and appears before an admiring public like a man-made mountain range. If, as well as the power of knowledge, it also represents knowledge in the service of power, this would be no accident, for its architect was Lev Rudnev, whose work also included the Military Academy and who was adept at that kind of design.

Aware as you may be of the building’s practical, X-shaped ground-plan and of the efficiency of a complex like this one which combines scholarship and student life, this cannot entirely banish a sense of puzzlement and unease as you make your way through the vestibules towards the exits, walking on stone tiles which are only now starting to become slightly rounded at the edges of the steps — the first signs of wear, after thirty years of use — and pass by great mirrors reaching up to the ceiling, and granite columns that reminded me of the picture of the palace at Knossos in our school history book; or when you sit in a cinema with a stuccoed ceiling, or cross the foyer towards a theatre auditorium obviously inspired by the Hall of Columns. For anyone living in this building it is impossible wholly to shake off a sense of uneasiness, a consciousness of the disproportion between function and décor. You are left feeling indifferent towards the over-rich ornamentation, though it was intended to be attractive; there is no escape from it but to ignore it.

The only way to cope with the impossibility of taking in all the wealth of detail, ornament and embellishment is to give the décor no more than a glance in passing. Otherwise it is all too exhausting and a distraction from the real and serious business of everyday life. In the metro the problem is greater still: the fact that you are moving more quickly exacerbates the conflict between the constant invitation to look and the speed with which the image vanishes.

The visitor’s perception of these monumental buildings becomes more complicated if he engages in a dialogue with their architects. They are, after all, major figures like Vladimir Gelfreikh (or Helfreich) and Mikhail Minkus (Smolenskaya ploshchad), Aleksei
Dushkin (Lermontova ploshchad), Mikhail Posokhin and Ashot Mndoyants (Hotel Ukraina and ploshchad Vosstaniya), Dmitry Chechulin (Kotelchneskaya naberezhnaya) and Lev Rudnev (the University). To these one should add the illustrious names of other architects who were responsible for no less puzzling buildings, and whose artistic background makes them even more incomprehensible to us: Aleksei Shchusev, Boris Iofan, Ivan Zholtovsky and Ivan Fomin. These architects were also artists; they trained at the St Petersburg Academy of Arts at the beginning of the twentieth century, and built villas and mansions for the St Petersburg aristocracy and the Moscow merchant class that were unsurpassed not only in splendour but often also in taste. These people were among the most sought-after stage designers of the St Petersburg theatre world, and proved able, apparently without compromising their sophisticated taste, to create original architecture in the modern Constructivist manner, such as Shchusev’s Narkomzem building and especially his Lenin Mausoleum. How was it that these same men were willing to indulge in the most riotous and at first sight senseless flights of fancy, such as Shchusev’s design for the Komsomolskaya metro station, Fomin’s for the one at ploshchad Sverdlova, or Zholtovsky’s ‘Palladian’ frontage for the apartment block near the Manège?

It is certainly true that an element of compulsion, and the danger that an architect might lose his livelihood by being banned from receiving commissions from the sole client, the state, played a considerable role. After all, as early as July 1932 the numerous rival architects’ societies were dissolved and replaced by the single Union of Soviet Architects, and at the same time Socialist Realism was proclaimed, in place of the existing variety of styles, as the one acceptable architectural principle. Yet the pressure exerted on the architects does not explain their switch to Eclecticism, any more than Stalinism can be simply equated with the practice of terror. Saying this lays one open to the charge of being an apologist; but the widely accepted and frequently repeated assertion that the 1930s made a complete break with the 1920s, and that the emergence of Eclecticism in the 1930s and 40s was merely a reaction, or indeed a ‘deviation’, gets one nowhere at all. As we know, pressure is especially effective when it is applied to someone who is no longer sufficiently sure of himself. New certainties take root where old ideas have fallen prey to uncertainty and a loss of confidence, and a new programme can take hold where an old one has run out of energy or where the conditions that gave rise to it are undergoing radical change. Familiar with the dates and the moments of hiatus in social and political history, we may often overlook the fact that developments in the microcosms of the artistic world follow their own separate logic. It is true that the Bauhaus was dissolved in Berlin in 1933, as had been its Soviet offshoot VKSUTEMAS (Higher [State] Artistic and Technical Workshops) in its later guise of VKSUTIEN (Higher [State] Art and Technical Institute) in 1930 – but does this alone account for the end of the era of Functionalism and Constructivism? The powerful advance, first of the neo-classicists and the advocates of art deco and later of the Eclectics, must have had something to do with the vacuum left behind by the previous period. When people pay tribute to the architects of the 1920s and are quick to sneer at those of the ‘30s and ‘40s, this is not always wholly a matter of aesthetic judgement, but arises in large measure from a feeling of solidarity with the victims, from sorrow for those who were crushed under the wheels.

The great buildings of the 1930s and ‘40s – such as the Lenin Library, the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, residential blocks numbers 4, 6 and 8 on ulitsa Gorkogo, the Vakhtangov Theatre on the Arbat, numerous metro stations and the seven principal high-rise buildings – could hardly have been executed if they had not been based on a thoroughly convincing idea. But the question is, convincing to whom and on what grounds?

The suggestion that this was a straightforward reaction, that after a period of being overshadowed the neo-classicists of the St Petersburg Academy came to the fore again as though nothing had happened, is not credible. A simple resumption of neo-classicism was an utter impossibility: the products of Soviet Modernism could not be ignored, and too many of the new generation of architects had been fundamentally influenced by the 1920s. If the buildings of the 1930s and late ‘40s express an aesthetic programme, it can be defined negatively as a rejection of undecorated, merely functional architecture, and positively as a search for a synthesis of the diverse styles and cultures to which the Soviet state believed itself the heir. The key to Eclecticism is that it is an attempt to work towards an original, autonomous language of architectural forms, not one imposed by decree.

Interpreting Eclecticism as a largely unsuccessful attempt to achieve a synthesis is a greater challenge in Moscow than in some
other cities. In Warsaw (with its Palace of Culture) or East Berlin (the former Stalinallee), the wedding-cake architecture is simply a monstrous import from the Soviet Union that does not even pretend to have anything to do with native traditions. In Moscow, on the other hand, it is deeply rooted in the city, and its emergence is in effect a resumption of the late nineteenth-century struggle to create a home-grown, neo-Russian style. Indeed, this Eclecticism can perhaps be best defined as the failure of a synthesizing process, the product of an artificially shortened process of growth, a forcible and externally imposed joining of parts which, whether by choice or necessity, were not given time to mature naturally. The artificiality of this undertaking is just another reflection of how the building of Soviet society was relentlessly driven forward; but societies too are not 'built', they have to grow.

However, blasé criticism of Eclecticism and the wedding-cake style very often either overlooks or derides the enormous, superhuman effort that was invested in it. It is all too easy to forget, when faced by an over-extravagance of decoration, that these stylistic currents are monuments to a synthesizing endeavour which, though forcibly setting an unrealistic pace, could still summon up sufficient self-confidence to act on the assumption of holding sway for all time.

In the Moscow of the 1920s the visitor was surrounded by a city of churches and clock towers. Walter Benjamin felt 'completely encircled by more than four hundred churches and chapels, that is to say by two thousand domes', and wrote of being spied on by an 'architectural Okhranka'. Nowadays the presence of the clock towers is no longer noticeable, and their strong upward thrust has been replaced by that of the high-rise buildings.

Note: almost all of the chapters in this book were written more or less in the order of my explorations and wanderings, with the exception of the present one. The reason is simple: you begin with the most obvious, the surface layer, which continuously resists you, and so you return to it again and again. This is why I have allowed myself to include a conclusion at such an early point in the book.

Is Moscow a city that has grown organically, where, as in other cities, the visitor can examine and interpret the phases of its architecture like the annual growth rings on a tree; a place where, helped by the experience and background knowledge that he brings with him, he feels a sense of continuity? Is it a place of market squares surrounded by burghers' houses, with the usual polarization between castle and cathedral on the one hand and civic institutions such as the town hall and guild houses on the other? A place where the old ring of defensive walls has been breached and ultimately obliterated by the unstoppable expansion of the town, leaving only the names of streets and squares to recall the old fortifications? Has its growth from a medieval town to a modern stronghold of industry been so organic that, whatever the disruptions along the way, one is chiefly conscious of continuity?

I do not think so. Moscow was the Old Russian capital in the era before Peter the Great and St Petersburg, and then became the capital again, first of modern capitalist Russia following the Great Reform of 1861, and then of the Soviet state, with all the central institutions that had once been transferred to the banks of the Neva brought back to the centre. But Moscow lacks one whole phase of history as a capital city (even if, tacitly, it always retained that status and was the only place where a Tsar could be crowned). Of course Moscow has its wealth of absolutist architecture — and indeed there are the styles actually known as 'Moscow Baroque' and, more famously, 'Moscow classicism' — but this was insufficient to determine the physiognomy of the city as a whole. The missing section of
most people, St Petersburg represents the quintessence of refined European urban culture. However, perhaps this too comes from adhering to a myth. At first sight Moscow does not seem to offer much in the way of sophisticated city life. From the start of the eighteenth century until the late nineteenth it appears almost like a vacuum, an unoccupied space only waiting for the day when history will inevitably change direction, and with ample room to absorb, at last, the pulsating energies of a giant empire. Perhaps it was providential that the great fire of 1812 cleared the ground, leaving Moscow and its region unencumbered and all the more able to exact vengeance for having been so humiliatingly demoted.

Two cities, then, embodying two separate historical developments: on the one hand Moscow, first pre-Enlightenment, pre-Petrine, Orthodox and Tsarist, and then capitalist, enjoying an unparalleled boom; and on the other hand St Petersburg, the silver city, absolutist, enlightened, imperial: even the coming of the big capital concerns could not disturb the serenity of its neo-classical façades. On one side the appeal of rampant organic growth, on the other the magic of geometry.

Significantly, the image of ‘two halves’ was used by Lenin early in 1918 when he commented that Russia had adopted the most advanced political structure, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The complementary other half, an advanced economic basis, already existed, but only outside Russia, in the shape of the German state capitalism practised by Wilhelm II and Walther Rathenau. But what is the effect of having two cultures developing separately? What happens to the growth of an urban culture when different traditions and standards emerge in isolation from each other without the benefit of creative friction and mutual adjustment, and when (as has often occurred) people simplistically contrast the two cities, defining St Petersburg as the outpost of Europe, but Moscow – in the words of Mme de Staël – as the ‘Rome of the Tatars’?

The superciliousness that has often been shown by St Petersburg towards Moscow, and the attitude compounded of envy and contempt adopted by Muscovites towards St Petersburgers, is like a coded mutual questioning; or, to put it more plainly, an attempt by the Russians of St Petersburg and Moscow respectively to pin down their own identity, to establish who they are and where they belong. The historical tension between Moscow and St Petersburg is subtly
perpetuated in the tensions and animosities that exist between the inhabitants of the two cities today, and this is no doubt the tension that is inherent in the concept of Russianness as such. If one were to trace the history of the expressions of hostility and of affection exchanged by the citizens of the two rival capitals over the centuries, one might be able to pinpoint the position of a Russian self-consciousness that lies somewhere between, and oscillates between, the two poles of East and West.

No one has more brilliantly delineated the features of the two capitals than Nikolai Gogol in his St Petersburg Notes, written in 1836, at a period when the character of both was already fairly well established. 'Where indeed has the Russian capital landed up - at the back of beyond! A fine trick of the Russian capital, to take up residence next door to the North Pole!' he exclaims in wonderment. And then he dashes off a phenomenological sketch which is still accurate even today if you make allowance for the provincialization that St Petersburg has undergone since then. He sees Moscow as having 'a full beard', while St Petersburg is a 'correct German'. Moscow 'sprawls all over the place', St Petersburg is 'erect, slim and elegant'. Moscow he regards as a 'homespun woman', St Petersburg as a 'dandy'. St Petersburg is a punctilious individual 'who will check how much he has in his pocket before inviting people out for a drink; Moscow is a Russian nobleman, and when he sets out to enjoy himself he carries on till he drops...'. In Moscow the journals write profound pieces about Kant, Schelling, 'and so on and so forth... the only subjects of the St Petersburg journals are the public and having the right opinions'. St Petersburg is where writers earn money, while Moscow is where they throw it around. 'Moscow is a great merchant business; St Petersburg a bright and attractive shop.

Russia needs Moscow, St Petersburg needs Russia. St Petersburg likes to make fun of Moscow for being crude and uncouth and having bad taste; Moscow sneers at St Petersburg for being venal, as well as unable to speak Russian.' Gogol has difficulty in summing up what makes St Petersburg what it is, and arrives at the cautious formulation: 'In a way the city is like a European colony in America, with just as little that is native and national, and just as much that is international and mixed and has not yet become fused into a new, firmly-knit body.'

For some considerable time now there has been a wave of nostalgia for the former glories of the silver city, but voices have also been raised belatedly anathematizing the epoch of Peter the Great for having set Russia on 'the wrong path', as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn claimed. This, like all such overstatements, contains a germ of truth: the very building of St Petersburg was made possible by the imposition of a ban on the use of stone for building houses in Moscow, to say nothing of the cultural and intellectual consequences. For centuries afterwards, Peter the Great's grand project continued to soak up energies in a way that inevitably led to inertia and a loss of vigour elsewhere. Hence it may be said without undue exaggeration that the founding of St Petersburg interrupted and held back Moscow's development as a city, and that it was Moscow that bore the cost of the Petrine reforms. Nevertheless, to speak of St Petersburg as the 'European' and Moscow as the 'Russian', or even semi-Asiatic, city obscures the fact that Moscow has always been the more truly European of the two. This needs to be stated bluntly if the stranglehold of the established myth is ever to be loosened.

Moscow in the Middle Ages possessed in almost complete form all the prerequisites, familiar to us from our knowledge of the rest of Europe, for the making of a city. It had a castle, as a place of refuge but also as the centre of that exploitation without which culture cannot develop; its layout was, not by chance, reminiscent of that of Paris; it was the seat of both the Tsar and the Patriarch, which provided at least the potential for the division of power and the rivalry between the spiritual and temporal hegemonies that in Europe proved so beneficial and productive (admittedly caesaropapism was not done away with, but there were heresies and Reformationist movements); and some of the ingredients of social unrest were present just as in the medieval towns and cities of Western Europe, even if Moscow did not experience the development of guilds with a republican structure.

It was in Moscow that the first Russian schools were founded, and in 1755 the first Russian university was established there, even though by that time St Petersburg was already the capital. And most significantly of all - long before 1703 Moscow had close ties with northern Italy, with the European Renaissance, the 'rebirth' of Europe. Venetian and Milanese builders were at work in Moscow well before anyone had a vision of a 'Venice of the North'. Moscow is quite manifestly not the non-European city par excellence, any more than the age of the Enlightenment, and in particular the period of the French Revolution, can be equated with what is meant by
‘European’. It rather seems as though, through the creation of two rival capitals, the potential causes of conflict that proved so fruitful in Western Europe were in Russia split apart, isolated and so rendered less productive. Whereas in France, for example, Versailles and the Third Estate of Paris were, so to speak, sealed inside a single pressurized vessel, their Russian counterparts were widely separated, with a consequent huge loss of pressure and energy. And when the vessel did finally burst, the explosion blew to pieces not just the ancien régime (Versailles, St Petersburg), but also liberal attempts at reform (Frankfurt’s National Assembly, Petrograd’s Constituent Assembly). This is no doubt the significance of the sequence of dates, 1789–1848–1917, so often cited by Lenin.

Moscow attempted to punish its rival by outshining it; how effectively is open to question. The geometry of St Petersburg cannot be recreated by means of a General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow; classicism can at best succeed again in the guise of neo-classicism. The transformation of Tverskaya into ulitsa Gorkogo may have outdone the Nevsky prospekt, but it could not equal it. That sounds fanciful, if not paradoxical; but the historical situation was in many ways paradoxical. Besides, one hears far more daring comments on the character of capital cities. Are there not some people who see Chicago and not New York as the most American of cities? To call Moscow the most Russian of Russian cities is a small matter by comparison. Russia’s Chicago, then?

4 A rampant boom

In the stone landscape the areas of art nouveau building have survived better than in other places, despite the clearances made under the General Plan – Moscow as the metropolis of the empire, but also as a European metropolis.

How is it that everywhere in Moscow, even today, the elemental vigour of art nouveau, which is known here as style moderne, is not only present but leaps out at you, and is all the more captivating for being surrounded by other architecture that is bulky and either over- or under-embellished? The reason must lie in the ideas and driving forces that informed that style and which are nowadays recognized in Moscow too as its defining characteristics.

First, the international dimension: Moscow and St Petersburg shared in the general European unease about culture and its traditional forms. Here that unease perhaps burst out in a more elemental fashion because it was combined with the discovery of native sources of strength.

Secondly, the democratization of life: luxury, blossoming in so many different ways that life seemed in danger of being suffocated by it, was growing so rampantly that a need was felt to return to and reveal the basic contours of life, the ground from which everything sprang. From the pure aestheticism of l’art pour l’art to making people’s lives more aesthetic: the ancient dream of making nature more human, and humankind more natural. However, this was not a ‘back to nature’ movement but a desire for the city-dweller to reconquer his living-space in the city.

Thirdly, there was a crisis of culture, that is to say the shattering of a culture that had become like a corset squeezing the breath out of life. There was a sense that the available styles – both classicism and the false trails represented by Eclecticism – were worn out, their possibilities exhausted (though in fact Eclecticism did much
The shadow of an imaginary tower

The storming of heaven, and power in a quandary –
The antecedents of the Moskva Swimming Pool.

There are buildings that cast a shadow even though they were never built. Most people, on first discovering the Moskva open-air swimming pool on Kropotkinskaya naberezhnaya – almost in the centre of the city, and open both summer and winter – view it as the pioneering achievement of a form of town planning that, instead of creating a landscape of stone that is hostile to human beings, offers them physical exercise, nature, sunshine and fresh air. You can see the vast circle of the pool when you look down from ulitsa Volhonka, and it is truly central, being only a few steps from the Pushkin Museum, hardly more from the Borovitsky Gate of the Kremlin and easily reachable by metro, using the Kropotkinskaya station. The idea of swimming in winter in the heart of an icy, snow-covered city, enveloped in clouds of steam that billow across the street, has something boldly fantastical about it, almost like deciding to pull down the Wall Street banks to make room for kindergartens. But in fact this huge round pool was merely an expedient. Where nowadays the little dots of the swimmers’ bathing caps are lost in the swirling steam, it was originally planned that the new, overwhelmingly vast, indeed monstrous centre of Soviet power, the Palace of Soviets, should tower into the heavens. The plan was never realized, and although the cause was not a confusion of languages like the one that halted the building of the Tower of Babel, the course of events leading to its abandonment was not wholly unlike the failure of that earlier heaven-storming enterprise.

The Palace of Soviets (illus. pp. 68–9, 73) was not the first architectural project intended as a conspicuous symbol of the new society.
Tatlin’s tower for the Third International and the Vesnin brothers' design for the Palace of Labour had achieved legendary renown in the early 1920s. For his tower, Tatlin envisaged three storeys rotating around a vertical axis and stacked one on top of another, all of them contained within a skeleton structure that spiralled around the outside; the overall height was to be 400 metres. This building never had a chance of being realized, but all over the world in the 1920s its combination of imaginative technology and revolutionary romanticism set the brains of architects in a whirl. The Vesnin brothers’ Palace of Labour design, submitted in 1922 as a project to mark the founding of the USSR, made a comparable impact. Transparency, strict functionalism and the avoidance of all superfluous ornamentation – these were the watchwords of the fathers of Soviet Constructivism.

In 1931, when the so-called Great Leap Forward of the first Five-Year Plan was well under way, the idea of creating a congress building of imposing magnificence was taken up once again. The history of that project has been thoroughly researched by Anatole Kopp, Antonia Cunliffe and Soviet architectural historians. An architectural competition was announced, and the successive phases of it read like a condensed history of Soviet architecture – from Constructivism to neo-classicism, from modest functionalism to the
grandiose and overbearing style that, for want of a better name, is known as wedding-cake architecture.

The competition, organized by a committee with the somewhat Byzantine title of the 'Palace Building Committee' and headed by one of Stalin's most loyal collaborators, Molotov, was to be run over four rounds. The wording of the competition announcement was sufficiently vague to offer scope to the various rival movements. The functions of the building were defined as follows: it was to house the government but also provide a cultural centre; it was to be the venue for congresses and for sessions of the Supreme Soviet, but also for theatre and concerts. It was to have two congress halls seating 6,000 and 15,000 respectively, and four further conference rooms each seating 500. Aesthetic guidelines were kept to a minimum: the building must be monumental and of outstanding design, and must fit into Moscow's urban landscape.

The composition of the jury that framed the terms of the competition and which met in June 1931 is surprising. Of its twelve members, only three were Russians and the rest foreigners, among them some illustrious names: Le Corbusier and Perret from France, and Gropius, Mendelsohn and Poelzig from Germany. Of course the spirit of the 1920s had not yet quite disappeared, and lines of communication between Berlin, Moscow and Paris were still intact. Le Corbusier, Mendelsohn and Gropius not only entered competitions but were able to do a certain amount of building in Moscow. Among the Russians on the jury were Ivan Zholtovsky, a former member of the St Petersburg Academy and a Palladian, and Boris Iofan, a Rome-trained neo-classicist of sophisticated taste. So far, everything seemed open and undecided.

The response to the first open competition was overwhelming: around 160 designs were submitted, 24 of them by foreign architects. However, the contest was not wholly the province of professionals: a further 112 designs came from interested non-professionals, both blue- and white-collar workers, unknown brigades acting on their own initiative. In August 1931 the designs were put on display for public consideration. The whole phalanx of the schools still in existence at that time – the Rationalists, the Constructivists, the advocates of proletarian architecture – and the most eminent architects all took part, for it was clear to everyone that the design for the country's 'Supreme Building' would set the course for the future, determining architectural taste and perhaps even deciding the fate of individuals. And the concepts and forms were accordingly varied: there were traditionalist solutions which borrowed from the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome or the Doge's Palace in Venice; there were overtly symbolic compositions – a ground-plan in the shape of 'one-sixth of the earth', a designation given to the USSR at the time; there were plans that reflected a desire for the Palace of Soviets to remain open as a forum of the nations and which therefore used space in boldly innovative ways, working with movable walls, open amphitheatres, galleries, balconies and other means of access to the centre of power; and there were straightforwardly monumental designs which conceived of the building as a unified complex.

However exciting the ins and outs of the four rounds may have been, however difficult it was to reach a decision, on 5 May 1933 the Palace Building Committee resolved to accept the design by Iofan: a circular structure rising in four stages, each narrower than the one below, to a height of 220 metres, with colonnades ranged in front of it. Or, to be more accurate, this design was taken as a basis for the further development of the project. There must have been something about it that left the commissioners of the Supreme Building disinterested and troubled. Was it that the height was to be only 220 metres, while other countries could boast an Eiffel Tower measuring 300 metres and an Empire State Building measuring 381? There is no mockery implied in this suggestion. For the fact is that from the very outset the Palace of Soviets project was under enormous pressure to compete.

As far back as 1922 the ill-fated Sergei Kirov, who did not live to see the outcome of the project, had announced with an undertone of menace that a palace of the Soviet power must have nothing in common, even in its outward form, with the parliamentary façades of a world that was now in terminal decline. In architecture, as in other spheres, the workers' and peasants' state, despised as backward, must assert itself against the bourgeois West: there must be buildings 'such as our enemies cannot even dream of'.

In the early 1930s there was a direct rival – the League of Nations Building in Geneva. This, however, was often disparaged at the time as a parliamentary and pacifist talking-shop. The Palace of Soviets should, and must, be something quite different. But what? It is an achievement – if a dubious one – of the competition that in the course of it an understanding was arrived at of what architects should understand by Socialist Realism. The statements made on the
subject were fairly diffuse and couched largely in emotive terms. But people knew what and who was meant, or to be more exact, they knew what Socialist Realism should not be. During the competition controversy raged, and the architects who came under fire were soon no less on the defensive than the left-wing opposition, which had long since been forced to quit the stage. The style, it was said, must be ‘national’, even if this was only defined in negative terms: not modern, not modernist, not like the Bauhaus in Germany or VKhUTEMAS in the Soviet Union. ‘Modernism’ and ‘Constructivism’ had acquired a connotation of being non-national, rootless, cosmopolitan, intellectualist. Furthermore, it should be ‘proletarian’, though this was even more difficult to define, for it was precisely the ‘left-wing’ Constructivists who had contributed most significantly to the development of a markedly rational, functional and yet imaginative style of building dedicated to the service of the workers, and who had protested vehemently against pomp and extravagance. Lastly, there was the demand that it be ‘monumental’. And since this notion was primarily quantitative, it could be translated into buildings of immeasurable vastness.

In the meantime, the unrealistic expectation of completing the Palace of Soviets within the current Five Year Plan had been abandoned. At the meeting of the Palace Building Committee on 10 May 1933 Stalin suggested that Iofan’s building should be topped with a statue of Lenin far taller than the statue of the ‘Liberated Proletarian’ envisaged by the architect. Iofan was instructed, together with the architects Shchuko and Gelfreikh, to produce the definitive design by 1 January 1934; the whole edifice was to be virtually double the size originally planned.

The Palace was to be no less than 420 metres high, with a total volume of 7.5 million cubic metres. According to Kopp, the large conference hall in the podium was to seat 21,000 people. The palace was to be crowned by a statue of Lenin more than 70 metres tall. A passer-by would have to be an enormous distance away to take in even a portion of the building. And there was provision for this: the Palace was to be surrounded by a vast level area with imposing approaches, parade squares and triumphal arches.

There does seem to have been a definite purpose behind all this. Anyone coming here to attend a conference would feel, before he even entered the building, a shudder of awe at its sublimity. Any delegate raising his hand to vote would know that he was consigned
to the mere pedestal of a gargantuan symbol fashioned in concrete and granite. The building has about it something of an artificial mountain landscape, or a prehistoric tomb. Even what made little sense was still calculated to have an impact, for in what direction could the Revolutionary leader – positioned over 400 metres high, and hidden from the eye of mere mortals by a blanket of cloud – point the way, other than onwards and upwards to the clear blue sky and the twinkling stars? Even at the time, Igor Grabar, a high-ranking cultural official, made the cautious comment that it would probably not occur to anyone to place a sculpture by Michelangelo 400 metres from the ground. But the Palace Building Committee had its reasons for elevating the earthly leader of an earthly revolution into the realm beyond the clouds. And no doubt it also knew the effects that giant buildings of this kind can achieve. Gogol, better known for
great and wise Party' and 'our leader, the great Stalin'. The minutes record: 'Thunderous applause, standing ovation'.

Elderly residents of Moscow can remember the start of the building work in 1939. Still older residents remember what preceded it: the demolition of the bombastic Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which, occupying such a central position, stood in the way of this project that was of such prime importance. Then as now, Soviet art historians deliberately played down the artistic value of that building, writing only of petit-bourgeois kitsch and pomposity. In fact, this church was one of the emblems of Moscow right up to the 1930s; it was begun after the defeat of Napoleon, and took almost half a century to build. With its Byzantine-Russian splendour and its vast size – it could hold 10,000 people – it became a symbol of the Slavophile national awakening of Russia. Before 1930 there was hardly a picture postcard on which its dome could not be seen. Now it was demolished in a very short time indeed, demonstrating yet again the superiority of state planning – at least in the view of the former head of the Dessau Bauhaus, Hannes Meyer, who was staying in Moscow at the time. He remarked that in Geneva the search for a site for the League of Nations Building had taken four years, whereas in Moscow the choice of location had been settled within four weeks.

Here it is worth pausing and leaving 1930s Soviet history for a moment. Orthodox believers were certain even then that the demolition of that mighty House of God would not go unpunished, and God-fearing people today will still tell you that the failure of the Palace project must have been God's revenge for that crime against His church. Now, while we cannot investigate the content of such testimonies, we can look at the astonishing parallels that exist between the construction of that vast cathedral in the nineteenth century and the plan for an even more vast Palace of Soviets about a hundred years later. The history of the building of the cathedral seems in many ways to anticipate that of the Palace of Soviets project.

The fire that destroyed Moscow in 1812 also sealed Napoleon's fate. Russia appeared as the vanguard of the European movement of liberation against the conqueror and dictator, and with the enlightened Tsar Alexander I a new age seemed to be dawning. This period of new national self-awareness, of Romantic cosmopolitanism and inner ferment, clamoured for self-expression, with Russia in the role
of Europe’s saviour from the monster who had betrayed the ideals of the French Revolution. This vision of hope and the dawning of a new age must be embodied in stone. Alexander I announced a competition for a memorial church, and Aleksandr Lavrentevich Vitberg was probably the architect who came closest to realizing the idea. The location favoured by Vitberg was Moscow’s highest point, the Sparrow Hills – now the Lenin Hills – and the complex, consisting of three churches built one above another, was to symbolize the union of body, mind and spirit. We know a good deal about the project and the artist, Vitberg, from the memoirs of Aleksandr Herzen, who met Vitberg later when he was in exile in Viatka. In My Past and Thoughts, Herzen writes:

Could any better place have been found for a temple commemorating the year 1812 than this, the furthest point of the enemy’s advance? But not only that, the hill itself was to be refashioned to form the lowest tier of the temple – with a colonnade enclosing the ground descending from there to the river – and upon this base, three sides of which were formed by Nature itself, a second and a third temple were to be built, all three together creating a wonderful unity. Vitberg’s temple, like the central doctrine of Christianity, was to be threefold and indivisible. The lowest temple, cut into the side of the hill, was in the shape of a parallelogram, a coffin, a human body.

Above this tomb, above this cemetery was the second temple in the form of a Greek cross, its equal arms reaching out in all four directions: this would be the temple of outstretched hands, of life, of suffering, of work.

Above it, crowning it, completing and perfecting it, was the third temple, a circular building. This temple, flooded with light, was the temple of the spirit.

But nothing came of Vitberg’s project; that sensitive and subtle artist was brought down by court intrigues and forced into exile. However, his fall and the consequent abandonment of his project reflected a political shift that had taken place between the reign of Alexander I and that of Nicholas I: internally the Decembrist revolt had been suppressed, while abroad Russia, as part of the Metternich System, was beginning to act as what Marx termed a ‘bulwark of feudal European reaction’.

When, under Nicholas I, work began in 1839 on the building of the cathedral, it already bore the stamp of the new administration.

Romanticism had been replaced by the Empire style, the gentle breeze of cosmopolitanism had been swept away by the fierce wind of ‘nationality’, and Vitberg had been succeeded by that master of a sometimes too insistently grandiose Empire style, Konstantin Andreevich Ton. The buildings designed by Ton that were erected over the next 50 years are characterized thus by Herzen: ‘Without faith and without special circumstances it proved difficult to create something truly alive; all new churches bore the mark of artifice, insincerity and anachronism, like those five-part cruets sets that Tsar Nicholas and Ton built, with onion towers in the Indian-Byzantine style where the stoppers ought to be.’

What can be said about the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, completed in 1883, is therefore, briefly, this: that the switch from Vitberg to Ton and from Romanticism to Empire reflects the shift from the reign of the enlightened Tsar Alexander I to the reactionary era of Nicholas I. Whatever problems the ideological aspect of the project brought with it, its sponsors had enough power and energy to realize their idea. This was not the case with the political overseers of the Palace of Soviets project, to whose story, by no means complete, we will now return.

The ‘heaven-stormers’ started their work, as we have said, in 1939. Barely two years later the construction process was interrupted by the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler’s armies. There were now more important uses for steel, concrete and labour, and these were redirected to the front. But the plan was not abandoned; it was only deferred. Right up to 1957 the metro station closest to the site was called ‘Palace of Soviets’. Around that time a sense of uncertainty must have crept in: the supreme builder had died in 1953, and cautious hints began to be voiced that perhaps rather than a palace it would make more sense to build some good solid housing, as Moscow was bursting at the seams. There was some equally cautious criticism of false pomp and the pointless, over-elaborate and above all expensive ‘wedding-cake’ buildings. In 1956, at the twentieth Party Conference, Khrushchev gave the first cues for ‘destalinization’.

Building work at the Kremlin and on the bank of the Moskva was not resumed. Even within the logic of Soviet dialectic it was not so much the war that restrained the ‘heaven-stormers’ but rather the climate of reflection and self-questioning that followed the death of
the supreme builder – for ultimately it is ‘internal contradictions’ and not external ones that, according to dialectical logic, are the decisive ones. The argument that the groundwater level and the nature of the ground itself on the bank of the Moskva would not have ‘tolerated’ a building of such massive dimensions also looks like an afterthought, for normally the structural engineers calculate these things before building work starts – though of course it is doubtful whether the now deceased Father of the Nations would have been swayed by empirical arguments.

The idea itself did not immediately die; it had always managed to maintain its hold, given that the project was, after all, a test of the superiority of the system; a proof, in a sense, of the Union’s own unassailable identity. Nevertheless the new leadership freed itself of the burden of enormous expectations, and discarded much ideological ballast. The choice of a new location alone was an indication of this. For the competition which was held between 1957 and 1959 the focus was shifted away from the centre, avoiding proximity to the historical core of the city, which Stalin had been so determined to put in the shade. Now the Lenin Hills, where the towering University building already stood, became the chosen site. Still more significant was the aesthetic distancing evident in the designs that were submitted – it was almost as though they could not get far enough away from the style of the Stalinist era that was now past. Nothing in these new designs recalls the earlier aim of symbolically embodying the future. They are almost indistinguishable from the Sports Palace or the pavilion for the World’s Fair. But these plans too came to nothing. No doubt the new masters did feel in the end that the location, far away on the hills on the other side of the Moskva, was too remote to be acceptable.

What now ensued may probably be seen as the end of the original project, even if it was not a resounding finale. The architects were instructed to withdraw inside the walls of the Kremlin. Within two years, from 1959 to 1961, the Palace of Congresses took shape here, parallel to the north-west wall; it is a building of concrete, steel and glass which hides its uncommon size behind an indistinguishable frontage. But inside the old fortress of the tsars the proportions are maintained: half of the building’s volume is below ground level. This Palace of Congresses is familiar to every Soviet man, woman and child, because it is from here that Party congresses and sessions of the Supreme Soviet are broadcast throughout the land. It is equally well known to almost every visiting tourist, since it is usually here, rather than in the permanently sold-out Bolshoi Theatre, that he or she manages to see Swan Lake or Ivan the Terrible.

And here the trail peters out. Nothing survives the dramatic momentum of the early stages of the project, to recall either Tatlin’s utopian but seminal design, or the brutal, massively oversized monument that was to be erected in the heart of the city. Normality reigns, even if it only serves to mask an embarrassing failure.

But is there really no trace? Must not a building with which people so desperately identified themselves for almost thirty years have left some traces etched more deeply into the face of the city?

This question is not merely rhetorical. There is a trace, far more lasting than the swimming pool now situated where the foundation pit was once dug, far more impressive than the Palace of Congresses in the grounds of the Kremlin. But in order to gain a view of it you have to retreat some distance away. To measure the mighty shadow cast by a gigantic building you must step outside that shadow. The numbing effect produced by huge buildings is dispelled only by increasing distance. On this matter, too, Gogol had something to say: ‘Let a person take up position at a great distance, and at once he will look down from above, and with great condescension, at the objects before him.’ And there is a viewpoint like that: the platform up on the Lenin Hills, high above the Moskva. As anyone who has been there will testify, the panorama is ‘magical’. In the distance there is the gleam of the golden domes of the churches in the Kremlin. Immediately in front of the viewer, on the opposite river bank, is the vast oval shape of the Lenin Stadium. Turning 180 degrees, he will discover behind him the curiously impressive mass of Moscow State University, standing 260 metres tall on the highest point of the Lenin Hills. The observer of this panorama, who of course has not come here wholly without knowledge, senses that he must be standing on some hidden line of intersection. He looks for some aids to orientation. The objects that catch his eye and direct his gaze are the seven high-rise buildings conspicuously towering up from Moscow’s sea of houses; arranged like the points of a star around the edge of the city centre, they have entered architectural history as the supreme examples of the ‘wedding-cake’ style. They must be linked by a more intimate relationship than their stylistic kinship alone suggests. And indeed they are: the seven tower blocks, which to this day
still define Moscow's skyline, were built at the seven most important, most prominent locations in the city. They all relate to a single focal point. But this point is not the Kremlin but the Palace of Soviets—a point, that is, which exists and yet does not exist. What is the best way of expressing this? What image would be appropriate? A circumference without a centre? A chord without a dominant? Spokes without a hub? In plain language, the imaginary axes intersect at the site of the Moskva swimming baths. The viewer's imagination, backed up, of course, by some historical research, knows better: the seven high-rise towers that determine the city's profile only form a complete ensemble when the eye, sharpened by historical knowledge, supplies the missing central component, that 'supreme building' which was to have been both the tallest and the greatest. From a study of materials from the 1930s and '40s it clearly emerges that the Palace of Soviets was intended to be the very heart of a new, reconstructed Moscow. But in the course of the planning process a shift took place in that relationship: although at first the Palace was envisaged as fitting into the city landscape, the acceptance of such a gargantuan design meant, in practice, the opposite, and required the city to be subordinated to the Palace.

So what traces really remain of that monument to the future? I would put it like this: the command that is relayed by the wedding-cake towers is still there, but the exclamation mark that should accompany it is not; nor, above all, is the commander. But for a monument that was never built, and a commander who died long ago, even that is trace enough.

A postscript: in Lion Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937: A Travel Report for my Friends*, published by Querido in Amsterdam in 1937, I happened to find a section headed 'The Tower of Babel'. Feuchtwanger is not referring to the actual Palace of Soviets, which he surely knew about, but uses the Tower of Babel as a metaphor, extracting a different meaning from the myth. He writes:

The air that we breathe in the West is stale and bad. In Western civilization there is no longer any clarity or resolution. No one dares to defend himself against encroaching barbarism with his fists or even with strong words, it is done half-heartedly, with vague gestures, and the anti-fascist declarations by those in responsible positions are sugar-coated and hedged about with reservations.
quantities of flowers are piled up on the tomb of the dictator with his name, rightly or wrongly, the victory is indissolubly linked.

Who can doubt that these men and women, who risked life and limb and staked their entire future, know well enough what war is never to want to experience another! Yet this annual revival of the spirit of the campfire, which perhaps counts for more in people's memory than reflections on the historical events, has something disturbingly rigid and static about it. At the veterans' gatherings in hotels, at the events held in the Red Army Theatre or in Gorky Park, in short, at the entire grand reunion of these former fighting men and women, time stands still - and yet times have changed. Since then there have been the tanks in Berlin in 1953, tanks in Budapest and Poznan in 1956, and the army of the erstwhile liberators in Prague in August 1968. (On the evening of 9 May the Czechoslovak ambassador gave a speech of thanks for the liberation of Prague.) For quite some time there have been the military advisers in Cuba, Angola and Ethiopia, and now there are the troops occupying Afghanistan.

However great the sufferings and sacrifices of the surviving heroes genuinely were, their suffering and heroism are used as window-dressing to legitimize aggression. The aggression inevitably looks like just an extension of the country's self-defence - it is aggression without an aggressor's bad conscience. This is more effective than any propaganda, and it greatly hampers the development of a 'peace movement', drawing attention to specific outrages that are committed. Such a movement runs the risk that in pillorying today's aggression it may appear to be calling into question that heroic period in the past, a time that secured the continuing existence of the USSR in a far more enduring way than either the Revolution or the Civil War. But perhaps a peace movement faces similar tasks whenever it is: in Germany it needs to rid itself of unthinking anti-fascism, and here of a no less unthinking patriotism.

16 Vsyaya Moskva

Vsyaya Moskva - The Complete Moscow - is the title of the Moscow directory that was issued annually in the years before the Revolution by Aleksei Suvorin, the press magnate and publisher of the conservative newspaper Novoe Vremya; the 1909 edition was already the sixteenth. Behind this simple title and the mundane purpose of the publication - to offer the residents of the aspiring metropolis, as well as foreigners who had settled there, concisely presented and systematically arranged information about who lived where, what was happening where and when, and what could be obtained where - the city's whole physiognomy is revealed. The first section, following the pages advertising Siemens & Halske, Dunlop and others, presents the Moscow of industry and commerce. Factories and banks, all in strictly democratic alphabetical order. Only in the second section are the city's imperial, governmental and public institutions listed.

For Vsyaya Moskva, 'tout Moscou' would be an inappropriate translation, so slight is the presence of the French, or the French spirit, in this city. If any foreigners stand out at all, it is the Germans: Kunze, Leib, a German choral society, a hospital bearing the name of Knie, the ARG company, the German Club, Scheffer, Schwalbe, Moscow's Deutsche Zeitung, or Werner and Pfeiderer, occupying premises at Myasnitskaya ulitsa 22.

Every self-respecting citizen had a telephone if he could afford it. The telephone and telegraph are indicators of the extent of communication with the world at large; and in fact they were cheaper to use in those days than they are now. This is shown by a list of tariffs for long-distance calls: making a call to Germany cost a mere 11 kopeks
per unit, to Austria-Hungary the same, and to either Switzerland or Belgium 17 kopeks. That is very little, and it tells us something about how heavily the lines must have been used when we compare it with the cost of a call to the Far Eastern, ‘Asiatic’ part of Russia – no less than 32 kopeks per unit.

One can well believe what Andrei Bely says about the telephones constantly ringing in the editorial office of the Vosy (in the Hotel Metropol, apartment 23, telephone number 50-89). The journal’s writers and correspondents in Brussels and Paris would spare no effort to be included in the next issue, because Moscow was Europe, and a journalist who got into print in Moscow would also be read in Vienna, Munich and Paris.

What else can the directory show us? The proliferation of consumer goods to suit all tastes, and an endless range of what are called services. Summarized in an alphabetical list is a whole geography of specialist shops offering everything from ladies’ lingerie to riding gear, from mushrooms and books to zoological supplies, as well as courses at a language school by the name of Berlitz – everything one could possibly want.

And it is a real delight to scan the restaurants and entertainments section. Here we find the Akvarium Theatre on the Bolshaya Sadovaya; the Salomeycki circus on Tsvetnoy bulvar (its directors are called Tuzzi, Kremser, Treimann and Will, the sort of colourful names that one expects in the theatre and circus world); the Eremite Theatre on ulitsa Karetnyy ryad; the Teatr Buff on the corner of Tverskaya and Sadovaya; not to mention the famous Korsch Theatre on Bogoslovsky pereulok; and the Art Theatre – which numbers among its ensemble Nemirovich-Danchenko, Moskvin, Kachalov and Stanislavsky himself – in the former Lyanozov Theatre in Kamergersky pereulok.

The directory has more than two pages of traktiry (bars and restaurants), providing a kind of semi-public, semi-private ambience that unfortunately barely exists nowadays. Among them are better-class establishments, including some that Bely mentions in his memoirs: the Eldorado in the Chesnokov building in Zhukovsky pereulok; the Alpenrose on the Sofiya; and other major establishments such as the Hotel Paris, the Hotels Frantsiya, National or Kontinent, and the Dekadenz restaurant in the Anker Insurance building in Neglinnny pereulok.

At some of these meeting-places the mood of the time was crystallized, history was anticipated, apocalyptic scenarios were

planned and revolutionary theatre rehearsed. One such place was the Café Pittoresque (Kuznetsky most 12), where Tallin exhibited his first relief sculptures and where Mayakovsky was wont to offend the ear of public taste; but there were also a number of hotels where figures like Turgeniev or Chekhov stayed, placing some distance between themselves and the kind of human being that this new age was producing, in order, no doubt, to observe them all the better.

On page 32 of the 1900 issue of the directory there is a noteworthy advertisement: a ‘Russian Society for Insuring Capital and Income, founded in 1835’ is offering its services. The address: Malaya Lubyanka 20. The accompanying picture shows the building which was to go down in history not as an insurance company office but as the Lubyanka’. The parquet flooring and central heating described by prisoners who were held there in the 1930s may well date from around 1900. At the time of the advertisement it was still an insurance agent who could be contacted at that address, on telephone number 933.

A directory lays bare the social and cultural topography of a bygone city in an abstract form, through closely printed lines and columns. This, rather than volcanic ash, is the medium in which the past is preserved in the post-Gutenberg era. Even by 1917 nothing much has changed in the directory’s pages. German firms and the German community are a little less prominent, the paper is of wartime quality, and the repercussions of the war can be seen to a limited extent: some of the institutions of government have moved to Moscow, and the administrative offices, departments, archives, etc. previously located in Warsaw – which had been Russian territory until then – have been evacuated to the Russian metropolis. Even so, the war against the Germans is not being waged in the directory: Junker & Ruh (sewing machines and stoves) and the Berlin firm of Karl Flohr (familiar to us nowadays as part of the Huo-Otis group, and even then a world leader in the manufacture of lifts – an important commodity for a Moscow aspiring to ever taller buildings) are still promoting their wares to an eager clientele.

Those who are sceptical when Lenin writes about a conspiracy on the part of international capital and declares war on it internationally should take note of the advertising pages of this period – in Berlin and London, as well as Moscow – and of the stock exchange reports.
Nouveauté:

MAISON DE COMMERCE

„Paul Carlson“

Fournisseur de la Cour de S. M. l'Empereur.

GR. MORSKAIA, 18.

Téléphone 15-10.

Lingerie pour hommes, dames et enfants; linge de lit, de table ainsi que Trousseaux tout prêts et sur commande.

Advertissements in the Almanach de St. Pétersbourg of 1910.

CHS HOFFMANN

OSCAR HOFFMANN, PROPRIÉTAIRE

FABRIQUE RUSSO-AMERIQUAINE DE BAUETTES DORÉES ET CADRES St-PÉTERSBOURG

FABRIQUE ET DÉPOT:

MAGASIN:

MALAIA DWORIANSKAIA 17-19-21

NEVSKY 11

ST-PÉTERSBOURG

(Propres maisons)

Au magasin

TÉLÉPHONE 210-39

TÉLÉPHONE 31-36

Hunting calendar from the Almanach de St. Pétersbourg of 1910.

Advertisement by the publisher M.O. Wolff.

Cover of the Almanach de St Pétersbourg of 1910.
The directory is informative in other ways too. Some may wish to search for the revered figures who have shaped their historical and philosophical consciousness, and they should by all means do so; those heroes, or their relatives, can be found here, for instance: the painter Leonid Osipovich Pasternak and his wife Rosa, a pianist, living at ulitsa Volkhorika 14, flat 9 – in other words, Boris Pasternak’s parents. Or the Vesnin brothers, Leonid and Viktor, listed at Denezhny pereulok (now ulitsa Vesnina) 12, telephone number 514-85. And in a city that fails to build a memorial to a famous son, it is worth discovering his father’s address. The building in which Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin was born on 9 October 1888 is to be found under the name of his father, Ivan Gavrilovich Bukharin: it is the Samoilovich House, in Novinsky bulvar (nowadays ulitsa Tchaikovskogo).

In the directory for 1917 there is as yet no hint of the whirlwind that will very soon throw all the information in its columns, the street names, the telephone numbers and the long-established addresses, into disarray.

It is striking how the very different character of St Petersburg finds expression in its directory. The contrast between the silver city and the motley confusion of Moscow is palpable as soon as one picks up the Almanach de St Petersbourg 1910.

The publisher, the Société M. O. Wolff, presents the addresses in the imperial city in a red leather binding with gilt edging and on fine-quality paper. The volume is in no way flamboyant, the art nouveau ornamental motifs are used with restraint, and in such proximity to the court, advertising is absent. The focus here is on rank, titles and the names of prominent families. The advance of democracy is limited to the listing of the names of the leading families in alphabetical order. And they live not in St Petersburg but in St Petersbourg. There are Russian names here, of course, such as Dmitry Modestovich Retsoy, but always written in the French manner. There is also a good deal of French and German blood: Cte. Vladimir Evstafievitch de Reutern, with a second residence in Ringen (Courlande), Cte. Georges Ivanovitch de Ribaupierre, and Vadam Nikolaevitch Repnine, of Nürnberger Platz 4, Dresden. The von Benckendorf and Benningsen families fill more than one page in the directory, and of course in the annals of history too.

St Petersbourg is the city of waterways: Quai Nicolas, the Fontanka River. There is a profusion of distinguished addresses.

### Hunting Calendar (Jagd-Kalender)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Époque de la chasse ouverte:</th>
<th>Jagdzeit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Époque de la chasse fermée:</td>
<td>Schonzeit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Genre de gibier:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Janvier</th>
<th>Fevrier</th>
<th>Mars</th>
<th>Avril</th>
<th>Mai</th>
<th>Juin</th>
<th>Juillet</th>
<th>Août</th>
<th>Septembre</th>
<th>Octobre</th>
<th>Novembre</th>
<th>Décembre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hunting calendar from the Almanach de St. Petersbourg of 1910.**
Theatre Square, Tsarskoe Selo, Marienhof. Names like these have outlived the titles, hierarchies and status symbols associated with those addresses: special telephone lines and railway links, membership of the Royal Yacht Club, the Academy of Arts or the Imperial Regiment. There are names of people who disappeared from the scene, and of others who survived or even achieved prominence later on, like the illustrious artist Ilya Repin (his name too appears in a Frenchified form), who painted the famous picture of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Modern-day admirers of Pyotr Kropotkin would be able to see here that the family of that aristocratic anarchist had one of the best addresses in the city. The *Almanach de St Pétersbourg* is a weighty volume, and everything about it suggests taste, quality, a sense of order and style. Financiers and the promotion of goods and services make no more than a marginal appearance, and then only if they can show the emblem indicating that they enjoy the patronage of the imperial court.

Advertising is frowned upon. The hunting calendar, on the other hand, is *de rigueur*, with its tables of close seasons for Caucasian partridges and deer. The almanac of 1910 obviously seeks to maintain a posture that is already under threat from the broad current of social change. St Petersburg is being put on display as though the world of the landed aristocracy, the crown and the leisured class were still intact. Yet who can wonder that this city also came to be the centre of the Age of Silver, the city of the Symbolists and Acmeists, and altogether of a sophisticated culture and an extreme sensitivity towards an inevitable future? It was no accident that Andrei Bely, author of the novel *Petersburg*, Aleksandr Blok, 'the poet of an entire era', Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam were later accused of both bourgeois decadence and aristocratic reserve – if not worse. How could it be otherwise in a city where not only the court but the Pushkin works too were firmly entrenched? But the 1910 almanac contains no hint of any of this. It sets its seal on the immutable daily round of balls, fruitless petitions and noisy parades of regiments with their gleaming accoutrements.

We have all found ourselves, in the course of looking up something quite specific in a reference work or reading some particular article in the newspaper, being sidetracked and forgetting what we are about. Instead of concentrating on the leading article we have been suddenly captivated by the small ads. That is how it was with me as I read the directories. But with them, luckily, there is a sharp
break in continuity that it is virtually impossible to overlook as one is reading or leafing through – and that is the year 1917.

How does a revolution impinge on so mundane an object as a directory? To put it more precisely, what effect does the impact of a revolutionary process have on the system of addresses, and how is this reflected in a directory? Have ‘high’ and ‘low’ been renamed and nothing more? Do the new titles merely conceal the old hierarchy, without anything really having changed?

To start with, a revolution intent on turning everything upside down has no time to waste on publishing a directory. In the years of the ‘onslaught of the Red Guards’ and of the Civil War, Vsyja Moskva simply did not appear – the editors could hardly, in any case, have kept pace with the speed of change and the chaos of improvisation. It was only in 1923, when the New Economic Policy was already in its second year, that Vsyja Moskva was published again, though no longer by the press magnate Suvorin but by the government publishing agency. The foreword declares candidly:

‘With this 1923 issue, the state publishing agency is resuming publication of Vsyja Moskva, after a long interruption, in the same form as before the Revolution. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided in this reference book is complete and accurate. This has not been easy to achieve, however. The Revolution has produced a complete upheaval in the governmental, political and social spheres. Not a single institution has remained unchanged; every institution has seen changes to its structure and personnel, and consequently to its addresses. Moscow, sole centre of commerce prior to the Revolution, has now become the capital of the Republic, and the organs of government have been transferred here from Petrograd. Moscow has become the political and economic centre of Russia.

The editions from the 1920s show that by this time the new system has succeeded in stamping its own emblems on the city. The directory is still printed on the poor quality paper used during the First World War and the Civil War. The titles of government bodies are designed to sound functional but at the same time impressive. To mention just the most familiar ones: TSIK SSSR, Sovnarkom, STO, GOSPLAN, Narkomindel, Revvoysensovet, VSNKh, Narkomtrud, Versud, OGPU, Narkomvnutorg, Narkomsobes. One could easily find even more impressive-sounding abbreviations, and some of those mentioned have become internationally known, GOSPLAN and OGPU, for instance. The columns of abbreviations printed in bold type symbolize the ambition to organize society and its political superstructure in a transparent, rational and clearly defined way, from the highest level at the centre down to the local bodies at the grass roots.

The guiding principle of the political structure is also evident from the hierarchy of addresses: the list starts with the Central Executive Committee, which has now returned to the country’s real centre, the Kremlin, and ends with the social and mass organizations. The position formerly occupied by banks and businesses is now taken by the offices of Moscow industrial firms, or the trade union headquarters of the railway workers, leather workers or tram conductors. The theatres already in existence have been joined by newly established ones, such as Proletkult Theatre Number 1, and the many workers’ clubs.

This is the period of the New Economic Policy, when the capitalist market has been readmitted but is strictly regulated. Hence there are pages of advertisements featuring Ford, Simca, AEG and their agencies in the Soviet capital.

What is most obvious in the directories after 1917 is the concentration of institutions. Since the dethronement of Petrograd, Moscow had not become in any way more Russian, but had turned into a Soviet city. Places that until a few years earlier had been emblazoned with the tsarist eagle were now painted over with revolutionary slogans. Where formerly autocracy had reigned supreme, in the nobles’ palaces and mansions and in the Kremlin, the new system had taken over. Before long Lenin roundly attacked it as ‘bureaucracy embalmed in Soviet oil’.

For years people in other countries went on deluding themselves that there would be a coup d’état, that the Soviet state represented only a temporary phenomenon. But once a system is in a position to publish directories, there is no longer anything temporary about it: it is here to stay. Nothing could demonstrate this more clearly than a handbook of this kind for everyday use. Where even everyday life is running on new lines, the days of temporary arrangements are over: people have drawn a line under the past and are getting on with the normal business of life. This too is reflected in the directories, for instance in the changes made to street-names. Names of grand dukes, tsars, imperial office-holders and saints have all but van-
ished. Anything that could be a public reminder of the past has been swept away – all the Mikhails, the Alekseis, the Nikolais. Street-names without offensive connotations are retained: Veterans’ Street, for instance, or New Village Street, Narrow or Broad Street, and the like. Some streets are rededicated to the heroes of the 1860s or ‘70s – Herzen and Chernyshevsky are among those honoured in this way. Street-names expressing the great ideals, such as ‘Great Communist Street’, are as yet only rarely found in these 1920s directories. Not significantly, there are as yet any streets bearing the names of the new leaders. The age of the personality cult still lingers in the future.

As you turn over the pages of the 1926 directory, the claim by the new system to be in touch with the people appears entirely plausible. The individuals listed under the rubrics of institutes or public bodies are still well known in their own right; indeed their names are often better known than the institution to which they are attached. It would be unthinkable today, but here they are, listed with their full name and place of work and a telephone number. Kalinin, for instance, the head of the Central Executive Committee, can be telephoned on Kremlin 211, and his secretary on 212. On the lines to the Presidium one can ask to speak to the trade union leader Mikhail Tomsky, or to Kamenev, Yenukidze or Smidovich. The crème de la crème of sociologists, statisticians and economists of the old school, for example Nikolai Kondratiev and Aron Wainstein, are assembled under the heading of the Scientific Research Institute of the Timiriazev Academy. In the entry for the ‘Communist Academy’ in ulitsa Volkhonka we find the elite of the Bolshevik party intelligentsia: the economist Preobrazhensky, Bukharin, known as ‘the party’s favourite’, the historians Bubnov and Kritsan, and in the Law Department the theoreticians Stuchka and Pushkanian. And the Marx-Engels Institute, as it was then still called, was the workplace of Ryazanov and Deborin. The figures I have mentioned enjoyed (albeit briefly) a revival of public interest and esteem in Germany and elsewhere, first through pirated editions issued by the 1968 revolutionaries, and then by courtesy of some major publishers who sensed that there was money to be made out of them. The 1926 directory does indeed contain a notable list of distinguished personalities, intellectuals of some standing – many of whom, however, were not to survive beyond 1937.

What catches your eye as you continue to turn the pages is the internationalist element, even though the doctrine of ‘socialism in one land’ had already been promulgated. Alongside Bukharin on the council of the Institute are the Hungarian Béla Kun and the Germans August Thalheimer and Clara Zetkin. Further down on the same page, admittedly only as a member of the council of the Lenin Institute at Dmitrovka ulitsa 24, is Stalin, telephone number 1-72-69.

There can hardly have been another city where so many prominent foreigners were ‘government officials’: Moscow at that time was the headquarters of the Comintern. Before long, new official linguistic usage was to turn the various institutes and secretariats into ‘dens of anti-Soviet conspiracy’, nests of ‘sabotage and wreckerism’ and of ‘active terrorism’; they were allegedly the bases from which the scattered economists directed the unrest among the kulaks and set out to organize a putch. And what sort of a putch might a Hegel specialist like Abram Deborin instigate – why, a ‘Menshevik-Hegelian deviationist’ one, of course! They would all – Bukharin, Deborin, Ryazanov, Tomsky and the rest – be excised from later issues of the directory, and it would not stop there. Most of them would be liquidated; not only that, but they would never even have existed, they would become ‘non-persons’. Into the offices under the old addresses came new people, nameless people. And so a directory, a work designed to serve the mundane purposes of day-to-day living, intended for the passing moment and not for history, is unexpectedly promoted to the dignity of a ‘historical document’, because it contains evidence of names that are not acknowledged to have existed.

And this is where the unyielding present caught up with my pleasurable browsing. I do not mean the kind of problems that have been reported in the international press, with telephone lines being cut off, or telephones being tapped, as in the case of Andrei Sakharov. It was something far less dramatic. In the photocopying department of the Lenin Library in Moscow I handed over several volumes of the directory with a very modest order, but the lady behind the desk informed me that the decision as to whether I could have copies of the pages I had selected was not hers to take – I would have to come back again the next day. Thus forewarned, I was not too shocked to learn on my return that permission would not be granted. Clearly, then – or so I deduce – these people are well aware of the stuff of which history is made.

The allure of these directories may tempt some readers to construct a theoretical basis for their happy perambulations through the
pages and the years, and to turn this pleasurable form of reading into a stick with which to beat established approaches to the writing of history. Some such attempts have been made, generally with the aim of promoting the ‘history of the common man’, but these efforts to create an ‘alternative view of history’ are too obviously forced to carry conviction.

Similarly, the faction that focuses on the structural development of societies and institutions almost to the exclusion of any living, human element – a deliberate reaction against history based on great men and great events – has long been in decline. What was formerly self-evident, namely that there can be no historical action without actors, has once again become the accepted view.

I will therefore simply make the following points regarding the value of the old directories as a source of knowledge.

To begin with – and this is a relatively trivial point – they are indispensable for reference and information, particularly in the case of historical figures who have been erased from the annals of history, either temporarily or permanently, for having (in the jargon of the day) deviated from the ‘course of history’. Many of those who were later executed, and some who have not been rehabilitated even now, can be found there: N.I. Bukharin, 2nd House of Soviets, apartment 229, Tel. 5-29-00; I. T. Smilga, Sretensky bulvar 6, apartment 18, Tel. 83-25; L. P. Serebrjakov, Kremlin, Yenukidze’s room; A. M. Deborin, 3-ya Meshchanskaya 3, apartment 4, Tel. 62-30; V.E. Meyerhold, Novinsky bulvar 32, apartment 45, Tel. 93-23; N. I. Trotsky, Kremlin, Tel. 1-44-86. And so on. (From the 1923 edition of Vse Moskva.)

Secondly – and this is a less trivial point – these are volumes that provide a picture of a city, that is, of an agglomeration of human beings. Despite the enormous changes between 1917 and 1923, it is amazing to see the extent to which Moscow remained true to itself. Revolutions move mountains, but not cities. In many respects, when you compare the hotels, cafés, cinemas and theatres in the 1917 and 1923 directories, it seems as though life is going on as before, as though nothing has changed. The lists of people attached to the renamed institutions indicate who has found a niche or tried to make his peace with the new system; the absence of important names often signifies exile, whether short-term or permanent. Thus in the various sections of the Academy of Arts at 32 ulitsa Prechistenka (ulitsa Kropotkinskaya) we find Kandinsky, A. Efros,
addresses. Not even the most soaring intellects spend all their time communicating ideas to kindred minds: alongside, or below, that sphere of activity they are attached to bodies, have districts where they choose to live, and places where they foregather. Even the most abstractly conceived political power occupies a space and a location. Power has an ambience, a dwelling with an actual, as it were physical décor. And if the many nameless ones have no place in the directories, that too is a kind of truth: they are still waiting to have their say, they have chosen to remain silent, or they have been silenced.

_Vsya Moskva_ continued to appear for another fifteen years, until, like so much else, this institution that symbolically bridged the divide between Russian and Soviet history was brought to an end by the events of 1937.

**Postscript**

_The Complete Moscow_: the phrase suggests something that is still whole, and unaffected by the break between generations. All the same, the following roll-call of names and addresses does not aim at completeness:

M. P. Artsybashev, Yermolaevsky pereulok 27, apartment 4 (1923 directory)

M. A. Bakunin, Botkin House, Petrovskijsky pereulok 4

V. G. Belinsky, Rakhmanovskiy pereulok 4

A. A. Blok, Arbat 55 (A. Bely), ulitsa Gorkogo 15 (Hotel Madrid)

V. Ya. Bryusov, Tsvetnoy bulvar 22, 1-ya Meshchanskaya ulitsa 30

L. A. Bunin, ulitsa Vorovskogo 26

A. P. Chekhov, Sadovaya-Kudrinskaya 6

K. I. Chukovsky, ulitsa Gorkogo 6

F. M. Dostoevsky, ulitsa Dostoevskogo 2

A. P. Dovzhenko, Kutuzovsky prospekt 22

I. G. Ehrenburg, ulitsa Gorkogo 8

S. M. Eisenstein, Chistoprudny bulvar 23

V. N. Figner, Vaganovsky pereulok 8

M. O. Gershenzon, Nikolsky pereulok 13, apartment 4 (1923)

V. A. Gilyarovsky, Stoleshnikov 5, apartment 10 (1923)

A. Ginzburg, Bolshaya Polyanka 11/14, apartment 25

F. V. Gladkov, Soimonovsky proezd 5

N. V. Gogol, Pogodinskaya ulitsa 12

A. Gramsci, prospekt Kalinina 1

A. S. Griboedov, ulitsa Tchaikovskogo 17

B. A. Gritsov, Trubnikovskiy pereulok 8, apartment 8 (1923)

A. I. Herzen, Svitsev Vrazhek 27/9

V. V. Kandinsky, Prechistenka 19 (Kropotkinskaya ulitsa) (1923)

V. P. Kataev, Mylnikov pereulok 4, apartment 2 (1923)

V. Y. Lermontov, Malaya Molchanovka 2

O. E. Mandelstam, Tverskoy bulvar 25 (1923)

V. V. Mayakovsky, proezd Serova 3/6 and pereulok Mayakovskogo 15/15

V. E. Meyerhold, ulitsa Nezhdanovoy 12

D. P. Ostrakh, ulitsa Chkalova 14-16

B. L. Pasternak, Volkhonka 14, apartment 9 (1923)

K. G. Paustovsky, Kotelnicheskaya naberezhnaya 1-15

S. S. Prokofiev, ulitsa Chkalova 14-16

V. I. Pudovkin, ulitsa Vorovskogo 29+31

A. S. Pushkin, ulitsa Nemirowich-Danchenko 6

A. D. Sakharov, ulitsa Chkalova 48a, apartment 68 (currently Gorki 137 Shcherbinka 2, ulitsa Gagarina 214, apartment 3)

F. I. Shalyapin, ulitsa Tchaikovskogo 25

A. N. Skryabin, ulitsa Vakhhtangova 11

D. D. Shostakovich, ulitsa Nezhdanovoy 8/10

A. Sinaysky, Khlebniy pereulok 9, apartment 9 (currently in Paris)

G. G. Spet, Dolgorukovskaya ulitsa 17, apartment 2 (1923)

L. N. Tolstoy, ulitsa L. Tolstogo 21

M. I. Tsvetaeva-Efroin, Borisoglebsky pereulok 6, apartment 3 (1923)

I. S. Turgenev, Gogolevsky bulvar 10

A. T. Tvardovsky, Kutuzovsky prospekt 1/7

N. I. Vavilov, Leninsky prospekt 33

I. V. Varga, Leninsky prospekt 11

S. A. Yesenin, Kropotkinskaya ulitsa 20

I. V. Zholtovsky, ulitsa Stankevicha 6