

The Fatal Splitting. Symbolizing Anxiety in Post-Soviet Russia

...the child solves a practical task with the help of not only eyes and hands, but also speech [...] speech introduces the child's own behavior [...] With the aid of speech the child for the first time proves able to the mastering of its own behavior, relating to itself as to another being, regarding itself as an object.

LEV VYGOTSKY & ALEXANDER LURIA (1934:109, 111)

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ABSTRACT *Based on written interviews with young people collected in 1997–1999 in Barnaul (Siberia), this article explores structural and rhetorical patterns employed in the young people's descriptions of the New Russian woman, usually associated with a small group of rich and successful people in Russia ('New Russians'). As the essay demonstrates, the image of the New Russian woman can be seen not only as a symbolic representation of new market-driven relations but also as a screen on which deep identification anxiety, triggered by the destabilized cultural environment in post-Soviet Russia, is projected. Using the framework of object relation theory, the article suggests that the type of symbolization used by the informants helps to cope with uncertainty about the past; at the same time it appears to offer a way to deal with the anxiety about one's possible future on the post-Soviet market.*

KEYWORDS *New Russians, identity, gender, object relations, paranoid fantasy*

Capitalism in Russia perhaps has not made a lot of progress yet, but there is at least one area where the IMF's desire for a 'diversified' and 'decentralized' economy has become visible. During the last eight or nine years, thousands of tiny kiosks have flooded the streets of Russian cities and villages, selling everything at once – from canned vodka to Taiwanese versions of Versace ties; from bootlegged copies of the latest Hollywood blockbusters to fat-burning belts. This mass eruption of private business is not only visible, but quite loud, too. Almost every kiosk is equipped with a sound-blaster system that broadcasts musical preferences of its owner(s). When in April 1997 I came to Barnaul, my Siberian home town, to do field research, the kiosks that had mushroomed in a bus station seemed to have been especially attracted to one song. Following a clear-cut rhythm of tango, a low, husky female voice with a Baltic accent sang:

Why have you forgotten me? Why do you have no pity for me anymore?
 I am out in Piccadilly Circus, With a shawl thrown on my shoulders...
 Back in the past, looking at my eyes, you used to stroke the collar of your fur-coat,
 While your lips were trying to find my lips...
 And all the rest that was not supposed to be looked for...
 The fiddles worked hard all night, And the smoke of cigars swam around.
 I kept giving you the gifts of my smile,
 While my tears were washing away my make-up...
 I speed up down Piccadilly Circus...
 But when you loved me I did everything wrong.¹

There was a certain irony in this combination of a kiosk, painted in dirty green, with metallic bars guarding it from burglars, and an aestheticized musical version of the IMF's motto: 'Everything for sale.' And yet, at least from a linguistic point of view everything was consistent: in Russian, the 'fallen' (*padshaya*) woman is synonymous with the 'sold out' (*prodazhnaya*) woman.

While trying to keep in mind this symbolic coupling of the economic and the sexual, in the text that follows I want to look at the feminized interpretation of the new economic order emerging in Russia from a somewhat different point of view. In 1997–1999 I collected 178 essays² in which 15–22-year-old Russians from Barnaul (Siberia) described their understanding of their national and gender identity. Interested in analysis of the relationship between socially available discursive means and young people's ability to utilize these means in order to articulate their own experience, I asked young Siberians to write down their associations, views, definitions, and experience connected (1) with the notions of Soviet/post-Soviet Motherland, and (2) with such figures as the Soviet man/woman, the New Russian man/woman and the post-Soviet man/woman. Being a part of a bigger project, this essay explores only one aspect of the current symbolic transformations in Russia³—that is, the structural and rhetorical patterns employed in the young people's descriptions of the New Russian woman, who is usually associated with a small group of rich and successful people in Russia ('New Russians').⁴ As I will show, the image of the New Russian woman can be seen not only as a symbolic representation of new market-driven relations (see e.g., Williams 1995) but also as a site of complex symbolic investments, as a screen on which deep identification anxiety, triggered by the destabilized cultural environment in post-Soviet Russia, is projected.

Barnaul, the place of my research, is a Siberian city with almost three hundred years of history. Populated by more than eight hundred thousand people, it

is the administrative center of the Altai region (*krai*) located on the border with Kazakhstan and Mongolia. Large military plants and factories transported to Barnaul during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) from the European part of the USSR became the backbone of the city's economy and infrastructure during the Cold War. Swift economic changes in the 1990s drastically modified the city. Military plants, classified by the government as 'objects of the state importance,' were officially excluded from the hasty – but sometimes successful – privatization. As a result, during the last few years the plants, the city and the region remain in a state of a prolonged economic and financial limbo and are often labeled in the media as 'economically depressive.' Employees of the military plants are rarely paid in real money, instead their salary would come already materialized – usually in the form of goods produced by their plants, which could be sold or traded by the workers themselves. In 1997 kiosks and mini-markets in Barnaul were stuffed with two particular versions of this 'materialized' wage – kitchen blenders and radio-telephones *Altai* manufactured by two plants that formerly specialized in submarine equipment and military engineering.

The majority of the city's population, while nominally keeping their jobs in the state sector, has adopted two main strategies of survival – barter exchange (*barternyi obmen*), that is, the face-to-face exchange of goods unmediated by money, and the exhaustive tending of plots of land (*priusadebnyie uchastki*) able to provide a family with a reasonable stock of raw and pickled vegetables for the winter.⁵ Vis-à-vis these strategies, a group of 'New Russians' started emerging in Barnaul from the middle of the 1990s. Many of them began as *chelnoki* (shuttle traders), who several times a month would go to China, Poland and – later – Turkey and the United Arab Emirates in order to stuff up their bottomless sacks with cheap textiles, fur coats, shoes and electronics to be sold in Barnaul's several big bazaars.⁶

It is this social and economic background that to a large degree defines the perspectives and expectations of the people I interviewed. Too young to belong to either of these groups, many of my informants perceived New Russians and state employees as possible identification models in their nearest future. Being first- and second-year students at a technical and a classical university, these students occupied a rather unique social and institutional location. In the post-Soviet Russia, institutions of higher education produced an environment in which the immediate reaction to current changes became less pertinent and more likely to be postponed. Five years of a usually tuition-free higher education accompanied by a – however small – monthly sti-

pend (and sometimes a room in a crowded dormitory) provided this group with an organized space and time, and significantly buffered them from the challenges of daily life. For many men university education has an additional benefit: it allows them if not to completely avoid, then at least to significantly put off the still mandatory service in the army. Given these institutional aspects, I was interested in seeing how young people whose personal transition from one generational stage to another is experienced in a relatively secure place would symbolically express a transition of a different sort, namely, a situation of a profound social transformation in Russia as a whole.

Another major reason for choosing this group has to do with its temporal characteristics. These young people are the first *post-Soviet* generation whose identities, lifestyle preferences and normative ideals are being formed during the period of transition. And yet, the students' immediate environment still —literally— bears the signs and slogans of the previous epoch. On one of the squares in Barnaul a building still carries a huge sign celebrating the 72nd anniversary of October Revolution of 1917.

By asking the students to write down their associations with the Soviet past and post-Soviet present, I wanted to see how this historical palimpsest is worked out and negotiated on a personal level or, rather, on the level of writing that vividly manifests one's ability (or lack of it) to master the existing symbolic structure and vocabulary, to find one's place within it and to be able to articulate this place for others.

As I will show, the relative freedom from the Soviet cultural legacy, typical of the first post-Soviet generation, comes with a price. The new, post-Soviet Russia is very often presented in young people's descriptions as lacking any social norms, any clearly defined social standards, expectations, and —sometimes— any future. One young woman put it this way: 'New Russia is a country that lost its previous independence and glory. It is an ill and humiliated country that is openly drawn into corruption, violence, fraud. New Russia is a pitiful, unhappy country' (f-20).⁷ As I argue, it is this overwhelming image of 'a free, uncontrolled country drifting in a direction unclear to anyone,' as another informant defined it, that modifies the work of symbolic mechanisms with which young people 'map out' the external reality.

The Siberian Piccadilly Circus

In order to make clearer the historical background against which the figure of the 'New *Russian* Woman' emerged, I want to briefly recall that new political regimes in Russia were often accompanied by corresponding types

of 'new' people. Barbara Clements has nicely summarized the main qualities of one of them. In her study of the 'New Soviet Woman' Clements writes:

Born in the revolution and civil war, the Soviet heroine first appeared in periodicals as a nurse, as a political leader in the army, even as a combat soldier. She was modest, firm, dedicated, sympathetic, courageous, bold, hard-working, energetic, and often young. She gave no thought to her personal welfare ... she could put up with physical hardship ... and even endure death, believing that her sacrifice had contributed to the building of the better world (Clements 1985:220).

Later on, along with being dedicated, hard-working and modest, the 'New Soviet Woman' also came to be seen as 'loving and maternal,' as 'the keeper of the family hearth' (Clements 1985:220).

Political changes of 1990s brought a different version of the New Woman. The title of the song quoted above, as well as the title of the concert with which the Latvian singer Laima Vaikule toured around the former Soviet Union in 1995–97, epitomized this version well. The title read: *I am out in Piccadilly...* The name of the British intersection is no accident here; nor is the somewhat 'foreign' — 'Baltic' — accent of the singer. In the popular Russian vision of the West, the Piccadilly Circus together with its continental counterpart — Place Pigalle — were often the epitome of a dissipated life, licentiousness and moral corruption.

Perestroika somewhat modified this Russian cartography of sin: the politics of glasnost discovered the 'intergirls' (*interdevochki*), 'sort of free-lance geishas' (Bouis 1991:vi), a domestic version of the woman from Piccadilly Circus. In 1987 a novel *Intergirl: A Hard Currency Hooker* written by Vladimir Kunin (1991) was first published by a Leningrad literary journal and became an instant bestseller. Between 1987 and 1991 ten editions of the novel were printed and three million copies sold (Kunin 1994:653–654). The literary success was accompanied by a cinematic one. The 1989 film *Intergirl* (dir. Petr Todorovsky) became the last biggest blockbuster of the Soviet cinema. Forty-four million viewers watched the film during the first year of its release (*Itogi* 1998).⁸

Despite its Soviet origin, the novel — and especially the film — to a large degree defined a major trend of the *post*-socialist symbolic field, in which the (new) Russian woman was represented as a border-state phenomenon, as an *inter*-girl, who sustains financial and sexual circulation without usually leaving the country. The intergirl was presented as a 'lone pioneer of the market economy' (Lissyutkina 1993:284), as a woman who knows her (high) price and who cleverly capitalizes on the resources available to her. Consider the

following quote from the book. In the beginning of the novel, Tanya, the main character, describes as a 'parade of the elite' the situation she witnesses in a police room of an expensive Leningrad hotel:

The Soviet fashion house had no business here. Vogue, Burda Moden, Nickerman, Quille, Cardin, Nina Ricci...

Every suit was a thousand or two [roubles].⁹ The boots cost six or seven hundred. The cosmetics—Max Factor, Chanel, Christian Dior... This was our trade union. Intergirls. Valuta prostitutes. Hard currency hookers.

There's Nina Meleiko. She gets the best clients. Speaks Italian and Finnish. She put together a Swedish-Russian conversation book. On our topic. Many beginners borrowed it to copy. For twenty-five roubles. Not expensive. Just can't let her drink – she gets mean...

My best friend – Sima Gulliver. She was a champion volleyball player. She's one tough cookie! Can make any client pay a full hundred dollars. Won't go for less. When she puts on her make up, you can't take your eyes off her. Got brains like the whole Supreme Soviet. Can make money of anything.

Nina Kisula. One businessman after the other, and she's always in a good shape. Swims in the morning, then the tennis courts, lunch only with business partners. Work in the evening. English, German, Finnish, of course ... the Leningrad specialties (Kunin 1991:8–9).

I will discuss at length the tendency to glamorize this form of market exchange in the last part of this essay; now I just want to emphasize the metaphoric chain 'woman-prostitution-foreignness-capitalism' that has been provided by post-Soviet mass culture.

To a large degree, these examples of the inverted Orientalism of the 'capitalist' peccadilloes—be it the Piccadilly girl or the *intergirl* herself—serve, no doubt, to counterbalance the view of prostitution presented in Russian classical literature most notably by Tolstoy (1994) and Dostoevsky (1993). According to it, manifestations of (woman's) intentional bawdiness were traditionally reserved for the West, while the same phenomenon in Russia was usually disguised as a 'stolen purity,' 'lost innocence,' or, at least, a 'forced surrender.'

In the mid-1990s, just before Piccadilly Circus became part and parcel of the symbolic landscape of the salespersons in the kiosks, another hit song had tried to adapt the traditional view of Russian woman's virtue to the then-existing circumstances. In a ballad with a slight hint of Gregorian chants, Tanya Bulanova, a blond woman with an ostensibly Slavic appearance, lamented:

It is such a pity that we will never be together anymore.
That there will be no songs sung together...
But at night your image is often in front of me, Reminding me of you, my beloved.
My dear, how often do I hear your voice! It calls me back to the wonderful day.
And I run to meet you, I run so hard. And I fall down in my dream, and wake up.
[...] Why, my honey, did you leave me? Why aren't you with me anymore?
Please, come back, I beg you so much, God knows that I still love you...¹⁰

Of course, there is nothing unusual in this trope of the abandoned (seduced?) Russian Penelope: the suffering is a matter of personal rumination, a matter of the woman's private experience. However, unlike in the story about the original Penelope, no actual activity accompanies the suffering in the song: there is no enactment, no acting out, no outcome, except the awakening. The past is reproduced in the fantasy and the fantasy acts as a form of substitution for (or a denial of) the present. The action is imaginary, while the loneliness is real.

As similar as they are, the songs differ drastically in one aspect. The center of the opposition of the 'wild (Baltic?) West' and the 'subdued (Russian?) East' seems to be occupied by the notion of the public presented as an amalgam of the 'foreign' and the 'sexual'. To be abandoned and to hallucinate about this in the privacy of one's own fantasy seems to be all right. However, in order to actually find a substitute for the 'defected beloved,' one needs to go at least to Piccadilly Circus. The danger of the public seduction must be geographically displaced. The woman who openly walks down Piccadilly Circus is doomed to have a foreign accent.

It seems to me that this proposition works in an inverted form, too. An anxiety caused by geographical vulnerability, by removed or modified borders and frontiers, leads to its displacement onto someone else's body. The more easily Piccadilly Circus becomes a part of the local scenery, the more foreign the girl 'next door' looks. As I show in the essay, the figure of the New Russian woman could be taken as an example of this symbolic displacement, in which by projecting onto the women 'next door' aspects of foreignness, by turning her into a walking flagpole indicating an alien, unfamiliar territory, my respondents were able to 'locate' shifting political, economic, cultural, geographical, etc. boundaries and borders in contemporary Russia.

The synchronicity of capitalism and prostitution hinted in Vaikule's song and made obvious in the book was especially visible in the students' essays. The following description of the New Russian woman appeared very often. A seventeen-year-old woman writes: 'A New Russian woman is a woman

who made a profitable deal. She marries not the man but his money.' Another insists, 'the New Russian woman seldom loves her husband: the main reason for her marriage was a financial one' (f-21). A seventeen-year-old male sees the New Russian woman as the one 'who chases after European fashion, who drinks and smokes and falls on everyone who wants her.' Yet another female seemingly summarizes the point: 'A New Russian woman is a woman who sold her freedom, her chance to be truly loved one day (to be loved in the Russian way!). In order to get good food and clothes, they agree (in their soul, of course) to put up with the unfaithfulness of their husbands' (f-18).

The moralist framing of students' representations of the New Russian woman, however, contained an element of ambiguity. One student expressed it well by portraying the New Russian woman as: 'wanton, conspicuously dressed, stupid and even dumb. She is attractive,' he wrote, 'but immodest and debauched.' It was precisely this moment of internal tension that finally forced me to frame the research question. Namely, why does this '*indiscreet* charm' of capitalism with all its 'corrupting' and 'corroding' effects find its personification in the (New Russian) woman?

A female student, who, as she puts it, has 'many friends among New Russians,' gives the following taxonomy of the types of the New Russian woman, explicitly indicating the patterns of life that were completely unavailable in the Soviet reality. In the student's view the 'New Russian woman' could be: '(a) the wife of a New Russian man who stays at home and does nothing; (b) a woman who has her own business and who is successful in it; (c) a woman who is good at 'presenting' herself; one who is dressed tastefully; (d) a New Russian man's daughter who studies at a Russian university, and later – in a prestigious place abroad; (these women are often disliked in the collective); (e) a mistress of a New Russian man' (f-17).

The New Russian woman thus represents a sharp borderline between the Russia of state socialism and the Russia of the period of the so-called 'market reforms.' In her description, the informant touches upon almost all spheres of personal life: family and job, career-motivation, self-image, children, and a certain version of privacy. And all these characteristics have at least one unifying feature—their explicit or implicit reference to the public: either by being presented as clearly opposite to it (e.g. the woman who stays at home), or by being presented as a justification of new publicly conspicuous practices. All these incarnations of the New Russian woman presuppose the reaction of a really existing or imaginary audience: be it a business environment (b) in the student's answer, a hostile collective (d), or an appreciative circle of friends

(c). This 'public' component does not become any less prominent even when the role clearly implies distance from the public scene (a). In a situation where the majority of women are—now 'voluntarily'—working in order to get through the 'period of reforms,' such a withdrawal from public life is remarkably salient. Even an ostensibly private matter (e) does not escape the moral gaze of society; describing this role, the student uses a word *mistress* (*lubovnitsa*) which in Russian is much closer to *concubine* than to *lover*, implying a degree of public institutionalization/evaluation.

Certainly, this multi-faceted vision of the phenomenon has a lot to do with a particular level of the informant's familiarity with the New Russian milieu. For the overwhelming majority of the young people I interviewed this milieu belongs to the realm of *fantasy* and/ or stereotypes. The farther the informants are removed from day-to-day encounters with the New Russian woman, the more improbable their descriptions were. Or – to frame it metaphorically – the stronger her foreign accent sounded. For example, a female informant trying to emphasize the non-ordinariness of the New Russian woman, describes her in a following way: 'A New Russian woman is a *lady* [English in the original] who has forgotten about her natural duties and lives only for her own pleasure. She is very polished and very confident. Nothing can scare her in this life' (f-17). Sometimes the image of this *lady* clearly reminds one of the clichés provided by *Dynasty*, *Beverly Hills* 90210, or *Santa Barbara*, available on Russian TV. Thus, a male student writes: 'The New Russian woman is a New Russian man's wife; not working, she only delivers pleasures to her husband; she does not take care of her house for she has servants. She plays golf and swims in the pool built next to her house' (m-17). Within the student's symbolic frame it is irrelevant that the pool built next to the New Russian woman's house (in Siberia) will be frozen at least seven months a year, or that the nearest golf course is as close as Moscow. For the image's ability to represent 'reality' is of a secondary importance here. Instead, as Vygotsky and Luria remind us, 'reality' is coped with through reproduction of symbols (1934:109, 111).

Sometimes a difficulty with 'fitting' the portrait of the New Russian woman into the actual landscape would become apparent to my informants and an inability to symbolically define the new woman's social position would be expressed through, or rather associated with, personal qualities of the New Russian woman. In other words, the impossibility to anchor *representations* of the New Russian woman within the existing symbolic order became transformed into her *personal* non-transparency and remoteness. A young female

reflected this tendency fully in the following comment: The New Russian woman? She is the New Russian man's wife; she is remarkably aloof, cold, and indifferent' (f-18).

With varying degrees of complexity, the young Siberians reflected in their commentaries the fact that the notion of the 'New Russian woman' produces a certain tension in the students' symbolic realm. The sign of the New Russian woman points to a certain rupture in the fabric of the 'dominant fiction' whose 'images and stories' are usually able to provide society with symbols of more or less universal consensus (Silverman 1992:30). The question once again is: Why is this rupture 'personified,' why is this symbolic gap rhetorically equated with the (image of) New Russian woman?

Signifying Holes

Making sense of symbols and decoding their intended meanings is a traditional task of anthropology: whether these symbols are understood as 'the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior' (Turner 1967:19), or as signs whose arbitrariness becomes contested (e.g., Taussig 1992:154). In my analysis of *written* texts, in which one's (in)ability to locate oneself within the field of the available symbolic structures is especially prominent, I am less concerned with the nature of the symbol/sign/representation and the hierarchies among them. Rather it is the very process of *symbol formation*, the process of *symbolization*, the process of 'negotiation' between the individual and the symbolic order that interests me. The main question can be put this way: What happens when the individual's coming of age coincides with a profound destabilization of the basic social, economic, ideological, etc. conventions and agreements, that is, when the symbolic order fails to provide him/her with a clearly located position from which to address others and to be addressed? If Jacques Lacan is right, and even 'the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier ... changes the whole course of history by modifying the moorings that anchor his being' (Lacan 1977:174), then where and how do these modified moorings make themselves apparent?

To put it differently, if any socio-political changes can be seen as changes of a dominant discursive regime, if success of these changes necessarily implies reconfiguration both of the practices of (re)production and the practices of signification (see, e.g., Goux 1990:129), then comprehensive and rapid transformations in contemporary Russia can be seen as yet another example of *historical trauma* (Silverman 1992:55), given, of course, that 'trauma' is un-

derstood here not as a concrete *event* but rather as the primary cause of necessity for 'resubjectification and restructuring of the subject' (Rauch 1998:113) in particular and for the 'reconstruction of politics and/or civil society after traumatic stress' (Fischer 1991:529) in general. As I will show, elaboration of what Melanie Klein termed *paranoid phantasies* might be seen as a way to deal with such a traumatic failure of the symbolic disorder to produce a stabilizing effect of subjectification.

As some scholars of post-Soviet society have pointed out, various attempts to make a personal sense of the (post-)Soviet world after-the-collapse often manifest themselves as attempts to clarify the meaning of basic gendered categories and practices (e.g., Alchuk 2000; Goscilo 1996; Pesmen 2000:99–100; Rotkirch 2000; Scholl 1999; Larsen 2000). By using psychoanalytic concepts developed mostly by various generations of the object relations school, in what follows I shall try to understand the internal logic of these attempts articulated in the texts of young Siberians. This analysis, I believe, can reveal to a certain degree the level of the overall traumatic state that is being experienced even by a group that occupies a relatively secure social position.

In conversation with me, two young people indicated what it means to be *in the process* of 'making sense' of the gendered order in today's Russia. When trying to describe their respective gender two usually very articulate female and male university students said almost the same thing. The nineteen-year-old woman commented: 'there is such a notion as femininity but I do not know how to define it.' In turn, the nineteen-year-old men told me: 'Masculinity lost its former essence, and no new definitions have popped up on the surface yet. I cannot even tell what the contemporary meaning of such a notion as masculinity consists of.'

To a degree, this situation of hermeneutic paralysis and failure of the symbolic order to perform the function of the gendered ordering reminds me of a joke repeated once by Lacan. As the French psychoanalyst recalled it, 'the little pegs always fit into the little holes, but there comes a time when the little pegs no longer correspond to the little holes' (Lacan 1992:106). One way to translate this joke, is to suggest that the usually well adjusted signifiers ('holes') of the symbolic order at a certain historical moment might fail to provide a stabilizing confinement for the new signifieds ('pegs') of the subject. In the moment of this historical rupture, the symbolic order is incapable of maintaining a (linguistic) 'form into which the subject is inserted at the level of his being' (Lacan 1997:179). In the moment of this trauma the subject can *not* recognize himself as being this or that signifier (*ibid.*).

It is precisely these holes (masculinity and femininity) designating and signifying the gender division that fail to provide the informants with forms to insert the modified meanings of their 'pegs' (e.g., *post-Soviet* femininity and masculinity) into in order to make their positionality graspable. Being unable to connect the meaning with the signifier, the young people seem to be avoiding any attempt at self-determination and self-inscribing.¹¹

In that respect, one way to deal with the feeling of the meaningful emptiness of the signifier, however surprising it might sound, is to proliferate its alleged meanings, to endlessly conflate and imbricate them. As if having given up on making the signifying hole fit for his/ her self, the subject tries to insert into it all kinds of pegs. In other words, when femininity is of no use for describing anyone familiar, it still might be utilized to frame someone completely foreign. Thus, as I showed earlier, the 'hole' of the New Russian woman can be used to host almost any 'peg' that has the label 'new'. As if proliferation of numbers of 'pegs' could make up either for the inability to differentiate among them, or for the failure to anchor the 'liberated' meaning of the gendered order.

Loose semantic connections between the (social) signifiers and the (personal) signifieds, caused by the existing social upheaval, appear to have left the young people unable to work out new appropriate links. In part, the lack of publicly recognizable signifiers able to manifest current changes was/ is substituted by a phantasmatic figure of the New Russian woman, usually associated with the negative side of transition. The (image of the) New Russian woman can be seen in this context as a defensive reaction that hides behind multiple and negatively charged details of one's inability to define one's own position vis-à-vis a fragmented (and fragmenting) symbolic order. For instance, a nineteen-year-old man when describing the notion of the New Russian woman gives the list of such qualities: 'New Russian woman: fur, luxury; does not like kids; young and beautiful; envy, greed, egoism, lust; easy money, prostitution; servants in her house; no interest and goals in her life; shamelessness, spiritual emptiness' (m-19).

When describing the mechanism underlying the symbolic production of the New Russian woman, it is useful to keep in mind the distinction between the 'symbolic equation' and the 'symbol proper' elaborated by Hanna Segal. As Segal suggests, any act of symbolization should be considered as a 'three-term relation,' that is, as a relation between the *signified* ('the thing symbolized'), the *signifier* ('the thing functioning as a symbol') and a *person* for whom the one represents the other' (Segal 1988:163). For Segal, one's ability to accept

the signifier as that which it is—i.e., as a substitute for the unavailable thing—is a result of the individual's developed capacity for symbolization rooted both in a clearly recognized distinction between the 'world of words' and the 'world of things,' and in a more integrated and less polarized ('whole') picture of reality.

As Segal indicates, increasing anxiety might provoke a situation of regression in symbolization. As a form of defense against anxiety the process of symbolization tends to be reduced to the mechanism of splitting that polarizes the 'good' and the 'bad' parts of the experience (see Segal 1974:26–27). Such a polarization, in turn, modifies the nature of the final products of symbolization. The signifier's *own* qualities are not recognized, and the 'the symbol-substitute is felt to *be* the original object' (Segal 1988:168). Thus, the symbol-formation is replaced by the symbolic equation whose primary (fetishist) function is 'to deny the absence of the ideal [good] object, or to control a persecuting [bad] one' (Segal 1988:168). Or, in Lacan's terms, having severed a stable connection with the signified, the signifier is ready to mask its 'vacuity' by hosting any available 'peg.'

There are at least two aspects of symbolic equation that are important for my discussion: first, it is the compensatory, defensive nature of the symbolic equation, its ability to displace the original lack and/or anxiety onto the substitute itself; and second, it is the inability to recognize the hallucinatory, symbolic essence of the substitute, i.e., it is the 'non-differentiation between the thing symbolized and the symbol' (Segal 1988:162). Rhetorical violence in regard to these substitutes and/or their symbolic devaluation can be seen, for example, as one of the results of such non-differentiation.

The informants' descriptions of the New Russian woman seem to demonstrate a logic of symbolization that is not dissimilar to that of the symbolic equation. As I tried to suggest, in a situation of societal and individual instability, the figure of the New Russian woman, whose high financial status is achieved through her moral downfall, can be seen as a result of the symbolic splitting, as a substitute, whose function is to be a repository for the feeling of anxiety.

By emphasizing the symbolic function of the New Russian woman, I do not mean to deny the actual involvement of actual women (new Russian or otherwise) in various forms of market and/or matrimonial relations. What I do want to stress is that, despite their lack of first-hand experience in the New Russian lifestyle,¹² the informants demonstrate a remarkable readiness to reproduce in their essays the negative clichés and stereotypes that are provided

by mass culture. The important aspect of these clichés and images, however, has to do not with their origin, but rather with the informants' tendency to operate within the same mode of symbolic equation in which the differentiation between the object (e.g., actually existing new Russian woman) and the symbol (image) is foreclosed. As I tried to demonstrate elsewhere, this negative portrayal has a clear gender dimension. Unlike the New Russian woman, the New Russian man tends to be presented by the same group of informants as laughable *nouveau riche*, even in spite of the commonly recognized fact of the criminal origin of his fortune (Oushakine 2000b). In that respect, for understanding mechanisms of the informants' symbol formation the *metaphors* of the New Russian woman used in the essays are much more important than the qualities and lifestyle habits of the *actually* existing new/ rich Russian women.

By taking up Segal's suggestion, in the remaining part of the text I want to explore to what extent this distinct role of the New Russian woman is a result of relations between the person symbolizing and the object being symbolized. As I will try to show, the structure of these relations is similar to that of the paranoid phantasy, with splitting and projection as the main mechanisms of symbolization. First I will briefly outline the main psychoanalytic aspects of paranoia and paranoid position, mostly elaborated by Melanie Klein, and then I will give a more detailed description of the New Russian woman as envisioned by Siberian young people.

Symbolizing Anxiety

Attempts to structurally connect the idea of the (postmodern) crisis of interpretation with the notion of paranoia are certainly not new (see e.g. Marcus 1999; Nicol 1999; Brennan 1993). While also trying to construe 'the domain of paranoia within reason' (Marcus 1999:5), in this essay I want to pursue a different line of anthropological analysis in which paranoid thinking is seen as a displacing interpretive model activated in order to express the (usually traumatic) experience that could not find any adequate symbolic representation (see Humphrey 2001).¹³ More specifically, I suggest that the critical condition of interpretative possibilities is achieved not only due to the lack of a homogenizing and unifying effect that the dominant fiction of the master narratives used to produce (see e.g., Strauss 1997). As the students' comments indicate, such a fragmentation of the dominant fiction is accompanied (if not aggravated) by a parallel process of *splitting*. The impotence of the symbolic order provokes and simultaneously is sustained by the individual's inclination to further fragment the symbolic field.¹⁴

Since Melanie Klein was one of the first who emphasized the active role of paranoid mechanisms in symbol production, I will briefly discuss her major points. However, one disclaimer regarding Klein's usage of anatomic terms in her description of psychoanalytic processes is necessary. I find particularly helpful the comment made by Wilfred Bion about analogies used in psychoanalysis. Similarly to Segal's distinction between the symbol proper and symbolic equation, Bion points out that the 'things used and what those things represent are dissimilar. It is supposed that a rifle and a penis are similar. But what should be exact is the *relationship* between the particular objects in the particular analogy and not the object themselves' (Bion 1970:5). Within this frame, Klein's analysis of relations, say, between the baby and the breast, interests me precisely because of the analytic possibility for analogy that focuses on the similarity of relationships between the objects rather than on the similarity of particular objects.

As is well known, Klein tried to see the infant's development as consisting of two stages, or rather positions: the *paranoid* (or 'paranoid-schizoid') and the *depressive*. The main difference between these two positions deals with the strategy the child uses in its relation to the external world, and, consequently, with the parallel processes in the ego and super ego formation. Thus, while the first position presupposes various kinds of splitting, the second position is marked by the dominance of the process of synthesis.¹⁵ The understanding of the dynamic of the *paranoid-schizoid* position is crucial for explaining the structure and content of the students' essays.¹⁶

As Klein points out, the child's 'original object-relation included only one object, i.e., his mother's breast as representing his mother' (Klein 1997:147). The child's relation to the breast, however, is not one-dimensional and is colored by mutually exclusive impulses framed later as love and hate. The first object, thus, is seen as a polarized source of both good *and* bad feelings. Klein phrases it this way, 'the first object ... [that is,] the mother's breast ... to the child becomes split into a good (gratifying) and bad (frustrating) breast' (Klein 1975:2). Why does the child use splitting as its main mechanism of interaction with reality? For Klein, the child's choice has a lot to do with two other processes that accompany the splitting, that is, *introjection* and *projection*. Both processes are clearly connected with the predominant importance of feeding as the link connecting the child and the world. In that respect, called upon as 'one as the earliest ego-mechanisms and defences against anxiety' (Klein 1975:6),¹⁷ splitting performs what could be called a 'communicative' function with the external objects.¹⁸ With the help of splitting, the

child maps out reality, as it were, distinguishing between the objects to be taken 'inside' and the objects to be 'expelled'.

By undertaking this geographical polarization of the good (introjected) and the bad (projected) objects, Klein indicates, the child accomplishes two main goals. First, the 'good breast is taken in and becomes part of the ego.' (Klein 1975:179). If successful, this introjection of the good object becomes the basis for the further development of the self (Klein 1975:268). However, the child simultaneously goes through a parallel process of *projection*: by singling out the bad objects and 'ejecting' them into the outer world, the child disperses its anxiety as well as its self (Klein 1975:144). Thus, secondly, it is these split-off and expelled parts of the self that in the process of their subsequent re-introjection provide the basis for the formation of the super ego (the Other) (Klein 1997:140).

It is important to keep in mind, as Klein reminded us, that the processes of projection and introjection have an *illusory* nature. From the very beginning, they are

bound up with the infant's phantasy-life; and the anxieties that stimulate the mechanism of splitting are also of phantastic nature. It is in phantasy that the infant splits the object and the self, but the effect of his phantasy is a very real one, because it leads to feelings and relations (and later on, thought-processes) being in fact cut off from another (Klein 1975:6).

Splitting, thus, operates in the domain of the imaginary, where real objects are reduced to the role of a fetish-trigger that can provoke a chain of reactions. Because of this phantasmatic and projected nature of the process of ego formation Klein calls the infant's first stage the 'paranoid-schizoid position' during which the 'internal' negative feelings become associated with 'external' objects.

Julia Kristeva in her *Powers of Horror* makes several points that shed more light on the problem of the subject formation or rather the subject's boundaries. One of these points deals with instability of the subject's (corporeal) borders and thus an always already present fear of disappearing, of being 'swallowed' by the outer world. As she puts it, 'the subject will always be marked by the uncertainty of his borders and of his affective valence as well; these are all the more determining as the parental function was weak or even nonexistent, opening the door to perversion or psychosis' (Kristeva 1982:63). The less restrictive, the less stable the disciplining role of the symbolic ('the paternal function') becomes, the more easily the subject can slip into the psy-

chotic realm of phantasy (about the maternal). The less certain the subject is about the frame of his/ her own identity, the more threatening the unlimited choice of reactions available to the subject might look. The flexible personal boundaries (e.g., the *objects* of the desire) coupled with unclear social expectations (the *acceptable forms* of the desire) lead to the situation when a regression to the primeval form of communication with the outer world (pain *or* pleasure, good *or* bad) seems to be inescapable.

Why, however, are these borders demarcating the subject and the *non*-subject mentioned by Kristeva, so fluid and movable? What does this fluidity rely upon? It relies upon a 'slow, laborious production of object relation' constituting the subject (Kristeva 1982:48). In this production, the mother stands for the 'object,' abjection stands for the 'relation,' and the final aim is 'to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother' (Kristeva 1982: 64) The relation to the object/ mother could not be anything else but ab-ject, ex-pulsion, re-jection for it is through this object the subject maintains his/ her external integrity. By clearly marking the 'no *man's* territory,' the subject simultaneously marks off his/ her own domain as well. To frame this slightly differently – the process of identification of one's own self can be seen as a process of establishing (introjecting?) and maintaining (projecting?) one's own borders. However, such a border-building has a relational nature and presupposes the existence of the object to 'bounce' from. In turn, the individual's capacity for symbolization – i.e., the phantasmatic substitution of the object with a symbol – helps to overcome the structural dependency on the actual object without losing the (negatively) identifying effect that such dependency produced. This is why symbol formation can be seen, as Segal points out, as 'an activity of the ego attempting to deal with the anxieties stirred by its relation to the object' (Segal 1988:163).

To this fundamentally relational understanding of the process of identification, Kristeva added yet another dimension. For her, the dynamic of subject/ object separation cannot be reduced just to the imposition of the Oedipal social rules ('not to desire one's own mother') onto the becoming individual. The separation in question is always a separation of the self, in which 'the outside is elaborated by means of a projection from within, of which the only experience we have is one of pleasure and pain. An outside in the image of the inside, made of pleasure and pain' (Kristeva 1982:61).

This comment of a young woman, describing her vision of Russia after the fall of Communism, helps to illustrate this idea of outside as the inside

projected outward, of the external world of objects that are *felt* from inside. The informant writes:

New Russia? I have a mixed feeling, and it is hard to understand what it is – pain or joy. The pain, for the country that could have been majestic, prosperous, beautiful, and peaceful. As to the joy – it is because Russia, despite all the difficulties, is slowly moving ahead, and one can feel a certain freedom (f-21).

As rhetorical as they might be, the ‘feelings,’ the internal reaction to the outer world described by the student, nevertheless clearly indicate how the mechanism of object relations works through introjection (pain/joy) and subsequent projection (pain/joy *for the country*). Another significant element of this comment is its binary structure, its rhetorical splitting – pain *vs.* joy – that simultaneously establishes a personal connection between the divided inner self and the correspondingly divided external world and, helps to compartmentalize and further fragment the ‘outside’ world.

Yet another comment of a young woman justifies the extension of the logic of the dynamic of object relations outside its initial (mother–child) dyadic frame and helps us to see how polarization of the feeling of pain/pleasure, that is, how polarization of the good object and the bad object happens, in this case temporally. Defining ‘Motherland’ in general and the ‘New Russian’ Motherland specifically, a student writes:

Motherland – this word reminds me of something from my childhood. When I hear it, for a moment I would hold my breath and the old [Soviet] song *What does the Motherland begin from?* would come to my mind. Then, at school we were told about the ‘little Motherland,’ (*malaya Rodina*) and as an example of it I pictured the village where my grandmother lived... This notion *is felt especially strongly* [italic is mine—S.O.] when I am abroad. When you know that you are the only one who is not in your Motherland while all the others are, you feel slightly wounded. As if something is missing. And then you come to understand that you could not live for too long outside of your Motherland.

New Russia – this sounds pompous. As to the meaning of the ‘new’ Russia, it is about the Russia that has ended up in a very deep pit, and it would take it a long time to get out of this pit. There is a severe class division, misery, and poverty. I have a feeling that everything has fallen apart. And what has not yet fallen apart is being stolen (f-21).

This quotation perfectly demonstrates the concepts of the object relations theory discussed above. Not only does it show the splitting process at work – the good Mother(land)/ the bad Mother(land), but also it makes clearer

the dynamic of subject/ object division with projection and introjection as its main mechanisms. The 'good' Motherland is taken inside, hummed as a song, while the 'bad' Motherland is projected *out-* and *downward* (in the 'pit'). It is hardly surprising that both descriptions employ the notion of border — in their literal, as well as metaphorical sense. The traumatic *separation* from the object — in this case from the Motherland — is experienced as a 'wounding' act (the fear of the introjected object in Klein's terminology), resulting in missing 'something' in the outer world (projection). At the same time, the separated (bad) object is seen as something 'sunk' in the abyss, something divided, fragmented, taken away, stolen.

If mechanisms of splitting are fully represented by projection and introjection, then its signifying, substantive part is usually associated with the process of *idealization*. For analytical purposes, I think it might be useful to couple Klein's notion of *idealization* with Kristeva's notion of *abjection*. It is during this dual process of idealization/ abjection that the parts of the bad or good object acquire their homogeneity and final, exaggerated valence.

What, however, is the purpose, the function of idealization? Klein suggests that the main reason for the idealization of good objects is to protect the ego 'against the terrifying' objects (Klein 1975: 241). The higher the level of illusory anxiety, the more exaggerated nostalgic phantasies about the 'good breast' become (Klein 1975:7). To phrase this slightly differently, the polarity between the idealized and the abjected becomes stronger when the subject experiences frustration. Or, as Klein puts, 'idealization is a corollary of the persecutory anxiety — a defense against it' (Klein 1975:192). At times, these two sources of idealization produce an interesting centaur. A female student gives the following descriptions of the 'ideal' woman and the 'New Russian woman':

Ideal woman — she is a keeper of the hearth, more emotionally than intellectually developed, with a talent for education of children; ready to sacrifice herself, she is a sort of brood-hen, acting under a slogan *All the best — for the well-being of humanity! All the best — to the children!* New Russian woman — business-like, extravagant, emotionally closed, knowledgeable in art, economics, psychology, sociology. A career-minded woman (F18).

The descriptions are exemplary in their polarized valences. Not only is the New Russian woman outward-oriented and self-centered,¹⁹ but she is also emotionally distant and openly alienating ('extravagant'). It seems that she is yet another version of the separated, cut-off object whose only function is to

remind the subject about the other side of the coin, i.e., to remind about the route to use in taking flight to the 'idealized object as a means of escaping' from anxiety (Klein 1975:9). The same pattern of splitting the *private* brood-hen from the *public* business-woman is used in the following comment, too. As if completely following Klein's distinction between the idealized, the good, and the bad objects, an informant writes:

Ideal woman – attractive, able to take care of herself, tender, kind, smart, attentive; a good housekeeper who is capable of creating and keeping up the hearth, and who, if needed, could make a good career, too.

The Soviet woman—a worn-out woman—usually always in the same, or same-looking clothes—who is totally exhausted by her job, husband, and children; she likes to have guests over to her house and have genuine fun.

The New Russian woman—'her legs start at her neck,' she is dressed in natural fur and has a 'gold-field' all over her body. She is not known for her intellect; she is lazy and unconstrained; a chain-smoker; could laugh all of a sudden without any reason (f-21).

Again, the New Russian woman functions here as a reversal of the recent past – with her laziness, false and endless entertainment, with her conspicuous dress and her unreasonableness. She is precisely this 'knot of debauchery,' as one student put it, this 'extremely bad breast,' to use Klein's language, whose positively idealized counterpart (the 'ideal' woman, who is 'tender' and successful in her career at the same time) is called upon to justify the impossibility of internalizing the good *old* object anymore. For, as Klein reminds us, by 'idealizing a good object,' the object of the primal identification – perhaps, the exhausted and worn-out 'Soviet brood-hen' – people try to deal with their 'incapacity ... to possess' it (Klein 1975:193).

To summarize the main points of this section. As has been said, symbol formation and ability for symbolization can be seen as playing a fundamental part in the process of coping with anxieties. Splitting of the object into the good and the bad—whether followed by idealization or not—helps to create a positive foundation for identification and defines the external limits of one's identity by mapping out the 'abjected territory'. If not followed by integration, splitting usually manifests the subject's regression to the primary stage of his/ her object relations. This regression might result either in a fragmented self unable to maintain the solidity of its external borders anymore, or in a narcissistic, megalomaniac (borderless) self, reproducing the original dyadic, mirroring relation of identification (mother/ child).

It seems to me that the phantasmatic object of the New Russian woman can be seen as a product of a similar regression to the fragmented self, provoked by identificatory anxiety in a situation of historical trauma. Or, in a different language, the New Russian woman can be interpreted as a projection of the individual's fragments into the outer world, as a form of defense against one's inability to symbolically frame one's self, to symbolically locate/ recognize one's own *borders*. Projecting destructive impulses into the figure of the New Russian woman might be seen as fulfilling compensatory and displacing functions—the negative feelings are contained outside of the subject and thus are perceived as not belonging to the subject but as alien or as foreign.

Exchanging Values

In spring 1995 in St. Petersburg, Russia (where I lived then), the city's two main theaters seemingly tried to juxtapose the 'woman from Piccadilly Circus' with their own *haute culture* versions of the same phenomenon. Almost simultaneously, three major theatrical shows were offered to spectators. The Kirov Opera began to perform two operas, Richard Strauss' *Salome* and Dimitry Shostakovich's *Katherine Izmaylova*.²⁰ The Bolshoi Drama Theater performed Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

There was something striking in the kaleidoscope of the exported or inspired-from-abroad images. The dancing Salome, demanding the head of John the Baptist. Lady Macbeth obsessively trying to get rid of the blood stains on her hands. Katherine Izmaylova—a Russian lady Macbeth—killing her family in the name of love. Striking, and yet not surprising. The fear of social disarray, political uncertainty, and cultural mutations traditionally manifests itself in the images of the woman who has gone wild, violent, obsessive. Patrice Petro, for example, in her study of the representation of women in Weimar Germany, indicates that images of the modern woman were 'a projection of male anxiety and fears ... emanating from various phenomena of modernity that were recast and reconstructed in terms of uncontrollable and destructive female sexuality' (Petro 1989:34).

To make this thesis about the seemingly eternal persistence of the image of *femme fatale* even more striking, I want to use a recent example. *Jokes About the Most Important*, published in 1997 in Moscow, in the section *From a Wife to a Secretary* offers the following:

A New Russian man attends a reception with his wife. As soon as they enter the room, a waiter comes up to the man and, offering drinks, politely asks him: 'What does you wife usually drink?' 'My blood!' – was the answer (Anekdoty 1997:14).

Let's see in more detail how this New Russian 'blood drinker' of the late nineties is portrayed in the young people's essays. It must be mentioned, though, that based on the material that I have collected, I can only partially agree with the (usual) thesis stating that the images of the *femme fatale* are primarily projections of male anxiety. Young informants of both genders demonstrated a similar understanding of what the New Russian woman is about. And the reason for this similarity, as I have argued, can be explained by a certain mechanism of symbolization employed in this particular case ('paranoid phantasy'). In the previous sections of this paper I showed how the students construct images of the New Russian woman by using splitting, idealization, abjection as their main mechanisms of symbolization; I demonstrated how these images are located in regard to other images (i.e., projection/introjection). My general presupposition was that the phantasy with the paranoid structure created in the students' essays had been a result of the students' attempt to symbolically cope with the anxiety caused by the 'historical trauma.' Now I want to explore whether it is possible to find any traces that would allow me to speak of a certain content of this trauma, that is, of certain social processes that might have forced the students to retreat to binary thinking. As I will show, the content of these processes could be seen in a specific vision of (market) exchange, in which commodification and public availability of the New Russian woman become conflated.

One of the female informants, describing the New Russian woman, distinguishes her two main versions. 'The New Russian woman,' the student writes, 'is predominantly a housewife, sometimes, a business-woman' (f-21). I shall deal with the rarer version of the New Russian woman first. Even though her representations in the informants' essays are infrequent, she is nevertheless present enough to produce a certain coherent portrait.

It has been shown already that often the image of the New Russian woman is associated with her ability to perform a role on a publicly open stage—be it Piccadilly Circus, a display of her self-indulgent consumption, or the world of business. The important moment of this publicness is one's—mostly voluntary—subjection to the constant external, anonymous and/or friendly, evaluation. The gaze of the outside examination, assessment, and recognition is persistently looked for, is relentlessly solicited. New Russians of both genders are usually described as people who constantly show themselves off, who 'try to live as if in a showcase' (f-18).

No doubt, this displaced fantasy about someone else's incessant striving for being *noticed* is a reflection of one's attempt to find external approval of

one's being as such. And yet, there seems to be more than that. Until recently, almost any form of public display in (Soviet) Russia was associated with its negative consequences—*public* purges, *public* marches, *public* pressure, etc. With minor exceptions, to be '*publicly* acknowledged' was meant to be '*officially* acknowledged'. Fragmentation and the multiplication of the institutions of authority have changed the situation completely—one's public exposure, one's *public relations* have become the key element to achieving success. However, mastery of this element does not come about easily. There is a certain discomfort with replacing the eye of the Big Brother with the eyes of multiple spectators. There seems to be a gender difference in the perception of a New Russian man's and a New Russian woman's self-exposure, too. A young man reflects this difference in the following way:

New Russian men? They are different, but usually a maximum of money and a minimum of culture... New Russian woman – she is a very self-confident, respectable business woman who thinks that she is pretty lucky in this life (m-21).

This opposition of the 'dummies in the Mercedeses' (m-19) vs. 'the well-groomed and self-confident New Russian woman' (f-18) points to different gender modes of public existence: the New Russian woman's public appearance ('well-groomed') is coupled with her feeling about this appearance ('self-confident'), while the New Russian man's appearance is metonymically reduced to a publicly displayed object (Mercedes/ money) and then ridiculed altogether ('dummies do not drive Mercedes anyway'). While it appears as a typical form of the New Russian lifestyle, public exposure is mastered differently by New Russian men and women. The New Russian business-woman functions in this respect as a useful outlet for the tension caused by a clash between the demand to become 'public' and the personal discomfort about becoming public. Students' pointed attention to feelings and self-perception of the New Russian business-woman is hardly accidental here. One of them, for example, made the following remark: 'The New Russian woman? She is almost the same as any other average woman but she has such qualities as persistence, boldness, steadfastness, and perseverance' (f-21). Another one describes the same idea this way: 'this woman has an iron grip and very strong will' (f-20). But what does this 'iron grip' of persistence aim at? The aim of this 'energetic, ambitious, and strong' woman is 'not to be dependent financially, not to be dependent in anything at all' (f-18). A young woman specifies the indicators of success of such an activity: 'the New Russian woman is a business-woman who has her own business, a company, a family, a house, a flat' (f-18).

However, something is not quite right in these images of the New Russian woman with her 'iron grip' and 'perseverance.' As if the cozy image of the Soviet brood-hen constantly makes itself apparent and thus prevents the new breed of business-woman from achieving her state of complete independence. A female informant puts this bluntly: 'there is nothing domestic about this business-minded New Russian woman' (f-20). Another woman, whose 'indicators of success' I just quoted, finishes her list with the line: 'the New Russian business-woman is the one who is dreaming about a passionate husband' (f-18). Without a passionate husband and a satisfying private life she may be independent, but she is incomplete; and neither her public success nor her high level of self-confidence can ameliorate this lack.

The image of the Russian business-woman is only marginally represented in the young people's essays. For the majority, the New Russian woman is a housewife, a person who is often thought of as a 'blood-drinker.'

Extending the metaphor of prostitute, many informants describe the New Russian woman as a 'beautiful, well dressed, careless person; the one who is cruel and calculating, who lives for money and love only' (f-18). Usually, the adjective 'New Russian' is a sign of the woman's marital status: 'a New Russian woman is a New Russian man's wife' (f-17). This marital status is usually seen as a consequence of a 'profitable deal,' as a student put it. But what does this *freedom-for-money* exchange result in? What are the following stages of capital's circulation? One female student sees it this way: 'A New Russian woman is a new Russian man's wealthy wife. She stays at home (she does not work), visits beauty salons and clothing stores. She dines out in the restaurants with her husband or a lover. She does not constrain herself a bit but completely depends on her husband's money' (f-20). Other students add the following characteristics:

The New Russian woman — a mink coat and all the other qualities of the ideal woman; a good car, high heels and stuff like that (m-18). The New Russian woman is independent, beautiful, cunning, and sexual. (m-22). The New Russian woman is a woman behind the wheel of a car, well-groomed and beautiful. (f-19) The New Russian woman follows the fashion and takes care of herself (f-20).

Even when the *freedom-for-money* exchange has not materialized yet, the new Russian woman is still part and parcel of the same economy: 'The New Russian woman spends all her leisure time in the beauty salons and hunting for a wealthy husband. She is beautiful and knows her price/value. She is elegant, attractive, strong, feminist and full of initiative' (f-20).

The 'selling her body' vs. 'buying consumer stuff' binary, as well as the multiple comments on wisely spending money, on knowing one's price/value, on making a good deal, on having one's own business, etc. are symptomatic. The New Russian woman seems to be a perfect figure by which to personify (and contain) a combination of the idea of making one's self public with the necessity of selling one's self publicly: a well-groomed woman in a mink coat walking down Piccadilly Circus.

By making the New Russian woman into a (sexualized) symbol of emerging capitalism with its demand that everyone know his or her value/price and be able to sell one's self wisely in the (marriage or job) market, the young people, in a sense, produced a symbolic field where exchanges of such a kind are permissible. Having located in the figure of the New Russian woman the lowest level of possible personal *sold-out-ness*, moral corruption and individual publicness, they seemingly achieve a placating situation, in which any other exchange of values would look almost decent.

I want to finish this text with yet another piece from the *Jokes About the Most Important*. To some extent it epitomizes a widespread vision of the New Russian woman whose iron fist can leave a man without his most important attributes—in this case, money.

Two female friends are talking about their lives.—'I heard you finally found your happiness? How did it happen?'—'Oh, very simply. First, I met a New Russian man. He had a lot of money and I had a lot of experience.'—'And now?'—'And now, he has a lot of experience and I have a lot of money' (Anekdoty 1997:17).

Translating the message of the joke into the terms of the essays I tried to analyze, it can be said that the New Russian woman plays a role of a signifying rupture around which both male and female informants could build a wall warding off their anxiety about the rapidity of the changes (or market transactions?) in the new Russia. The high level of frequency with which young people utilize the image of the fallen woman, the *femme fatale*, the woman who knows her price in the brave new market, and the distinct structural and substantive position of this image in regard to others (e.g., the New Russian man, the Soviet woman, etc.), I believe, sufficiently demonstrates that this phantasmatic figure functions as a symbolic object of displacement and compensation. It helps to cope with the feeling of uncertainty about the past left behind by quickly disappearing references of state socialism. At the same time it appears to suggest a way to deal with the anxiety about one's possible future on the post-Soviet market. Even if only by way of symbolic equation.

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Notes

1. Music by R. Pauls, lyrics by V. Peleniagre.
2. For the purpose of stylistic and content-wise comparison, written essays were also accompanied by oral interviews with a small number of the same informants. The essays and interviews included more questions; in this essay I will use only a limited number of quotes.
3. For my discussion of the informants' views on the 'post-Soviet man/woman' and on the 'new Russian man' see Oushakine (2000a) and (2000b) respectively.
4. The history of the term 'New Russians' is somewhat ambiguous; the term's current meaning appears to be a result of the two closely intertwining practices. When on September 7, 1992 *Kommersant-Daily*, a Russian-language newspaper with a half-Russian and half-English title published in its first issue an editorial article called 'Who are they?', it described 'New Russians' as a small group of successful businessmen who – as the newspaper described it – start their day with a glass of orange juice and a fresh issue of *Kommersant-Daily*. This attempt to locate a newly emerging class on the post-Soviet symbolical map, however, was undermined by the popular use of the term; in this case, 'New Russians' emerged as an enterprising and wealthy, yet legally questionable and intellectually (linguistically, aesthetically, etc.) challenged group of relatively young people. Despite its ambivalent and unstable meaning, the term functions as an important watershed marking a fundamental distinction between personal and professional identities conceived and developed within the Soviet (symbolic) system and the one that is closely associated with the ideology of (financial) success and is marked as a *post*-Soviet phenomenon. For more on New Russians see Faibisovich 1999; Ivanova 1999; Grant 1999; Pesmen 2000:260–61; Yurchak 2000.
5. On strategies of survival in provincial Russia see Burawoy, Krotov & Lytkina 2000.
6. For more on the 'shuttle trade' see Humphrey 1999.
7. Throughout the text, in the brackets followed quotes from students' essays, the letter indicates their gender, the number their age.
8. In the book (and in the film), Tanya, the heroine, is a young woman from Leningrad who works full-time as a hard-currency prostitute in major Leningrad hotels designed mainly for foreign tourists. In order to maintain her 'official' status (and not to upset her mother, a teacher), she also works part-time as a nurse. Eventually, Tanya fulfills her dream — she marries one of her clients, a Swedish businessman, and leaves the Soviet Union for Sweden. In the end, having found out that her mother is seriously ill, on her way to the airport Tanya dies in a car accident. For more about this film see, e.g., Attwood 1993:71–75.
9. The black market exchange rate at that point was four roubles for one dollar. The average salary in the country did not exceed 130 roubles at that time.
10. The music and lyrics are written by the members of the band *Letnyi sad*.

11. Working with the same set of texts, I described this tendency to avoid any self-determination as a 'state of post-Soviet aphasia' (Oushakine 2000a).
12. As the essays indicate, a very negligible part of the informants belonged to – or even knew closely – really existing New Russians. Most of them were from a city intelligentsia and working class background.
13. In her attempt to use the notion of paranoia to grasp the post-socialist narrative strategies, Caroline Humphrey suggests that there are three important interconnected links to keep in mind: the displacement of a traumatic experience which is still present; the creation of a closed interpretative domain and the sense of being immersed in a situation with a predetermined future (Humphrey 2000).
14. Georgina Born in her study of subjectivity uses a similar approach. Speaking about musicians, Born noticed that, used as defense mechanisms, various forms of splitting 'between areas or periods of their practice, or between their production and consumption ... are a way of dealing with two worlds of discourse or cosmologies – modernism and popular – defined by absolute aesthetic and socio-economic differences' (Born 1997:493; see also Born 1998:375–377).
15. It is precisely the difference between these positions that later gave Segal a basis for differentiating between the symbol-formation and the symbol-equation.
16. I am not going to deal with the second, 'depressive,' position, in this article mostly due to the different function it performs in coping with anxiety. Unlike the first position, this one aims to overcome the early splitting and thus to repress the binary type of perception of the inner/outer worlds.
17. Earlier in this article Klein outlined the main sources of primary anxiety, namely: the fear of annihilation, the trauma of birth, frustration of bodily needs (Klein 1975:6).
18. To quote Klein in full on this matter: 'The onset of the development of [the child's] ego which is accompanied by the growing ability to test reality leads the child to experience his mother as someone who can give or withhold satisfaction and in this way it acquires the knowledge of the power of his object in relation to the satisfaction of his needs – a knowledge which seems to be the earliest basis in external reality for his fear of the object. In this connection it would appear that he reacts to his intolerable fear of instinctual dangers by shifting the full impact of the instinctual dangers on to his object, thus transforming internal dangers into external ones' (Klein 1997:126).
19. In Russian, 'career-oriented', 'career-minded' – *kar'erist(ka)* – are traditional substitutes for 'self-centered' and 'egotist'.
20. The opera is based on the novel written by the Russian writer Leskov at the end of the nineteenth century. The title of the novel (and for some time the title of the opera itself) is '*Lady Macbeth from the Mzensk province*'.

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