

# The Quantity of Style

## Imaginary Consumption in the New Russia

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... it is a matter not so much of expression accommodating itself to our inner world but rather of our inner world accommodating itself to the potentialities of our expression, its possible routes and directions. (Valentin Voloshinov, 1998: 91)

**I**N 1988 *Ogonyok*, probably the most prominent Soviet magazine of the period of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, published a short essay 'About Sausage'. The magazine wrote:

Long suburban trains roll every day into Moscow from Kaluga, Ryazan, Dmitrov, Serpukhov, and Zvenigorod, and hordes of people alight driven by the single-minded desire to buy sausage.

These 'sausage trains' have become a central part of our lives. People keep coming on, cheerfully using up their holidays or taking days off work. 'It's not so bad, we're used to it!' they say. 'What's a day wasted when you're stocked up with sausage for the next fortnight!'

Yet they don't look happy. They look tense and tired as they anticipate the queues and the angry shouts of 'Here come the country bumpkins, cleaning out shops!' They can think of nothing to say in their own defence as they stuff the sausage into their hold-alls like thieves, praying that the saleswoman won't notice them as they anxiously creep off to the next queue. (Aleshkovsky, 1990: 19)

Ten years later, in the post-Soviet Russia, there are no 'sausage trains' any more. In September 1999, talking to the students of Moscow State University, Vladimir Putin, then prime minister of the Russian Federation, noticed: 'The 20-year old down-to-earth dream of Soviet paradise – with sausage and

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freedom as its main symbols – is almost fulfilled now; we have plenty of both . . .’ (Putin, 1999). And yet, despite its material omnipresence in the post-Communist Russia, ‘sausage’ has not lost its symbolic importance, functioning as the ultimate indicator of consumer prosperity or lack of it.

In what follows I want to explore how this ‘single-minded desire’ of the Soviet consumer rooted in the economy of shortages continues to shape and influence the *post*-Soviet understanding of consumption. To do so, I will analyse a set of 178 essays written by young Russian people that I collected, mostly in April 1997 in Barnaul, a remote industrial Siberian city with a population about 800,000 people. Being a part of a bigger project, this article deals with only few themes articulated by the respondents: with the phenomenon of post-Soviet imaginary consumption, with the gender characteristics of the subject of post-Soviet consumption, and, finally, with the patterns of this consumption.

### **Making Up the Subject**

In contemporary social theory it has become common to displace the idea of the ‘postmodern condition’ on to the idea of ‘consumer society’ (Jameson, 1991). To a degree this move is understandable – through identifying the ‘subject of consumption’ one might try to map out possible trajectories of reproduction of the postmodern condition itself. Along with this attempt to theorize the cultural logic of the contemporary moment and the location of the consumer vis-a-vis global economic trends, consumption studies seem to demonstrate yet another, somewhat parallel, tendency. The understanding of the fact that ‘consumption is a production’ (Stewart, 1992: 259) has resulted in a gradual shift towards problematization of the dynamic that emerges during the process of consumption both *between* the subject and the object of consumption and *within* the subject of consumption. The subject of consumption studies here is, predominantly, the *Western* consumer, and it is reasonable to ask whether the cultural logic of contemporary postmodern consumer society is applicable to the post-Soviet condition. Can the ‘post-Communist’ and ‘post-modern’ be seen as synonymous, as some authors suggest (e.g. Epstein et al., 1999; Kelly et al., 1998)? Or is it ‘premature’, as others insist, to expect that ‘the post-Communist world will converge with a postmodernized world of stylish consumption cultures and globalized lifestyles’ (e.g. Ray, 1997: 556)? Diagnosis of the post-Soviet *condition* is beyond the limits of this article. Moreover, as I argue, regardless of this diagnosis, the ‘making up’ of the post-Soviet subject of consumption is well under way, and this article is an attempt to understand how far this subject has advanced in its development.

For my survey in Siberia, I deliberately chose a group of young people – high school and undergraduate students – who either do not remember or have not had a first-hand experience of the Soviet reality. In 1985–6, when Soviet society started experiencing its first changes, my respondents were three to ten years old. Their exposure to the Soviet reality was not so much ideological as habitual. To a large extent, knowledge of the ‘Soviet’ was accessible for them through the lifestyles of their parents, relatives and

friends rather than through direct brainwashing and/or collective rituals of self-indoctrination.

There were two sets of phenomena I asked students to describe in their written essays. One of them dealt with the Soviet past ('Soviet' Motherland, man and woman). By asking students to write down the remembrances and associations that these notions provoked, I wanted to see to what extent the students' largely post-Soviet life would influence their 'recollection' of the Soviet time. The second set of phenomena was concerned with so-called post-Soviet reality ('new Russian' man, woman, and 'new [post-Soviet] Russia'). Almost none of 178 respondents belonged to the small group of rich people usually labelled as 'new Russians'. The majority of the students represented families of workers, educators, peasants and intelligentsia whose life-style, as the Finnish sociologist Jukka Gronow rightly indicates, was based on a 'rather homogeneous conception and ideal of what was a good life, with its limited luxuries' (Gronow, 1997: 66). This social location certainly influenced the way in which students constructed their images of the 'new rich'. Lacking in personal experience, respondents' knowledge and representations of wealthy Russian people were based on publicly displayed images and clichés of the new rich Russians, or these knowledge and representations were shaped by students' own fantasies about 'wealthy' life-styles and 'unrestrained' consumption.

As distorted and exaggerated as they are, I think students' imaginary portraits of new Russians are interesting not because of their (non)correspondence with the 'really' existing new Russians. Rather, they are interesting because it is these fantasies and envisioned ideals that define, frame and finally constrain the social and cultural expectations of the young generation. To put it differently, students' descriptions of the new Russian style to a large extent can be seen as an example of what Marshall Sahlins calls a 'historical metaphor of a mythical reality' (1981: 11). These descriptions articulate an unfamiliar, 'mythical' situation (e.g. patterns of wealthy consumption) by translating them into the already familiar vocabulary of metaphors and conceptions. By exploring metaphors and symbols in which students chose to envelop the new status of the new rich I attempt to understand through what rhetorical devices the students identify the ideology of success in post-Soviet Russia. In my analysis, I mainly rely on the theoretical arguments developed in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of tastes and his theory of cultural production. First I draw a general picture of the new Russian consumption as it appears in the students' essays; then I give this picture a sociological frame.

### **Introjecting Political Changes**

When asked to give a description of the Soviet Motherland and post-Soviet Russia (quite often defined in mass media as 'new Russia'), students wrote:

When I think about Soviet Russia I recall the huge line-ups in stores and constant grocery-bags. But it was also kind and cheerful in this country.

The new Russia? – I associate this notion with a lot of pain and heartlessness. Everything is for sale; everything is being either bought or stolen. Tramps, refugees, and tradesmen are everywhere. (Male, 20-year-old)<sup>1</sup>

Soviet Motherland: it is *Perestroika* and Gorbachev. I also recall a doughnut that cost back then three kopecks, and my childish carelessness.

New Russia – it is new (rich) Russians, crimes, chasing after money and fame; it is about a mindless striving for a better life. (m-19)

Soviet Union: Communists, patriots, red banners, Lenin, monthly ration stamps to buy food, Gorbachev, queues, stupidity.

New Russia – the stores are full, there are neither queues nor money any more; anyone could say any thing but this would not make any change at all . . . (f-17)

At least two things seem to be significant here. First, the two *political* regimes are metonymically associated in students' essays with the dominant elements of consumption of the time (queues, grocery-bags, doughnuts, full stores, sales, etc.). The political (as well as the economic) is merged here with the personal, or at least is perceived in personalized terms of everyday practice. This personalized aspect of political memory becomes even more obvious in the feelings that are associated with the daily routine ('kind', 'cheerful', 'painful', 'careless', etc.). By establishing the emotional valence of one's historically specific day-to-day activity, the person is able to make sense of the political regime as a whole. I think, following Verdery's suggestion, it is possible to understand this attempt of perceiving the (post-) Soviet world through the prism of relatively stabilized consumption patterns as one of the mechanisms with which people 'reconfigure their worlds of meaning in the wake of . . . a profoundly disorienting change in their surroundings' (Verdery, 1999: 50). Consider the following quote in which political changes are displaced onto changes in consumption practices. A 15-year-old female student wrote:

To describe Soviet Russia? I recall food stamps to buy sugar, congresses of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. And people – Gorbachev and Raisa Maksimovna [Gorbacheva].

New Russia? It is about the transition to a western life style. A lot of boutiques and mini-markets have been opened; euro-style and euro-design are popular. This is not typical for Russia. But personally I like the style of new Russia. Take, for example, sales persons in stores. During the Soviet time sales people could just scream at the customer and send him very, very far away. Now, in the new Russia they advise you how to take care of the thing you bought, they tell you 'thank you for the purchase'. It is just a pleasure to talk to these salespersons. It is pleasant to do shopping with such clerks. (f-15)

This tendency to substitute a politically oriented rhetoric with the rhetoric of one's personal experience of consumption, this literal appropriation and incorporation of a historical event, certainly, is hardly surprising. Recalling Melanie Klein's studies of mechanisms of introjection and projection<sup>2</sup> as the main tools whereby the relations between the subject and the outer world are realized, the students' attempt to rhetorically associate political regimes with various elements of consumption (queues, grocery-bags, sales, tradesmen, food-stamps, boutiques, etc.) can be interpreted as one of the most natural ways of appropriation and/or rejection of the societal changes and the discursive regime in which these changes are enveloped.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, a puzzle in the students' vision of consumption. While elaborating the opposites of the *empty* Soviet *grocery-bags* vs the *full* post-Soviet *stores*, the majority of the students demonstrate a somewhat perplexing choice. In spite of a virtually unlimited selection of consumer products, they kept 'filling up' these grocery-bags with the same old sausage, as it were, maybe in a better wrapping. A female student puts it this way:

The Soviet people: their most distinguishing feature is the restricted scope of interests (I have in mind an 'average' Soviet person, even though back then everyone was average). When I recall the Soviet person, I see a woman with string-bags (with sausages in them) in each hand running home after work. I also see a man walking home with a newspaper in his hand. As soon as he comes home, he occupies the couch; his wife meanwhile, after an equally hard working day, hurries up to the kitchen to cook dinner for him. She spends her weekend doing laundry, ironing, cleaning and washing. And he still keeps lying on the couch. Once in while (maybe!) they would go to the cinema or . . . well, that's basically everything they could go to – plus theatre, and maybe a museum. After that they would come home and go to sleep.

The new Russian people. I do not want to depict a typical new Russian couple as it exists in the popular imagination. I just want to describe an ordinary family living in the new times in the new Russia. She could afford herself the pleasure of buying the cosmetics that she exactly wants, having the shoes that suit her, even if, to buy the things she likes, she would have to save money for a certain period. This couple can go to a supermarket and buy together the food they like, to treat themselves (yes! for their own pleasure) with the candies, cookies, or sausages that they want to buy. And this is *the* difference. Everyone chooses whatever he or she wants. He could go wherever he wants and enjoy himself in a way he'd like. And if he likes a computer better – he would buy it and get busy with it. Maybe all this sounds primitive and even banal, but this is my opinion. It is this way that allows for more possibilities of being a man and being a woman. (f-19)

The quote is exemplary in many aspects. While the Soviet life-style is seen as restricted and limiting, it is nonetheless points to a wider variety of cultural practices (shopping, but also newspapers, cinemas, theatres, museums). In turn, the new Russian style is understood as more relaxed and enjoyable and yet it is almost exclusively reduced to shopping. Is the new

Russian 'shopping list' any different from the shopping list of an 'average Soviet person'? Almost always, the difference between the two is minuscule. In that respect, the student's quote demonstrates a feature, typical of most of the students' answers: the understanding of being able to choose 'whatever he or she wants' is accompanied by a clear lack of new objects of desire exceeding the familiar Soviet list of 'candies, cookies, or sausages.'<sup>4</sup> Having realized that the new Russian subjectivity manifests itself first and foremost through consumption, the young respondents remain limited by the vocabulary of the consumption 'genre' inherited from the Soviet epoch. Thus, ironically, one's ability to 'choose whatever he or she wants' is cancelled out by one's inclination to choose the already familiar. However, while retaining this *vocabulary* of consumption, the students' essays demonstrate clear changes in the *grammar* of consumption: limitations in the *variety* of signifiers are overcome by the freedom to structurally improvise with *quantity* and *types of combination* of already existing signifiers. I shall return to this point later.

If arrested development of the vocabulary of the consumer's desire demonstrated by the students is ostensibly Soviet in its origin, then the historic figure on which this restricted consuming ability gets projected is certainly a production of post-Soviet times. Unlike in Soviet times, when shopping, or rather waiting in queues, was usually seen as the duty and prerogative of women, post-Soviet consumption is largely associated with the figure of the 'new Russian man' – that is, 'a man who got rich during the transition from the USSR to Russia' as a student puts it (m-17). Apparently, the gendered character of consumption depends on the position of consumption in the hierarchy of social activities; when display of consumption becomes important for production of dominant status, consumption is perceived as a male type of practice.

It would be wrong to say that the new Russian woman is not associated with any consumption practices at all; however, the vision of her consumer activity has quite a different focal point. The woman's own commodification precedes her entry into the domain of consumption: among various characteristics given by the students, the most common one describes the new Russian woman as the one who has sold her freedom in exchange for clothes and food. For instance, a female student writes:

The new Russian woman is a woman who sold her freedom and her chance to be truly loved one day (loved in the Russian way!). In order to get good food and clothes the 'New' Russian women agree (in their souls, of course) to put up with the infidelity of their husbands. (f-18)

Another student adds more colour to this picture:

The new Russian woman is the decoration of the house; weak and beautiful, she is afraid of her husband. She cannot influence any decision, being just a supplement to her husband and lacking in any initiative. She is silent and has a narrow scope of interests. (f-19)

New Russian woman? She has no moral principles, she knows no love, no devotion. Money is her Lord. Very vulgar. (f-19)

Despite this perception of the new Russian woman as being heavily involved in 'market' relations, the outcome of this market exchange of 'freedom for food' is more anticipated than actual. On the contrary, the objectified indicators of the new Russian man's financial power, his multiple, albeit not so various, possessions are listed in almost every student's essay. The following quotation makes this difference between the man's and the woman's 'grocery lists' clear:

The new Russian man – a crimson suit, a tie, a jeep; [his own] flat; restaurants; a lot of mistresses; prosperity, luxury.

The new Russian woman: a business-woman who has her own enterprise, a company, a family, a house, and a flat . . . (f-18)

The flamboyance of the new Russian man remains one of his main qualities even when the new Russian woman is not equipped with the props of her own business. In the following quote, the new Russian woman acts as a backdrop against which the Russian man makes his transactions. Or, rather, she exists as one of his possessions, one of the attributes of the 'malestream' (Goscilo, 1996: 15) fashion. A female student writes:

A new Russian man is a short and fat man in a crimson suit who even when standing on his sack of money with a cellular phone in his hand, is still shorter than his female companion. (f-18)

How can these two tendencies articulated by the students – male domination in the field of consumption (the '*subject* of post-Soviet consumption') and the limited or undifferentiated scope of the products to consume (the '*objects* of post-Soviet consumption') – be understood from the viewpoint of the sociology of consumption? In order to explain students' vision of the new Russian consumption I want to rely on several concepts developed in Pierre Bourdieu's logic of practice and theory of taste.

It must be said, though, that by applying Bourdieu's concepts to Russian cultural reality I am not equating the processes of cultural reproduction and consumption in Western and post-Communist societies. Nor am I trying to show, as so many researchers do, that Bourdieu's schemes prove to be insufficient in explaining, for example, the consumer behaviour of a particular group; or that they cannot grasp a logic of a specific form of consumption; or that they fail to incorporate certain philosophical propositions (e.g. Erickson, 1996; Ostrower, 1998; Schatzki, 1997). Instead, I will follow the strand of sociological and anthropological literature that, as Anthony Free puts it, sees 'Bourdieu's socio-analytic brand of reflexivity' as providing 'an escape from a narcissistic concern with "self" to the exclusion of any

mention of “the world(s)” that created that self” (Free, 1996: 413; see also Ortner, 1998). Within this approach the specifying of Bourdieu’s theory ‘with respect to the socio-historical particularities of the population of interest’ (Holt, 1997: 109) is a point of departure, not a point of destination.

In his *Distinction*, trying to define the relationship between the subject’s original patterns of daily consumption and his or her upward social mobility, Pierre Bourdieu, invoking Veblen’s observation on habits and habitual relations, points out that there might be a potential conflict between conditions of the *acquisition of property* and conditions of *its use*. As Bourdieu puts it, ‘the members of the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it’ (1989: 318). That is to say, a change of status does not necessarily imply the immediate changing of one’s ‘system of acquired dispositions’, that is, one’s ‘categories of perception and assessment’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 11). Rather, such upward mobility makes apparent the level of knowledge of culture that has been achieved so far.

I want to extend this view of enduring nature of already acquired cultural dispositions to interpret a slightly different realm of consumption, that is, the *imaginary* consumption or, more precisely, the imaginary re-production of previous patterns of consumption behaviour within a different context and/or environment. I argue that, despite its phantasmatic, ‘mythical’ nature, this form of imaginary activity is shaped by the same system of acquired dispositions that usually makes itself apparent in daily consumption practices. Imaginary consumption, in other words, does not function – to borrow Watson’s term – as a form of ‘proto-consumption’, i.e. as ‘a phase of apprenticeship to consumption’ (Watson, 1998: 131). Rather, it solidifies the patterns of consumption learned earlier, acting not only as a productive process, but also as a process of re-production of one’s cultural habits.

### **Symbolizing Excess**

As I have pointed out already, the new Russian subject of consumption – the new Russian man, that is – was perceived by the respondents first of all as a distinctive kind of consumer. To what extent does this imaginary new Russian man reflect the consumption habits and patterns of the students themselves? And if he does, would it be possible to trace in the students’ essays the same conflict between the imagined new Russian’s wealth and the conditions that frame this imagination?

Let me start with a student’s remark that captures well two main types of the new Russian man. Describing his vision of this figure, a male student makes the following splitting:

A new Russian man could be:

- (a) a man with a shaved skull, overdosed with anabolic steroids, with a gold-gold cross on his chest. He drives a *Land-rover*, and usually is dumb. His life is based on robbery and plunder;

(b) an elegant young person, a stylish gentleman, highly educated; knowledgeable in politics and economics; working a lot. (m-20)

I want to emphasize two points here. First, the type of the opposition between the 'shaven-skull' man and the 'stylish' gentleman created in the quote is remarkably different from the types of binaries that describe the new Russian woman. The collective image of the new Russian man in this quote appears to have a circular nature; it is self-referential and self-contained, embracing two (the negative – '*vulgar*' – and the positive – '*elegant*') poles within itself. This certainly was not the case with the new Russian woman. The oppositions which students used to describe her imply either a drastic expansion of the realm of the woman's functioning – *public* (business woman) vs *private* (housewife). Or these oppositions suggest a qualitative change in the new Russian woman's consumer status – from *seller* (of her freedom) to *buyer* (of clothes and food).

To frame this differently, in portraying the new Russian man the students locked his images into a closed circuit with no idealized or abjected outsider to refer to (besides *another new Russian man*). The difference between a 'bad' new Russian man and a 'good' one is not so much a difference in essence as a difference in degree (e.g. '*ignorant*' vs '*intelligent*'; '*vulgar*' vs '*elegant*'). However, contrasting in their developmental stages, they both nonetheless belong to the same breed. A student makes this 'genetic' connection between the two new Russian men – or rather this transformation of one into another – even more clear: 'The new Russian man? The majority of them have made their money illegally, but now they are moving into legal business' (m-20).

The second major difference in students' descriptions of the new Russian man's consumption and that of the new Russian woman has to do with the *sources* ensuring their new life-style. To enter the domain of the market (economy) and thus the domain of symbolic goods, the new Russian woman 'makes a good deal', either by 'selling her freedom', as one student formulates it, or by selling her professional qualities (as business-woman). The point of the new Russian man's entrance into the domain of the symbolic exchange remains unclear in the students' essays. The only sure thing about the new Russian man's money is its illegal origin.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the man's *personal role* in the accumulation of capital is somewhat displaced. His 'lots of money' is, as a student puts it, 'easily earned' (f-20). Yet another one adds,

The new Russian men? Those high-rolling bold daddies with gold neck-chains, crosses and pot-bellies? They are not famous for their intellect, but they do count money well. They are far from being perfect. They mindlessly spend money for they get it easily (illegally); criminals. Women are slightly better but not that much. They look down upon people, but at the same time they are very efficient people. (f-21)

Having become the starting point rather than the goal of social/economic

exchange, wealth and money in students' descriptions of the new Russian men resist any symbolization. Probably projecting his own perplexity about how to capture the symbolic significance of the new Russian man, a male student wrote: 'New Russian is a man who has power and a lot of money – quite often earned illegally – but who does not really know what to do with all this money' (m-18). Devoid of their symbolic import, goods in students' descriptions are 'mindlessly' bought and, as I will show later, are 'mindlessly' replaced by the same 'mindless' type of goods. The purpose of imaginary buying in this case is not to make a 'deal', even a 'profitable' one. Rather, the idea is to indicate, to mark off the new Russian man's location on the financial scales, solely in order to move it up during the next transaction. To put it in a different language – 'goods' are used in the students' description not so much semantically as syntactically: not for the meaning they refer to, but for the relationship they manifest.

The different logics employed by students in their descriptions of the new Russian man's and the new Russian woman's market roles make it easier to understand the homological difference in their public location, too. The public image of the new Russian woman is seen as basically not having any *specific, targeted* audience. That is, her alleged *public image* is equal to the *availability* of the goods on the market, indifferent to any other dimension but financial. The sexual availability of the new Russian woman is certainly a part of her 'public' identity. One of the students expresses this idea in the following form: 'The new Russian woman? She . . . falls on every man who wants her' (m-17). The new Russian man's public image acquires a different dynamic. Public image here is somewhat *excluding*. The proliferation of the (gold neck) chain of the signifiers that the new Russian man relies upon is restricted, limited, (b)locked within a small group of consumers able to participate in the same style of consumption. Public image here stands in for *flamboyance*, for being noticed from a *distance*; for the point in question is not to be *available* but to be *seen*. As another student puts it: 'The new Russian man is a man in a jeep with a phone-receiver glued to his head. He constantly tries to *show himself off* more than his new Russian friends and fellows' (m-20). Unlike the new Russian woman's, the public image of the new Russian man is not aimed at any specific group outside of the circle of the new Russian male fellows.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it seems to be justifiable to speak of two main features of the new Russian man's consumption as reflected on by the students – its stylistic, aestheticized, visible nature, on the one hand, and its semiotic, encoded, and excluding character, on the other.

What are the objects in which the economic and social superiority of the new Russian men gets encoded by the respondents? Symptomatically enough, the tools through which the new Russian men cast their reflections are strikingly similar in students' essays. Regardless of their gender or educational background (humanities or technical), the portraits drawn by the young respondents are virtually the portraits of the same person – of the man whose consumer dispositions were formed during the period of state socialism. These dispositions, however, have been aestheticized and make

themselves apparent *quantitatively* rather than qualitatively. Several quotations illustrate the point:

New Russian man – a 75-gram gold neck-chain, a 75-gram gold cross. A very expensive car, an expensive suit. Undoubtedly – a lot of intellect, common sense, and important connections. Very enterprising; with a tie for \$100. (m-18)

New Russian man – must have a cellular phone, a huge gold neck-chain, with a ring on each finger, with an expensive car. His wife is a doll in his hands; and he is always in ‘touch’ with the criminal groups. (m-22)

New Russian man – a shaved back of his head, his body is a mountain of muscles; with a slightly dumb expression on his face; lots of gold decorations; a cellular phone is a must. When talking, he likes to discuss only one topic – money; that is – how he earns it and how he spends it. (f-20)

Almost all the components of the *new Russian* man listed here in one way or another contain traces of the previous Soviet epoch. During the period of state socialism, gold decorations were traditionally thought of as being the *ultimate* representation of one’s prosperity and one’s successful investment of money.<sup>7</sup> The same rule applies to cars as status objects. In Soviet times having a car was not just a sign of one’s financial situation (cars were expensive). It was also a manifestation of one’s ability either to get through all the bureaucratic obstacles in order to be able to buy it, or it was a sign of one’s access to the important connections through which the car could be purchased without several years of waiting. Even the famous signature of the new Russians – the cellular phone – conspicuously resembles its Soviet predecessor, the ‘*hot-line*’ phones that used to connect the local party officials with their bosses in Moscow via a special – *exclusive* – switchboard.<sup>8</sup>

The students make it clear that it is not the *novelty* of the things that transform an old Russian into a *new* one. What is it then? Apparently, it is the *mindless quantity* of the things that the students use as the group’s marker: the *number* of rings (‘*on every finger*’), the *weight* of the neck-chain (‘*huge*’), the *price* of the car, of a suit, or of a tie (‘*very expensive*’); the *mass* of muscles (‘*a mountain*’, ‘*overdosed with steroids*’); and the *amount* of the intellect (‘*a lot*’; ‘*none*’). It seems that in the students’ perception the ideology and aesthetics of success coincide with the ideology and aesthetics of excess, rather than, for example, with the ideology and aesthetics of novelty or sophistication. A female student transforms this binary of the new Russian *bounty* vs Soviet *shortage* into the opposition of the new Russian man’s *extremes* vs the Soviet man’s *ordinariness*:

A typical [Soviet] man is a man who could be hardly distinguished in a crowd; he is of average height, average intellect; he is, generally speaking, an ‘arithmetic-mean man’. When he comes home from his job, he occupies the couch – to read newspapers and watch TV. He is a pessimist who constantly thinks

how to provide his family with all the necessary things. When at home, he wears sweat-pants that have lost their shape a long time ago; in fact, his wardrobe is far from being designed by Pierre Cardin<sup>9</sup> and this, actually, does not really bother him. His main hobbies are fishing, hunting, soccer, in other words – nothing interesting.

New Russian man – a crimson suit, a gold neck-chain; he is very ambitious and has inflated demands/desires. But he knows how to get around and earn money using all available means. (f-17)

As the comment indicates, the ‘old’ Soviet man is short of everything – height, intellect, money, shape, interests and, implicitly, power. To use another student’s phrase: ‘A Soviet man is a hardly noticeable, tiny and weak human creature’ (f-17). The New Russian man is the direct quantitative opposite of that, and the word ‘*inflated*’ in the student’s description is of a key significance. It is this ‘above average-ness’, this transgression of the borders of mediocrity or the limits of the ‘necessary’ things that seem to distinguish one man from the other in the students’ view. Thus excess and exaggeration become distinctively *new* Russian, and, particularly, *male*.

There is one important aspect in the students’ essays that indicates a somewhat uneasy relationship between the (exaggerated) picture of the new Russian that they drew and their own attitude toward this picture. The ‘*mindless*’ nature of excessive, quantity-driven consumption is, no doubt, acknowledged by the students, albeit in a somewhat disguised form. Students’ multiple references to jokes about the new Russian man who tries to make sense out of his new social location, in fact help them to avoid the problem of logical explanation of the utterly mythical image of the new Russian by displacing the very phenomenon on to the level of the comic. And yet, what is comic in these jokes has, again, a quantitative rather than qualitative nature. The logic of the jokes told seems to develop along this line: ‘I have more *than you* do’ – ‘I have more than *you think* I do’ – and finally – ‘I have more than you *can even think of*.’ The following joke, quite popular in Russia a couple of years ago, is a good example of this logic:

A new Russian’s son approaches a gorgeous lady in a lobby of five-star Metropol hotel in Moscow.

‘Mind a stroll?’, he volunteers.

‘Well, I bet your car ain’t a *Volvo*’, she replies.

‘Nope, it is not’ he confides.

‘And you do not own even an average size bank’, she continues.

‘Nope’, he admits again.

‘And you do not have a three-story house in *Old Arbat* [a prestigious district in downtown Moscow]’, she concludes. He agrees again.

‘Then get lost, loser!’

The lady leaves and the chap stands in distressed puzzlement.

‘I can trade my *Saab 900* for a *Volvo*’, he muses himself, ‘and I can split my financial trust into a chain of average-size banks, but I obviously can’t

talk my father into demolishing the top three floors of our *Old Arbat* residence . . .’

Besides its quantitative aspect, the restricted list of status-symbols in the joke is close to the students’ vision of the new Russian man. Just as in their essays, the joke does not cross the limits of already established symbolic borders (*car-flat-savings*) that outline what Veblen calls ‘the subsistence minimum’ of consumption (1967: 107). The plane on which the status objects are located here is the same plane of material possessions reflecting their Soviet origin, indicating the ‘taste of necessity’ (even if ‘inflated’), not the ‘taste of luxury’ (Bourdieu, 1989: 177). The breakthrough to a different symbolic language able to adequately express a new *social status* does not happen. Nor does a new way to express one’s financial wealth appear. Instead, time and again the same rhetorical device of *exaggeration of the already familiar* is used to present someone whose economic and social position is understood to be much higher than that of the students or the audience of the joke. Time and again, the students try to solve the conflict between the low status of the objects of the new Russian man and his high social position via the same route – through inflating the *prices* and quantity of consumer goods. And references to the comic help to make this inflated, *mindless* quantity of style if not more believable then at least less questionable.

A short detour to Freud might be helpful in understanding the role of the comical and its connection with quantity in the students’ essays. In his book on jokes, Freud indicates that in order to be pleasurable, the joke must find itself in the operation of *comparison*. Thus, for example, he writes about the origin of the comical:

. . . a person appears comic to us if, in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; and it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him. (Freud, 1960: 242)

Two elements are important in this conclusion about jokes dealing with the ‘*quantitative* factor’ as Freud calls it (1960: 238), that is, with the amount of (intellectual and/or physical) energy invested in the action. First, the mechanism of the comic implies a temporary *identification* of the subject of speech (the joker) with his or her object of speech (the matter of the joke). In other words, multiple references to the jokes about the new Russian man made by the students indicate a peculiar strategy of an imaginary relation with their main subject/object of jokes. The new Russian man apparently functions as a model of the self which still needs some ‘improvement’; and the students’ emphasis on quantitative aspects could be understood as their way to displace or laugh off the model’s ostensible flaws. The identification here is seemingly built on the principle ‘I

vs *not-exactly-I*; the identification's completeness is not rejected but rather postponed, deferred. A student reflects this clearly: 'I am not a new Russian yet,' a 21-year-old man writes, 'but I could become one' (m-21).

Second, the pleasure of the comic in the 'size' jokes comes from the presupposition that one would do better had she or he happened to be in the same situation. As a result, identification with the subject is reinforced and it even acquires a positive imaginary value. However, regardless of the types of identification, it is important to notice that difference in status is portrayed as difference in quantity and is accompanied by a suppressed feeling of superiority in regard to the new Russian man, which acts as a spring whose release makes the whole business of imaginary comparison enjoyable and therefore doomed to be repetitive.

### **The Culture of Symbolic Shortage**

The comparative element, fundamental for jokes, certainly, makes it very tempting to explain the quantitative aspect that dominates the new Russian style through the lens of yet another theoretical frame in which comparison plays a very important role. The frame in question is, of course, Veblen's concept of 'conspicuous consumption', with the 'canon of honorific waste' as its main feature (Veblen, 1967: 116). Despite multiple similarities between consumption patterns of Veblen's leisure class and students' new Russians, there is at least one, very essential, difference. Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' is an *emulative process* rooted in the operation of comparison of one's consumption patterns with that of the group with a higher economic, social, political, etc. status (Veblen, 1967: 31). Unlike this 'invidious' and 'aggressive' conspicuous consumption aimed to comparatively reproduce *already established* patterns of a desired lifestyle, the imaginary consumption of students, as I argue, is rooted in the operation of *projection* of their own system of dispositions on to the new Russian subject of consumption, unfamiliar to them. Students' preoccupation with quantity in that respect has a logic quite different from the 'law of wasteful consumption'. In fact, it recalls more the strategy of the 'fashion dude' described by Simmel (1971). Being limited in number of fashionable signifiers, the dude achieves a difference of quality through the means of 'the quantitative intensification' of the elements which 'are qualitatively common property' of the class the dude belongs to (Simmel, 1971: 304). So do the students: the qualitative limits of the post-Soviet vocabulary of consumption are overcome through quantitative changes in the grammar of consumption.

Bourdieu may provide us with another clue to understanding the objective aspect of the 'quantitative' factor so vividly demonstrated by students. Describing the patterns of the working-class cultural consumption, Bourdieu points out that when the need to impress someone arises, it is realized via increasing the *quantity*, not the *quality* of the product (1989: 194–5). In the remaining part of the article, I will try to explain the logic of association of working-class cultural habits with the consumption style of the new Russian elite.

Let me recall for a moment Bourdieu's distinction between the taste of luxury and the taste of necessity (1989: 177). The main characteristics of these two types of tastes express the level of the subject's dependence on the material conditions of existence. While the taste of luxury reflects an individual's ability to move beyond consumption limited by the satisfaction of one's primary needs, the taste of necessity represents one's having to adjust his or her aesthetic views to the reality of daily demands. From this point of view, the juxtaposition of the Soviet man's *ordinariness* vs the new Russian man's *excessiveness* perfectly demonstrates the students' understanding of the structural difference between luxury and necessity. The issue is, why is luxury understood as a person's ability to have ten *gold rings* instead of ten paintings by Joan Miro or, at least, Ivan Shishkin?<sup>10</sup>

The concept of homologies and their effects is helpful in this situation. As Bourdieu points out, the hierarchy of tastes and goods within the domain of culture corresponds to an adequate hierarchy of property and power relations within the domain of the economy. Thus, the position of the subject within the field of cultural production reflects and reproduces his or her position within the field of economic (and political) power. It is this mirroring effect of the field of cultural *production* that Bourdieu defines as 'homological' (1993: 44–5).

Homologically speaking, it is reasonable to expect that institutionalization of the *new Russian* elite, its struggle with other politically and economically powerful groups, is to be confirmed by the elite's corresponding institutionalization within the field of symbolic representations. To put this another way, the economic power of the new Russian men had to be translated in the students' essays into a homological field of cultural production typical for this group. However, with the rare exception of the 'elegant new Russian gentleman' (who, in fact, is mentioned only by very few students), this field of the new Russian cultural *production*, the field of distinctively *new* Russian objects, is absent in the students' comments. Moreover, unlike descriptions of a 'typical' new Russian, scarce portraits of the 'stylish gentleman' depicted by the respondents are remarkably silent about his cultural preferences. It remains unclear in which cultural practices and objects his elegance finds its representation.

In that respect, the New Russians, taken as a sociological whole, differ significantly from culturally and ideologically distinctive groups of the Soviet period – be they political dissidents or, for instance, underground rock musicians. The symbolic power of these groups was rooted in their ability to maintain their status somewhat 'outside of the symbolic order' established during the period of late socialism (Yurchak, 1997: 169) – first of all by creating an alternative system of (counter)cultural production. Thus, for example, the Soviet dissidents, in a process of a long struggle with the Soviet authority, managed to create a more or less effective field of cultural industry: with *samizdat* as their communication tool, with anti-Soviet and mainly pre-socialist symbols as their cultural vocabulary, and with their own group of 'experts' able, when necessary, to correct ethical and aesthetical

deviations from the dissident standards (e.g. Aksenov et al., 1997: 186–9). Unlike other ‘cultural dissidents’, the new Russians had neither the same amount of time nor the same repository of distinctive symbolic goods upon which to build their own (counter)culture.<sup>11</sup> It is precisely this situation of the post-Soviet symbolic shortages grounded in a problematic condition of the post-Soviet cultural production along with students’ own cultural habits and system of cultural dispositions that determined young people’s difficulty with the symbolic framing of the new rich class.

Besides its underdeveloped character, the field of post-Soviet cultural production began, in the second half of the 1990s, to demonstrate a tendency that significantly differs from the situation of geographic, economic and stylistic ‘displacement’ of domestic popular and high culture by western mass culture that had happened in the early 1990s (see e.g. Condee and Padunov, 1995). As many Russian commentators indicate, the deconstruction of the ‘Grand Style of the Soviet Epoch’ was replaced by 1997 with a profound cultural nostalgia for the ‘best and brightest moments’ in the recent socialist past (Ivanova, 1997). This nostalgic tendency, this ‘return to oneself as an outcome of a new identification’ (Ivanova, 1998: 77), this invention of the post-Soviet past, initiated and undertaken mostly by Moscow-based TV and radio stations, publishing houses and show-business producers is only more significant given the fact that penetration of alternative (mostly Western-based) cultural styles into the daily life of Russian people outside big cultural centres was not as nearly as pervasive as it was in the major cities (see e.g. Pilkington, 1998: 382). Thus, the absence of a proper *new Russian* cultural industry coincides with (or maybe even manifests itself as) a parasitic exploitation of the cultural legacy of the previous period,<sup>12</sup> thereby making especially clear the double nature of the post-Soviet condition, in which ‘persistent continuities with the socialist order are at least as striking as disruptions of it’ (Verdery, 1999: 24).

This post-Soviet culture of symbolic shortage might explain to a certain degree why the students used the same Soviet status-objects to portray an essentially different consumer group. The objects of their choice, while being Soviet, were not socialist; while being widely used to indicate one’s status, they were not, however, used to manifest one’s ideological preferences. The same logic of the post-Soviet past seems to be true also in regard to the emphasis that students put on the new Russians’ cultural *consumption*. Unlike in the case of ‘cultural dissidents’, the message now is to be read not in *what* is being said or performed but *how*, or rather, in *what quantity* it is consumed.<sup>13</sup>

The young respondents appeared to understand very well the homological connection between the social/economic location of the new Russian subject and his or her cultural tastes. However, the absence of the institutionalized field producing the new Russian culture forced the students to make a logical move – from the symbolically vague field of *economic production* to the symbolically transparent field of *cultural consumption*, thereby missing altogether the field of the *cultural production* that is supposed to

deliver new symbols. The students' accent on quantity has its roots in the missing link of the culturally productive field. For consumption can be communicative (e.g. signifying) as long as one pattern of it differs from another one. The interpretative difficulty emerges when a small group of consumers attempts to appropriate the objects that belong to the field of *mass* cultural production. By establishing the field of '*restricted large-scale*' cultural production, i.e. the field of over-priced, exclusive, *elitist kitsch*, the students overcame this impasse.

As is well known, the function of *restricted* cultural production is to maintain the symbolic boundaries of the cultural producers, while the task of *large-scale* cultural production is to increase the profit of the producer(s). Limited access to the cultural products in the restricted field is the main condition of its existence: the (un)availability of the goods produced within this circle is ensured by control over the 'rarity of the instruments with which they may be deciphered' (Bourdieu, 1993: 120). Correspondingly, the popularity of mass cultural production is secured by the constant reproduction of the standardized forms of cultural perception.

This binary scheme works perfectly well when applied to a society that has a stable/stabilizing social structure and, consequently, a hierarchy of cultural tastes. However, it faces certain difficulties explaining a post-Soviet society that is going through a stage of comprehensive transformation. The new Russian man in the crimson suit with a huge gold neck-chain and a cellular phone in his hand with a ring on each finger easily avoids a clear-cut cultural taxonomy. His conspicuous consumption of goods that belong to the field of large-scale cultural production is meant to non-homologically represent his belonging to the top of the economic hierarchy, that is, to the restricted circle of the 'lucky few'.

Several factors play an important role in turning *large-scale* socialist 'democratic luxury', as Gronow calls it (1997: 49) into *restricted* new Russian elitist kitsch. One of them reflects changes in culture in general. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of state socialism significantly undermined (at least in the first half of the 1990s) the then-existing hierarchies of cultural taste. To use Bourdieu's terms, one can say that *legitimate taste* was discredited politically and thus lost its classifying attraction. In a situation of cultural vacuum, the top of hierarchy was gradually occupied by *popular* and *middle-brow* tastes (Bourdieu, 1989: 16). This process was accelerated by a rapid circulation of elites themselves, which prevented the current-elite-in-power from taking time- and money-consuming measures in order to refine the instruments of their cultural consumption.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising then, that the main indicator of a person's high economic, social, or political status becomes the indicator traditionally used within the field of cultural consumption framed by various shortages – that is, *abundance*, monetary abundance first of all. In a situation of shortage of status-symbols, this monetary abundance manifests itself in the inflated prices of the already known status-objects. As a result, the taste of luxury, that is, one's distance from necessity, begins to express itself in one's ability *to have more* of the

same thing and *to pay more* for the same thing. The rules of the field of *restricted* production are imposed on the field of *large-scale* production, producing in the end a field of *restricted large-scale* production. The following joke is a perfect example of this logic:

Two new Russians meet, and one asks:

'Hey, Vasia, where did you get your nice tie?'

'At the Valentino store. Cost me \$1000.'

'Phew', the other says with contempt, 'I know a place where you could get exactly the same tie for \$2000!'<sup>15</sup>

The portrait of the new Russian man with a ring on each finger and a heavy gold cross on his neck certainly belongs to the same field of *restricted large-scale* production. Being limited by the number of signifiers, the students chose to increase the value of already familiar objects. By inflating the price, that is, by over-estimating the objects, they in fact shift the emphasis from *value* to *cost*, from stylistic dimensions of the new Russian objects to their positions on the price-list, or to the position of their owner within the field of production. In this moment, wealth/power becomes unmediated, that is, non-symbolized, and the students' discourse on the new Russian man's consumption choice is replaced by a discourse on the new Russian man's money.<sup>16</sup> The following quotation, for example, is remarkable for the absence of any concrete objects that the new Russian man buys; his 'power to buy *things*' in student's imagination is reduced to an abstract power to buy '*all possible things*':

The new Russian man is a very enterprising person who makes enough money to buy presents and all possible things for his wife and relatives, as well as friends abroad; he also can go abroad for expensive vacations. Almost everything in his life is reduced to money . . . (f-21)

Another student adds to this: 'The new Russian man is a man who can earn good money and who likes to show how well he lives and how fully he enjoys his life' (m-21). Yet another student, perhaps displacing her symbolic exasperation on to the new Russian man, writes: 'He likes to discuss only one topic – money, how he earns it and how he spends it' (f-20). The cycle *money-goods-money* thus seems to be perfectly completed. Having exhausted the symbolic potential of their Soviet past, the students regress to the primal signifier, with *inflated size* as its basic source of distinction.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

The sociological interpretation of the students' essays that I have attempted to undertake in this article helps to clarify several important aspects of post-Soviet consumption. First of all, changes in consumption patterns are seen to be the most important indicator of political changes. Second, the increased prominence of the role performed by consumption has caused serious modifications of its gender dimension. Contrary to the Soviet times,

when women were the main consumers, conspicuous consumption in the period of transition is closely associated with the figure of the new Russian man. Third and most importantly, the article tried to analyse the mechanisms that underline the students' imaginary picture of new (rich) Russians and a corresponding style of 'wealthy' consumption. As students' comments indicated, to a large extent an attempt to envision unfamiliar patterns of consumption brings with it reproduction of one's own cultural dispositions and habits. In a sense, students' construction of the new rich Russian man seems to follow the cultural logic of the Soviet consumption patterns, rooted in the experience of shortages. Being unable to easily come up with adequate cultural signifiers that could homologically represent the distinctive economic location of the new rich, students chose to follow the path of quantitative rather than qualitative representation, that is, they chose to express 'the taste of luxury' in terms of 'taste of necessity'. As I suggested, besides students' own cultural dispositions, the prominence of the quantitative factor reflects a bigger socio-cultural situation. The absence of a developed field of post-Soviet *cultural production* shifts the accent from symbolic production to symbolic consumption. At the same time, the limited number of new Russian status-objects, typical of the post-Soviet culture of symbolic shortage, logically results in 'quantitative intensification' of the old objects. The combination of these two factors (the personal history of the students and the cultural development of the society) might explain why in the students' essays the most fundamental feature that distinguishes the new Russian man is the amount of stuff he manages to accumulate. By inflating numbers, by increasing size, by enlarging amounts, the students tried to bridge an inevitable gap between the new Russian role-model and their own expectations rooted in the Soviet lifestyle.

### Notes

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1. Hereafter the letter in the brackets indicates gender of the respondent, while the figure indicates his/her age.
2. *Introjection* is usually understood as an attempt to make a piece of 'outer' reality into an indispensable aspect of the person's internal world (Klein, 1987: 116). In turn, *projection* traditionally is seen as 'the putting of a part of oneself into another person with whom one then identifies' (Klein, 1987: 58); such type of identification is known as *projective identification* (see also Mitrani, 1996: 23).
3. On introjection of discursive regimes see Born (1998: 381).
4. The computer mentioned by the young woman is a promising clue of an emerging new consumption pattern; however, it should not be overestimated, given that among 178 respondents she was the only one who associated a computer with the new life-style.

5. The students are not alone in this opinion. *Izvestia*, one of the most influential Russian newspapers stated recently, 'There is no reliable information about the sources of the "New" Russians' wealth'. The poll conducted by the newspaper among businessmen, state officials, lawyers, etc. (i.e. among the people who either have a 'new' Russian style of consumption or have a chance to monitor it first-hand) confirmed yet another view of the students – 84 percent of the newspaper's respondents thought that the sources of wealth were illegal (*Izvestia*, 22 April 1998).

6. One of the reasons for this emphasis on the new Russian man's excluding public image might be the students' own social origin. As I indicated, the majority of them were familiar with the new Russian style precisely through *publicly available* and *publicly displayed* images and stereotypes. One might expect that the *excluding* and *distant* character of the new Russians is the consequence of the students' lack of first-hand knowledge rather than a typical feature of the lifestyle in question.

7. At the end of the 1980s when people were desperately trying to invest their money into something able to retain its value through the economic changes, the biggest jewellery store in Barnaul, in order to reduce the crowd in the store, imposed a limit on purchasing gold merchandise. The limit was two gold items (usually neck-chains, wedding bands or earrings) per customer.

8. In his detailed portrayal of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, Michael Voslensky gives an extensive description of the elaborate ritual associated with telephone usage in the Soviet Union:

To a nomenklaturist a telephone is a status symbol and hence an object of pride. . . . A highly placed nomenklaturist must have at least six at his disposal. One is for internal communication and another is for communication with the outside world; both pass through the secretary's office. To prevent possible listening in, there are two other lines that do not pass through the secretary's office. Finally – and this is the nomenklaturist's greatest pride – there are two special government lines, one called *vertushka* and the other the *Vé-Che*. . . . [It was Lenin] who originated the vogue of the telephone. He had a small automatic switchboard (ATS) installed so that there should be no operators who might overhear the Kremlin leaders' conversations. Instruments with a dial were then a novelty and were called *vertushkas* (from '*vertel*', to turn). . . . *Vé-Che* is an abbreviation for *vysokochactotnyi* which means high-frequency. This is a government line for long-distance calls. . . . Because of the enormous distance covered by the VC network, the switchboard is not automatic. So you have to lift the receiver and tell the operator the town and VC number of the person with whom you want to be connected. . . . *Vertushka* and VC holders know very well that their conversations are being monitored, but that does not spoil their pleasure in belonging to the favoured few who have those instruments. (Voslensky, 1984: 207–8, 212)

Besides its ethnography, the passage is interesting in depicting the logic of the culture of symbolic shortage – when the number of status-objects (signifiers) is limited, their usage is based on structural, quantitative, rather than qualitative principles: the quantity of telephones is to make up for the lack of qualitative distinctions.

9. The choice of the designer is telling – Pierre Cardin was the only foreign designer who managed to establish productive relations with the Soviet authorities during the time of late socialism. In 1987 Cardin was even able to open what could be called a socialist version of a designer store named '*Ljuks*' ('*Lux*') in Moscow.

10. Ivan Shishkin is the painter whose realistic Russian landscapes were very popular and widely available in reproduction during Soviet times.

11. Olga Matich's recent study of the funeral rituals and symbols of the Russian Mafiosi proves the same thesis (albeit in regard to a different subject) about cultural endurance of the Soviet aesthetic and stylistic vocabulary in rituals of newly emerged social groups. As she indicates, the image of the bandit that the funeral monuments reveal is in tune with 'the elevated funeral ritual typical for [the style of] socialist realism' (Matich, 1998: 104). Despite their economic, political and cultural differences, the new rich Russians and the Russian Mafiosi experience the same symbolic problem – a lack of unique stylistic tools with which to make their distinction(s) obvious.

12. Elsewhere I define this cultural inability to symbolically express the on-going social changes (or already changed reality) accompanied by regression to the symbolic forms of the past period as 'the state of post-Soviet aphasia' (Oushakine, 2000).

13. There is a good empirical indication that seemingly supports my thesis that an emphasis on quantity of consumption (as opposed to quality), while being closely connected with actual availability of various symbolic goods, is nevertheless an issue of *taste dispositions*, limited by previous (actual or imaginary) practices of consumption. The architectural tastes of recent Russian immigrants settled in Brooklyn in 1991–6 might be a good example. As the *New York Times* reported, the Russianization of Manhattan Beach, the affluent Brooklyn neighbourhood, is accompanied by the introduction of peculiar architectural standards, too. As the paper remarked, 'It is not difficult to pick out the renovated or rebuilt Russian houses; one non-Russian resident classified the architectural style as "the fortress look". . . . Some new Russian buyers have simply torn down the existing homes and started over. Huge columned, brick structures seem to be a popular style' (23 September 1998, Section B).

14. In his study of taste, Gronow shows how the same task of the institutionalization of the tastes of the new elites was solved in the Soviet Union in 1930s in a more planned manner. As Gronow suggests, starting in 1934 the process of drastic modification of public taste and its hierarchy established a taste of luxury that represented a 'way of life that was lived by rich people sometime in the middle of nineteenth-century Europe – or rather a life which the Bolsheviks thought the rich had lived: champagne, caviar, chocolate, cognac, perfume . . .' (1997: 52). The top of the hierarchy was occupied by the canonized 'classical style'. Gronow writes: 'It was as if the history of literature, music and art has stopped sometime in the mid-eighteenth century . . .' (1997: 56). The chronological location of the roots of this 'taste of luxury' proposed by Gronow certainly can be a matter of dispute – for instance, Tschaikovsky's music, indispensable for the Soviet understanding of high culture, originated sometime in the late 19th century; the same holds true in regard to yet another epitome of socialist luxury – the 'Russian classical ballet', whose traditions were, in fact, shaped during several decades in the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th centuries. The important thing to notice, though, is the fact that the quick success of this campaign was determined (1) by borrowing ready-made cultural forms from cultural styles of previous periods and (2) by politically motivated and highly organized implementation of the new cultural standards. As I indicate, none of these cultural strategies was easily available for the new Russian elites in the 1990s.

15. There are more anecdotal cases of the same logic. One of the Russian newspapers described the way a Pavarotti concert was organized as a part of the celebration of Moscow's 850th anniversary. The concert was staged on the Red Square;

however, only 6000 people representing the Russian political, economic and cultural elites attended it. All of them, as the newspaper says, were given free tickets. Pavarotti was paid the same fee as he would receive for singing in a 100,000-seat stadium (\$1,000,000). The large-scale production, thus, was lifted to the level of a culturally exclusive event by limiting physical access to it (*Argumenti i facti*, 1998, No 15).

16. It is hardly surprising that none of the students mentioned such common attributes of the 'New' Russian life-style as, for example, collecting art objects, rare books, weapons, cars; or the ability to own aeroplanes and helicopters; or the ability to live abroad while doing business in Russia, etc. The students did not mention even such 'a must' of the new Russian men as personal bodyguards. The already mentioned poll conducted by *Izvestia*, for example, defines this indicator as *the most important* in the hierarchy of the 'New' Russian symbols (77 percent of respondents), followed by 'a cottage in suburbia' (76 percent) (*Izvestia*, 22 April 1998). The absence of bodyguards in the Soviet period of the students' life and their relative inconspicuousness might explain the absence of this symbol in the students' descriptions. The importance of expensive clothes in this poll occupies the last line and is mentioned only by 33 percent of 1130 respondents. Another important characteristic of the new Russians that remained almost unnoticed by the students but was found to be very essential for the new Russian men's activity is what Dinello recently called the *F-connection*, that is, 'the relationship among financial outlets, firms, friends, families, and favorites' (Dinello, 1999: 24). It is precisely this set of connections and networks that, while remaining unsymbolized and non-transparent, at the same time forms, frames and structures the new Russians as a group. Significantly enough, knowledge about these constitutive elements and most important symbols of the new Russian style can be attained mostly through one's personal encounters with it – an experience that students did not have.

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