

Material(ized) Desire: Forging a Subject of Consumer Ideology in Postsoviet Russia

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These birds will be changed into men. I foresee in this several disadvantages. Many of those men will commit sins they would not have committed as penguins. . . . But in order not to impair human liberty, I will be ignorant of what I know, I will thicken upon my eyes the veils I have pierced, and in my blind clear-sightedness I will let myself be surprised by what I have foreseen.

Anatole France, *Penguin Island*

I. "The way we were"

If, as Althusser and Žižek argue, ideology is indeed external, i.e., predicated on material practices, then it is safe to say that until the late 1980s the ideology of consumerism was virtually absent in Russia or, to put it more cautiously, existed as disembodied desire. Soviet patterns of consumption were markedly different from their Western counterparts. A sociologist from the Russian Center for Public Opinion and Market Research (VCIOM) argues that, among consumers, the idea of prosperity and material well-being was expressed in terms of a large number, rather than a wide variety, of commodities. Material goods were identified with products, but not brands, with some products serving as symbolic indicators of social status. The upper strata differed from the mainstream groups not so much in terms of their lifestyle as in terms of the quantity (and, at times, quality) of the same basic comforts (Levinson 3).

At the same time, Western-made products always possessed a "surplus value," their symbolic status being a constitutive part of the "myth of the West," which had no single geographic referent. They functioned both as symbols of access to the consumer dreamland beyond the Iron Curtain, and as visual signposts of differentiation between privileged and "ordinary" Soviet citizens.¹ Soviet Russia's "second economy" (the black market) both contributed to the myth by circulating smuggled Western products, and made effective use of their symbolic status, often attaching Western brand name labels to Soviet-made goods. The absence of advertising, while a result of product shortage and homogeneity in consumption patterns, in its turn contributed to the mythical aura of Western products.

When Soviet consumers were finally exposed to Western shops and products in the late 1980s, they experienced shock at the variety of things on display.² Initially, however, the array of goods seemed to the majority not

only psychologically overwhelming, but also "irrational, economically redundant, and the nuanced differences between the brands were perceived as serving the [. . .] perverted needs of some consumers" (Levinson 3).

Early advertisements, for the most part, were copied from American or European ones, or made by Russian advertising firms on the basis of detailed instructions from Western companies. Russian economists and cultural producers point out that campaigns to recruit potential consumers from former Soviet citizens often misfired. The two most often quoted reasons are the viewers'/readers' ignorance of the products themselves³ and the "otherness" of the very language of advertising. In fact, Western ads were often criticized for their excessive "pushiness" and their nakedly cajoling nature. Thus, the unsubtle sexual allusions characteristic of many Western ads were typically singled out as an alien element preventing Russians from responding to the advertisements. It is more plausible, however, that the rejection and ineffectiveness stemmed from the *form* in which messages were offered to the consumer, rather than the visual content of ads. To use the Žižekian model, consumers saw right "through" the images, without being caught up in the process of signification as addressed specifically to them.

Both temporally and semiotically, the arrival of ads as pleasure-promising signs was linked to two major and simultaneous shifts in Russian culture at large: the gradual replacement of the old, logocentric culture with a new, visual one, and the social displacement of high culture to the periphery. The new visual reality of advertisements on TV and in new glossy magazines brought about new anxieties contributing to the already existing experience of rupture with the past—political, economic and cultural.

Native-made magazine ads, and especially TV commercials, tried to establish essential links with the audiences' experience, mentality, and expectations by reinforcing cultural stereotypes. The old, displaced patterns—high culture and reliance on verbal narratives combined with specifically Russo-Soviet cultural and historical clichés—stepped in. The two best-known Russian attempts to create native TV commercials were the MMM series, executed in a quasi-documentary "verist" style that reproduced "typical Soviet citizens" on the screen, and Bank Imperial's "artsy" commercials, shot in pseudo-historical style which their producers dubbed "cynical romanticism." While the first purported to educate former Soviet citizens in practical issues, the second worked in the genre of "historical" anecdotes, supplying them with a luxurious *mise-en-scène* (Figure 1).

Despite their strikingly different stylistic execution and cultural references, both commercial series operated with the comforting idea that one can succeed in new economic conditions "just the way you are" simply by



Figure 1.

accepting the new rules of the game, i.e., trusting the reality of the promises and inventive advertising techniques. Indeed, a mass influx of investments, especially in the MMM bonds, proved that the rhetoric of commercials "made by Russians" and targeting people "just like you" touched both community feeling and a desire that had been present long before the means of satisfying it appeared. However, also present were deeply embedded cynicism and distrust of any propaganda or the sale of any myth.

In the process of educating the Russian consumer, envy had to be cultivated and channeled, desire structured, and skepticism used to cater to the potential consumers' feeling of superiority and sophistication. Mere availability and materiality of the goods beyond glossy images were able to "recruit" only a small portion of the population with adequate resources. This has been especially true of intellectuals (constituting a fairly large percent of the emerging middle class and the "new rich"), for whom any societal change always presented itself loaded with loyalty to spiritual traditions, cultural superiority, and an ambiguous attitude toward material comfort.⁴

II. Cultural Revolution, Part Two⁵

The case of the newspaper *Kommersant*, which constructed new consumers virtually overnight, is very suggestive, if not typical, of the advertising strategies of the last decade. The paper featured stories and images along the lines of "A normal person begins his day with a glass

readily accepted as "natural." The discourse of "normality" was positioned at the intersection of the rhetoric of the "civilized" way of life and that of material comfort. While the first was flattering to the educated part of the New Russians, the second fed into their deeply-rooted desire to become like "them" (i.e., Europeans and Americans) in their appearance and habits. The rhetoric of an "educated choice" was effective: the audience not only bought the (self)image that was offered to it, but the instructions concerning what "normal" people should eat, drink, wear or drive proved to be powerful mechanisms of group cohesion. In this manner, the process of acquiring suggested products preceded and defined the formation of this consumer group's new identity. Since the only available model of new identity was that of a fictional Western businessman, any image/sign of consumer goods, services, or entertainment was to be associated with the new identity as a change in social status. The myth of the West in its split Soviet version—as a land of material abundance and of personal freedom—was the original desire/sin/guilt into which the emerging ideology of consumerism was projected.

The equation of "normal" with "Western" in the ads is reinforced by the context in which they appear. Modeled on Western magazines, Russian editions are usually published outside of Russia, on glossy paper, and feature articles that effectively collapse information and advertisement. In a way, such editions are "infomercials" (Andersen 31-32) in which *haute couture* and cigar exhibits flow seamlessly into stories about the rich and famous who consume them. For the Russian consumer whose previous reading experience was associated with low-quality paper and bleak grayish illustrations, this visual glamour triggers powerful identification with "normal" Western quality.

But the new mythology had to be both materialized and adjusted to the system of cultural assumptions and values, an important aspect of which was always the cult of (high) culture. Visual signifiers of the desirable world of things, alluring because of their texture, lustre, and color, were to modify but not cancel the existing myths. What is striking about advertisements in post-Soviet illustrated magazines for the *nouveaux riches* are the strategies of combining the materiality of images with "eternal" (non-material) values. The pleasure of possession is consistently linked with the pleasure of knowledge and sophistication.

The new consumer ideology in its visual instantiation thus had to balance two equally powerful myths: the myth of high culture as the ideal and the myth of the West as the material. Both function as reference systems in Williamson's sense, i.e., as sources of visual image and cultural associations/assumptions transferred onto the advertised product (31). But when

captured within the single frame of an advertisement, these two poles of reference also function as peculiar "fields of vision." Far from concealing their double constitution, advertisements work through internal splits and tensions in the production of meaning.

Lacan's concept of "dompte-regard"—the "taming" of the gaze by the visual image—helps to illuminate the close link between the emergence of visual culture and the development of consumer ideology in 1990s Russia. According to Lacan, "[w]hat determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 106). Lacan posits the scopophilic drive as the site of desire, substitution, unfinalized subjectivity, and envy. "Invidia," which, as Lacan quite astutely reminds us, derives from the Latin "videre," is thus a mechanism of the subject's (self)-positioning and (self)-centering.

As the case of the *Kommersant* campaign suggests, Russian readers "recognized" themselves in the pattern of everyday behavior, rather than taking it as a model for the constitution of new identity. The existing fetishism of Western products as signs of both the enviable lifestyle and the desirable (i.e., "normal") identity presented itself in the guise of an always-already existing "me." While any direct address to the potential consumer would have been perceived as a lie or a message "not addressed to me," the rhetoric of "you know what you are; just bring out the normal person in you—recognize yourself in the image" triggered ideological fantasy.

Lacan's "mirror stage"—an image of the child in front of the mirror who is unable to realize its independent existence vis-à-vis its reflection but identifies with the image to get an impression of the integrity of its ego—captures, if only metaphorically, the process of this self-centering of the post-Soviet Russian through the visual:

The mirror stage is a drama [. . .] which manufactures the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image [. . .] to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity. (Lacan, *Écrits* 3)

Clearly, the Russian consumer is a child with a twist: sophisticated in reading myths, yet unable to position himself vis-à-vis the fragmented values and mythologies he is confronted with. To "recruit" this consumer "in the making," ads constitute a *mise-en-scène* of desire through a skillful arrangement of objects loaded with mythological associations. The viewer/reader is thus positioned both outside the frame (as a cynical reader of myths) and inside it (as the subject who "always-already" knows the value of the

goods). The equivalence between the two is established through the play between a desire for the material and a desire for the ideal/culture.

Within this framework, it is precisely the oscillation, the fluidity of relationship between the ideal of culture and the materiality of its artifacts that makes the interpellation effective. The tension between the two is resolved through the reader's gaze: "staring" back at you through its alluring ambiguities, the picture makes "you" the point of intersection of material fetishism and cultural sophistication. It is "you" who recognize the essence/the center/the ideal.

Verbal messages play a significant role in the process of the centering and the self-recognition of the subject. Not only do they target the reader who still believes that the most important information is contained in the Logos, but the stories that verbal messages tell serve as navigating devices in the flow of meaning within the ad. The following analysis is intended to describe both the strategies of positioning the consumer/reader vis-à-vis the image and the interplay between visual and verbal rhetoric in ads.

III. "The divine crispness of money"

The advertisement for Continent Bank (Figure 2) illustrates the strategies of channeling subjectivity into the established framework of associations by creating multiple frames of identification and meaning and constructing multiple oppositions. A Stradivarius violin (identified

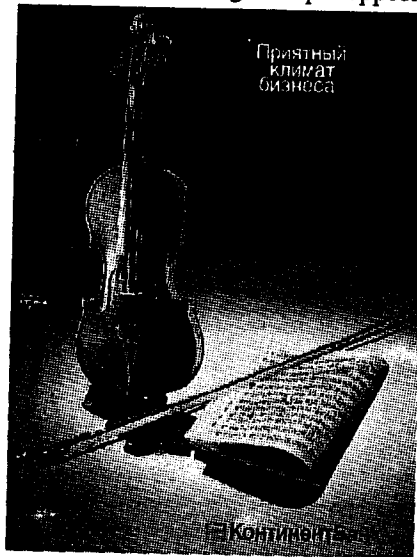


Figure 2.

as such by the inscription of the date and the name of the master—"Antonio Stradivarius, 1716") as a material object shows the wear and tear of time, its surface polish long faded. But its value as a symbolic cultural object created by a genius has no equivalent. The image, thus, attempts to preserve the "aura" of the object, its uniqueness and authenticity. Reflections in the glass surface give objects in the image three-dimensionality, volume, restore the "aura" threatened by the print reproduction. The link that the image makes between the violin and the bank is based on the transference of

the meaning of cultural tradition, the timeless quality of performance. The bank partakes of the violin's aura.

Another split, built on the first one, exists between the eternal value of classical music and the object itself, which has a market price. Far from concealing the idea of the market, the ad openly uses it to establish the split value of the violin: the higher its market price, the higher its symbolic value. This seeming contradiction, in fact, increases the symbolic value of the violin as a transitional carrier of desirable associations for the bank. The Continent Bank clearly markets itself as a financial service for *connoisseurs*, hence its name, drawing on the *European* cultural tradition. The appreciation of music (by "you," a sophisticated consumer) is a metaphorical link between the uniqueness of the Stradivarius violin and its extremely high symbolic value, and the "unique" services Continent Bank can provide. The link between the two is captured by the verbal message: "The pleasant atmosphere of business."

While seemingly leaving the potential bank customer "free" to choose, the image already projects him into the image. There are three material objects in the ad: violin, bow and sheet music. The only element missing is the musician, *you*, who will step in for a stellar performance. And because the tools are perfect, so should you be (by making the right choice). The verbal message, then, is far from an abstract, unaddressed comment: the pleasant atmosphere is there for *you*, and while admiring the superb work of the Italian master, you are already the subject of the "pleasant atmosphere" of music/business.

The ad, therefore, brings together "natural" possessiveness⁷ as a positive and culturally legitimate quality (after all, money is there to enjoy the beauty) and the Russian cult of high culture and true art—traditionally viewed as incompatible with mercantilism. Within the system of signification of the ad, the violin functions as a mortise,⁸ transferring its symbolic value onto the bank. From the point of view of the reader, however, the violin works as the "gaze of the other": the legitimizing culture that the knowing consumer cannot but appreciate. The eternal opposition of "art for art's sake" vs. "the art of sale" finds its reversed reflection/resolution in "business for profit" vs. "business for atmosphere/beauty."

A similar strategy is used in the El Dorado Supermarket advertisement (Figure 3), which bridges consumption and culture through an interplay of the visual and the verbal. But the latter plays a much more important role here: the information about the store establishes the initial framework within which the visual images work. As the text on the right informs the reader, the supermarket sells exclusively products from France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. In addition, the store also features a restaurant with "European



Figure 3.

cuisine." The main visual attraction of the ad—the young saxophonist—both illustrates the Western character of the supermarket and links it to the cultured taste of its future customers. Atmosphere again is the point of transition, a peculiar invisible mirror between market and pleasure.

In terms of composition, the spatial play between the visual and the verbal message is also resolved in favor of the visual. The color match between dark blue of the night sky and the lettering of the supermarket name, on the one hand, and between the golden of the saxophone, the musician's bow tie and the belt, the butterfly and the lit windows, on the other, establishes a flow of meaning from the left to the right of the ad. The otherwise prosaic food consumption is made appetizing and erotic in the musician's "oral play" with his saxophone. The pleasure the supermarket supplies is naturalized through the physical movement of our reading processes. Once the élitist status of the supermarket is established, the ad substitutes direct marketing of products for the "atmosphere." Bright colors and the Romantic musician become the basis for appeal and identification.

In the ad for the Moscow Bank Visa card (Figure 4), the play between market and pleasure is inscribed into the very structure of the visual message. Balancing between eroticism and consumerism, the ad makes the female body the centerpiece of the two-page-wide image. Inscribed onto the girl's body, the word "visa" equates the two in their desirability and availability.

The meaning of the girl's stretched body, however, is not reducible to a mortise. a *tabula rasa* for the visa inscription. which transfers its meaning of

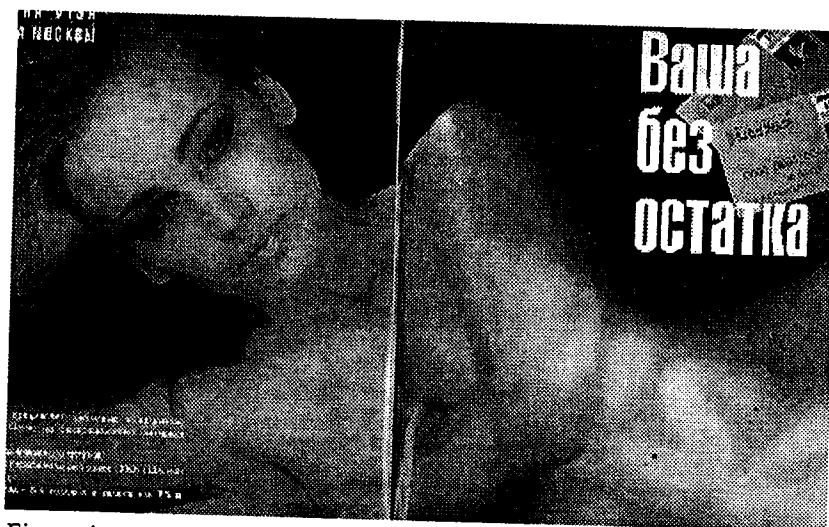


Figure 4.

thereby, the point of interpellation. The desire is "already" there, floating between the welcoming body/card and your eyes. By merely looking at the girl/card, you already possess both. Visa will empower you to win women's love.

But the verbal message, while drawing on the girl-visa transference, shifts the meaning from the finalized possession/consumption to longing and Romantic love: "You've been waiting for this for a very long time.... You were hoping that the one which only yesterday seems so unattainable and could not belong to you completely, would finally become yours . . . Totally yours! Visa card from the "Moscow Bank." The titillation of ambiguity (Is it the girl? Or the card?) is supported by grammatical means (in Russian, both "visa" and "card" are feminine nouns). The girl's dreamy eyes match the "hazy" lettering of the word "card."

The girl, then, is not reducible to her body (she is the "only one," the one you've been dreaming about), just like the card is much more than a piece of plastic that can buy things. Just as true passion can never be completely satisfied, so the possession of the card will open up insatiable desires. By eroticizing an educated business choice, the ad creates a surplus meaning which both empowers and appeals to the reader who knows the value of his dreams. It is, indeed, the platonic ideal, accessed through plastic (card).

The "Tuscany per Donna" perfume ad (Figure 5) is a rather unconventional image. Advertisements targeting female consumers in Russia, for the most part, gravitate toward a Romantic image of femininity, with the ideals of domesticity and gentle passivity serving as framing qualities. The



Figure 5.

"Tuscany per Donna" instead links the perfume with the idea of the "essential" woman as an active, passionate and seductive *femme fatale*. The main color correspondence is crimson, which links the woman's hair, shadows on her face, and her earring with the perfume flask.

The woman's hair and the flask are inverted reflections of each other, with the verbal message ("We introduce Tuscany per Donna") in the middle working as a mirror. The visual structure splits the meaning in two complementary directions: the perfume brings out a Donna in you (Tuscany *per* Donna) and is, then, just a tool. But this new identity is inseparable from the flask (which is the reflection of which?). The perfume presents itself as "always already" the essence of femininity.

The quote from Dante's *Divine Comedy* at the top of the image ("Unrestrained, it hurries the flame to the moon") works as a multivalent frame of reference. Pointing to the Italian origin of the perfume, it transfers onto the perfume the symbolic capital of classical poetry. Moreover, Dante's Beatrice and "Donna-of-the-perfume" become one ("Was that the perfume that inspired Dante?"). This formal mythological correspondence, however, does not exhaust the significance of the quote. Instead, it creates a tension between various parts of the composition. The opposition between the flame and the moon (heat and cold) interprets the relationship between the perfume and the woman on the one hand, and the woman and the young man whose blurred image is in the background of the picture, on the other. If the perfume gives the Donna its flame, the Donna/you (wearing the perfume) will bring the flame to the man. Conveniently, he is depicted in the (cold) greenish-white color of the Moon, as opposed to the shades of dark red enveloping her.

Once the Woman "absorbs" the color/flame/passion from the perfume, she herself becomes the flame. The "natural" attraction between the woman and the young man works to naturalize the role of the perfume as the "container" of those passions and desires. The quote, then, merely suggests a



Figure 6.

frame of reference. But once the quote is read/recognized by you, it becomes your story/romance.

The ad for the Caligula Boutique (Figure 6) makes culture the natural landscape for the ideology of the market. The visual focus of the image is split between the young man in the foreground, wearing the advertised Italian clothes, and the Coliseum as the symbol of Italian culture and tradition, in the background. The link between the product and the mortisè is again established by the verbal claim: "We've been dressing the élite for 2000 years." Thus, by choosing the product (Italian clothes) you, naturally will join the élite. In this respect, it is

interesting to note that in Russia, a cultural knowledge of Rome/Italy as the bearer of a millennium-long tradition of literary and artistic achievement precedes associations of Italy with style and fashion, a role traditionally filled by France.

The idea of becoming the élite is juxtaposed to the image of the crowd of tourists in the background. The young man/you clearly stands out from the crowd. Thus personality itself ("you are an individual") is constituted by the clothes you wear. But the visual opposition between the young man and the crowd also bridges the abyss between culture and market. In fact, the Coliseum is not just a symbol; it is also a cultural artifact, a tourist attraction, a part of "Italy for sale." The difference between the group of tourists ("them") and the young man ("you") is that they "buy into" culture by passively contemplating it, while he/you "buy" culture embodied in the "Caligula Boutique" clothes. Clothes themselves become constitutive of the "new you" on many levels. But the rhetoric of the image reverses the constitutive nature of consumer ideology: the differentiation between the "old" you and the "new" you (predicated on your knowledge of the symbolic landscape of the ad) precedes the differentiation between products.

The color match between the man's clothes and the material symbols of the Roman empire (the helmet, the leather armor) completes the transference of meaning from culture to its consumption: all objects are made of genuine, natural materials, all are tactile, all may be purchased. The "elevated" meaning of culture fetishism is transferred onto the fetishism of objects.

The image, however, has more than spiritual values to offer as a reference. The man's casual posture, his unbuttoned shirt, unfastened tie, and unruly "Italian" hair make an allusion to notorious Roman debauchery and unrestrained sexuality. Here again, the image of the young man serves as a mirror for the "new you" of the reader. The Roman as one with relaxed sexual mores, the stereotype of Italian masculinity, and the culturally legitimized sexuality make the interpellation effective. The ad, then, makes extensive and complex use of the cultural stereotypes and myth of Italy. The "pure" cultural desire/idea is given a tactile and flattering material expression.

The Club Royale ad (Figure 7) operates with a rather complex system of material signs. The left side of the image displays an array of "status" objects: an expensive, massive watch, a stylish lighter, a business organizer, casino chips, and a personal membership card. The function of these objects is to transfer the meaning of the night club for the elite onto the identity of the customers. The transition from the left to the right side of the image is effected by matching color. The white of the impeccable shirt blends into snow, the neon light—into the clear, blue northern sky. While seemingly the movement is from left to right (from culture to nature), both the verbal message in the left top corner ("The night continues") and the two bright red patches of color on the right (the only primary color in the ad) reverse the direction of the flow of meaning. The red catches the gaze, traps it, and brings us back to the red of the value on the casino chips. The dynamics of the images suggest that night, in fact, continues from nature to culture,



Figure 7.

bringing with it all the thrills—the meaning doubled in the intense blue color of the club membership card, which symbolically contains a condensed potion of all the dreams, desires and magic that the night/club has to offer.

But the right part of the image tells its own story. The Smirnoff vodka, associated with the business style of the New Russians, is positioned in the nature part of the ad. Indeed, it appeals to the “true Russian” spirit of comradeship, soul-to-soul conversations, and relaxed atmosphere. While the status-vodka belongs to the tradition of ritual drinking, it also becomes the magical mirror in which you can see the “new you.” The ad also presupposes the sophistication and cultural awareness of the new Russian business elite through an allusion to Anatole France’s novel *Penguin Island*. It simultaneously points to the allegorical aspect of the image (history of Western civilization) and to the reader who know/understands the allusion. The penguin (one of four in the ad) is *in the process* of being transformed into a civilized being. The tool of transformation is the Smirnoff bottle. But if the bottle is a magic space (for the penguin), it is also a mirror (for you). The image mobilizes the myth of the West, while linking it to the Russian/your bonding over vodka. The club, in short, appropriates the cultural meaning of Smirnoff vodka as the “right” kind of drinking that the night club hosts: with friends or business partners, “civilized” drinking, drinking which distinguishes you from the crowd of ordinary birds.

In France’s novel, the penguins’ quest for “identity” results in the creation of a corrupt society, with a narrow-minded, philistine population and dull-witted leaders. But if the zealots from Alca took the myth of the Enlightenment literally, the call for transformation in the Club Royale advertisement is safely placed at the cross-section of “appealing” discourses. Western appearance and prestige, world culture, and the Russian soul offer a “guarantee” against undesirable associations and by-products of consumer ideology.

IV. In Lieu of a Conclusion: All that Žižek Allows

According to Žižek, incoherence of the call as the major mechanism of triggering ideological fantasy is linked to the external nature of belief—“the external, nonsensical ‘machine’—automatism of the signifier, of the symbolic network in which subjects are caught” (36). In many Russian advertisements, decentered meaning becomes a mechanism for both avoiding straightforward and aggressive ads and of luring the consumer into the trap of recognition. Meaning is diffused, located at different points of the image, in the barrage of objects and words. Thus, space is left for interpretation, which becomes the mechanism of interpellation. The

viewer negotiates a place in that grid for her- or himself, never giving up the old, but finding a niche for himself in the changing symbolic order. Ultimately, however, the range of possible identities is predetermined, captured within a series of specific cultural references.

Ads, therefore, function as mirror-like reflections in which consumers (mis)recognize themselves in terms of familiar (and desirable, i.e., culturally legitimate) stereotypes. In the case of post-Soviet advertising, this *méconnaissance* positions itself in the gap between the "sophisticated me" and the "acquisitive me." The ads use various instantiations of the myth of the West as desire/site of interpellation. Through multiple visual links/oppositions the images establish correlations between the material and spiritual aspects of the appreciation of a new market reality. The myth of culture itself serves as a peculiar mortise, a point of reference for the interpollation of the reader. In particular, the rhetoric of sophistication and knowledge functions as an effective means of substituting culture for market, bridging the ideal and the material: art and market, culture as symbolic capital and culture as an artefact intended for consumption. The construction of subjects of consumer ideology in Russia ultimately takes the form of re-educating a "cynical reader of myths" into a "cynical consumer."

Notes

¹ The Berezka shops in major Soviet cities were ostentatious manifestations of the materialist hold on idea-driven and "classless" Soviet society. They sold Western consumer goods, but only for hard currency. Since possession of currency was prohibited by law, these shops, accessible only for foreigners or privileged Russians working abroad, were sites of both desire and envy disguised as "proletarian anger." The very name of the shops has cynicism inscribed in it: "Berezka" literally means birch-tree, i.e. the "natural" symbol of Russia/nness *par excellence*.

² The issue of these products' availability to the majority of the populace requires more examination than space allows. The ads analyzed in this essay target upper social groups ("new Russians") and the emerging middle class.

³ Transliterated foreign names often gave material for verbal puns and jokes. The fate of a "Vidal Sássoon" commercial is very revealing. Transliterated into Russian, the name almost literally spells "[I] saw the sucker?"—the association destroying any meaning of beauty and style which the commercial was trying to create (Bushueva 2).

⁴ The "spirit over body" philosophy was a feature of Russian culture from the tenth century onward. Flat and fleshless icon painting and moralistic religious literature were the only available artistic models until the seventeenth century. Soviet history added a new dimension to this split. In the 1950s—early 1960s the intelligentsia declared a war on the consumerism and philistinism associated with late Stalinist society. Ironically, the moral and politically subversive quest of the intelligentsia was epitomized in official Soviet condemnation of Western, and above all American, shallow pursuit of material well-being. Soviet shortages and drab quality thus not only acquired ethical value but also represented the spiritual "essence" of the Russian people.

⁵ In Soviet history, the term "cultural revolution" refers to the late 1920s-early 1930s Communist Party campaign to liquidate illiteracy among workers and peasants, as well as to the spread of a selected and sterilized version of high culture. Ironically, the late 1990s campaign of educating the Russian consumer uses similar rhetoric, albeit with the opposite economic and ideological goal in mind.

6 While orange juice as a product simply did not exist in the Soviet Union, the allusion to the newspaper is more complex. On the one hand, all national and local newspapers were delivered at a fixed time. More importantly, however, printed media was the forum of the single official point of view, radiating from the Kremlin via all newspapers across the Soviet Union. By referring to "your newspaper," *Kommersant* used "liberation discourse" to both occupy the empty center/model, and to congratulate the reader on making the right "choice."

7 In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger links advertising to the tradition of oil painting. Both convey "a vision of total exteriority" (87); both define "the real as that which you can put your hands on" (88); both celebrate "a new kind of wealth—which [is] dynamic and which [finds] its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money" (90). Pleasure of possession and tangible beauty become interchangeable and mutually reinforcing phenomena.

8 Although Robert Goldman's term "mortise" is similar to Williamson's use of "signifying object," Williamson describes the process of meaning transference as unidirectional (from the signifying object to the product), while "mortise" is a framing device, the very form of which, as Goldman notes, "provides a set of background assumptions that as an interpretive signpost to the ad's content" (72). The interpretation of the ad then moves away from structure and the hierarchy of meanings, depending instead on the interrelationship of the objects in the image.

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