

The villas of the 'New Russians': a sketch of consumption and cultural identity in post-Soviet landscapes

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From the early 1990s on the outskirts of Russian cities there have appeared developments of spectacular villas designed for the habitation of the rich. For the first time since the Revolution, we see the appearance of large, individually-owned houses for single families. The villas are interesting in two ways, for they represent not only a new form of real-estate property but also a new and evolving architectural style. Their raw, red brick facades give them a quite different appearance from the apartment blocks and weather-beaten log cottages of the Soviet era. What can be discovered from the villas about the cultural identity of the people who commission them, the business elites who are called the New Russians? The story I shall tell reveals the deep ambiguity of 'readings' of the material object, not only in general but more particularly when cultural identity is so contested as to be hardly achievable.

The New Russians can be imagined as a cultural entity with a shining, spectacular face and a shadowy side. There is a certain circularity in their relation with the villas, since if people are asked who the New Russians are

they will often reply that they are the ones who own that kind of conspicuous house. These new kinds of people are known to others by appearances, that is, when material signs of their presence are perceived in the post-Soviet landscape.

"We often see his shining automobile racing through the city at high speed. Sometimes his slightly plump figure in an expensive cashmere coat is glimpsed as he passes from his car to a restaurant or bank or through the mysteriously glittering doors of a luxurious office" (Kryshtanovskaya 1997).

It will be suggested that we are faced here, more starkly than in most cases, with the two-sidedness of 'identity', that is, the relation between identity as conferred by others and identity as felt and expressed from inside.¹

This paper will point to the difficulty involved in achieving cultural identity amid the contested values of contemporary Russia. In the context of consumption, it is useful to distinguish between mytho-historical self-images (interpretations of one's material objects that

provide a placement of the self in the world) and what is said about these same objects when no such mythic work has been achieved. The villas of the New Russians are the ground for two specific self-images, that of an *haute bourgeoisie* within an imagined 'historical' Empire and that of sleek, efficient Europeans within a globalized vista of modern business elites. I follow Miller (1994a: 313-6) in arguing that this contradiction of myths is neither inauthentic nor a cause of anxiety to the New Russians themselves. Indeed, there is a third villa style which is hyped as the most prestigious and popular, namely the combination of the two styles mentioned above (*Business in Russia* 1995: xxiv). The point, however, is that it is very often the case that none of these styles can be achieved. There is a slippage between the mental image and the physical fact of the building, often indeed a ludicrous gap. This reveals the unintended aspects of identity creation, the heaps and bits and pieces that have somehow ended up on the site, which of course are at the same time visible and 'readable' by everyone else. The slippage may be unintended but is no accident, since it reflects the general post-Soviet condition, which is characterized by uncertainty or irony towards any grand mythic projects.

Furthermore, the very materiality of the villas, which are built for a widely detested social category, the New Russians, becomes a fertile ground for acts of demonstrative negligence, even sabotage. Building teams are often drawn from the rural poor on temporary contracts, in other words from people who have no liking whatsoever for the rich in Russia's divided society. The New Russian client buys, let us say 'a jacussi', which indeed appears in the bathroom, but only to find that it is fatally cracked, somehow built in with insoluble plumbing problems, and surrounded by tiles which clatter from the wall at a touch.

Consumption is central to the creation of culture, since it involves a process of objectification which enables material things and

their discourses to become forms through which people have consciousness of themselves. Miller (1994b: 66) has written of the fundamental contradiction inherent in this process, of culture's tendency towards reification, whereby "forces which were developed to enhance human understanding may become instead the reified goal of life and obfuscate and oppress their own creators". The case I am considering should be located perhaps 'before' this stage, at the beginning of culture's work. The New Russians are struggling not so much with an already completed reification as with the conditions of achieving meaning, and here the contradiction of objectification is not just a question of alienation or appropriation but also the very basic problem of achieving the intended wholeness and coherence of the objects themselves. What kind of sign, even to oneself, is the villa which does not function as a house, or the jacussi which is broken? Before addressing this question, it is necessary first to deal with the category of the New Russians and the people denoted by the term.

The New Russians in the public landscape

The term 'New Russian' has its place among a host of epithets of difference, labels for people marked in this way as somehow alien from the unmarked, 'ordinary' Russian crowd. Gypsies, Caucasians, Tadjik refugees and many others are subject to intense stereotyping in the shifting matrix of economic-political competition, where images of shady deals intersect with broader categories of 'race' and nation (Lemon 1996, Humphrey 1997). But the New Russian idea engenders a further anxious ambiguity, as these new people are understood not to be intrinsically other but indeed to have derived and spun away from 'us', the unmarked mainstream, and furthermore it is felt that they may represent Russia's future.

The term 'New Russian' has evolved to acquire a definite and transferable meaning. It refers to an image of people with a new and alien mentality, people who are rapacious, materialist, and shockingly economically successful. In short, New Russians are 'new' because they do not give precedence to various hoary Soviet values, which are still mostly seen in a rosy hue by everyone else: the value of honest labour, of supporting the *kollektiv*, of respect for the working masses, of high-minded personal frugality, and above all the value of production of goods for the benefit of society as a whole. In this mode of talking New Russians are presumed to be 'corrupt'. I have often been told that no-one could become so rich in an honest way. This can imply a general moral condemnation, not simply an accusation of illegality, so it can include acting autonomously for one's own economic benefit, which was virtually prohibited one way or another in Soviet times, and leaping to riches by financial astuteness (in other words, as if by magic) rather than by the time-honoured methods of patronage and *blat*² (see Humphrey 1995). Business people do not share these perceptions although they are of course aware of them, and therefore the loaded term 'New Russian' is rarely used as a self-appellation, unless with an ironic smile as an explanation to outsiders.³

Recently, the term has come to be omnipresent in the media as a description which can be applied in spreading contexts. So New Russian can apply to Georgians, Buryats and so forth,⁴ and even to Gypsy children who skip school to set up their own money-spinning businesses, in this case described by their teacher with some admiration for their initiative (*Izvestiya* 8-6-1997: 5). By the late 1990s the term no longer necessarily implies condemnation, and indeed the tone in which it is used indicates much about the speaker. Nevertheless the intelligentsia still contrasts the New with Eternal Russians. For example, a theatre critic accuses a production of a play by Dostoevski of conjuring up luxury both

on the stage and off (the unbelievably large bouquet from the Mayor of Moscow, Yurii Luzhkov, the audience of political and commercial personalities, the noisy actors depicting "foreign Russians with their mad and light money, who are unable to create a form for themselves") and all this is incompatible with the "wild, nervous, thirsty condition of the Russian soul" (Maksimova 1997). But at the same time there are many young people for whom "lack of form" creates no anxiety at all. For them, it is enough of a goal to become rich. "New Russians, ah, there are so many wannabes", as one businessman said to me.

In sum, we have a term which refers to a new mentality and an aspirational status rather than to a defined social group, a term, furthermore, which is primarily used from outside. In many ways the category is not unlike *Homo Sovieticus*, the New Soviet Man, which was similarly an aimed-for goal for some, a rhetorical image, and an object of endless ironic musings from the intelligentsia. Interestingly, both categories are structured by gender, though in different ways. The New Soviet Man was accompanied by the New Soviet Woman, who stood at his shoulder as a 'lesser equal' in the same heroic mould.⁵ The New Russian, on the other hand, is pictured as a man, with glamorous female dependents. Advertising directed at New Russians supposes a penumbra of 'feminine' wives, mistresses and high-class prostitutes, who emphatically do not control businesses and whose time is pictured as being spent in consumption, home-making, manicures, self-improvement, and so forth. One even finds a rhetorical flourish dimly reminiscent of earlier inspirational efforts. For example, the glossy magazine *Domovoi* (Home) for March 1997 has a cover with a trailing flower and the words:

"Life is a pure flame,
and we live
with an invisible sun,
shining in us"

Perhaps because consumption plays such a large part in the presumed activity of the New Russians and because it is the women who do much of the buying, the whole category appears as an uneasy world, ferociously male on its leading edge and yet feminized inside by gendered objects designed to appeal to women. As will be discussed below, the villa itself has this same structure.

In short, I am suggesting here that 'New Russian' is a cultural category and that it is this changing cultural entity, rather than a presumed social reality lying beneath it, which should be used to explain the relation between the villas and the identity formation of the owners. Rather than visualizing the issue as a dualistic opposition between 'people' and 'things' (for discussion, see Miller 1994b) this paper asks: what kinds of culturally defined persons engage in the making of the villas? And we should be aware of these houses in the same cultural medium, that is by the term they are widely referred to, *kottedzhi* (a word resonant of refined repose, deriving from the English 'cottage', which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper).

However, a cultural account is not in the end adequate unless there is some knowledge of the social, economic and political circumstances in which the cultural phenomena arise, and this is fundamental when the achievement of culture is in doubt. Anthropologists often assume, perhaps because this is their experience of fieldwork, that culture is unproblematically in existence (whatever is there, is 'culture'). Yet the case of the New Russians shows clearly that culture, in this instance the convincing coincidence of the desired images with the material objects, has to be achieved and may be a process fraught with difficulty. To explain the construction of New Russian culture requires that an account is given of economic and social conflicts, though I shall confine myself to an extremely brief summary here.

The business, service and financial elite of Russia exists in a complex world peopled also

by government officials, elected politicians, the managers of former state (now 'privatized') enterprises, industrial workers and miners, state employees (such as teachers or doctors), state dependents (such as pensioners), petty traders, the armed services, and agricultural workers. The most notable fact about this elite is that it has money at its disposal, and yet pays very little tax,⁶ whereas virtually all other people are subject to late payment of miserable wages, payment in kind, or no wages at all, while the former state enterprises for which they work are subject to high taxation. During the 1990s, the Russian economy, especially outside the metropolis, has become substantially demonetized. There has been a mass turn to subsistence agriculture, even by city dwellers, and to barter. In circumstances where there is a general lack of money (when even unemployment benefit might be paid in fur coats⁷ or an electricity bill in saplings, Humphrey 1997), when poverty exists on a vast scale,⁸ and street prices are the same as those in Western Europe, it is not surprising that business elites are the object of intense envy and dislike.

The 'New Russians' can be broadly described in terms of wealth (rich),⁹ generation (young and early middle-aged), occupation (finance, business, services, crime),¹⁰ and lifestyle (innovative, western). They are thus culturally somewhat distinct from the old Soviet *nomenklatura*,¹¹ those managers and officials who have retained influence while also generally clinging to previous methods and values. The distinction holds even though many of the *nomenklatura* have become managers of privatized enterprises and in some cases become very rich,¹² and even though many of the New Russians are people who 'rose out of production', having gained experience (trading, negotiating, making contacts) in the previous Soviet enterprises and then turning this to good account in their new life as entrepreneurs. Now, very few New Russians make their money from manufacturing. Rather, they are importers, exporters, retailers, wholesal-

ers, bankers, financial consultants, racketeers, and so forth, and in these activities they both cooperate and compete with the other main economic players on the scene, the directors of enterprises, the aspirant petty traders, and the government officials.

It is difficult to be more precise than this in mapping cultural categories, such as New Russian and *nomenklatura*, onto the shifting and complex occupational categories of a diversifying economy.¹³ The children of the old Soviet elite have had an advantageous position from which to start up new business; the pervasive network of protection-patronage 'roofs' ties many a disparate institution together, while young, flexible and commercially astute people can try their hands in a number of contexts, moving say from illegal to legitimate business, from employee to entrepreneur, or from government official to banker, and back again. Nevertheless, a certain consolidation is becoming apparent. In the last few years difficulty in obtaining loans from banks and high taxation have created obstacles to setting up new firms, and there are indications that the number of small businesses has declined (Nelson and Kuzes 1995: 124). At the same time in particular localities, banks, government agencies and existing successful firms often operate tightly linked and mutually beneficial relations (Clarke, Ashwin and Borisov 1997). Still, close as these ties may be, the villas are a mark of cultural change: the old *nomenklatura* tend to be content with their already highly privileged apartments and country homes (*dacha*), while it is the business people, wielding wealth rather than power, who put much of their money into building villas.

The New Russians bear an ideological weight on all sides: they are the great hope for a new bourgeois transition to capitalist prosperity for the whole country and at the same time they are the reviled carriers of the erstwhile crime of speculation.¹⁴ This situation promotes an anxiety more acute than that created by the previous gulf between New

Soviet Man/Woman and the realities of life. The New Russians ponder the pages of *Vogue* and feel they should fashion themselves as better than their Western equivalents, because after all they are Russians, and in the vanguard. Hence the importance of styling salons and gyms, where physically new bodies are being pummelled and cosseted into shape. Perhaps never before have style magazines been taken so literally to heart, by people who missed out on generations of advertising: New Russians scrutinize *Vogue* because they think they should really look like that. Bearing the results in their newly thin (to the point of emaciation) bodies, the current wives produce themselves to excel over their lumpier sisters, the former wives, wannabes and no-hopers.

The spread of visualization in the Russian culture industry has given birth to a new social institution, the *prezentatsiya*, a media party for the celebration of new cultural events (a film or album release, an exhibition, a new journal) which normally takes place in the vacated halls of high culture, such as the Central House of Artists. Condee and Padunov (1995: 159-60) have remarked that the ritual of *prezentatsiya* "serves high culture with an eviction notice", replacing it if only for a night with the culture of titillation and spectacle. Here, and in the newspaper reports next day, New Russians become the visible emblems for the flashy ebullience of a new cultural wave. Yet there is an undertow of anxious relations, heard in the bitter accusations of heartless vulgarity from outside and the rumours of depression, anorexia, or desperation from inside (the last perhaps not unconnected with the insecurity of economic life and the dangerous ties with racketeers which virtually all businesses are forced to maintain).¹⁵

A journalist has written, "We call him the 'New Russian' and we suspect him of all possible vices. But to be honest, we know almost nothing of his life" (Kryshtanovskaya 1997).¹⁶ However, this 'ignorance' is no barrier to the construction of categories and does not mean it is impossible to identify actual people as

New Russians (people will say, for example, "My nephew is a New Russian"), but it does raise a problem of the cultural self-identity of people so described. How does one see oneself through a category that has been created largely out of negation? The social currency of stereotypical jokes about New Russians is that they operate 'in the opposite way to everyone else'. For example: two New Russians meet on the street in Paris. One says to the other,

"That is a very splendid tie you are wearing. How much did you pay for it?"

"One thousand francs."

"Oh you fool. I saw one round the corner for two thousand francs."

Material culture and identity in political context

The approach of this paper takes account of the theoretical critiques of a transparent notion of identity which sees it as integral and originating, as the unmediated emanation of a centred author of social practice. The concept of identity used here is not essentialist,¹⁷ but positional and strategic. The example of the New Russians is a good one to illustrate the point that identity does not signal some inner cultural 'self' underlying superficial differences and more genuine than the artificially imposed 'selves' given from outside. The New Russians have no shared history, or if they do, it is an extremely short one. We should accept that such an identity can never be unified and that in our times it is increasingly constructed through contradictory and contested discourses.

Stuart Hall (1996: 2) points out that what is needed in order to theorize identity is "not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice". However, this should not so much entail abandoning the subject as reconceptualizing it in a displaced or decentred position. This rethinking stresses

the concept of 'identification', which is the process by which subjects relate to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which that appears to entail. Identification operates by the "binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'" (1996: 3), which requires that what is left outside, its constitutive outside, in fact consolidates the process itself. In this case we are dealing with a most complex process, however, whereby those left outside may not only consolidate but may also undermine the meanings given by the New Russians themselves, thus creating fractured, never-quite-achieved images. The construction of a public exterior (the villas, the Mercedes cars, the designer clothes) which excludes others, is also the shining face on which the excluded inscribe their envy, jealousy, admiration, and so forth, thereby establishing certain socially-current meanings that even the New Russians themselves cannot ignore.

So what this paper points to is the difficulty and contingency of identification as a process. This is particularly the case with identification through the medium of large material objects like houses, which are subject to economic, political and other constraints, and which always sit in a landscape created by other interests and histories. The projection of cultural identity in such a situation is always 'too much' or 'too little', an over-determination or a lack (Hall 1996: 3), and in this case the misfit is especially interesting in relation to Russian history. It is argued here that the New Russians are engaging in a process of self identification, using the resources of history and European culture to represent themselves to themselves. But essentially this success of this process is dependent on the relation of New Russians with political powers that can sustain them. The further one moves from a political metropolis, the weaker and more incoherent this self-identity becomes, contested and laughed-at from outside, and incapable of containing and subsuming the objects to its own interpretations. Here

another process takes place, a default consumption, whereby the material objects, appropriated one by one, themselves appear as sufficient, as almost un-reinterpreted things, to be appropriated for 'what they are'. This process I call 'content-consumption', that is, content as distinguished from form. With this process, rather than cultural identity being created through re-interpreting objects in the micro-world of cultural understanding of the metropolis, here the goods themselves confer their identity on their owners ('the man with the Mercedes,' 'I am the sort of person who has a *kottedzh*).

The attitude this latter process reveals is founded partly on the inability of a particular group to re-mythicize objects culturally,¹⁸ and partly on a more pervasive post-Soviet eclecticism, an anti-utopian signalling which subverts any grand myth (Boym 1994: 250). Now it is true that in a few of the most sophisticated metropolitan villas, where the owners may be financial 'sponsors' of conceptual artists or film-makers, there is a radical eclecticism which is a consciously postmodernist statement. But in the provinces something quite different seems to be going on, a plainly acquisitive 'content consumption' that is more like a fall-out of Soviet-era Socialist Realism, the anti-aesthetic which lingered into the 1970s and 80s as the naturalist depiction of 'reality' but bereft of the Stalinist myth which had inspired it (Groys 1993). In this case 'content consumption' cannot be regarded as a culturally creative gesture, insofar as it cannot attain style and ignores form.

The above implies that it would be wrong to suppose that our task is to discover what New Russian cultural identity is, as if 'it' were a whole 'thing' waiting in limbo, ready for analysis. Rather, we should be looking at the historically-formed contexts where affirmations of identity appear or are made evident. The building of new houses is evidently a quite specific context. Consumption here, instead of being constituted as entirely separate from production (i.e. as an activity only of

choosing or receiving already constituted objects like in Soviet times) is promoted by real-estate agents as a wonderfully creative matter. The client is encouraged to intervene in the production of the villa as a whole object. Villas are constructed and marketed in Russia as *repertoires* of parts, such as "S. P Poras staircases, heating systems, Saunatec saunas and winter gardens with Forsan Metalityo equipment" (*Business in Russia* 1995: xxvii), which are built into whole houses along with locally-made foundations, brick-laying, roofing and so forth. Architects are notably absent from this process. The clients are thus, at least in the agents' rhetoric, enabled to create their "own individual comfort and luxury" (often an illusion, as will be explained further below). To help them a host of life-style magazines, real-estate agents, interior designers, landscapers, floral consultants and so forth, have appeared in the metropolis. These agencies are staffed by wannabe New Russians, the cutting-edge of the aspirational class, the interpreters who take the most active part in concocting the mytho-historical stories which give sense to the whole idea of the *kottedzh*. In the provinces these 'cultural translators' (Bredin 1996) hardly exist, and this is another factor which encourages the piecemeal activity of 'content consumption'.

Superficially, the villas might be seen as a quite unproblematic arena for identity construction, simply as a Veblenesque conspicuous consumption aimed to convey messages and make an impression. Furthermore, because the New Russians have suddenly emerged only in the last few years, their villas escape the condition of the socially-formed *habitus* which structures most forms of dwelling everywhere. Carsten and Hugh-Jones have written (1996: 64), "A ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought, the house is a prime agent of socialisation". Clearly the villas are not like this, as many of them are not lived in at all, as will be explained below. However, it will be

argued that even in the most inventive scenario the villas are involved with existing cultural categories. Perhaps more generally one could say that there is a contradiction between 'conspicuous consumption' and the idea of inventing an utterly new house-style, since material objects cannot denote any meanings unless they are part of some kind of semantic conventions. What is significant in the case of the villas is that the value attached to the conventions is disputed. For example, high fences may denote privacy, but is privacy a 'bad' or a 'good' thing? In various parts of Russia there are different outcomes of the shifting "battle of the sign" (Voloshinov 1973). Furthermore, the battlegrounds of pervasive social disagreements uncover further layers of disaccord and lack of conviction, so a villa glowingly viewed by some as a 'palace in the Baroque style' may by other people (or at another time) be seen only in terms of its brand-name German components and compared unfavourably with Swedish varieties, or it may simply be summed up by price, and again this may be done sourly or with admiration. Such piercings of the cocoons of cultural agreements about what things mean are fiercest in the provinces, perhaps, but even in the great cities there are other, more practical, underminings of pretensions going on.

For all the elimination of architects, the consumption of housing in Russia is not a free arena for bricolage according to whim. On the contrary, the clients have to contend not only with the financial transaction (how to get hold of and transfer money in order actually to receive an inhabitable building),¹⁹ but also with Russian planning laws, the politics of urban space, the problems of transportation, struggles over supply of electricity, water, telephone lines, etc., and the slap-dash habits of builders. And then there are the neighbours. We should be asking ourselves why construction companies advertise bullet-proof glass windows and almost always refer to security in one way or another. It is not that we can see consumption as in principle free, but

hemmed in by such limitations. Rather, such conditions are intrinsic to the process of consumption of housing from the outset (Hertzfeld 1991). They are social conditions informing not only 'choices', but also 'non-choices' - the outcomes that no-one really wanted or consciously planned for. There is perhaps always an underside to identity, namely the unselfconscious practices which are nevertheless perceived sharply from the outside.

The rest of the paper will first discuss the socio-political conditions of the existence of villas and then proceed to comment on the aesthetics of the new houses. I shall use Revzin's (1993) discussion of architectural meaning, in particular his distinction between stylistic and iconographic analyses of architecture as art, to provide the means for describing the semiotic connotations of the villa. I conclude with some implications of Boris Groys's radical argument (1992, 1993) about the aesthetic power acquired by the political leader in Stalinist Soviet society to make an argument for the implicit politicization of the aesthetics of Russian housing.

Housing as property: the *dacha* and villa compared

To understand the impact of the villas we have to think ourselves into a situation where for seventy years housing had been deliberately divorced from wealth, and wealth to a great extent from power and status. This long-standing Soviet arrangement has not changed overnight. Even in summer 1996 it was the case that the Russian government leaders, including Yeltsyn, were all allotted housing in the same, externally unremarkable apartment block in Moscow, this block also being inhabited by a due percentage of 'the people' in archetypal Soviet style.²⁰ Politicians losing their posts had to leave the apartment block (Rykovtseva 1996).²¹ Villas on the other hand embody a new relationship with the dwelling: the villa is private property and a

demonstration of wealth rather than political position. This, involves a nexus of relations to property and regulations which can best be understood by comparing the villa with the *dacha*.

In what follows I shall be leading towards the idea that the appearance of the villa is not just a matter of chosen style, but rather that its whole existence in the landscape is a function first of all of its economic-political status. Let us examine first the idea of 'property'. The origin of the word *dacha*, from *dat'* (to give) lies with seventeenth-century bestowals from the Tsar, an idea followed also in the Stalinist period when comfortable wooden summer houses in Russian style were allotted to officials and elite intellectuals. Another type of *dacha* appeared from the 1950s onwards, when land for vegetable plots was given out to institutions. This was then divided amongst favoured workers, and the recipients often built tiny houses on their plots which they called *dachas*. Commonly they had no electricity, running water or central heating. By the late 1970s plots were being given out by city district administrations to worthy and needy citizens, now further and further away from the city and ever smaller in size.²² It was only in the 1990s that *dachas* began to be bought and sold. Thus the historically-established idea of the *dacha* is of something given to worthy citizens by the state, and a *dacha* likewise could in principle be taken away, for example on dismissal from a post.

The modern villa, on the other hand, exists only as a private purchase, and it came into being when the building of private houses in urban areas was legalized in 1991. Describing the advent of a new villa development near his *dacha* at Firsanovka, between Moscow and St. Petersburg, Shevelev has written:

"Traditionally, the Soviet *dacha*-owners could be separated into the possessors of village houses with six *sotok*²³ of land, and the masters of pre-war *dachas* with larger grounds.

There is no need to explain the fact that between the two there was some dislike and responding disdain, because all of that is a matter of the past. These antagonisms were forgotten as soon as the three-story red brick newcomers appeared. Compared with them, the constructions on 6 *sotok* and the *dachas* of the *nomenklatura* look equally poverty-stricken (*ubogo*)" (Shevelev 1996).

There is another aspect to the *dacha* which contrasts with the villa, its personalized domesticity. Aleksandr Vysokovskii (1993: 271-308) has argued convincingly that although neither Soviet apartments nor *dachas* were their occupants' private property, people developed a "false sense of ownership" for the spaces they inhabited, particularly for the *dacha*, which they usually built with their own hands:

"Pseudo-ownership is a very real cultural phenomenon in this society which for more than 70 years has declared and waged unceasing war on private property. (...) People tend to 'acquire' what they use, without considering who really owns it" (Vysokovskii 1993: 277).

With its hammock under the apples tree, its veranda crammed with jars of salted cabbage, its privy under nodding sunflowers, the *dacha* as a building was the result of ceaseless tactics to create a sense of privacy and individuality by outwitting the norms and building regulations of the state. The built area of the *dacha* was predetermined, as was its site on the plot, the materials, and the number of storeys (only one). It was forbidden to enlarge it by adding a shed, and so forth. Yet any guest at a *dacha* settlement will notice that virtually all of them have a bulging second storey, almost like a mushroom cap on a stalk: this is the mansard roof, an excellent way to get more space while remaining within the one-storey rule. The *dacha*-with-mansard looks like a chosen architectural style, but in fact it was a functional strategy in the politics of construc-

tion.

Now the villa has a quite different appearance, for the owners do not see themselves as engaged in creating domesticity in the face of state-dictated homogeneity. The rationale is quite different. The purchaser of a villa is a master (*khozyain*) who signals the social position of the independent operator. His prominent gates and boundary walls connote withdrawal from the mass of the people, his turrets evoke an 'I'll look after myself' defiance. In Russia, as suggested above, one cannot assume personal identification to be stronger with private property than with state owned *dachas*. Rather, private property connotes independent operation in the market, and identity is marked here by signs of success in this dangerous arena, not domesticity. Having said this, we note that advertisements addressed to New Russians try constantly to overcome the presumed alienness of the market by appealing to reassuring emotions: e.g. "Windows of Rehau plastic: windows for your loved one", "Furniture from the firm *Furniture*: a magical door into the world of your day-dreams", or "Cactuses for the home: love them, pamper them: they will not deceive you" (*Domovoi* February 1997).

Villa settlements are so numerous as to substantially alter the urban environs,²⁴ and they are not just found on the outskirts of the metropolitan cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. They appear around cities and towns at each level in the administrative hierarchy. Republican capitals like Ulan-Ude, centre of the Buryat Republic in Siberia, provincial (*oblast*) centres such as Yaroslavl, and even district-level (*raion*) towns such as Gusinozersk, centre of Selenga Raion in the Buryat Republic, all have their areas of villa development. It is true that villas in the most distant regions are relatively small and few. Nevertheless they bear the same relation to the standard Soviet housing stock as do the metropolitan villas, namely that they are detached houses built as the private property of 'the rich', and they therefore arouse the same furious question:

why is there money to build those palaces (*dvortsy*) when we can hardly feed our children?

Reading expense

It is far from certain that the more specific images of owners and estate agents ('a Finnish *kottedzh*', 'a unique atmosphere reminiscent of Rococo palaces') are readable by many people from the house in front of them. What is clear is that people these days have a good idea of how much villas cost, because prices have become an obsession in general. Even small provincial towns have at least one supermarket selling costly foreign goods, which most people will have visited even if they have never bought anything there. From such luxuries downwards, though counterfeited brand-name goods, solid home manufactures and utensils, to bricks, concrete blocks, tiles or nails, Russians scrutinize the goods and carefully note the prices. In one respect Russians can judge one another's consumption according to a commonly accepted scale - by the cost. This is the first step in the semiology of the villa, the reading of price.

The new villas, are, of course, expensive. It would be more accurate to say they are glaringly expensive, since they are almost invariably constructed with decorative facades of brick, a material which is both new-looking and costly in the Russian context.²⁵ The bright bricks are so much the norm for *kottedzhi* than a glance over the landscape singles out these developments from any other buildings. It is inconceivable that a villa would be constructed of Russian concrete panels like the gaunt apartment houses, and Western details and pre-fabricated kits are common. Wooden villas are extremely rare, perhaps because they might connote associations with the lowly log-cabin,²⁶ despite the fact that wooden houses are several times cheaper and retain the heat through the winter better than brick ones. In Ulan-Ude in summer 1996 to build a small

version of such a villa, with 3 bedrooms, cost between \$350-70 million rubles, about \$70,000, when the median wage, for those lucky enough to have one, was around \$75 a month. Significantly, villas are often sold for dollars by the square metre (e.g. one near Moscow cost \$3,000 per sq. metre in 1997). This economic practice confutes the rhetoric of individuality and taste, and it is at one with the obsession with price among the people in general.

Villas in the politics of the locality

In July 1996 I visited a few villa development sites on the outskirts of the city of Ulan-Ude, a puzzling experience. In one case, the site was located in an open steppe, but the villas were all built cheek by jowl. There was hardly enough space for each house to have a small garden. The site was about half a mile from a rural road which perhaps had a bus service, but clearly it would be difficult to live there without a car.²⁷ At another site, tall, impressive houses jostled side by side, but a closer look revealed roughly-finished walls and uneven windows everywhere. The houses had electricity, but no water or drainage. In both places residents were curiously absent, but guards leapt out aggressively as soon as we approached. "Why have you come here?" they enquired suspiciously. When we said we were interested in new architecture, a look of disbelief crossed their faces.

These few observations: the close-packed building site, the distance from basic city services, the low quality of the construction, the absence of residents, and the suspicion of visitors seem characteristic of villa settlements elsewhere.

"The construction is striking in its prodigality and absurdity. It is clearly being put up by one firm with the aim of selling the houses. But to whom? What kind of person would one have to be to buy such a thing? Both in pocket

and in intelligence, because all this luxury is crammed onto miserable plots, wall to wall, window to window. Either the attraction to the 6 *sotok* plot has become a genetic endowment, or someone is getting ready for all-round defence (Shevelev 1996: 26).

Here we touch upon the 'non-choices' which I have suggested are inherent in the processes of consumption as far as private housing is concerned. How can they be explained?

Shevelev's ironic suggestions about genetic endowment and all-round defence are not so far off the mark, as I shall discuss below, but the villas are also embedded in the post-Soviet politics of land development. In Soviet times all cities had forward-looking general plans (*genplan*) prescribing where building developments of various types could take place. These plans were worked out centrally, and so the plan of Ulan-Ude, for example, was designed thousands of miles away in Leningrad. Today, these plans are still operational, though in many cases they are approaching the time of renewal.²⁸ More important is the fact that the mentality of the plan, which still exists for many city officials, is being turned to the pursuit of profit, and hence it battles with new forces engendered by privatization. As well as conforming with the general plan, villa builders have to negotiate a great number of other *spravki* (permits), each of which might be refused and may have to be paid for.²⁹

In Ulan-Ude in 1996, there were just three sites designated for villa development within the city boundaries. It is evident that the politics leading to such an outcome are complex: in some cases land is obtained from the province-level forestry commission, in others from local state farms, in yet others 'from Russia herself' (i.e. the administration in Moscow). The coordination of land-use and its allocation, to the city, to private building firms, to industrial enterprises, or to individuals, is done by land-committees at district level,³⁰ yet such arrangements do not prevent conflicts. For

example, the enlargement of city boundaries may be resisted by agricultural settlements on the fringes, themselves eager to take advantage of the possible sale of construction land (Ruble 1995: 126), or powerful industrial firms may use their influence to force local authorities to allow the construction of *kottedzh* housing in desirable spots to sell to their managers (Ruble 1995: 125-6). The result of such negotiations is an odd disposition of development sites, here crammed uncomfortably beneath looming public housing, there located miles from the city in a waterless wasteland.

With all this, the chief planner of Ulan-Ude spoke to me with accustomed authority of the 'norms' of land allowed for housing of various types: one *sotka* for central city plots, 4 *sotok* for vegetable plot-type dachas near the city, 8 *sotok* for more distant dachas, and 12 *sotok* for the new private villas on the outskirts. It is a curious fact that despite the great expanses of land available in Russia by European standards, the planner-architect spoke almost disapprovingly of 12 *sotok* (less than 1/3 of an acre) as a "very large plot", and he implied that he had been driven to allow so much mainly because the boundaries of the city had recently been expanded to take in former agricultural land. Here the city regulations encountered the rural norms of 12 *sotok* for villagers living by subsistence farming, and therefore the city planners had been forced to allow villa developers the same amount. It seems that two factors combine to reduce the size of development plots: the desire of the possessors of land to maximize their returns, and the Soviet principle of the 'norm', which is tied somehow to a moralizing "no more than anyone else" and "only what they deserve". The idea of the land 'norm' is indeed far older than the Soviet version of it and is deeply embedded in the attitudes of many Russians, so it is significant that even amongst potential owners of such villas I did not encounter objections to the small size of plots. On the contrary, some people praised the houses for

being sufficiently far apart to conform with sanitary and fire-risk regulations.

Once I was returning with some Buryat friends to Ulan-Ude and reached a pleasant bluff overlooking a river; before us there stretched several empty wooded valleys threaded with winding tributaries, and just beyond there lay the city. Imagining how such hillsides would be scattered with private housing were this in Europe, I asked my friend why the New Russians had not built villas here. "Who would want to live out here all on their own?" was the response. "Anyway, a house on its own would be robbed bare within days". It is virtually impossible to get urban services extended to distant lone houses, whereas a whole settlement of *kottedzhi* stands a chance. But security is just as important: virtually every villa for sale in *Mir i Dom Nedvizhimost'*, a Moscow-based real estate journal, is advertised with some such phrase as: "sited in an elite *kottedzh* development with its own defence". The idea of security pertains not only to the housing scheme as a whole but to the individual dwelling too. Shevelev comments about the development in Firsanovka:

"A new wave of owners appeared in 1995. The most vivid of them, in local views, was Konstantin Natanovich Borovoi, who built a house in Firsanovka which left no-one in any doubt that it was his fortress. A fence suited for an atomic base, embrasures rather than windows, and walls like those of Butyrki [a prison in Moscow, CH]. 'That is not a house, it's a military objective', said Firsanovka, and they did not envy Borovoi. They felt only pity for him, just as one always feels compassion for people living under the conditions of a regime" (Shevelev 1996: 26).

The building in of defence into the villa raises interesting questions about conspicuous consumption. Signals of luxury in contemporary Russia are almost metonymically related to security, and the explanation for this may be

that the symbolic function of conspicuous consumption is first of all pared down to index nothing but pure wealth, and wealth is assumed to attract crime. The distinctiveness of the Russian situation, can be seen if it is compared with the houses built by successful business people in the Andes.

The Otavalenos build splendid houses in their villages with the proceeds of textile trading done in the cities. They are too busy to spend much time at these houses, which are described by Colloredo-Mansfield (1994) as prime example of conspicuous consumption. The Andean villas legitimate the economic status of the family and its descendants in relation to the social world of the owners, which remains that of the kin in the village. People hold conflicting standards for appraising displays of wealth, and the meaning of wealth is not self-evident. So along with creating a new flat-topped house style to communicate and legitimize a modern type of urban wealth, some rich people have also turned to the enhancement of traditional forms, which declares their continued participation in rural values. In both cases they use local materials and village work parties. This practice reaffirms local, reciprocal economic relationships (Colloredo-Mansfield 1994: 861-2).

By contrast, the New Russians create social enclaves fenced off from the ordinary *dacha*-dwellers and villagers. Local materials are abhorred. To the extent they have to be used they are the source of the most annoying 'ineptitude', such as concrete stairs in which every step is a different height. Villas are never built by neighbourly work-parties, but by ill-trained teams assembled by contractors. 'How to avoid choosing the wrong contractor' is a theme of real estate publications. The advice is to make sure the same firm handles all stages of building and finishing, "otherwise various contractors may pass the blame for various flaws to their fellow workers, the outcome of which will be the infamous collective irresponsibility" (*Business in Russia* 1995: xxv). Such magazines also advocate getting rid of

Russian labour altogether ("No more plumbers" *Business in Russia* 1995: xxiv),³¹ and employing foreign teams instead. As one might expect, the social exclusivity of the development is a selling point. "Not just anyone can get a *kottedzh* there", I was told, and developers advertise "neighbours worthy of you" as part of the deal. Thus, reciprocal economic relations, along with exchange of home-grown vegetables, spades, and all the rest of the *dacha* ambience, is the last thing the New Russians want to be involved with. It is therefore not surprising that the villa is not conceptualized as a wealth-enhanced version of the *dacha*. Instead, it refers to the deeper Imperial past, in the form of the *kottedzh*.

The aesthetics of the *kottedzh*

Builders and estate agents make efforts to provide 'styles', which are marketed to dovetail with, or evoke, the emerging cultural tastes of the New Russians. In this context we can now discuss the villas in semiological terms, though such conscious semantic representation is only part of the villas' social significance. In discussing architectural meaning Revzin (1993) distinguished between two distinct semantic structures, one of style and another of iconography. "The semantics of style", he wrote, "does not emerge from the sum of meanings produced by separate elements but rather as a result of prescribing meaning to stylistic categories and establishing their connections with general cultural categories". He continues, "Everything is different in iconographic language. A distinct element - a motif, a stable compositional scheme - carries meaning that is defined and quite autonomous. For instance, a temple cupola usually signifies a heavenly dome, regardless of period or style" (1993: 220). We may not agree with some of the assumptions here (Rezvin writes of wholes and elements carrying meaning, as if no-one gave such mean-

ings and no-one ever misunderstood them). But Rezvin's distinction between style (in the particular sense outlined above) and icon is useful, as it enables us to discuss the mythic meaning of the stylistic category of the *kottedzh* in general and distinguish it from the meanings attributed to types and elements within villas as specific houses.

Any villa, however grandiose and elaborate, can be referred to by Russians as a *kottedzh*. The term refers to leisure dwellings scattered in the parks of princely estates of the eighteenth-century Russian aristocracy. An example is the 'Cottage Palace' in the grounds of the magnificent Versailles-inspired Peterhof Palace. The architect, Adam Menelaws, designed the Kottedzh to resemble an English cottage, where the Tsar would be able to feel himself a private individual in a light and graceful setting. The building is not in any particular architectural style: it combines Neo-Gothic tracery with features of an Italian villa and mediaeval vernacular (Shvidkovsky 1996: 234-5).

In present-day Russia, the establishing of the eclectic *kottedzh* as a 'stylistic category' in Rezvin's sense is the work of taste-forming magazines. *Mir i Dom Nedvizhimost'* (no 3, 1997), for example, carries an article on the imperial park of Il'inskoye, in which there were several pavilions, artful ruins, a dairy, outhouses and cottages. All were set in a "delightful rural composition, linked by peaceful alleys." Allowed to fall into ruin in Soviet times, Il'inskoye has since been acquired by a commercial firm which has built in the grounds a number of standardized (*tipovyye*) silicate-brick *kottedzhi*. The owners are encouraged to see themselves mythically, as descendants of the most outstanding people of the time, the elite of Moscow society, who were favourites and guests of the Tsars at Il'inskoye. The journal enthuses:

"The reconstruction of the demolished outhouses and cottages in the previous proportions, the return to the historical style given

to each of them, carries in itself the secret of the transformation of an immemorial historical ensemble into a residence-complex, in which its own architectural and artistic qualities and comfort will answer the highest demands of contemporary European standards".

The overall 'style', in Rezvin's sense, of the modern *kottedzh* is so eclectic as almost to reject style, and as far as I know the actual copying of earlier aristocratic pavilions is rare in the extreme. What the 'style' does do is to establish an illusory link between contemporary individual villas and the notion of the eighteenth-century *kottedzh* in its regal setting.

The *kottedzh* 'style' leaps over various other existing types of Russian housing which the New Russians have not embraced, notably the classically-proportioned eighteenth-nineteenth-century country estate, the solid *izba* (peasant farmhouse), not to speak of the houses of the non-Russian peoples of the empire. Even the Art Nouveau *style moderne* (Brumfield 1993) and pseudo-Russian Byzantine Revival architecture (Boym 1994: 266), both popular among pre-First World War merchants of Moscow, have not reappeared in any significant numbers. We should remember, in this context, that the villa clients normally do not engage architects, but use building firms with their own draughtsmen instead.³² Architects are producing albums of designs to attract clients, sometimes incorporating features of the local and native traditions, but evidently they often misjudge the New Russians.³³ Even in Buryatia, few if any clients have come forward to build a *kottedzh* incorporating an interesting transformation of a *yurta* (the indigenous Buryat dwelling). The villas which are actually built somehow have to be able to reconcile the vaguely historical with foreign-modern, not indigenous or native components. However, this 'style' which is not a style is not divorced from Russian architectural traditions. The original aristocratic *kottedzh* itself was a hotchpotch of ele-

ments or a pastiche alluding to European models of various dates.

Shvidkovsky (1997) reports, nevertheless, that the most recent New Russian villas in Moscow are starting to be architect-designed, mainly because clients are beginning to demand more specific historical styles which are difficult to achieve without a professional. This trend is associated with the grand building projects of the metropolis. Moscow's popular and active Mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, has embarked on a transformation of the city, i.e. the development of expensive shops and vast malls together with the grandiose reconstruction of symbolically important historical buildings and monuments.³⁴ The Mayor demands the creation of a distinctive Moscow Style, and although no-one is quite sure what this is, it is definitely not Soviet, i.e. not Constructivist or 'Bolshevik' (Shvidkovsky 1997). Showpiece shopping complexes are not banished to the outskirts but consciously constructed to make 'harmonious ensembles' with potent architectural symbols of Russian history in the centre. It is significant that it is not architects but the Moscow city government, backed by Yeltsyn, which is at the forefront in creating a distinctive architecture for Moscow. As Shvidkovsky (1997) points out, this merging of the new and ancient city represents the ideology of the present power structure, in which business has an important part. The modern commercial block, with its turrets as references to adjacent monuments, is intended to demonstrate the profitability and stability of the regime.

This politicized architecture rejects the specific emblems of Soviet architecture, but it is continuous with the Soviet idea, embodied above all by Stalin, of the Leader as wielder of aesthetic power (Groys 1993). In my view it supports the New Russians' self-identification via their buildings, by providing a context in which historical and European images can make sense. This can be seen more clearly if we examine the interior design elements incorporated in villas. Rezvin's idea of ico-

nography (1993) is useful for discussing this, as it draws attention to architectural elements transposed into the villa for the very reason that they have independent, non-local meanings. The state's Moscow Style is the context within which these items can be reincorporated as statements of specifically Russian identity.

Business in Russia (May 1995) tells us there are three basic types of interior. The first is the "so-called European style, which presupposes a range of light colours, simple and rational use of space, plenty of light, air and modern, built-in light sources. Such interior designs are similar to those of offices". The second is the Napoleon III style, which is "essentially a blend of the Classical Baroque and Renaissance and creates the feeling of a sumptuous palace. It calls for intricate modelling on ceilings and walls, tapestries, rich fireplace design, inlaid parquet floors in seven or eight varieties of wood, sculptured archways, chandeliers ...". The third and most popular style is a combination of the first two. "The rationality, functionality and simplicity of the basic interior design are more or less harmoniously merged with single elements from the distant past. For example, arched openings look good with columns or half-columns made of modern imitation marble".

The curiously eclectic *kottedzh*, the overall 'style' in Rezvin's sense, can incorporate and Russify what otherwise would seem like architectural oxymorons (e.g. the European functional aristocratic retreat). Nor is a masculinized fortified exterior, with a feminized, sleek or luxurious interior, at odds with New Russian social culture, as mentioned earlier. Under the heading "A woman at home should know her place", the magazine *Domovoi* (3, 1997) runs a piece on the boudoir. Accompanied by eighteenth-century French engravings, the article illustrates some boudoirs suitable for active, modern Russian women ("in the boudoir it is absolutely necessary to have a little divan for beauty sleep"), where she can seclude herself for feminine,

yet influential pursuits. All this makes a certain sense in relation to the mythical background notion of the *kottedzh* as the leisure dwelling of favourites in the exclusive park of the ruler, but it only attains non-risible visibility because it is being advertised and constructed in the context of the government's projected change of political culture³⁵ and actual reconstruction of Moscow's great Tsarist monuments.

To some extent this set of notional references is reproduced in the provinces, in the domains of the regional Prefectures. But the greater the influence of the conservatively Soviet *nomenklatura* the weaker the historical-aristocratic connotations of the villa. In distant towns the power of restrictive planners is greater, the animosity of local workmen more evident, the foreign design parts are more difficult to acquire, and the less is the purchase of Moscow Style, indeed of style of any named kind. This is the realm of what I have called 'content consumption', where items of the house are put together as barely-planned conglomerates. A kitchen may be distant from other plumbing, a bathroom located on the ground-floor when all the bedrooms are on the fourth floor, or a ceremonial hall may take most of the interior space. Function and security have priority (e.g. store-rooms for business stock, iron grills over windows, armour-plated doors). Here, where money is scarcer, villas take years to put together with whatever one can obtain: one may have a fitted kitchen, but not a bathroom, or electricity but no telephone. Furthermore, items may be present, but *ne rabotayut* (they are 'not working'). The aspirants to the status of New Russian may have to put up with the aspiration to a villa.

Thus, from the iconographic point of view, an item in a villa has its place in a three-tiered structure of potential connotations. A jacuzzi, let us say, may be successfully integrated in a design scheme like 'Napoleon III' along with swagged curtains, gold-framed mirrors and so forth. Or it may be simply a jacuzzi set down

in an otherwise unremarkable bathroom (the 'content consumption' variant). Or the jacuzzi may be broken or not working, a sign which indicates the beleaguered situation of the owner. The point is that people know that any one of these possibilities contains the potentiality for the other two. Villas are the architectural embodiment of New Russian cultural identity precisely in manifesting this shifting range of potentialities, and we should not make the mistake of thinking that successful reproduction of any one model design 'represents identity'.

The *kottedzh* as a place for living (or not)

The equivocality of self-identification is paralleled by the uncertain and probably changing role of villas in New Russians' lives. Whatever their mythic evocations, in practice villa developments are modelled on the Euro-American suburban house designed for year-round living by a single family. This might in principle imply substantial social changes, especially in contrast to the crowded multi-occupancy of the communal flat of Soviet times. The suburb, however, is at odds with the established Russian urban way of life, which is based on the city apartment, with the *dacha* as an occasional retreat. It is difficult for New Russians to overcome these established ways, not only because they form the familiar *habitus* of expected sociality, but also because an entire infrastructure is designed to support them and not the suburb. Several people have told me how they began to rethink the idea of actually living in the *kottedzh* after they broke the springs of their cars on the roads, shivered in inadequate private central heating, and found themselves marooned in a half-deserted building site.

All of this makes the *kottedzh* quite unlike the dwelling of established societies. Bloch (1995) has described how the Zafimaniry house grows and literally hardens as the mar-

ried couple live together and build their mutuality.

"This house and this wood can be seen as material culture, but to an extent this is misleading in that such a phrase suggests something different from non-material culture. It would be quite misleading to see Zafimaniry houses as expressing Zafimaniry marriage and society and containing married pairs. The house is the marriage" (1995: 215).

The *kottedzh*, on the other hand, is objectified as material culture, as described above, and it has an existence which the owners may hardly incorporate into their everyday life. Shevelev (1996) describes what seems to be a common pattern of use. His New Russian neighbours at Firsanovka arrive at two o'clock on Saturdays, park their Volvos in their yards ("where they are the only living element - everything else is bare earth"), let out the Rottweilers, set up a table by the car, make shashlyks and drink vodka; by eight they are singing along to pop songs, and by ten they tie up the dogs and set off for home. They hardly enter the villa. The incomers do not visit the neighbouring *dachas* and know nothing of the surroundings that make the place dear to the natives, the fact that Solzhenitsyn lived nearby, that Lermontov's grandmother's estate is not far away, or that Lenin went hunting in these forests.

This pattern, in which evidently the city apartment is still the basic home of the New Russian family, does not mean that they do not identify their status with the *kottedzh*. Indeed, as people in the provinces have often told me, it is sufficient to let drop a phrase like "Last week-end at the *kottedzh*, we...." for listeners to be impressed. The role of the *kottedzh* in establishing what kind of person you are dealing with is also why it is often used as a backdrop for making business contracts. A lavish meal and a tour of the site, with explanations of all the improvements to be made and the fittings shortly to be intro-

duced, declares the achievements and aspirations of the owner to the business colleague. However, to have a villa is a very fine thing, but to live year-round in it is another matter,³⁶ and indeed the large numbers of villas abandoned and for sale indicate that many people must have made an expensive mistake.

Conclusion

Generally in anthropology studies of identity concern small peripheral groups who bravely construct their culture amid the oppressive weight of homogenization and global economies. Here we have quite a different case: a massively wealthy elite whose consumption nevertheless has difficulty in achieving cultural coherence. What Miller (1994a) calls the 'forging' of cultural identity cannot be easily achieved in contemporary Russia. 'Forging' is a pun referring to the simultaneous "process by which intractable materials are, in the forge, turned into something new, both useful, solid and fine" and to the act of forgery as an act of fakery (1994a: 321). I would agree with Miller that the authentic culture of modern urban people may be created out of faked or recycled images. Yet for this authenticity to happen there must be certain conditions, and these seem not to be present in Russia at the moment. There must be a resilience and energy given to image-making itself, and this, Mayor Luzhkov notwithstanding, is undercut in Russia by post-Socialist mistrust of all grandiose myths. Furthermore, there must be the possibility of rather direct appropriation of material objects to the process of identification. Clothing, food, and media presentations are quite easily turned to this task, but the house is a much more recalcitrant, and therefore in many ways a more interesting, object. The urban villa, as a physical building, cannot be directly created, even if the intermediary of the architect is removed. The house is irrevocably locked into the fact of its construction by culturally excluded others and its geo-

graphical positioning in their world. It thus bears the evidence in itself of the redoubts and battle-scars of the Russian economy and society. The visibility of this evidence and its potentiality for multiple readings destabilizes the linking of mythic identifications with actual houses.

The above is perhaps putting it too mildly: the vast majority of villas are unrecognizable as examples of any specific image of the *kottedzh*. Yet, it has to be said that the villas have a characteristic appearance. Here we do not find the long, lazy horizontal lines surveying a verdant landscape of a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Most Russian villas rear upwards in several storeys, with sharply tilted roofs, pointed gables and porches, and they frequently have long thin windows running up through several floors. The turret or tower is a favourite feature. This remarkable verticality may be to some extent unintended: if you want a very large house but have only been given a tiny plot, there is no other way to go. But surely a thrusting verticality is relevant to the question of cultural identity. Like a person's handwriting, it is the unconscious trace of the self. I cannot do otherwise than make an outsider's interpretation here: these villas seem at once ambitious and embattled, grandiose and unfinished. They look both foreign in their sharp facades and Russian as they huddle together. The owners may not have quite intended it this way, but then they, like anyone else, are not quite masters of their cultural identity.

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Notes

1. This paper is based on research in Moscow and Eastern Siberia in 1996-7. I talked with and visited some people who were described as New Russians, but had greater opportunity to discover other people's views of them from outside. I hope to do further research on this subject, which is why I call this paper a sketch.
2. *Blat* refers to the practice of seeking personalized favours and back-door transactions which was omnipresent in the Soviet period.
3. New Russians prefer a range of English-derived terms for themselves, *professionally* (professionals), *delovyye lyudy* (business people), *dilery* (dealers), *menadzhery* (managers) and so forth. The Russian *predprinimateli* (entrepreneurs) is used in reference, and *gospoda* (gentlemen) is often used in address, for example in advertisements.
4. Alternatively, people may talk of New Buryats, New Kazakhs, etc..
5. This is a generalization; in fact gender representations changed interestingly during Soviet history, though never portraying women as passive or dependent, see Bonnell (1991 and 1993).
6. Unlike the former state enterprises, which are often dependent on government subsidies, the businesses of the New Russians are relatively autonomous. In fact, avoidance of tax is a refined art throughout the Russian economy. The former state enterprises often deal with the situation simply by not having any money, while the New Russians have invented a myriad of ways of secreting their millions away from the tax authorities.
7. This example is given in the excellent analysis of non-payment of wages in Russian by Clarke, Ashwin and Borisov (1997: 5).
8. According to a World Bank study conducted in 1996, 64% of households in Russia had a total income per head below the official subsistence minimum of \$66 per month. Half the households had only 1/3 of the amount they estimated they needed to live normally, 83% had less than 2/3 of that amount, and only 7% had what they considered a normal income (Clarke, Ashwin and Borisov 1997: 10-11).
9. Preliminary analyses of the rich in terms of class are very contradictory. However, there is

some agreement on the approximate numbers involved, although all observers note the difficulty in making such calculations when virtually everyone under-reports their earnings to avoid taxes. Varoli (1996: 7), quoting Soviet sociological sources from 1994, writes that 1.6 percent of the population can afford to purchase nearly all of its desires, a figure which translates into 2.3 million people. He also mentions more recent American research which estimates that some 60,000 people earn more than \$1 million a year, while the ultra-rich, around 1,000 individuals, earn tens of millions a year.

10. My own observations and the comments of well-informed Russians suggest that New Russians are less represented among managers of privatized former state industries, but newly set up firms, banks, stock exchanges, etc. are usually run by well-educated young people from a variety of backgrounds. Parts of government too are staffed by highly-trained young technocrats: in an abrupt reverse of Soviet life, the old Party higher training schools have become Schools of Management Studies and breeding grounds of potential New Russians. Many entrepreneurs made fortunes at the beginning of privatization, particularly in trading spin-offs from the oil and energy industries. Some of these diversified their firms and created subsidiaries, so, for example, someone who started by selling tyres might now head a conglomerate including oil sales, garages, second-hand cars, timber trade, supermarket retailing and so forth. The climate for starting new businesses worsened in the mid-1990s, making it difficult to develop from trading into production. This is one reason why entrepreneurs have so frequently been accused of being 'speculators' (Nelson and Kuzes 1995: 123; Humphrey 1995). However, the firms which flourished in the early 1990s are now established in the economy. Tied in with local government and banks (they may even set up their own banks), they are courted as 'sponsors' by poverty-stricken organizations of all kinds. Another source of the New Russians is the protection-racket groups. These have increasingly taken hold of the privatized and retail sectors as the state's ability to enforce law weakened. A 1994 study showed that at least 70% of privatized enterprises and commercial banks in

Russia had connections with organized crime (Nelson and Kuzes 1995: 131), and more recently Russians simply say that it is impossible these days to start a business without a 'roof', meaning in this context a protector to whom illicit payments are made.

11. The *nomenklatura* is the name for the lists of trusted officials who were placed in positions of responsibility in Soviet times. About nine-tenths of the *nomenklatura* directors of privatized enterprises remained in their positions at the end of voucher privatization (Nelson and Kuzes 1995: 129)
12. According to Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley (1997) the *nomenklatura* retains power in Russia, unlike the situation in Central Europe where a managerially skilled business elite is dominant. They argue that in Russia, power is used to amass personal wealth, especially in real estate, to a much greater extent than in Central Europe.
13. In parts of the CIS like Kazakhstan, the new rich may be radically differently constituted from those in Russia, e.g. consisting of relatives and clients of the President rather than heterogeneous and independent entrepreneurs.
14. It is important to remember that in the mid 1990s many people were still in prison who had been charged with 'private entrepreneurial activity' (Nelson and Kuzes 1995: 124).
15. Konstantinov (1997: 180) writes, "If we do not indulge in self-deception we must acknowledge that over 90% of the private business sector in Russia is linked one way or another with the world of bandits or thieves-in-law [racketeers]", and he remarks (1997: 175) "Protection rackets take between 20-30% in cash of the monthly profits. It should be remembered that if another gang attacks, the racketeers will not protect the business and its owner, for whom they do not give a fig, but their own interests, their 20-30%".
16. Kryshantovskaya's article (1997) describes a day in the life of a New Russian from the provinces. This was an 18.5 hour day of hectic activity, filled with 8 important meetings, over 6 hours spent in shuttling between offices, 14 contracts made over the phone, a total expenditure of \$1,812, and only 50 minutes spent with his family.
17. An essentialist understanding of identity would see it as the solidarity or allegiance naturally

- arising on the basis of recognition of the common origin or social characteristics of a group.
18. This could also be described as a failure of 'hybridization' or 'creolization', the process of recontextualization whereby foreign goods are assigned indigenous meanings and uses by the culture of reception (Howes 1996: 5-8).
 19. Even large transactions are still normally made in cash (Ruble 1995: 70); mortgages, planned payments, etc. are still virtually unknown in Russia.
 20. They are also allotted luxurious country houses, known as *godacha* (state dachas).
 21. Rykovtseva (1996) reports that, apart from the representatives of 'the people', only Gaidar and Grachev of the top leaders seem to live full-time in this block, which is nevertheless surrounded by numerous security guards and continuously supplied by couriers with food etcetera.
 22. The first *sadovyye uchastki* were usually 800 sq. m. (8 *sotok*) in size, and later ones were 600 and 400 sq. metres. They were given to women with over three children, veterans, deserving invalids, etc.
 23. A *sotka* (gen. pl. *sotok*) is 100 square metres.
 24. Even by mid-1992 the Leningrad Region had established a zone, extending up to 70 kilometres round the city, in which 250,000 building sites were allocated for detached dwellings (Ruble 1995: 123).
 25. In summer 1996 in Ulan-Ude a wooden house cost 1.6 million per square metre to build, whereas a brick house cost 3 to 4 million per square metre (interview with P. G. Zilberman, head architect of the city of Ulan-Ude).
 26. In 1990 around 15% of city dwellers in the Russian Federation lived in log houses (Ruble 1995: 68), which were 'private property' (*lichnaya sobstvennost'*) although the land they stood on was the property of the state. Such houses are commonly without running water, drainage or central heating, though they usually have electricity. They are considered inferior to apartments and Russians normally move out of them when they can, so in effect they remain the habitations of the disadvantaged.
 27. This unusually well-built development of large private houses included some much smaller houses for the victims of a recent flood. One can imagine that the city had aimed to cover the costs of the flood-relief housing by selling the villas. Some flood victims were living in their houses, but the villas were unfinished.
 28. The General Plan of Ulan-Ude is in force until 2005 and the City Architect was awaiting the arrival of the new one, 2005-2020. These plans are still designed in St. Petersburg, but with the consultation of local planners.
 29. "Have you any idea how many bits of paper must be collected to build that villa? (...) In the kingdom of the magnificent palaces there will necessarily be one small hut with a flag on its roof - the local administration. Though your house may be your castle, whatever you want to do (let's say, to move a doorway) you'll have to go to the administrator on your knees. And the 'people's control' over there love collecting your donations for themselves" (Sivkova 1997).
 30. Individuals may request a land-committee for a site, and the committee then offers them a plot on one of the areas it has acquired for villa development. Alternatively, the land-committee may allocate land to an institution or firm, which then builds the villas and advertises them for sale.
 31. It is almost as though firms use new types of heating systems and so forth in order to eliminate the native workman. "The plumber with a cluster of packing fibre hanging out of his pocket has been banished to the ranks of comedy films" (*Business in Russia* 1995: xxv).
 32. This, of course, arouses much dismay among architects, and is regarded as a continuation of the subdued war between the profession and the Ministry of Construction of Soviet times (interview with the head of the State Committee for Architecture of Buryatia, July 1997). Architects' struggles to be included in the design and decision-making process for important projects have sharpened since the state-run Buryat Grazhdan Proyekt was privatized as a joint-stock construction company. In Buryatia the economic situation is so serious that there is little work for the company however; nevertheless, it has remained as a *kollektiv* and makes ends meet by trading in wood, fertiliser, etc.
 33. Such an album of designs for individual houses was produced by architects of Buryatia in 1996. The plans include houses in wood and brick, with many interesting native and vernacular features, but none of them has been built.

34. These include the Church of the Kazan Mother of God on Red Square, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in place of the open swimming baths in the centre of Moscow, the Red Porch of the Great Kremlin Palace, the palace of the Russian President, etc.
35. See Luzhkov (1996). The foreword starts, "In Moscow it is not only the power which has changed, it is the whole concept of what power is. We shall implement a mechanism of government which is founded on the idea of service, not command. We shall establish an administration in which power is no longer an instrument of forcing people to reach targets set from above but is part of the capital's service system to improve the capital's economy".
36. Living at the villa requires extraordinary mastery of transport, which indeed some New Russians do have (several cars with chauffeurs and body-guards, planes belonging to the firm, etc., Kryshtanovskaya 1997). However, Shvidkovsky (1997) reports on a recent move among the rich to buy up central apartments in Moscow, knocking several together to make one grand unit.

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