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DOUBLE CRITIQUE:
KNOWLEDGES AND
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POST-SOVIET SOCIETIES

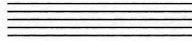
SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

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Double Critique: Knowledges and Scholars at Risk in Post-Soviet Societies

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MADINA TLOSTANOVA

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Joseph Dzhhaloshinsky

Russia: Cultural Transformations,
Tolerance, and the Media

The Three Vectors of Russian Culture

It is hardly necessary to prove that both Russia and the world have changed drastically in the past few years. Thousands of books have been written about it. And the main conclusion of the majority of these books is that more and more people have acquired the opportunity to self-definition, as people are being freed from all previous local limitations and practically the whole world is becoming open for us. Among many features of this new reality I would name just a few: (1) In order to survive and develop, the modern individual does not have to be closely connected with other people, so the problem of solidarity disappears. (2) The direct connection between the level of relative well-being and the degree of the intensity of one's efforts to gain this well-being disappears as well. In other words, a strong social policy, typical of modern states, leads to the fact that those who work a lot and those who work very little live almost equally well. (3) A certain premonition of the exhaustion of natural resources creates specific anxiety in the modern individual's consciousness, making him regard all people around him as potential enemies.

These and other circumstances have drastically changed the conception of modern reality and rendered all previous culture, which was shaped in completely different conditions, almost useless. This feeling about the inadequacy of previous culture makes the modern person start a quest for new rules of life. The very loss of previous reference points leads to stress, which can produce aggression and intolerance. At the same time, the culture of aggression and intolerance occasionally turns out to be much more effective than the culture of solidarity.

One more problem is that people turn out to be built into a more and more all-embracing and quickly functioning communicative net, with fewer and fewer chances to personally influence the amount of circulating information or the tempo of its circulation—to say nothing of controlling these parameters. On the contrary, our life is more and more defined by global communication. In modern communicative society our alienation is expressed in global communicative flows' power over us, that is, over the separate individual and in the inability of the separate individual to influence the global communicative flows or control them.

A quest for the new rules of life in this new type of society is taking place today. It is clear that culture is looking for ways of self-renewal and adjusting to the changing conditions of being.

Russian culture could be better described as comprising three different vectors. One of them proclaims the organic principle of holistic unity and interconnection of everything existing in the universe as the basis of relations between the individual and the world; the principle of accepting the sovereignty of the most minute elements of the universe and respect for the rights of these elements; the principle of natural growth in everything that is alive and rejection of revolutions and explosive changes. This is a *cosmocentric culture*.

Cosmocentric culture can be found in many peoples on all stages of human history. The Russian village, for example, was an independent civilization that was organically shaped for many centuries and based on the ideal equilibrium of universe.¹ Cosmocentric culture, according to E. Fromm, realizes to the fullest life's orientation to being, to existence.² Within the Western culture this orientation was most clearly expressed in the works of medieval European thinkers. In addition to Fromm, modern authors who exhibit this orientation include V. Vernadsky, A. Schweitzer, and Y. Lotman.³ Obviously, tolerance is natural within a cosmocentric culture.

I call the second type of culture, the type that is clearly seen in Russia, a

sociocentric culture. The main feature of this system of relations is the idea that the center of the world is a certain human community to which a given individual belongs. A fundamental feature of sociocentric culture is the dissolving of personal subjectivity into a certain "we," some articulation of community, which acts as a higher power and force in relation to individuals. Individuals accept voluntarily, but often unconsciously, the schemes and ways of thinking and behaving that are normal for this particular community and are regarded as the only possible ones.

Such a culture allows a person to see himself and others only as members of the tribe, of the social or religious community, not as independent human beings. On the one hand, this prevents an individual from becoming a free creative person, independently defining his own life; on the other hand, it offers the sense of belonging to some holistic structure, allowing for the possibility of taking a particular and unquestionable place there. Belonging to "us" removes from individuals the burden of responsibility for their own decisions, frees them from painful doubts and from the ontological burden of freedom itself. At the same time, belonging to "us" can give people a sense of pride and superiority.

Another important feature of sociocentric culture is the constant presence in the mind of the individual of the clear, precise notion of some—"them"—who are enemies. In fact, the sense of "us" emerges precisely on the basis of rejecting "them." This is what makes sociocentric culture different from cosmocentric culture. Preserving the dissolution of a human being in the community, it sharply isolates this community both from the rest of communities and from the world of nature. The more powerful, scary, and threatening the monster identified as "them" looks, the stronger the necessity to rally closely and dissolve it into some kind of "we."

The division of people into "same" and "different" fits hand in glove with the idea of violence. This takes various forms. The most primitive kind of violence is connected with the struggle to destroy "others," "aliens," those who are not "us." This cruel but naive notion of violence is accompanied by another, wider, less naive but no less cruel view in which one realizes the meaninglessness of any straightforward destruction of "others." This perspective generates one's willingness not to destroy the enemy but instead to make her indistinguishable from "us."

When writers and intellectuals look for "others" among themselves and in the society as a whole and then blame these others for hatred, for Russophobia, or for their worship of the Western way of life, or when leaders dis-

play tendencies to divide groups into "same" and "other" ("Who is not with us, is against us"), it all looks very much like a medieval witch hunt or the persecution of heretics. In the twentieth century the most popular divisions became those of religion, class, and nation. Within the frame of such a culture, support, mutual help, and all other meanings of the concept of tolerance are permissible only in relation to a strictly fixed notion of "ours"/"us." Hence the class hatred, religious hatred, and social hatred: Such hatred in this context becomes not only permissible, but in fact obligatory, because "others" infringe upon "us."

The third vector of Russian culture that is expressed in all spheres of human experience, including journalism, is *egocentric culture*. Egocentric culture is characterized by the tendency to self-assertion, the joy of consumption and creation, and power over others. This type of culture is based on the idea that every human being is the creator of his own happiness, while happiness itself equals possession. However, being oriented toward herself and striving for the achievement of her own goals, a representative of egocentric culture always has to remember that, just as she does, the people around her think only about themselves. So in order to reach her goals an individual must take into account and use the interest of others. This can take place in quite acceptable forms, or it can acquire a more manipulative nature.

The loss of primary connection with "us" turns freedom into an unbearable burden; it becomes a source of doubts. And then there arises a strong tendency to get rid of such freedom: to retreat into subordination or find another way of connecting with people and the world, in order to avoid the diffidence even at the price of losing freedom. However, a different path is possible as well. Egocentric culture has two developmental options: a predatory one and a humanistic one.

In Russia, egocentric culture is sometimes called "Western culture"; this term stresses that this culture type was imported into Russia (or even implanted). But in reality it is a natural result of human adjustment to particular conditions, and it is as natural for Russia as for other countries.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned types of culture are ideal models. They create the three vectors for the space within which the real culture is organizing itself. What is meant here is the predominance—more or less absolute—of one of the types. In this sense we can speak of the Euro-American, Asian, and many other real and possible cultures. At the same

time, in practice, each of these "condensations" vacillates toward one of the three ideal types.

For example, if we turn to the analysis of Western culture that has strongly affected the minds and hearts of many educated Russians, it will be difficult not to notice a contradictory synthesis of cosmocentric and egocentric cultures, under the unquestionable dominance of the latter. This synthesis results in the three main elements on which Western culture is based: respect for property, respect for human rights, and respect for the legal institutions of society.

Certainly, Western culture displays various subvariants as well. For example, Fromm points out an influential culture that he calls "pagan": Within its limits, the idea of the superiority of one people over all others and one person over all other persons is actively proclaimed. The life goals within the frame of pagan culture are pride, publicity, prosperity, and other attributes of supremacy, while the means of attaining these goals are conquest, plundering, destruction, and victory.

The main feature of another variant of Western culture—the technocratic one—is a belief in the possibility of realizing a certain grandiose technical utopia, turning nature and society into a unified cosmic machine, controlled from one center. There are reasons to believe that the technocratic culture, with its cult of the violent, rough interference into the natural processes of being, is one of the derivative forms of what can be called sociocentric and egocentric cultures. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the technocratic civilization is actively developed both in the West, where the egocentric culture dominates, and in the East (Japan, Korea, and now China and India), where the sociocentric culture dominates. In Western culture the world is knowable and controllable. However, these assumptions are not universal. In the types of culture usually defined as "Asian," the world is generally assumed not to be knowable, much less controllable.

Russian culture has been shaped in an era of total disintegration and rejection of cosmocentric culture (that left as a legacy to its successor an almost imperceptible gleam of previously existing treasures), under the strong influence of sociocentric culture and radical negation of everything that is connected with egocentrism. The natural character of cosmocentric insertions becomes obvious if we take into account the fact that the basis of Russian country (village) culture, according to many scholars' works, was formed primarily by the cosmocentric culture.

At the same time, this sociocentric culture slowly but steadfastly grew out of the cosmocentric culture. A. Amharic, studying the notions and views of Russians, pointed out thirty years ago:

For Russian people either due to historical traditions or something else, the idea of self-government and equal-for-everyone law and personal freedom and responsibility that it brings—is almost completely foreign. Even in the idea of pragmatic freedom an average Russian would see not the possibility of arranging his own life properly but a threat that some kind of crafty person will arrange a good life for himself at your expense. The very word “freedom” is understood by the majority of people as a synonym of the word “disorder,” as a possibility of unpunished anti-social and dangerous actions. As for the respect for the human rights as they are—this will cause a simple perplexity. One can respect power, force, even intellect or education, but the idea that a human individuality itself has a value of its own—is completely wild for the folk consciousness. We as people did not go through the European period of the cult of human individual, the individuality in Russian history has been always a means but not an end in itself. Paradoxically, the very concept of the “period of the cult of personality” came to mean for us a period of such humiliation and repression of human personality, that was unknown even for our people before.⁴

Even such an attractive idea as justice in practice, as A. Amalrik states, turns into the desire that “no one lives better than me” (but this is not a notorious “leveling,” as people easily accept that many live worse). This idea turns into hatred of everything standing out of the average; exceptional individuals are regarded not as role models but, on the contrary, as people that must be driven to become as all others, and any initiative, any higher and more dynamic way of life than we have, draws only hatred. Many people saw leveling as the sacred and finite principle of a higher justice, the solution to all problems, the epitome of history. But it was precisely the realization of the idea of egalitarianism (understood as leveling) that brought twentieth-century Russia its most dramatic misfortunes and failures.

Finally, it should be noted that as a result of horrible shocks started by the Civil War and continuing for several decades, 160 million people were ejected from their traditional cultural systems, primarily villages, and

forcibly “thrown into” the cities, where there was no one to help them familiarize themselves with a different urban culture, one that struck them as foreign and hostile.

Marginals, lumpens, and people who went through the horrible experience of prisons and Stalin’s camps also had an essential influence on Russian social relations. The result of this all was the phenomenon called “Soviet subject.” A. Sakharov characterized it as follows:

The ideology of the Soviet philistine (I am speaking of the worst, but unfortunately rather typical for the proletariat, peasant and intelligentsia notions) consists of several simple ideas: (1) The cult of the state, in which in several combinations the reverence for the power, the naive assurance that in the West life is worse than here, the gratitude to the “benefactor”—the state, and at the same time, fear and hypocrisy—come together. (2) Egotistical striving to provide well-being for himself and his family, “living as everyone else,”—by means of pull, protection, theft, hushed up by the authorities, and necessary hypocrisy. . . . (3) The idea of national superiority. It acquires severe historical and pogrom forms in many Russians and not only Russians. Very often one may hear: why should we spend money on these black (or yellow) monkeys, why should we feed the parasites. Or: It is the Jews (or Russians, Georgians, *chuchmeks*—i.e., inhabitants of Central Asia) that are to blame for everything.⁵

Although Sakharov wrote this more than fifteen years ago, it is still relevant today. According to the all-Russian poll conducted in 2004 by the Foundation “Expertise,” around 70–75 percent of Russians think that “such key branches of economics as electric power engineering, coal industry, oil industry, railways, etc. should belong to the state” and that we “cannot possibly let the foreign capital into these branches, otherwise Russia may lose its independence.” Half of the respondents see the “power of Russia” in the fact that working for the well-being of the state has been always more honorable in this country than working for yourself. About 70 percent of respondents think “the state must guarantee to each of the citizens a decent job and a decent standard of life.” An opposite opinion—that “the state should only take care of the well-being of those who cannot really work themselves, i.e. the elderly, the children, the handicapped”—is shared by only 28 percent of respondents.

At least 73 percent of respondents agreed that the severity of the punishment is an effective instrument in reducing crime and that under particular circumstances it is quite acceptable to keep an individual in prison without trial. More than 60 percent expressed the opinion that "our country needs not so much the laws and political programs as strong and energetic leaders whom the people would trust" and that "executing the terrorists in public is the right thing to do." About 50 percent of Russians think that "the president must become the sole master of the country, and only then we will break through"; that "in Russia it is necessary to be afraid of power, otherwise nobody will respect it"; that "those who prevent the president from pursuing his politics have no place in our country"; and that "the most important thing in the work of law and order institutions is to stop crime, even if in order to do that it will be necessary to infringe upon the rights of the accused." The accumulated data allows us to single out the main cultural matrixes of an average Russian: *rejection of personality, individuality, and independence in the sphere of production and socially meaningful activity; and a conscious "dissolution" of oneself in some kind of "we"—real or imagined.* Without overcoming these assumptions, it will be impossible for us to move into the "radiant tomorrow."

In the conditions when the objective movement of historical process is more and more persistently driving people from the sociocentric culture to the egocentric culture, a fear of the consequences of this transition drives millions of people to acquire a new, even if illusory, "us." What is meant here is the drive to "acquire ancestors," to create one's own genealogy. The skeptical attitude toward genealogies that was predominant in the earlier official ideology has changed today in social and political journalism to the enthusiastic celebration of people who have a genealogy or want to acquire one. Many people still sincerely believe that Russian culture is not marked with racism and xenophobia, but that is not so. Most Russians strictly divide the representatives of various peoples and social and religious groups into sameness and otherness. The following situations illustrate my point.

Suspicion and Aggression toward Everyone Who Is Not "Us." Taking the enemy outside the frame of society and demonizing the enemy in the context of global conspiracy theory are typical devices; moreover, they underpin the thinking of a large number of our contemporaries, who in principle are not capable of admitting their own mistakes. All of Russian history is a quest to identify and wage a resentful war with the guilty.⁶

Suspicion toward Material Well-Being, Envy of the Rich. From all the riches of Christianity, Russian and later Soviet culture accepted as one of its cornerstones only the idea that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The penetration of socialist ideas into Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century only helped to articulate the people's natural resentment of wealth, private property (and together with it the rights of an individual, opposing himself to the majority), and many other Western values.

Even today a lot of people assume that being poor in principle is "normal." The most unpleasant thing for these people is not to have a miserable life, but to be worse off than others: "So what, that we are poor, we live as everyone else does." One can "live as everyone else" on any level, even the lowest. There is again the same constant striving to be among the "same," but it is preferable when those "same" are poor, because being poor allows one, first, not to make too much of an effort, and, second, to feel more spiritual, closer to God.

This point of view—that poverty indicates spirituality, and well-being indicates lack of spirituality—is popular enough among certain Russian political and social journalists. Hence comes the new spiral of isolationism and messianism. Hence comes the fantastic model of future Russia as the fortress of morality in the world of amoral materiality. Hence the Russian answer to the question "How can we become the spiritual leaders of humankind, aiming to achieve the stoic rejection of the total power of money?"

The flipside of this approach is the extreme popularity of various lotteries, gambling machines, and animated cartoons about certain Yemelyas who sit by the stove (while their brothers work in the field) waiting for luck; and luck always finds such Yemelyas, because they are precisely the lucky ones. On a closer examination of this contradiction it becomes clear that it is not wealth in itself that is scorned; what is unacceptable is to struggle for material success, to demonstrate initiative, to save money.

Lack of Respect for Law and Legal Institutions of Society. Western culture grounds itself in the notion that impersonal law regulates relations between individuals, while for Russian culture it is typical for one to expect all interpersonal relations to be based on pure emotions, without the mediating role of the law.

The West is more rational, more experienced, due to its fear of the sinful human soul; it tries to put limitations on a person by means of conventions.

Not trusting human nature, the West gives each person a chance to set a necessary distance, a peculiar “sanitary cordon,” preventing everyone from excessive closeness or excessive informality, preferring a comfortable life, without the dangerous freeing of impulses that can lead to unpredictable consequences. Russia always believed in the natural man and attempted to reveal him, liberate him, set him free; and though untying some knots revealed others, such as bad instincts that caused suffering, in this suffering the natural man could live passionately and without looking back.

Persistent Frustration and Lack of Confidence. This feature of Soviet (and now Russian) subject is well known to anyone who compared our compatriots with representatives of Western culture. The difference in behavior is determined by the fact that the private life of a law-abiding citizen in the United States is untouchable.⁷ Moreover, all governmental institutions, including the legal ones, are required to fully inform people about their activities. In Russia, in spite of the legal institutions’ formal goal of protecting the civil rights, it is precisely these institutions that cause most fear in people. The reason for that is not just the history of our country, but also legal ignorance: people’s lack of knowledge of civil rights and duties with respect to legal organizations and, reciprocally, the rights and duties of such institutions with respect to citizens.

Fatalism Turning into Nihilism. Another feature of Russian culture is its deep fatalism. A fatalist is a person who thinks that there is a certain self-functioning mechanism (be it a mechanism of happiness, of social structure, of fate, etc.) that one way or another “interferes” in her life. A person who thinks about her place in the world and about her personal dignity, on the contrary, accepts the fact that there is always an opportunity for self-realization, that it depends only on herself, on her own work and spiritual effort, aimed at the emancipation and development of her individuality. This fatalism is demonstrated in the notorious and well-known Russian lack of responsibility and practical thinking.

At the Crossroads

My intention in the previous enumeration was not to be exhaustive but to identify some features under whose constant influence we all live. However, there are reasons to believe that the culture I described above has

already begun to be destroyed. What will follow it is a new set of spiritual instruments at whose center will most surely lie the egocentric culture. The Russian inclination to collectivism, social justice, and leveling of incomes, pointed out by many scholars both in this country and abroad, is now disintegrating. In reality it is rampant individualism that prevails in the country now as a natural reaction against forced collectivism. The “collectivism/individualism” pendulum has now sharply moved in the direction of individualism, and there is simply nothing to balance these extremes.

However, the champions of other types of cultural codes are not abandoning their position yet. They oppose in many ways the centering of a culture around the idea of individual sovereignty. Moreover, we can witness a completely unbelievable impulse toward what can be called a new collectivization of consciousness. If in Soviet times collectivization was forced, now it is a voluntary collectivization. Under the slogan “Creating a civil society in Russia,” people now unite in quite exotic structures.⁸ Mass media has already pointed out that now, instead of the powerful and mighty “we” of totalitarian empire, we have the “we” of religion, nationalism, democracy, and anticommunism. Each of these “we’s,” infected with the energies of their own truth and intolerance, manipulates the language of absolute categories and all-embracing ideologies. It is only the sacred passwords that changed: Now they are “spirituality,” “traditions,” “human rights.”

Another important conclusion is that culture is acquiring a three-level structure. The lowest level is the traditional local culture—the culture of the city/town where an individual dwells, or the culture of the social group or some other subculture. The middle layer is what can be called a general state culture—a conglomerate of values and notions, the acceptance of which is considered necessary for a citizen of a particular state. The specificity of this culture and its difference from the so-called national culture is particularly obvious in a state like Russia, which comprises many peoples (ethnicities).

The third layer emerging and becoming more powerful is the so-called global Americanized culture: the culture of management and information, the culture of Snickers candy bars and iPods, the culture of fast food, uni-sex clothes, powerful cars, and other products that horrify some people and mesmerize others. In these conditions a human being has to adjust not to just one of these cultures but to all three at once.

The traditional institutions of culture-translation—family, school, and so on—cannot cope with their culture-producing function. The schemes of existence offered by these institutions turn out to be obviously ineffective.

It is clear that in this situation the role of mass media grows considerably. Mass media functions as the cultural educator of an individual, strategically offering her various technologies of successful behavior and effective activity; that is why from the utilitarian point of view any TV channel or newspaper or other form of mass media can become an instrument that helps individuals orient themselves to the existing "technologies of life."⁹

Organizing the choice and translation of information, mass media shapes the informational flows that essentially erode the archaic stereotypes and in many ways create new ways of life—new standards for the meanings, values, norms, and motifs of social behavior. Externally this is expressed in the destruction of the established canons, which angers the "keepers of the culture." These "keepers" bombard mass media and other channels of communication with their proclamations about the death of the state and its culture, the destruction of which is unprecedented in its meaninglessness and cruelty. The whole new culture is denounced as base. And too many people in Russia believe this denunciation.

The models and standards of political culture occupy the most important place in the system of cultural matrixes. In the last several years Russia has founded institutes of political democracy, shaped a new market economy, and created the new legal basis for the state and civil life. The censorship and the ideological dictate in the sphere of culture and art were abandoned to the past. The main attributes of democratic statehood are the appointment by election of the executive power leaders and legislators, the multiparty system, the separation of powers. A certain stabilization of state power and management has also taken place.

However, in many important spheres of life the country has been developing in the direction of the new but not very attractive social structure. Civilized and maximally transparent relations of business and state, the defense of competition and honest business, are in an embryonic state. The partnership between the state and the society is poorly developed; the mechanisms of civil control over the ruling power have not yet been established. As a result, the alienation of power from society and of society from power is preserved and at times even grows. The idea that the state is corrupt and ineffective is widespread in society. On the other hand, the state still often regards the population not as citizens but rather as subjects.

A lot of hopes rested on the nongovernmental and nonstate organizations (NGOs or NSOs). Some time ago many Russian politicians and analysts of democratic orientation believed that as the social-psychological grounds

of the previous Communist system were gradually destroyed, new forms of social consciousness would arise, creating a foundation for the alternative democratic system. It was assumed that the civil society in Russia would present an effective resistance to power and authoritarian tendencies and that the structures of the civil society would act as the crucial element in the process of democratization. Unfortunately, reality did not bear this out. An unbiased analysis shows that many structures of the third sector are not really interested in democracy.

Without exploring further the vagueness of differentiation between the civil, political, and other nongovernmental and nonstate structures, I will simply explain that the third sector and democracy in Russia have quite complicated relations with each other. In Russia there are now many NGOs and NSOs that, not yet having become a normal counterbalance to the state, have already actively blended into the system of management, becoming a certain instrument of power, by means of which this power solves certain tasks. Lately more and more suspicions have arisen that a large number of these NGOs and NSOs are in fact organized by the power specifically for its own aims.

In my opinion, the factors necessary for the shaping of the system of civil society are not the large number of NGOs, but rather the presence of several necessary conditions:

- Market relations, which permeate the whole society and are controlled by social ethics
- Respect for law, which stands in defense of human rights
- The publicity of power, which is supported by the existence of an independent media
- The presence of a powerful middle class, which is ready to protect its rights against any infringements

Moreover, I would suggest here that in the postmodernist era the very existence of permanent social organizations is very questionable. These organizations emerged in particular social conditions as an effective instrument by which individuals could be organized and their actions coordinated in defense of their interests. In the epoch of electronic democracy, the Internet, and mass communications the necessity in such organizations considerably diminishes. The main element of civil society becomes the responsible (or, as she is sometimes called, "adequate") citizen.¹⁰

Such a citizen is characterized, on the one hand, by a high level of in-

dividual autonomy in relation to the society in general and the power of state in particular. Such an individual is defined by many authors as self-sufficient and inherently valuable. On the other hand, such an individual is able to constructively interact with other individuals in the name of mutual goals, interests, values, and also is able to confine efforts to fulfill his private interests to the wider society's well-being, expressed in the legal norms.

It is absolutely clear that for the shaping of such types of social subjects there are particular institutional prerequisites, mainly the minimum of democratic rights and freedoms, making the autonomy of individuals and the self-organization of citizens both possible and legal. However, the institutional (including the legal) conditions alone are not enough to bring such organizations about. No less a part, and maybe a more important part, is played by the cultural or social-psychological prerequisites. First, only the people who know that their own actions are the best way of defending their interests, of solving the economic, social, and political problems that are most important for them, can be the subjects of civil society. Second, a real or potential subject of the civil society is a person who is certain that people can achieve real results only by uniting, by combining their efforts with those of others. Third, these are people who respect but are not afraid of the government they elected.

Unfortunately, in a social-psychological sense Russian society still is, so to speak, in a "disassembled condition." In such a situation the initiative necessary for the intensification and consolidation of democratic reforms cannot come from "below," from the masses and institutes of civil society. So the course of political forces in power is still determined from the "top" and in some cases this is even more obvious now than it was during the Soviet era. The main agents of social transformations in Russia and their guarantors turn out to be the elite groups and representatives of power, but not civil society. The political events of the past few years have demonstrated how unstable the process of democratic transformation in our country remains and how dangerously high the role of individuals, as opposed to groups of individuals, is. It is also clear that power in such conditions not only turns out to be the main "engine" of societal reformation but also has many opportunities to steer the ongoing changes toward its own interests. Thus modernization and democratization of Russian society may acquire the features of authoritarianism.

All this indicates that the process of the construction of civil society in Russia has not, unfortunately, led to those results that were imagined; civil

society is not the leading instrument for turning democracy into a Russian way of life. The most fundamental element of civil society is an independent media. First, the media provides the population with reliable and accurate information about the events that are most important in citizens' lives. Second, the media plays a role in the expression and shaping of the public opinion on these or those political institutions, on the economic, political, cultural, and other spheres of life of society. Third, the media performs an educational function, helping to socialize the citizenry. And finally, the media acts in a civil society as an instrument for dialogue between various social groups. Only such a dialogue, based on journalistic ethics and the rules of conducting business in the public sphere, is able to unite and consolidate the society, to politically educate people, to develop their sense of self-esteem, instead of being the tool of coercion, intimidation, and disinformation.

Due to the transitory state of Russian society it was the mass media who between 1985 and 1986 performed the functions of the civil society. Or, to put it more bluntly, the journalistic community usurped the citizens' right to express their own goals, interests, values, and expectations. This usurpation was forced because there have been (and still are) no other mechanisms and structures that could democratically consolidate the public opinion.

However, in the process of realizing this mission the mass media has generated a serious problem for itself and for the society. The press, though full of the best intentions, has gradually stopped hearing the opinion of the population and begun to regard itself not as a tribune, but as a voice of civil society. The professional community, serving the press, definitely belongs to the advanced social levels, but can it consider itself—based on this assumption—to be a voice of society? Is it possible that it serves as a voice only for itself?

Certainly in the last few years the press in Russia has not only grown in quantitative sense but also has gone through important qualitative changes. It has become more varied and multifaceted, freer and more relaxed, and in many respects more creative. However, the Russian mass media has not yet become an effective institute in the democratization of the Russian remote regions. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that local journalists' ability to perform their role of "democratic optics," through which the audience can see the events in their true light, in recent years has deteriorated considerably.

We can single out several possible causes for such a development: both

external, in relations to mass media, and internal. The external reasons are obvious: the low level of economic state of affairs in the country (and hence the insufficient amount of advertising and the need to ask those in power for the resources and privileges); the high level of administrative and financial dependence of mass media from the power and large-scale business under the practically complete indifference of society to the problem of the freedom of press; the unfavorable legal regime. All this has been pointed out time and again, but the situation is not yet changing. The political and economic peculiarities of the regions can be put into the same group. The need for regional self-identification stimulates the foundation of regional mythologies, while the local mass media is used as their translator. The regional leader in this case is presented to the mass consciousness either as a cultural hero on a national scale, or—in case of the existence of oppositional press—as an embodiment of evil on a national scale.

The studies demonstrated the Russian people's lack of need for an independent press and their unwillingness to defend mass media's independence. Most people tend to think that the autocratic or governmental control over mass media is a norm. Irrespective of the way the population interprets its own position and the situation in the country, as a rule it supports the supreme power, and when the ruling power and mass media conflict, the people usually side with the ruling power.

More than half of respondent journalists are sure that the state has the right to interfere, and indeed must interfere, in the processes of mass media. Thus, in their world outlook—in the level of political awareness and the development and articulateness of their ideological and political positions—the journalists are not considerably different from their audience. We see in them the same inclination to conformism in relations with power, the same inability to view politics as a competition of principles and alternative programs, the same dream of order inside the country and prestige abroad. And the same readiness to obey the “powerful hand” for the sake of this order and this prestige.

The Scenarios of Russia's Development

In the last several years Russia, like many other countries, has found itself facing a choice of the strategic model of development. Or even a choice of its relation to the one and only model that is presented to the humankind by the so-called West. The essence of this model is rather simple: market

relations in economy, defense of human rights as the Alpha and Omega of social life, respect for the law, and the public and informational transparency of power, which is truly accountable to the people who elect it. In other terms this model is described by means of the concepts of civil society, or open, informational society.

Certainly, real life in Western countries does not always correspond to these ideals. But it would be foolhardy to reject the model itself on these grounds, the same way that it would be foolhardy to blame Jesus Christ for the fact that many Christians do not behave in the way that he preached. What is more important is that the Western societies that proclaimed this model of organization are, slowly and with great difficulties but persistently, bringing it to life, proving that it is possible to live like this, and moreover, that life organized on the basis of these principles is much more effective than life in other societies. That is why many countries today must decide whether to accept this model as a basis for development or look for others, and, if to accept it, then how to bring it to life with respect to the essentially different historical and cultural experience of various peoples.

There are three possible answers to this question. One of them can be defined as the “Westernizing project,” another as the “modernizing project,” and the third one as the “fundamentalist (or, in other terms, archaic) project.”

The Westernizing project is connected with a belief in the inevitability of building of the universal global community, based on the principles of democracy and liberalism, scientific and cultural progress, on the all-penetrating model of the industrial and postindustrial economy. Russian champions of Westernization want to take part in the realization of this grandiose historical project. The champions of the modernizing project think that “the Western project of the world order” clashes in Russia with the insuperable difficulties and must be replaced with a modernization process that is similar in form but alternative in essence. Modernization is a specific way in which traditional societies can adjust to the challenges of globalizing civilization.

Finally, the “fundamentalist project” is oriented toward the principal and condescending rejection of the values of the Western world. It grounds itself in the ideas of “coming back to the roots,” “pressing oneself against the deeper essence of folk wisdom,” “the defense of national culture,” and so on. The failure of totalitarian regimes in Russia created certain conditions for the awakening of civil activity. However, due to a number of circum-

stances, after a short period of perestroika this activity went into recession and did not lead to the creation of stable mass civil social-psychological orientations, to the shaping of a system of mass social notions that could be used as the basis for the development of civil society.

An especially powerful impediment to the shaping of civil society in Russia is the lack of a democratic tradition in the national political culture. The researchers of this culture pointed out time and again that Russians are traditionally marked by a state-paternalistic complex: They do not feel either love or trust for the ruling power, but everything good and bad in the life of an individual depends exclusively on this power. Second, the most typical feature of this mentality is the psychology of leveling, which has nothing to do with the values of egalitarianism in the Western democratic culture. On an individual level it (like the state-paternalistic complex) is nourished by the conscious or unconscious sense of social weakness of an individual. The leveling plays a compensatory part: If an individual is poor and miserable, he "consoles" himself with the fact that everyone else lives the same way. Those who—by means of nontraditional behavior—reach a higher social and material status are condemned because they deprive others of this consolation and become a source of psychological discomfort. The only legitimate way of raising one's status is the one that takes place not as a result of personal efforts, but by the will of fate or the intervention of the authorities.

It is precisely due to society's massive reluctance to choose the Westernizing scenario that this project failed in Russia and that the country pushed to the surface the forces that managed to grab the pendulum, which was accelerating away from the Westernizing project and back toward the fundamentalist-archaic one.

It is obvious that further changes in the Russian situation will be determined by which developmental road the state and the society in general choose. The most pessimistic scenario is based on the supposition that the resistance of particular social structures will derail the plans of the country's transfer to a market economy and democracy. The odds of such a scenario are low, but not impossibly low. If the development takes this direction, Russia will face not just internal but also external catastrophe.

Another scenario that many specialists find more probable is based on the supposition that in the near future Russia will be a moderately authoritarian state with the economy of a mixed state-capitalist type. If this scenario is realized, the state will strive to control the structures of the third sector and the mass media using both legal and nonlegal levers.

In any case, it is obvious that the road to the new civilization will be long and difficult. The change of cultural matrixes of peoples' interaction presupposes the tackling of many interconnected tasks: the changing of social-economic reality itself, with the purpose of making it clearer, more transparent, understandable for an individual consciousness; the securing of the transition from the repressive culture of communication to the dialogic one; the shaping of the reflecting, rational individual. But this must be the subject of a separate conversation.

Notes

- 1 See K. Myalo, "Oborvannaya Nit Krestyanskoi Kulturi i Kulturnaja Revoljutsija" ("The Torn-Off Thread of Peasant Culture and the Cultural Revolution"), *Novy Mir*, no. 8 (1988).
- 2 E. Fromm, *Imet ili Byt (To Have or to Be)* (Moscow: AST, 2000).
- 3 V. Vernadsky, *Izbrannie Trudi po Istorii Nauki (Selected Works on the History of Science)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981); A. Schweitzer, *Kultura i Etika (Culture and Ethics)* (Moscow: n.p., 1993); Y. Lotman, "Kultura i Vzryv" ("Culture and Explosion"), in *Semiosphere* (Saint Petersburg: Iskustvo SPB, 2000).
- 4 A. Amalrik, "Prosuschestvujet li Sovetsky Sojuz do 1984 Goda" ("If the Soviet Union Survives until 1984"), *Ogorjek*, no. 9 (1990): 20.
- 5 A. Sakharov, "Simvol Very" ("Symbol of Faith"), *Literaturnaja Gazeta*, October 3, 1990.
- 6 In my view there is a clear correlation between a social system's attitude toward human rights and its level of tolerance. For a European or an American, rights and freedoms are the socially recognized space of personal self-realization. That is why infringement upon anyone's rights is for a European or an American the gravest of crimes. In Russian legal space there are also norms according to which the rights and freedoms of a human being are not to be taken away and are given from birth to everyone (article 17, part 2 of the Russian Constitution), while the state guarantees the equality of rights and freedoms of a person and citizen—irrespective of gender, race, nationality, beliefs, membership in any social organization, and other circumstances (article 19, part 7) and consequently everybody must treat these rights with respect, understanding, etc. However, in practice a Russian citizen's rights and freedoms are something external, something that is given by the beloved motherland or by a kind master and that can be taken away at any moment and with no explanation. A European and an American know that when several individuals clash there are inevitable conflicts and it is necessary to somehow resolve them. In order not to lose face, it is better that each of the conflicting sides is tolerant of the other. This tolerance as a rule is rewarded by an appropriate compromise and by the deference of the opponents and fellow citizens. A Russian citizen knows that softness and tolerance will be interpreted by the opposite side (as well as by friends and allies) as cowardice and irresolution. So developing tolerance is a function of the development of human rights. The deeper the idea of irrevocability of personal rights and freedoms sinks into the national mentality, the more tolerant the society and all its structures will become. Those changes, which have been taking place in Russia in the last few years,

have not yet deeply affected the mental grounds of human behavior in order for us to speak of a real restructuring of behavior stereotypes. And the present situation in Russian society has little to promote the development of tolerance. Very few people believe in the stability of processes going on today; everyone is waiting for something, and as a rule this “something” is bad. It is clear that these “anxious expectations” create a specific climate of collective lack of confidence within which a tree of social tolerance and agreement cannot grow.

- 7 *Editor's note:* Dzhalosinsky wrote this essay before the news of warrantless wiretapping of Americans' domestic and international communications became public. In the same way that the experience of the Soviet Union did not alter the faith of many on Communist ideals, though, it could be that this new scandal has not changed his views on Western liberal ideals. — WM
- 8 I would like to be understood correctly here. I am not against civil society or the rights of people to unite according to their interests. I only think that the existence of many unions of citizens has nothing to do with the civil society, whose constitutional basis is the idea of the sovereign responsible citizen.
- 9 It is a different story that such an attitude toward the media is usual only for a person who really makes decisions. The majority of our compatriots—in my calculation, up to 70 percent—do not make any decisions; they only react to someone else's decisions. The media then turns into entertainment. One can watch American movies a hundred times, where activity, independence, etc., are propagated and defended, but one would not necessarily do anything oneself as a result. One would not make any decisions. And no ideas will ever penetrate your mind until you become an acting subject.
- 10 An adequate citizen, then, is a well-oriented individual whose self-identification in society is correct and who actively participates in the life of society, with respect to its real condition and clear prospects, by making well-considered decisions. “In order for the democracy to be effective, it is necessary, as R. Dal points out, to have a certain level of citizens' competence.” And if even in the “old” democracies the “tragic limitations in the competence of citizens” manifests itself, then in the “young democracies” the tackling of the problem of incompetence “becomes of paramount importance.” R. Dal, “Problema Kompetentnosti Grazhdanina” (“The Problem of Citizen's Competence”), in *Demokratia: Teoria i Praktika (Democracy: Theory and Practice)* (Moscow: n.p., 1996), 22.