

TOOLS

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Hazards at Culture Gap

More than once, American applicants for these trips have described their previous foreign travel as none--"except Canada," or "unless you consider Canada." Obviously, Canada is a sovereign country, so what people probably meant by these qualifications was that Canada does not seem "foreign" because the people are so much like Americans--culturally. There **are** differences, but one has to be more sensitive to pick them up than would be necessary when visiting many other countries.

What can go wrong when there is a cultural misunderstanding? There was a story a few years ago about the early labor negotiations with a Japanese company in the American automobile industry. At one of those hot moments that indicate that talks are getting serious, the union side got angry and staged a walkout. After waiting the appropriate amount of time for this "traditional" play-acting to have its effect, they returned to the table... to find that the Japanese company representatives had left--assuming that the talks had broken down--and had not the slightest intention of coming back! Honor had been offended. Neither side knew the other's cultural rules, and it took explanation and persuasion by **intermediaries** to get the sides back together again.

Luckily, both cultures at least accepted the concept of mediation. One could imagine a culture in which suggesting mediation would be considered an insult or cowardice--fear of confronting one's adversary directly! In Farsi, the language of Iran, the word "mediation" has the connotation of "meddling," or interfering in an unwanted manner. So, some years ago when UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim said he came to Iran to "mediate" the American hostage situation, it caused a riot. (L. Copeland and L. Griggs, *Going International*, Random House, New York, 1985, p. 79)

Here is another example, in which negotiations failed because of cultural conflicts between American and Greek officials. (from, Edward Hall, *The Silent Language*, Fawcett, Greenwich, 1959.)

Upon later examination of this exasperating situation two unsuspected reasons were found for the stalemate: First, Americans pride themselves on being outspoken and forthright. These qualities are regarded as a liability by the Greeks. They are taken to indicate a lack of finesse, which the Greeks deplore... Second, when the Americans arranged meetings with the Greeks they tried to limit the length of the meetings and to reach agreement on general principles first, delegating the drafting of details to subcommittees. The Greeks regarded this practice as a device to pull the wool over their eyes. The Greek practice is to work out details in front of all concerned and continue meetings for as long as is necessary.

It also appears that Russians put great stock in negotiating **agenda**. "Weakness" in insisting on what points must be on the

agenda was seen as an indication of how the opposite side would eventually negotiate on those points.

Even leaders with protocol advisors make mistakes that enter diplomatic folklore. For example, Lyndon Johnson once sat down next to the King of Thailand and crossed his legs so that his foot pointed at the King--unaware that, in that country, it was an obscene gesture. The friendly hug he later gave the Queen did not help matters: Nobody is allowed to touch her.

If you were applying for a job in Europe, it might be normal behavior on a résumé to give your age, nationality, marital status and number of children, your military history (in Switzerland), your parents' background (in Germany); to include a photo (France), to avoid stating ambitious career goals, to say nothing about your hobbies. Things that, in the United States, might be discriminatory, or irrelevant, or private, or show initiative, or prove you are "well-rounded," would operate in a different context there.

Culture can lead to completely opposite interpretations. One thing that seems to bother Westerners in China is the spitting habit. "The Chinese spit everywhere and continually; in the street, in buses and trains, in restaurants... While they're at it, likely as not they'll blow their noses, without handkerchiefs--for the Chinese there is nothing more repulsive than the Western custom of carrying nasal excretions around in the pocket."

Bridging the Gap

Looking first at the positive side, we are lucky; at least we have, and commonly use, expressions like: "put yourself in his shoes," or "try to see it from my point of view." This means that within our society and culture we have the notion of empathy, of trying to understand others who are different from ourselves. In fact, the idea is so normal that perhaps you never considered that there may be other cultures where such an intellectual exercise is not current, or is not desirable--or is **impossible!**

As an illustration of the range of cultural diversity, consider this: There exists an aboriginal tribe in which people believe that all they are doing is reliving the lives of their ancestors, in an endless cycle. For their own lives, it would be impossible to comprehend the meaning of the word "progress." They live on a river bank, and they fish. They do so by hanging onto a log to keep afloat in the water. A neighboring tribe uses boats, which are much more convenient, but the tribe we are talking about cannot adopt this practice although they are exposed to it--because their ancestors did not use boats, and they **are** their ancestors.

There is no value judgment here, no saying that one way of

life is better than another. After all, we have our own kinds of limitations. We--North Americans and Europeans--may try to **understand** others, but we do not always **accept** them. In fact, we are the ones who sent missionaries to convert others to **our** ways and, Americans especially, have a reputation of trying to spread the values of the "our way of life."

It also seems to make us feel good (democratic, tolerant, ...) to say that, "in the end, we (all human beings, cultures) are basically alike." You know, we all want to raise our children properly, live at peace, and so on. We say this in part to show that we do not discriminate against those who are different from us.

To a certain extent the similarities are real, but it should not be overdone. There **are** fundamental, **subtle** ways in which societies and cultures are quite different, and they may perceive or experience a reality or a world-view different from our own. If we ignore this when we travel and encounter other cultures, we risk discomfort and misunderstanding. If we ignore it in politics, the risks are even greater. Recalling Pearl Harbor, the Chinese crossing of the Yalu, the debacle of the Bay of Pigs, the Vietnamese resistance, the Iranian defiance of the United States and the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, James Reston asked why, "from administration to administration of whatever party, the United States is constantly taken by surprise in a world it is trying to help but does not quite understand." Then, concerning the TWA hijacking some years ago: "Washington is trying to deal with a world it knows little about, thinking it is dealing with the liberation of a plane and its passengers when it is up against not merely terrorists but a struggle for power in the Arab world and a clash of philosophy about nothing less than the meaning of life, here and hereafter. Stumbling into this, Americans even at the top of the government are startled. Americans are still innocents abroad, physically the most mobile people in the world but intellectually still longing for an isolationist world that is gone." (James Reston, "America Is Usually Surprised," New York Times, 24 Jun 85)

Consider the reverse situation. Foreign students in the United States are often given jobs as teaching assistants, and they walk into classroom settings unlike any they have known. At least one university has provided them a kind of survival manual of dos and don'ts. One piece of advice: Don't take being treated informally as a sign of disrespect; the students do that to all teaching assistants. (In most countries the student-teacher relationship is highly formal.) Or, "Do not dress too formally. Move around the room. Use your hands when talking. Stand about an arm's length away when chatting one-on-one. Establish intermittent eye contact while talking." (Scott Heller, Chronicle of Higher Education, 11 Sep 85)

You will find exercises on interpersonal space in the questionnaire below, and you probably already know that eye contact in some Asian cultures is impolite, while in England a partner in conversation will likely maintain very steady eye contact. You may become disconcerted when a Russian friend stands so close when talking that you feel your eyes crossing. These seemingly small matters affect relationships.

It very often happens on study trips that participants begin to discover they have "problems." Something is wrong and they are not sure what or why; they have an itch, and they don't know where to scratch. There are, of course, the obvious things: homesickness, being in a strange place, living in a group structure,¹ lack of control, etc. Still, there may be something more, difficult to put one's finger on. Situations that, on the surface, are parallel to those at home just do not play out in the expected ways; cues given or received do not have the right result.

What I want to do here is to give you some **tools** to help you understand another society and culture. They are tools that can be applied to looking at any culture (including our own), but you will have different degrees of success as you apply them in Russia because, after all, Russian society is much like our own: It is European, and many North Americans have Slavic origins. If you apply these tools, you will be **active** (probing, asking questions, testing), instead of being passively buffeted about by circumstances, by mysteries, and knowing more about **why** you are uncomfortable may help you deal with it. At best, you may come to accept and even enjoy new social "rituals"; at the least, you will be better able to put up with what may be inconvenient.

Much of what is discussed here is borrowed from the work of Edward Hall, an anthropologist who for a long time helped the US State Department train people to understand the cultures of the countries in which they would serve. If you get interested, you can read his books, *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, *Beyond Culture* and *The Dance of Life*--all in paperback. I will also draw on Roland Wright's (and colleagues') work on *relational theory* for the discussion of personal and stranger relationships. While I do not deal with it here, you ought to run, not walk, to your bookstore for (paperback) copies of Paul Fussell's, *Class* or *The Dumbing of America*. You will be able, through them, to see American society as it might look from the outside--and the books are written in a very witty style.

¹ Aside from the fact that living with a group for a month can be stressful because it is not the pattern we are used to, internal differences among the members can become exaggerated and result in tension, or worse. As you read the following pages, keep in mind that some of the cultural variety that is described occurs not only between countries but within them--and North America is more culturally diverse than we realize. For example, within some cultural groups, confrontation and being outspoken is considered a good thing, and arguments clear the air without engendering personal animosity. Other groups do everything to avoid this open expression of conflict and do take it personally when it occurs. While you might choose your friends to be compatible with your own outlook and behavior, you do not have the same choice about who will turn up in our delegation. This can (and has) lead to conflicts that need not happen if people are sensitive.

A Questionnaire

To begin with, I propose that you fill out a kind of questionnaire. There is a series of questions below. Think about them, perhaps do a bit of observation (for several you must do a kind of "study"). Then write down your answers in a separate notebook that you plan to take on the trip. When you get to Russia, start trying to answer the same questions as they apply in that country. See if your answers change as you are there longer and if your answers are different as you travel outside Moscow.

- 1) Suppose you arrive in a new city. You look at a map of it. With which of the two street layouts would you be more comfortable and less worried about getting lost?
Americans or Canadians will often choose the grid; a European, the star. The latter looks more complex, but since European cities often grew up around important points (castle, town hall, market, church), the European knows he will always get **somewhere** by approaching a node (each of which is unique), whereas America's long streets seem to go nowhere and every block appears alike.

Grid layout

Star layout

What is the layout of Moscow? When you are standing on the street, can you see enough other streets around you to get a feeling of this layout pattern (as you would see several blocks at once in many North American cities), or is a map required to see the pattern? Does this make it more difficult to "feel" where you are?

- 2) When you give people directions to get somewhere in your home city, how do you do it; that is, what are your points of reference? Do you use freeways, streets, landmarks, distances, something else? If you ever lived (or do live) in a small town or rural area, what were (are) the reference points there for giving directions?
Once you see Moscow, how do you think you would give directions there, especially in the newer residential areas, e.g., those you see near the Academy of Labor? It is not always easy for residents either, and that can lead to peculiar misunderstandings. While you will meet taxi drivers who outright refuse you, sometimes the reason is honest: The driver will not go to certain residential districts unless the passenger can give adequate directions, but because of the language barrier you may not realize that that is the reason for refusal to pick you up.
- 3) You are alone in your car, it is rush hour and traffic is crawling. People in other cars can see you. Which of the following activities would you be willing to do without caring what other people think: smile at something you think of? sing along with your radio? pick your nose? shout aggressively at another driver who does something you do

not like? What does this say about the degree to which we have made the car a private place in a public setting? Now, when you ride the Metro, observe how Muscovites create a private space in **their** form of commuting. Are they shy about staring out from that space at you?

- 4) If you work in an office (or your boss does), is the door kept open or closed? Whichever the case, what message is it meant to convey? Would you free to knock and just walk in, or would you wait for an answer? See if you get to observe the same situation in Moscow. Would somebody coming into your workplace and looking around pretty much be able to guess who the boss is or where the boss is probably located? Would the boss be central and visible, or in an "inner" office?
- 5) In what sort of situations do you feel uncomfortably crowded: a bus? an elevator? your workplace? a bar? When you are physically crowded (as in an elevator), what do you do with your eyes, where do you look? What about your hands? How do you react to physical contact with somebody else? What is your reaction if people bump into you on a crowded street or in a crowded building (and their reaction)? What are the reactions when this happens in Moscow?
- 6) If you walk down a street in your city, do you make eye contact with people coming toward you? smile at them? What do they do? Do you get the same response in Moscow? Ask the Russians you get to know how they explain the differences you observe.²
- 7) You are on the street or in a building. At a distance, you see somebody you know and who is coming toward you. At what distance do you start the greeting process (waving, speaking)? Does it depend upon visual contact? being within earshot? closer? If you come upon two people you know who are in conversation, how do you know when to complete your approach without feeling you are interrupting? Is there sometimes an awkward moment of indecision?
- 8) Think of different public places in which you have been (airport waiting lounges, your doctor's office, a bus etc.). Are seats arranged to keep people from having contact (in a row), or to encourage contact (in a circle, grouped)? In restaurants, how wide are the tables? If you are having an intimate dinner, how close can you get to the person opposite you, and can you hear each other without being overheard? Do you think these "architectural" practices reflect what we think is appropriately public or private behavior?
- 9) Observe situations in which you are in conversation with the kinds of people listed below. In each case: How close are you? How much of the person do you see easily, and do both your eyes meet or do you have to shift and look from

² When McDonalds opened in Moscow, some customers mistook the smiles of the staff for mocking; they thought they were being laughed at. This new approach to service was hailed, but what was the real meaning of trained smiles?

one eye to the other of the person to whom you are talking? What can you smell at conversational distance: body odor? cosmetics? nothing? What is speech like in each case (loudness, informality/formality, presence or absence of accompanying gestures)?

- a. somebody with whom you are intimate
- b. a friend
- c. an acquaintance or a colleague at work
- d. a stranger
- e. the speaker at a meeting

Make the same observations in Russia. Are you ever uncomfortable because your sense of appropriate distance or of communicating behavior is not followed? (Of course, you may not have all these types of relationships there.)

- 10) How are the doors constructed where you live? where you work? To what extent do they screen out sound? In Moscow, what is the door situation in your room? in the office of an "important" person?
- 11) Observe the noise level of people (conversation, laughter) in the public places where you have occasion to be (waiting rooms, public transportation, restaurants, etc.). In North America, how much space do people "occupy" by the sounds they make? Does this vary with age, or social/ethnic group? Compare these same factors in Moscow and other Russian cities. The Metro is a particularly good "laboratory" for studying this!³
- 12) In a conversation, how does the person to whom you are talking communicate that he is listening/understanding (staring, nodding, blinking, grunting)? Do you get similar facial, body and verbal cues from Russians? What are your first impressions of new people (for example, lecturers) you meet there? What visual cues, if any, do they give about their personality? Are there more cues as time passes, and were your initial feelings/opinions about these people borne out?
- 13) In your city, what would you consider an old building? Are such buildings old because of their age or their condition? Can you draw any conclusions about how long things **last** in North America?
When you are in Russia, what do you consider being old? Does this change the longer you are there? as we visit different cities? Do you suppose that the presence of the physical past contributes to the persistence of *social memory* in people, i.e., the influence today of events that occurred long before? At the same time, you will see much that is new, and you might learn a lot by probing whether people (especially the young) prefer the old or the new.
- 14) In your daily life, how long do things **take**: a meal? getting ready to go somewhere? an answer to a question? other things you can think of? What about the same phenomena in Russia? With respect to the responses to questions, is it just their length or also their **structure** that is

different--and might there be any relation to what you explored in Item 13?⁴

- 15) Are you the sort of person who is comfortable doing one thing at a time, according to a schedule **monochronic**? Or do you prefer doing many things at once, without any particular order **polychronic**? In which way does your boss prefer that you behave at work? If you prefer one of these two styles, do you know people who prefer the other? If so, do they differ in their background (family, origin) from you? Do you have to work with them, and what difficulties does this pose? Which style seems to apply in Russia? Are there differences of this kind within our group that cause misunderstanding or friction?
- 16) You are invited to somebody's house for dinner at seven p.m. At what time do you arrive? Does it depend upon who invited you? You invite people to dinner at seven p.m. At what time do you expect them to show up? In both cases, how long after seven p.m. would be considered as having come "late"?
- 17) You go for an appointment at a given hour, and you are kept waiting in the reception area? After how long do you get annoyed or feel you are being "given a message, if the appointment is with: your doctor? your boss? a commercial relationship (for example, a bank loan officer)?
In Russia, what does "on time" mean in different situations? Are there situations where you become annoyed by time relationships/practices: within our group? with our hosts?
- 18) When you need to be alone, where do you go? Do you try to be alone **with** people (e.g., a bar where you are a stranger), or **without** people (fishing, camping, a walk in the country)? What can you find out about the preferences of Muscovites in these respects? You may find they have been heavily exposed to socializing forces yet also close to rural roots. In a new place or city, do you prefer to explore with other people or on your own? After you get to Moscow, do you try to explore on your own or with people? Does the limitation on contacts with strangers (language) make you feel not just alone, but isolated? Does the way in which you like to be alone or to explore new places when you are at home make it easier or more difficult to do these same things in Russia?
- 19) **Before** you go on the trip, make this set of observations on several different days (at least once on a work day and once on an off day). Note as many people as possible with whom you come in to contact and classify each person into one of two types of relationships: 'personal' or 'stranger'. 'Personal' would include family, friends, some people with whom you work (in general, **those interested in you as a whole person, not just your functional role**). 'Stranger'

³ And by **listening** first, we might avoid the appearance of howling and screaming that seems associated with Americans boarding a train.

⁴ The Russian propensity for patience, which some attribute to the Oriental part of their character, has implications for international relations. If American foreign policy often appears to occur in fits and starts, the Russians have seemed more capable of sustaining a position for a long time and waiting for a desired opening. (The pace has surely changed recently.)

would include people you have never met before, store clerks, bank tellers, etc. (Some of both types you may "meet" by telephone.) What is the proportion of personal/stranger relationships? Is the proportion different on a work day and a day off?

Do the same thing several times during the trip, starting at the very beginning. How does the daily personal/stranger proportion change with time? Is there any parallel between that proportion and how comfortable you feel at different stages of the trip? Is it **just** the **proportion** that is related to how you feel, or is there something else? For example, you **know** how to deal with most stranger relationships at home (buying, ordering repairs)--though a new situation may "throw" you. Do things get better as you learn the "rules" for non-personal relationships in the foreign context? In other words, you have to keep two things in mind: Some stranger relationships may become personal ones, and you will also get a better idea of how to behave with, and what to expect from, strangers.

One possible barometer: Compare how you deal with making purchases at the beginning and at the end of the trip. At first, do you get the result you would normally expect? Another measure: when the personal/stranger proportion gets distorted, such as when we leave the familiarity of Moscow for a trip, is it as disorienting as when you first arrived in Moscow?

These questions have emphasized your behavior **toward** another person who is a stranger, or "category" (clerk, etc.). Yet for all these "others," **you** are also a stranger or "category" (client, delegate/student, hotel guest, and so on). At home you probably know how to "be" a category. So you should also note whether you have to relearn any of these roles when you are abroad, and you should see if you can detect whether any Russians are having to make an effort to deal with you in this sense. Often the best people to watch for signs of this are the floor ladies in the residence. They know how a "guest" (a category) behaves, then along come the North Americans...

Remember, when you are at home, a proportion of your day is spent with people who know you and are concerned about you as a **whole** person, while some see you only as the role or category you are playing. You get used to this distribution or balance. On the trip, you are, at least at first, cut off from your normal level of personal contacts--and it can be disconcerting.

- 20) The last question will also take some systematic observation on your part, **before** you go and during the trip. This time you need to note the communications you have with people during a day and, in each case, to what extent there is understanding that is **implicit** and the degree to which you have to be **explicit**. For example, your spouse comes home at the end of the day, you take one look at his/her face and you already know a great deal about what kind of day it has been and what he/she needs (including emotionally)--without a word being said. Most of this kind of communication is implicit; it is based on much experience. In the same day, you might have gone through training in

a new procedure at work in which everything had to be clearly spelled out (**explicit** communication).

Not only does each of us experience both kinds of communication in our daily life, but some **cultures** tend, overall, to be more **explicit** or more **implicit**. This may be reflected in their arts: literature, painting, etc., where silence may be as important as sound, space as important as what is in it. Two things can happen when we encounter a culture whose balance is different from our own. We may miss very strong messages simply because they are not delivered with the force we normally expect when something important is meant to be conveyed⁵ or because we do not know enough about the **context** in which the message rests. Conversely, we may feel annoyed when a message is too overbearing: "We got the point, you don't have to keep hammering it in!" In the latter case, we understand the **context** well enough that we don't need so much detail.

So when you are on the trip, you will want to look for two things. First, **how much change is there in your habitual daily mixture of implicit and explicit communication, and does this change break the rhythm that makes you comfortable in your normal life at home?** In other words, a certain portion of the communication you have with people each day is implicit, while on the trip more of your daily communication will be explicit: You do not know the people in the delegation or the Russians you meet well enough at first to communicate subtly, many things are being explained to you in lectures and otherwise, you yourself have to make many explanations. This shift in proportion may fatigue or annoy you.

Second, are there differences in the proportion of explicit/implicit communication **as they practice it in Russia** that make us miss some things and/or feel that others are unnecessarily repetitive? NOTE: Not all the differences you will observe are **cultural** reflexes. People we meet will also make assumptions about how much context (background) we have, and will consciously communicate according to those assumptions. Their assumptions can err in either direction!

You will also make mistakes about how much context or background you have to provide. Just see if you do not feel a strain while you are asking a question or discussing a subject as you try to get a feel for how much you need to explain to make yourself clear, beyond what you would have to do at home. Sometimes, because you do not provide enough context, you will get an answer to a question you did not think you asked.

As you look back over these questions, you can see the

⁵ You may understand this better from the jokes you will hear in Russia. Unlike many of ours, the punch lines do not provoke a big guffaw. They have a more deft touch, but they echo in your mind and reveal deeper meanings and ironies in the minutes that follow--like an aftertaste. "Of course I have my own opinion!" goes the punch line of one from the Soviet era. "But I totally disagree with it..."

assumptions they contain. The way *space* is used and experienced is a **cultural** characteristic. This includes not just physical space and the things we put into it, but the space within which human interaction takes place. Not all you will observe about space has a cultural explanation; politics and history also play a role. In fact, the contrast you will notice between the layouts of modern cities and of old Russian towns or the countryside represents a break with the cultural past, not its continuity. It is the result of political decisions and the recent history of the country. In a similar way, the development of the American suburbs owes much to the postwar economic situation and even to certain political factors.

The use and experience of *time* are also cultural but, again, there are other dimensions. An industrial society could not have been built without changing the social use of time: Were everybody not at his post when the factory day began, nothing would have been accomplished. Now we are entering another transition in the social use of time and space as information technology changes when and where we have to be in order to work.

People experience their environment and each other through their **senses**: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Cultures do this differently--have different "rules"--and giving the wrong cues or misreading the ones we receive can be the source of misunderstanding or discomfort. Touch, for example. You may not be indifferent when you see Russian women holding hands as they walk, and men may kiss each other in greeting--but then they don't pat each other on the rear like American football players...

Human beings have relationships with each other, and these are of different kinds. We learn, as we grow up, how to behave in different relational situations. Moreover, **where** we grow up makes a difference. The more people gather into cities, as opposed to being raised in rural or tribal⁶ societies, the more they have to develop ways of dealing behaviorally with strangers.

Tabula rasa?

Cultural sensitivity is not the only preparation necessary for your Russian visit. None of us go there without preconceptions, with a *tabula rasa* (clean slate). The preconceptions may be positive, negative--or both. More than once, though, the following sequence has occurred. A person arrives in Russia and discovers, to his surprise, that so much is familiar. There are colors rather than just shades of gray (!), people behave basically like those back home, many problems are similar, and so on. Again, but in a different sense this time, the first conclusion is that "they're just like us." Initial defenses and skepticism are relaxed. Nevertheless, little by little, things don't "jibe"; it **is** different after all, and sometimes the person feels a bit betrayed, as if he has been taken in after allowing himself to

⁶ A Cherokee acquaintance of mine once said that as far as his tribe was concerned, the only strangers they ever saw were either dead or running!

become vulnerable, and goes home feeling more negative than upon arrival.

Each of us will form opinions about Russia. We like to say we have a "right" to our opinion. But, careful! An **opinion** is not a prejudice or a gut reaction; it has to be earned. Think of a judge, who must sift through evidence, examine opposing arguments, measure a case against legal norms and precedents--and only then arrive at an **opinion**. You have a similar task.

The question is where to start, what is the frame of reference? Should you measure/evaluate Russia against its own standards and potential? against "universal" standards? in comparison with North America? That is for you to judge, and it depends upon your goals. Are you more interested in Russia *per se*, in its internal life, or are you more concerned with its international role, how this will evolve and what cooperation is feasible or desirable? Whatever your interest, it will be useful to step back for a moment and set Russia into some context and to examine the questions of preconceptions and perspective.

First, there are several "givens" about Russia that can not be ignored in any analysis of the country as it behaves today. It is a huge country, about twice the size of continental United States. Most territory lies well to the north (like Canada, but it has six times as many mouths to feed) and most of the country has an average annual temperature below freezing--with obvious implications for agricultural potential. Most raw material and energy resources are in the east, thousands of miles from the industries in which they are used.⁷ It is a multinational country (not multiethnic like the United States, where people immigrated and, to different degrees, became assimilated). Russia has only recently become urbanized, but this urbanization has occurred very rapidly.⁸ Even in cities like Moscow, many people are only a generation away from peasant **culture**. Politically, the country has always had a highly centralized tradition; that was not a Soviet invention. Russia was the target of invasions for centuries, and thus the fear and mistrust of the outside world have deep roots (as those of you who remember the television production of *Peter the Great* will recall). While industry existed before the Revolution, it had its origins among peasants rather than in towns, and the industrial initiative came more from the state than from entrepreneurs (a history different from the West). Into this setting, the 1917

⁷ Most of the population lives in the European part of the country, west of the Urals. Nearly all the energy is **consumed** there, but almost all the resources are east and southeast of the Urals. The result is that a major percentage of all freight haulage from east to west is accounted for by fuel! This helps explain the Russian commitment to nuclear energy. (Sovetskaya Rossia, 30 Apr 1987)

⁸ "In its degree of urbanization and the percentage of its rural population, the Soviet Union is comparable to the United States prior to the first world war and to France in 1940... Since the end of the second world war, however, the Soviet Union has achieved in twenty years an evolution comparable to that of France between 1860 and 1940." (Basile Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society*, Pantheon, New York, 1983.)

Revolution brought a foreign ideology (Marxism), modified and adapted by Lenin (one party system, etc.). The upheaval of the Revolution was followed by the Civil War (including foreign intervention), Stalinism--drastic and forced changes in agriculture and the peasantry, the (mortally) diminished role of the Party--the physical and human devastation of World War II, finally, attainment of global status and then the loss of that status.

Those are the big and basic issues from which you must begin. A second aspect is until a few years before it ceased to exist, the Soviet Union had a "bad press." Not that things did not continue to be done there that deserved criticism, but many writers seemed drawn only to the negative. They interviewed the marginals, the refuseniks, the dissidents or, in interviews with "ordinary" people, would emphasize the rare "admissions" or "acknowledgments" of problems. For balance, the writers assured us that Russians were warmhearted and given to deep friendships. One can understand that for a journalist conflict makes good "copy," but efforts that claimed to be less transitory sometimes took the same approach. Consider the documentary aired by PBS on *Frontline* in February 1986. It was supposed to further understanding by following a group of American tourists on their Soviet trip, but the title alone, *Russia: Love It or Leave It*, implied that this program was about a country whose citizens did not want to be there.⁹ The Soviets knew this, and were not particularly ready to sit down with a stranger and foreigner, whose motives were unknown, and begin by pouring out all their complaints. Even people on the street reacted when they saw pictures being taken of what they felt were their defects. There was also a defensiveness in official contacts: The factory you might have visited was running quite smoothly and without problems, thank you...

David Shipler (*Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams*, Penguin, New York, 1984) who was New York Times correspondent in Moscow from 1975-79, suggested that there was another side to this. The resistance to criticism cut both ways, and he recounted incidents when he was roundly rebuked for being forthcoming about deficiencies in the United States: "Our delight in self-criticism, and our guilt when we fail to dissect ourselves with sufficient honesty, bring to Russians something close to visceral revulsion." He told of visiting an American exhibition in Moscow with a Soviet ("hard-line") colleague in 1976 and commenting to her that the displays were not balanced because they did not also show the negative side of US life. "She was horrified at me. This was supposed to be a celebration, she said, the 200th anniversary of my country's founding. Why should a government, celebrating such a momentous occasion, publicize problems?" Shipler explained this reaction as an old Russian, not Soviet, trait: "the distaste

⁹ The film showed little of the Americans' experiences. There were interviews of "marginal" Soviet citizens, and a focus on how the producer disobeyed the instructions of what he was, or was not, to film. Since he got away with almost all his "violations," one must presume there was no serious enforcement.

for introspection and the compulsion to mask unpleasantness."¹⁰ That compulsion did not inhibit the Soviet media from focusing on problems (unemployment, poverty, racism) in their coverage of the US.¹¹

The discussion above became like ancient history with the coming of *glasnost*. Self-criticism on just about any subject took on unbelievable proportions and it was done in front of the whole world. You will see examples further on in the *Briefing*. Still, centuries could not be undone in a few months, and some people felt conflicts as they acted out the newly-expected behavior, especially in front of foreigners, while others went out of their way to emphasize what was negative in Soviet life.

In evaluating *glasnost*, it was necessary to keep its context in mind to measure the depth of its effect. While we have been pretty much able to say and write what we wanted for a long time (if anybody would listen or read), the Soviets faced restrictions; at the same time, words always **counted**: what was uttered was taken seriously, they could even punish you for it (and literature, especially poetry, was almost revered). "The word is like a bullet, piercing armor, inflicting wounds, altering lives . . . the word has a power unknown in a West of plentiful debate and easy honesty . . . We [meanwhile] are bathed in information until we no longer feel its force." (D. Shipler, *op. cit.*)

The exiled Soviet poet and Nobel laureate, Iosif Brodsky, expressed something similar when Soviet journalists interviewed him: "It is language that gives birth to poets, not poets who give birth to language. Given the fact that the Russian language exists, something remarkable is bound to happen from time to time. Such is the nature of our language. No matter what is going on in the country, it will always offer up something remarkable from deep within itself. So long as there is a Russian language, poetry is inevitable." (Izvestia, 4 Dec 88)

There are areas *glasnost* took longer to touch than others, and the solid front of unity Soviets displayed concerning their country's foreign policy did become annoying. One of our speakers in 1987 said that, try as he might, he just could not think of a single Soviet foreign policy error since the time of Khrushchev. Sometimes it hardly seemed worth carrying on a conversation when the Soviets would not, as we do, criticize their government in this domain, but this was not all one-sided. In a revealing incident in 1985, an American delivered a paper during a joint symposium with our host's students, then invited participants from both sides to criticize his opinions. Another

¹⁰ This may explain the frustrating experience delegates sometimes used to have of not getting answers to special requests. Nobody wants to deliver bad news.

¹¹ On that score, it used to be problematic that our delegations spent a month asking questions that unabashedly probed the weaknesses in the Soviet system or the transgressions of Soviet foreign policy, but let one of our lecturers allude, as politely as possible, to American faults, or disagree with American policy, and the air became electric with defensiveness or even charges of "anti-Americanism."

American delegate blurted out, "I didn't come here to debate a fellow American." In his mind, he probably added, ". . . in front of the Russians."

Does this shoe really fit the other foot?

In this section, we examine aspects of Western life as seen in our own press, particularly negative ones. The purpose used to be to prepare participants in the course for the critical view of their own countries to which the Soviets sometimes subjected them. Since we take our own conditions as a given, the good with the bad, it was useful to isolate some unfavorable conditions to see better how we might look to others (who, of course, have their own set of circumstances that they see subjectively). In the end, what we **value** will strongly influence how we perceive ourselves and others (and what we fail to notice or to grant great significance). That may be unavoidable. What I hoped to avoid was having people feel they were under siege when shortcomings they regretted and struggled against were mentioned by foreigners [sic].

During perestroika, Russians derided everything about their own country and idealized conditions abroad, so it was often necessary to have the "ammunition" to convince them they might be exaggerating in their perceptions of the West. Now, nationalism seems to be swinging the pendulum the other way again, but for different reasons.

First, a brief quiz. Most of us have a notion of democracy and of countries that are democratic. Still, can you identify the countries in which the following can lawfully occur?

- 1) The government can raise and lower tax rates by simple announcement. The legislature may not even debate or vote on these changes.
- 2) The government can declare information to be sensitive or secret and order the press not to print it. There is no appeal, and violators can be prosecuted.
- 3) The police of this country are forbidden by law to operate abroad, but they have often kidnaped suspects and forcibly returned them for trial. The highest court of this country has ruled that how the defendants were obtained is of no concern so long as they get a fair trial.
- 4) Everybody who stays in a hotel must present positive identification (e.g., passport) and is automatically registered with the police.
- 5) On matters declared "important," the government may prevent debate on a new law by the legislature--or even circumvent the legislature entirely and simply issue a decree.
- 6) Pretrial release is uncommon. Even a charge as minor as driving with a false license can mean spending several months in jail awaiting trial.
- 7) There is an official state church, and everybody is taxed to support it.
- 8) The Communist Party was not illegal, but if you belonged to it you could not have any job in the public sector.
- 9) The military assists in the making of war films--and it censors them.

- 10) Torture is officially sanctioned as a method of interrogation.¹²

¹² Quiz answers:

- 1) Many parliamentary democracies. Once a year, the budget is "announced," including tax changes. Passage is a formality by virtue of the government's majority.
- 2) Great Britain, under the Official Secrets Act. Oddly, it sometimes happens that the news is printed or broadcast abroad and so is known to everybody, but the British press can't repeat it. Banning the publication of *Spycatcher* was one example; more recently, the British government forbid radio and television journalists from broadcasting the voices of IRA members and others declared to support terrorism. The Israeli democracy made contact between journalists and members of the PLO a crime.
- 3) United States. The Supreme Court ruled in 1886 that however defendants reach the United States, due process is preserved if they get a fair trial, and other courts have subsequently upheld this approach (unless the American agents commit torture). In November 1989 the Bush Administration testified before Congress that it had arrogated to itself the right to send FBI agents into other countries to make arrests even over the objection of those countries. Shortly after came the invasion of Panama... And in February 1990, the US Supreme Court ruled that American agents did not need a warrant to search a suspected drug dealer's home in Mexico [sic].
- 4) Belgium, Italy and other countries.
- 5) France, under section 49(3) of the Constitution. A conservative government used this provision frequently to push legislation through in the short time it had in power to prove itself before the 1988 presidential elections. The Socialists, when they were in power, did so as well.
- 6) France (as well as other countries, including Russia). Although there is presumption of innocence, about half the prison population is simply awaiting trial.
- 7) West Germany, but one can apply for an exemption. Great Britain also has an official church. By the way, have you ever thought of the separation of church and state as a contradiction? Most religions prescribe a total way of life and, in many, everything one does (play, medical care, agriculture, etc.) has religious significance. Yet we separate public and religious life officially (think of the abortion issue). Whom do we resemble in this? "With the possible exception of the people of the USSR, Americans have tended to compartmentalize religion and to reduce its social function more than any other people." (Edward Hall, *The Silent Language*)
- 8) West Germany again. The practice was called *berufsverboten*.
- 9) United States. The first criterion the Pentagon had for passing on a script was that it benefit the service and, said Robert Sims, assistant secretary for public affairs, that it "portrays the military services in a positive and accurate light." New York Times: "A public affairs officer will step in to stop filming if it deviates from the agreed script. The services also screen the finished film before it is released." For the Soviet-American dogfight in "Top Gun," for example, the Navy changed the fight from over land to over international waters and insisted that Navy pilots not fire first.
- 10) Israel, where it is called, "physical pressure," and classified by levels: "intermediate," etc. Long-term detention without charges, trial or sentencing has also been practiced.

Taking Our Pulse

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) a few years ago announced the results of a literacy study of 3,600 Americans between the ages of 21 and 25. Only twenty per cent could figure out from a bus schedule when the next bus would arrive. Just thirty-seven per cent could present the main argument in a newspaper column they read. Fewer than half (forty-three per cent) could decipher a street map. The ETS president said the results were "much better than expected."(!)

Seventeen candidates for Senator from Maryland were faced with an unexpected quiz on current events when they appeared on a television program. Neither Barbara Mikulski (who was elected) nor Michael Barnes (subcommittee chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee) could name both then Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and his successor, Yitzak Shamir.

Prior to an American election a few years ago, the brochure for a seminar on campaign tactics advised candidates to learn how to "think and talk in five-second increments." Consultant Michael Sheehan further advised that men should wear blue suits, light blue shirts and lean forward and cross their legs to "break the flatness of shots." Another consultant claimed that Americans spend an average of five minutes a week thinking about politics. The campaign technique recommended by the media advisors was the KISS rule: "Keep it short, simple and stupid."

Joanna Stasinska left Poland in 1981 and came to live in the United States. She recalled how television news in her home country used to be about successful harvests and coal mining results, and how she hoped to be rid of this and hear the truth on American television news programs. Then, she said, she "began to realize that American news has its own version of the harvest report: The first ten minutes of every [local] newscast invariably feature a succession of murders, kidnappings, rapes, robberies, hit-and-run accidents and fires." She was even more surprised at the indiscriminate intrusion of commercials and remembers the following sequence of stories seen one night: "[A] beach in Israel with many half-naked, sun-toasted bodies (a story about a hotel involved in a border controversy between Egypt and Israel), the death camp in Auschwitz with its gas chambers and crematoria (part of a background story on the Bitburg affair, Ronald Reagan's controversial visit to that cemetery), then a commercial for a company that makes ovens." She remembered when Ferdinand Marcos was threatening to use force during the revolt against him in the Philippines and ABC had just managed to establish live contact with rebel leaders Ramos and Enrile. David Brinkley stopped to say, "We'll hear the answer to that question after we come back, but first a commercial break." They might have been dead by then, exclaimed Stasinska. American networks "feel free to say to history, 'Hold on for a second, because we have to run a commercial.'" (New York Times, 26 May 86)

How worldly are American leaders? When preparing Vice President George Bush's Summer 1986 visit to Jordan, his advance team demanded that he and his entire press entourage be provided with helicopter transport to visit a Jordanian Army

base. When informed that the Jordanian air force did not have enough helicopters for that number of people, the Bush aides suggested borrowing some from Israel (with which Jordan had been in a state of war since 1967)! The next suggestion was that the Jordanians stage maneuvers so Bush could be filmed watching them, but the US Embassy stepped in to point out that Israel might believe the shooting was for real. Finally, when Bush made the visit, he asked to be photographed looking through binoculars at "enemy territory"--a plan vetoed by the State Department since from the vantage point in Jordan the "enemy" would be Israel.

One conclusion of a 1986 *Washington Post* study of 5,000 young people across the country: "As a group they seem more optimistic, self-preoccupied, self-reliant, achievement-oriented, and unable or unwilling to connect personal goals with societal objectives. They tend to scorn the ironic, uncertain, contemplative and idealistic. They adore the quick, active, clear-cut and pragmatic. They prefer symbols to words, movies to books, television to newspapers, the present to the past or future."

An example of how perspectives may differ: Under the headline, "Fewer US Homes Affected by Crime," . . . the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that 22.8 million households, or twenty-six per cent, were 'touched' by crime in 1984 [burglary, auto theft, household larceny, rape, robbery, assault]." The figure was 27.4 per cent in 1983. (Associated Press) You may recognize crime as a problem in the US, but if you have to live there, you do not let it **define** the country. However to many people elsewhere, a country where one in four is "touched" by serious crime in a year may seem little less than barbarous. (If Americans were afraid to travel in 1986 because a dozen people had been killed in terrorist acts, imagine the nervousness of Europeans contemplating a visit to a country with twenty thousand murders annually.)

Sometimes outsiders characterize other countries by what residents consider only a problem or an aberration. A good illustration of such an anomaly was the Soviet internal passport. While this document had greater importance in the USSR, other countries have national identity cards, something resisted as intrusive in Great Britain and North America. In those countries (France and Germany, for example), the police can demand to see your "papers" for any (or no) reason and haul you away for investigation if you cannot produce them. Internal passports were not a Soviet innovation; they existed under the tsars. Possessing one was not seen as a restriction, but as a freedom, because they gave the **right** to movement. Under the tsars, and well into the Soviet period, peasants could not obtain internal passports, a way of preventing them from leaving their farms. Only in 1976(!) did Soviet law state that every person more than sixteen had a **right** to such a passport.

There is hardly a better story to show how what we are used to influences our perceptions of the outside world than the one David Shipley told about two Soviet women arguing over whether Americans have internal passports. When an American they asked explained that they do not, one woman turned to the other and said triumphantly, "You see? I told you Americans couldn't travel freely inside their own country."

Here is another illustration of how things may look from the outside. The United States has a pluralistic (multi-party) democracy with a system of checks and balances to prevent excesses in the different branches of government. This type of pluralism might have seemed strange to many West Europeans. There, the basic thing that distinguished one political party from another was the vision each had about what the economic **system** should be (socialistic, liberal capitalistic, etc.). That is not so in the United States, where it is considered almost unpatriotic to question the "free enterprise" system as the country's foundation (though nothing in the Constitution prescribes how the economy should be structured), and doing so would be suicidal for a major political party.

Furthermore, in spite of checks and balances, Americans do not have another kind of accountability considered normal in most parliamentary democracies. In Great Britain and Canada, among others, the Prime Minister and the entire cabinet must regularly submit to a question period in Parliament from the opposition. In the United States, cabinet members occasionally testify before Congress; the president never does. He answers questions from the press--but only if and when **he** feels like it.

There is a certain amount of patriotic zeal in Russia, and its nationalistic orientation is a new concern, but a comparison is also in order. If you were parachuted into a country where schoolchildren were required to stand up day in and day out and swear loyalty to their country with the rest of their classmates, where would you be? (Hint: Recall the great "issue" facing the electorate in the 1988 Presidential election?)

One problem Americans abroad sometimes have is that they not only judge other countries by **whether** they have made the same "advances" as we, but expect the **timing** to be the same. An example is women's issues. During the 1984 Soviet trip a question was asked about the existence and control of sexual harassment in the workplace. The answer that came back had something to do with rape, and some people were annoyed, feeling that the Soviets were confused and "backward" on the subject. They were judged on this issue by **our current** standards, as if to say, why aren't you where we are? That is to forget that the United States had only just started to write careful definitions of sexual harassment and the Russians, not knowing the social **context**, had trouble even translating the term. (Apparently, the interpreter translated the term as "rape," so naturally the answer did not make sense.) Another illustration about timing, worth remembering before giving lessons on "human rights," is that while all men were created equal in 1776, in the United States they could legally be told where to sit, eat and go to the toilet, according to their color... a scant few decades ago.

Get Me Out of This Paradox!

All the reading you have done and will continue to do will help you on the trip, but many who went before you--and did the reading--still had problems when the reality hit because no amount of words produces the **feelings** you may have once there. What I would like to do is give a little practice in having

these sensations of confusion and frustration. It is not easy, because all I can use are words on paper, but if you cooperate it should work. Just sit down in a quiet place where you can think.

Now, all you have to do is look at the sentence below and figure it out. The answer may come to you in a flash, or it may take awhile. Once you believe you have the answer, don't stop. Keep thinking about the sentence and watch what happens as you try to explain it to yourself. You will go round and round, sinking into a trap from which there is no escape. Ready? Here it is:

This sentence contains exactly three errors.

When you have recovered from your vertigo, let me make several points. Dealing with that sentence resembles coming to grips with another country. Certain differences stand out as obvious. Others are more hidden because they are **on another level**. When (and if) you finally do discover them, it can be with a feeling of triumph: Got it! With more time and experience, doubts arise, and the whole distinction of true and false begins to blur until it seems those terms are meaningless. It is frustrating, and there can be a feeling of having been fooled or betrayed because what was clear is not what it seemed. That can be the point when people grab for and defend the dependable and familiar frame of reference.

Go back to your quiet place and let us try one more example that relates to the uncomfortable feeling produced when either side criticizes the other **even if that criticism is objectively accepted as valid**.¹³ Here is another sentence based upon the same principle as the one above, but somewhat easier to deal with. To illustrate that **who** says what **can** make a difference, we will use it twice:

A Russian says,

"All Americans are liars."

An American says,

"All Americans are liars."¹⁴

See?

Asking Questions

Until now, we have been dealing primarily with tools of observation, but the other powerful tool you have at your disposal is asking questions. The results you obtain will depend upon both your skill and your preparation.

¹³ Those of you who have seen the Soviet film, *Repentance*, will appreciate how vehemently the Soviets would have criticized it if it had been made by a Westerner, even if it had been frame by frame exactly the same.

¹⁴ These exercises are not just "tricks" with words; they have profound implications. They are about self-reference (e.g., the sentence that comments about itself) and self-knowledge. A related problem, which you may have thought about at some time, is whether the human brain can ever be the tool to fully understand the human brain... If the subject interests you, have a look at Hofstadter's, *Goedel, Escher, Bach*.

First, you have to keep in mind that there are at least two broad categories of questions: those that clarify or give you additional information and those that help you analyze and interpret what you have seen or been told. It is not easy for us, as a group, to develop and maintain a strategy of how much time to devote to each type of question when we are in formal situations. If we ask clarifying/content questions, we will get very thorough answers--and then no time is left for the other kind! Using our question and discussion time wisely is something we should work on together, but each person can help by holding back clarifying questions if we are running out of time so that questions that probe deeper get a chance to be asked.

Preparation is largely a task to accomplish **before** you go. That is when you have time to think about what you are reading, to take notes and to write down questions that this reading raises and that you might otherwise forget. For those of us without, say, a lawyer's or journalist's skill, off-the-cuff questions will often be superficial.

These days, asking questions requires a different kind of talent from the past, when it took great effort to elicit anything but the standard explanation of events and conditions. There is a greater range of political opinion, and alliances fluctuate. One tack might be to put the same question to different people. By the way, for free lessons in questioning skills, those of you in North America might watch the *Jim Lehrer News Hour* on PBS, daily.

The View from the Other Side

It is worth knowing that the current love affair one part of the Russian establishment has with the Western economic model(s) has origins that predate the Gorbachev period. Morton Schwartz (*Soviet Perceptions of the United States*, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1978) followed the evolution of the scholarly and official views, in the former case primarily as the *Institute of US and Canada Studies* research revealed them.

On the one hand, the US was admired as a model to emulate for its achievements of wealth, technology, "business-like" approach to production and efficiency. The Soviets wanted to get to the same point, but within their economic system, though borrowing some Western methods. On the other hand, the capitalist system was seen as inevitably exploitative, overly commercial, in moral decline, and given to generating greed and inequality. While it could no longer be denied that the system produced wealth, it was also seen as provoking psychological crises of alienation and dissatisfaction.

If there were once the feelings that American domestic unrest would work to the Soviets' advantage, that big business saw military spending as an aid to the economy and that international conflict helped keep social peace at home by diverting attention from local strife, Schwartz saw all that as changed in the eyes of Soviet analysts. "The arms race, militarism and even an aggressive foreign policy are no longer seen as automatically working to the advantage of the American socioeconomic system. [Soviet analysts argue that] significant segments of the business and political leadership of the US have come to regard high levels of military spending as economi-

cally--and politically--dangerous." "...for the first time 'influential groups of monopoly capitalists' have come to understand that militarization and war are no longer a reliable stimulus for economic development." In the view of Soviet Americanists, US policy makers no longer relied on military expenditures to control business cycles, as they were believed to have traditionally done. "...rather than serving as a means to encourage 'social peace,' wars are now considered 'one of the chief causes of domestic conflict' [e.g., the war in Vietnam]." "In a stunning reversal of form, the social stability of 'monopoly capitalism' in the United States--as well as its economic well-being--is now believed to require a tranquil international environment."

Of course, these words were written by Schwartz in 1978, based upon Soviet articles until 1977, in the period of détente. During the harsh period of the early 1980s, we met with researchers from the *Institute of US & Canada Studies* and found they were "liberal" but a bit more attracted to some clichés about the military-industrial complex. Now you may find the pendulum has swung wildly (speaking of clichés!) and some on the Russian side have gone overboard in admiration for American economic know-how.

Coming Home

Your need to observe does not stop at the end of the trip. One of the biggest advantages of foreign travel is that you learn more about your own country (positive and negative) because you have had a chance to make comparisons. Besides, you may suffer what is called "reverse culture shock."

"Most expatriates are not prepared for the terrific 'come-down' they experience when they come home. Memories and myths of home--how it is cheaper, cleaner, better and more efficient--are shattered. Compared to Germany, America seems loud and dirty; after Brazil, people seem too rushed and impersonal. The bureaucracy here is slow, too, waiters are rude and crime a constant problem." (L. Copeland and L. Griggs, *op. cit.*, p. 204) Though this warning is made to people, such as businessmen, assigned to long periods abroad you will find some of it applies to you even after a short trip.

The difficulty most members on the Russian trip encounter is that so many people they know at home cannot understand the experience. Your friends and relatives say enthusiastically that they want to hear all about it, but you soon find their interest wandering, or they are only attracted by the superficial and not by what you found deep and meaningful, or they look at you with some suspicion, wondering if you have been "had" because you do not reinforce their preconceptions. In fact, it is because of the mutual understanding of a shared experience that many delegates remain in close contact with each other.

Through Russia on a Mustang (excerpts)

NEARLY A CENTURY AGO, in 1891, the American, Thomas Stevens, went to Russia, hired a horse and guide and toured the Empire. Through this humorous step backwards in time, you can explore Russian character and behavior and see some origins of what you will find today. Remember that all this

happened twenty-six years before the Revolution.¹⁵

"The harshest feature of the many harsh sides of life in Russia, to an American, is the utter absence of constitutional rights."

"Individuals have no rights in Russia. They exist in peace and breathe the air outside a prison cell solely on the sufferance of the police, whose authority over them is practically that of deputy despots in their capacity as representatives of the Czar . . ."

[Stevens quoting from his earlier book]

"Everywhere, everywhere, hovers the shadow of the police. One seems to breathe dark suspicion and mistrust in the very air. The people in the civil walks of life all look like whipped curs. They wear the expression of people brooding over some deep sorrow . . . Nobody seems capable of smiling . . . government spies and secret police are everywhere, and the people on the streets betray their knowledge of the fact by talking little, and always in guarded tones."

"The Russians were keenly sensitive to the criticisms of the people of America concerning them, more so than to the opinions of any other nation. A rebuke from us seemed to them like a rebuke from a friend. They are thicker-skinned in regard to England. Abuse and bias from the press and people of England, many Russians have come to regard as a foregone conclusion . . . This is the inevitable consequence of the political tension between the two empires. But they expected from us, at least, an impartial judgment equally as to their good qualities and their imperfections. It was because they regarded America as a country with which they have ever been on the friendliest terms . . ."

[in a conversation with peasants]

We asked them about America. They had heard of it, but knew nothing about where it was. They asked if it was a good country to live in.

"In America," I replied, "every man is his own Czar, and nobody has to be a soldier unless he wants to."

"That may be good for Americans," they said, shaking their shock heads, "but not for us. For us, our Czar is much better."

"Here you have to work for five rubles a month," I pursued; "in America a workman earns as much in one day. Why don't you go to America, like the Germans?"

"It is true that we work hard and get small pay, but it is better to remain in Russia and be poor than to live elsewhere and grow rich. It is all very well for the Germans, but we like Mother Russia best of all."

[in a discussion with a police official]

"The only enemy we have," said he, "is Germany . . . England doesn't understand us, and so she hates us. The Hebrew is our greatest economic question. The countries of the future are America and Russia. Our people have more good qualities than bad. Our faults are great, but our virtues are greater. Our prisons are good, and will, in time, be better than the prisons of any country in the world . . . People at a distance," said he, "remember our faults and forget our virtues. We have plenty of both. Our intentions are good, but our methods are faulty. As a people we have no talent for detail, and for that reason our administration is defective. We are the kindest-hearted people in the world, but a Russian is too easily contented with things as they are. We are not thrifty like the French, nor economical and plodding like the Germans, nor progressive and energetic like the Americans . . . You would think that the Russian moujik would envy his prosperous neighbor and follow his example, but he seldom does. He even considers himself superior, and laughs in a good-natured way, saying, with pride, as he thinks of his hard fare, 'What is death to the foreigner is life to the Russian.'"

[Stevens recounts his guide's recollection of his interrogation by the police in Ekaterinoslav]

"Who is this man, your companion?"

"He is an American, Mr. Stevens."

"How do you know he's an American?"

"He has an American passport and he speaks English. I believe he's an American."

"The passport doesn't prove anything. He might have obtained that from someone else. How do you know who he is? How are we to know?"

"I believe there is no doubt about his being an American. He sends his letters to America."

"Ha! He sends letters, then?"

"Yes, to America."

"What does he say in his letters, and where does he send them to?"

"I don't know what he says. He sends them to New York."

"How often does he send away letters; are they big letters?"

"Yes, big letters, and he sends them whenever we reach a city."

"But what does he find to write about? What's his business? Is he a correspondent?"

"He sends letters to America and he will write a book about Russia. This is what he is riding through the country on horseback for."

"But you. What are you with him for? How's this?"

"I am traveling with him to interpret for him and because I wish to see the country."

"But I can't understand it. A Russian and an American traveling together in this extraordinary manner. Who gave you leave to do this thing?"

¹⁵ To encounter these similarities even earlier, read de Custine's, *Empire of the Czar*, a French aristocrat's account of his trip to Russia in 1839.

"My brother and my mother both gave their consent. My certificate of communion and college certificate were both lost with my passport. You have seen my [internal] passport, obtained at Orel."

"That is not a passport! You have nothing to prove who you are! You look more like an Italian than a Russian!" (Sasha was dark.)

"I am a Russian Orthodox. I am well known; in Moscow, where my brother is in business."

"What's your brother's name? How old is he? What business is he in? How do we know all this?"

"His name is Nicolai Critsch. All I tell you is true."

"Did you ask the Governor of Moscow to let you make this journey?"

"No, we didn't think it would be necessary."

"Did people in Moscow know you were going to start?"

"It was announced in the newspapers there."

"What newspapers?"

"The *Moskovski Listok*, the *Novosti*, and others."

"Where did you get the money to make this journey?"

"Mr. Stevens pays the expenses for both of us."

"Where does he get it?"

"I don't know. From America, I suppose."

"Has he got much?"

"I don't know."

"But there must be some motive for such a journey. People don't spend money and undergo the fatigues of such undertakings for nothing."

"I have told you--he wished to write a book about Russia."

"Ah! Has he written books before?"

"Yes; two, I believe."

"About Russia?"

"No; about Africa, and about a bicycle journey around the world."

"Is he a celebrated man? Is he the American who was once a cowboy and has now become famous?"... {Buffalo Bill Cody--EF}

"I don't know."

"Is he writing good things or bad things about Russia?"

"I don't know. I don't think he is writing bad things, however."

"How do you know he isn't?"

"I don't know."

"Where's his writing? Where does he keep it?"

"He has sent it away, I have said."

"Sent all of it away?"

"He makes notes in a book every day--short notes."

"What about?"

"About the things we see along the road."

"What do you mean? What things has he seen?"

"He writes about the *moujiks*, the *traktirs*, the *uriadniks*, and the country."

"What does he say about the *moujiks*?"

"He tells about the way they live, what they eat, and how they cultivate the land."

"Does he have anything to say to them?"

"No; he doesn't speak Russian."

"Are you sure that he doesn't speak Russian?"

"I have never heard him speak Russian."

"Perhaps he only pretends that he doesn't. How do you know?"

"I don't believe he speaks any Russian. He asks me about everything"

"What things does he ask you?"

"About the people; all sorts of questions."

"Does he ever go about among the *moujiks* without you?"

"We are together all the time."

"He is always with you; never alone?"

"We have always traveled together from Moscow."

"Does he sleep where you do?"

"Yes; we always stop at the same place at night."

"How do you know he doesn't get up when you're asleep and go about among the people?"

"I don't believe he does."

"But do you know this positively?"

"I should know if he did; I know he does not."

"How would you know if you were asleep?"

"I don't believe he does."

"What things has he got with him in his saddle bags?"

"A few clothes and two or three books."

"What are the books about? Are they in Russian?"

"No, they are in English. One is an American magazine."

"Has he got any printed matter in Russian?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"I know that he has not."

"No little books, pamphlets, or printed sheets?"

"No; he has nothing of the kind in Russian."

"Are you sure he doesn't give the *moujiks* any papers?"

"I have never seen him give them any papers."

"But in the night, when you're asleep?"

"I believe he doesn't give them anything."

"You're a young man and have much to learn from experience. What things does he ask you about?"

"I have said--about the people and the country."

"You must not show him any bad things. Do you know this?"

"He sees everything with his own eyes. I only explain them if he doesn't understand. I cannot help what he sees as we ride along."

"What else has he got?"

"He has a Kamaret."

"What's a Kamaret?"

"A new kind of camera."

"Who gave him permission to carry a camera?"

"I don't know. He has no permission."

"What did they say about this at Tula, Kharkov, and Kursk?"

"Nobody asked him about a camera at these places."

"How does he carry it?"

"On his horse."

"Has he taken any pictures with it?"

"Yes."

"Where are they? We must see them."

"You cannot see them. They are to be taken to America to be developed."

"What pictures has he taken?"

"*Moujiks, uriadniks, houses, all sorts of things.*"

"What is his idea in taking pictures? What will he do with them?"

"He wishes to show them to people in America, I suppose."

"Doesn't he know that he has no right to take pictures without permission?"

"He knows he must not photograph prisons and fortresses."

"How do you know he hasn't photographed these as well?"

"I don't believe he has. He knows that it is against the law."

"When did you first make his acquaintance?"

"A month ago, in Moscow."

"How did you come to know him?"

"I learned that he was going to ride on horseback to the Crimea, and volunteered to go with him and interpret for him."

"You didn't know him before he came to Moscow?"

"No."

"How did you know what kind of man he was?"

"I and my brother went and saw him. He is an American and a good man"

"Did he want you to go with him first, or only after you asked him?"

"We talked it over. He then said he would be glad to have my company."

"Well, you must see the Governor tomorrow. He wished to see you. You must not leave town or take any photographs. Now, in God's name, go!"

Smile Please...

*I do not want to leave the impression that everything in Russian behavior is derived from ancient history. In fact, some of these patterns of comportment are the result of habits established under Soviet power, and certain of them needed to be done away with. That is the position of Grigori Gorine who wrote the following article published in the 21 Jun 88 issue of **Moscow News**. Some of what he describes were just the things that bothered members of our past delegations.*

The Expression on the Face

SOME YEARS AGO I was returning from a foreign visit as part of a cinema delegation. We were standing in line to go through passport control. In front of me, Nikolai Krutchkov, People's Artist of the USSR, held out his passport. The young border guard took and verified the photo. He looked at the photo, then at the artist. Again, he lowered his eyes and scrutinized the passport, then again at Krutchkov's face. The seconds ticked away. Finally, Krutchkov had had enough and said:

"Well, don't you recognize me, sonny?"

"Yes, I recognized you, Comrade Krutchkov."

"Then why don't you smile?"

"Because it's against regulations."

He curtly handed back the documents and unlocked the turnstile, and the celebrated artist timidly put his feet on the territory of his own country...

I don't exactly know if such a regulation really exists or if it is just an oral instruction, but the fact is there. The sour face in the immigration booth is generally the first thing people see when they arrive in the fatherland. The customs officer then begins his baggage inspection wearing the same austere expression. I understand that this inspection is necessary--but, good grief, it's not pleasant for either party. One would do better to lighten the procedure with a smile, even an excuse: "So sorry to bother you, but I'm required to do this. I hope you have nothing that is not allowed, I'll put everything back in order when I've finished. My, what beautiful shirts you bought; you have excellent taste. My compliments!" But, oh no! The procedure takes place under the disheartening silence of the verifier, accompanied by the stuttering flattery of the verified...

Who erased the smile from our faces, and when? In what safe is it locked up?

When is the last time you saw a traffic policeman laugh? Or a hotel doorman smile? Shop clerks painfully manage the bare outline of some sort of smile only when they are in front of a camera or on television. Bureaucrats in the ministries heading

for work don the mask on their faces at the same time as they put on their austere suits and black ties--and the same manner... "What is it, Comrade? Are you looking for me? No, that's not my area, Comrade. I don't know, Comrade. Why don't you let me do my work?" All this in a dry tone and cold expression.

Why is there this atmosphere of morose nervousness in all our laundries? The same thing in our polyclinics: At the reception and registration desks they look at you in the manner of an old anatomical-pathologist. Why are we so crabby and quarrelsome in the street, in public transport, in waiting rooms?

Abroad, one can easily identify Soviet tourists by the stressed expression on their faces and the stiff way in which they move. You want to yell at them, "But relax a little! You are in Montmartre!" But no. They don't relax. They gather even closer to the bus, to the tour guide. And he, sternly: "The visit is over, Comrades. Back on the bus!"

However, we're at the hour of remodeling, and we already know that one must begin it with oneself. And one must begin one's remodeling with the face. It's not at all easy. Years of desperate efforts to "obtain" something, of making agreements, of agreeing--and decades of docile servility--have left a stamp on our facial muscles. A courteous smile costs us enormously. Sardonic, sneering laughter still gets by, but the happy heartfelt smile at a passer-by has gone out of style.

But we have to be concerned with this. Our climate is already rigorous, and this spring has been rather chilly, but in principle the assuaging of our local atmosphere depends upon us. If I bring this up now, it is because in some places the remodeling itself is taking place in a pretty gloomy way. Meetings are held in a climate of reciprocal reproach and effervescent hostility. Somebody will recite your faults to you without the least compassion and without a shadow of irony with respect to his own shortcomings. In the minutes of meetings you will not find the remark, "laughter in the audience," but always, "noises," "stamping."

Elections of leaders take place in an ordered, somber and... vaguely sad atmosphere. I agree that we have no need to imitate Western elections that are often transformed into shows accompanied by the cancan and boisterous noise making, but we don't have to go to the other extreme either. Let's try to do them in a happy spirit. After all, it is not death that awaits our elected official, but his new position. (By the way, I think it would be a good idea to test candidates for their sense of humor. A person who lacks one will not be a good leader; he'll annoy everybody by his chicanery and by stressful situations that a person with better spirits could resolve with a joke.)

Look around us! Our streets and boulevards are dominated by boring, monotonous, supposed "propaganda": diagrams, statistics, solemn promises. There are posters announcing infinite prohibitions: "Don't dig." "No entry." "Danger of death!" The skull and crossbones is to be found on all the electric poles. Couldn't we instead draw a beaming drunkard's face with the expression: "Go ahead and touch it, ye who have had enough of life." You'll see that you'll have no takers, but people will have kept their good humor.

The hour has come to launch a national contest for the

most spiritual posters, billboards and road signs because, apart from their primary function, they also reflect our intellectual level. The people who gave the world Gogol, Shchedrine and Bulgakov should not be publishing millions of copies of such maxims as: "Forbidden to walk on the grass."

Our people have spirit to spare, as evidenced by the numerous highly critical anecdotes that appeared spontaneously during the most "stagnant" period in our literature. We would do well to legalize them. Our newspapers and magazines are constantly publishing extracts of "foreign humor," as if our popular humor didn't exist. Nevertheless, we have no shortage of anecdotes; we have always had enough, even exported them to "underdeveloped" countries.

Let's separate from our past, then, laughing. And let's go smiling toward the future (and I hope **that** is not a joke) that seems to be awaiting us.

The Road of Torment

*Satire is well-honed as a form of Russians' humor and political commentary, so it is no wonder they should submit the fruits of perestroika to it. This short piece by Max Olev is from, **Moscou, Génèreuse et Brutale, Autrement, Paris, September 1989, and translated from the French. It speaks to an issue you will find inescapable, and it should tell you that the Russians do not like it either.***

Never take it into your head to go into a public toilet, avoid them like the plague--heed the advice of a Moscow native! Why? For all sorts of reasons.

First, they are not all that easy to find. For decades the city has suffered from a chronic shortage of this type of establishment. According to reliable calculations, there is one public toilet bowl for every twenty thousand Muscovites. On the one hand, one has to deduct the toilets that are forever out of service and, on the other hand, add the weight of the three million visitors from the provinces who flood the capital each day. Having no experience, these one-day visitors are condemned to the worst suffering because of the lack of places to satisfy the most natural of needs. Yet, they are ready for this trial and face it with the utmost stoicism, just to have a crack at finding a bit of sausage or other such trifle, whose very existence has been forgotten about where they come from.

Supposing that, because of some sixth sense, you manage to discover an enameled plaque with the letters "W.C." on it in dripping paint, followed by an arrow indicating the direction to take, don't think for a minute that you are at the end of your troubles. For, inevitably, there is the waiting line. Not that it isn't shorter for the men's room, since they clearly must spend less time tending to such things, but for the women's room, the wait is guaranteed. Well, after all, one can wait; it will only be about five minutes. Yes, but don't forget: if the line is too long, you may not make it to the front because closing time is eleven p.m.

It is long ago now, at the dawn of Soviet power, that Lenin declared that, "under communism, public conveniences would be made of gold." As concerns communism, I can't say any-

thing; I haven't tested it. Meanwhile, in the era of "developed socialism" it is downright difficult to say of what metal the WCs are made. Here we come to the third obstacle: the filth. Filth, and the stench that goes with it in the Moscow toilets, can literally knock you over. A descent to the toilet (for these establishments are most often found underground where the ventilation leaves much to be desired) is excellent training for chemical warfare: For hygienic reasons, they don't clean the WCs; they prefer to sprinkle them with lye. Only the most resistant survive. For my part, I would advise the leaders of Western countries who are concerned with disarmament not to lose sight of the stock of chemical arms that the public toilets of Moscow represent.

Yet perestroika came, and part of the monopoly on public toilets was ceded to cooperatives. First it was decided that "private" toilets would exist in parallel with state toilets. Life, however, soon brought its own corrective force. Why be troubled with constructing new edifices? The Moscow Soviet finally resolved to rid itself of the problem, or almost so, and the "cooperators" took up the burden with joy. Just think of it! In the conditions of penury in which we find ourselves, cooperative toilets, at ten or twenty kopecks a customer, add up to one helluva take!

We wouldn't be so ungrateful as to deny that the WCs of perestroika are rather clean and that they function. The cleaning lady doesn't chase you out of your stall with her mop when it suits her fancy to move the dirt from one corner to another. In that, there is a laudable effort by the cooperators in favor of civilization: They deserve our thanks, but you know how people are; the more they have, the more they want.

So it is that nobody would ever think to find paper in municipal toilets. Finding a talking horse would be easier, and yet, in the cooperative toilets, it exists! Only, how to benefit from this amenity? For the paper in question is to be found well before the stalls, next to Mr. or Mrs. Pee-pee [the French appellation for toilet attendants.--EF]. What is our dynamic cooperator trying to suggest here? Must the client, at the

moment he arrives, blare out in every detail the object of his visit, or must he, with his pants down around his feet, return across the room, jumping like a kangaroo, as need requires? Obviously, civilization has not yet extended very deep roots.

Besides, TP is an eternal problem for us. Sometimes it completely disappears from circulation, and Muscovites have acquired the habit of buying the maximum number of rolls whenever they find it in the stores. It isn't rare to see people walking about wearing rolls of toilet paper around their waists like hunting trophies.

And what do the natives think of their public toilets, you'll be wanting to know? Many turn their noses up at them, believing that even the cooperative WCs aren't clean enough, and they refuse to adopt the "eagle's stance," with two feet on the rim of the bowl--a risky and uncomfortable exercise. Others don't want to pay (though, for now, there is hardly any alternative). It's necessary to be understanding. If you have to deduct fifteen kopecks twice a day, on average, from a monthly salary of about 120 rubles, that ends up being expensive. If you have the bad luck to suffer from an intestinal disorder, you're one step from bankruptcy!

There remain, of course, the public WCs (among the last free ones) near the Kremlin, from which they get their name: "Under the stars" [each Kremlin tower being topped by a red star--EF], the favorite meeting spot of homosexuals. There one can still find the graffiti--drawings, the inscriptions and the hopes of future happiness--which the staff of the cooperative toilets erase without pity.

Nevertheless, I feel the reader's doubts arising. Is it possible that such vulgar problems exist in the toilets of the capital of one of the great world powers? Of course, I answer, you can try the experiment and convince yourself. Still, if you want my opinion, don't take it into your head to go into a public toilet, avoid them like the plague--heed the advice of a Moscow native.