

## THE ZOMBIES OF THE OUTSKIRTS

**The new districts of Moscow have names ending in "vo": Beliaievo, Iassenevo, Certanovo, Novoghireievo, Medvedkovo, Biriuliovo, Orekhovo-Borissovo, Bibirevo, Golianovo. And they are, for the Muscovite intellectual, what Tibet is for the Lamas.**

**Text by Vladimir Sorokin**

I can't help but associate this ending with the popular exclamation "vo !!!" (but look at it), in which strangeness and threat, servility and foolishness are combined, in short, everything that constitutes the essence of the peasant mentality that remains predominant in our country. After all, it would be quite fair to see today's Russia as a country of urbanized peasants: most Soviet cities are actually populated by peasants who, in the last fifty years, have lifted the anchor from their decaying villages to flow into the cities.

Moscow and its neighborhoods, which since the post-war period have grown like mushrooms essentially to house these uprooted ones, is no exception to the rule. Their size is literally chilling. Together, all these Medvedkovo-Biriuliovo could contain thirteen times the Moscow of yore, enclosed within the confines of the Garden Belt. Comically, the new neighborhoods are officially defined as "microsectors". And an immense part of them is inhabited by the peasants of yesterday, who, having fled with their heads lowered from the life of misery of the kolkhozes, got hired in the Moscow factories and after long years of hard work, they obtained the propiska [registration; right of residence] of their dreams, which allowed permanent (but really permanent?) access to salami, butter, meat.

The new neighborhoods of most Soviet cities look like each other ad nauseam. As a rule, these are "typical buildings" built on uncultivated land or intended to replace villages razed to the ground. These stable-rabbit hutches built quickly (over a three to five year span), have in common a total absence of architectural research and differ only in the number of floors, which changes at the same time as the leaders of power, but continues to progress steadily. : four in the time of Khrushchev, six and eight under Brezhnev, then fifteen and even twenty-three. The jokes about the anonymity and uniformity of the new microsectors are innumerable. Like this verse, once popular with taxi drivers: I'll take you to the tundra / and also to Ivanovo. / I'll take you where you want, / but not to Certanovo.

And, indeed, it is not difficult to get lost in the new neighborhoods. A Riazanov film is based on a curious but true fact: the protagonist, who lives in Moscow, in via della Construction (romantic, isn't it?), Finds himself, completely drunk, on a plane to Leningrad; there, once again lucid, he gets into a taxi, gives his address to the driver who disembarks him in a street of the Construction in every way identical to

that of Moscow. The building is also the same. Even the keys, which open the apartment door.

### **THE INVASION OF MOSCOW**

The new districts of Moscow are essentially inhabited by limitciki - people who fled the province and got hired in Moscow industries with a "limit", that is, for two or three years, without the right to opt for another firm; usually, after about seven years of hell in the workers' quarters, they form a family and obtain, as the supreme grace of the state, an individual apartment, far away, in an atrocious suburb, for example in Lianozovo. The limitciki are regarded in Moscow as inferior beings. Muscovites look at them with contempt, because of their yokels, their provincial accent and even the monstrous queues in the shops, which, without them, would surely be ten times shorter. "Hitler failed to take Moscow, the limitciki yes!" the Muscovites joke maliciously. "That's where our misfortunes come from," the middle Muscovites often say during queues

age.

However, it must be said that the limitciki themselves, after spending five years in Moscow, feel totally Muscovites and begin to insult newcomers, to define "scoundrels" of young people who may have been born in their own village. In fact, limitciki are not a recent phenomenon. The first appeared in Moscow in the mid-1930s. They were, for the most part, employed in the construction of the subway, in the industries and in other administrative buildings - as many constructions defined, at the time, "construction sites of the Communist Youth". Having grown old, they recount the horrors and sacrifices they had to endure to have the right to live in an apartment with hot water and to buy Hungarian chickens from the store. For example, the parents of one of my friends, who fled the kolkhoz in the late 1930s and found work at ZIL, the large car factory, could not even get a room in a workers' accommodation. So they bribed the manager of a property, dug a cellar with his permission and six lived there, without any comfort, until 1955. Strangely enough, the pile of earth they produced during these works is still there, real. monument to their peasant obstinacy. Another family, consisting of four, lived for eighteen years in a room of the industrial workers' accommodation where they worked, with their daughter who, until the age of seventeen, shared a bed with her mother. . But, as far as difficulties are concerned, today's limitciki have nothing to envy to their predecessors.

## THE BUILDING ITSELF

However, the limitciki are not the only ones living in the new neighborhoods. The intelligentsia found themselves there little by little, together with simply wealthy people (who are mainly involved in commerce), who buy a cooperative apartment from the state. I live there too - in Lassenevo -, in a fifteen-storey cooperative building, just fifty meters from the Ring Belt that relentlessly divides the world between Moscow and non-Moscow. Once you have passed this narrow strip of asphalt, you will already find the birch forests around Moscow; non-Moscow begins, that is Russia and its non-Muscovite space (snow, snow again snow), its non-Muscovite time (eternity, the nothingness of time), its non-Moscow problems (where to find salami? ). I rarely walk in my neighborhood, I prefer to cross the road and go into the forest, from where the white boxes of the buildings, piled against each other, appear particularly strange. But today, I have an excuse for a walk in Lassenevo. I dress heavily and take the elevator. Outside it is freezing (we are at the end of November), it is snowing and there is wind (there is always wind in Lassenevo, the highest area of Moscow). On a frozen bench, at the entrance to the building, stands an old woman with a cane, rigid as a statue. Of these old buildings, there is one at each entrance. In all weathers, they come out of their den to "spend a moment in front of the house", thus perpetuating the peasant custom inherited from their grandmothers who, fifty years ago, leaning on their sticks, made long stops on the steps.

passerby.

I pass my grandmother and take the winding path that runs alongside the buildings. In the middle of the afternoon, people going for a walk are rare. A lot of snow, on the other hand, ice and children who make a frozen mound collapse with a great noise. Snow and building walls, building walls and snow. I climb the hill and glance at the view. The first idea that arises when you look at these buildings is that they were built not by men, but by a faceless state machine. The Stalinist skyscrapers produce the same impression, especially the University, a grandiose monument of Stalinism. Whenever I go for a walk in the Lenin Mountains, I say to myself, frozen to death, that definitely no, this building was not created by men or for men, but rather by the state and for the state. And this feeling leaves me only gradually, as I get closer to the University, when I finally see tiny windows, an entrance hidden behind the columns and, now almost in place, some ant-men. What a pity that people are studying there! It would be much better if the building existed for itself and in itself, without any human being, a fearsome stone symbol of the Stalinist state, a sort of Ding an sich [In German, the expression, specific to the philosophical language, means

"what in self".  
It is true that the buildings of lassenevo do not have the solemnity of the colossus of Stalin, but they are also built by the state and not by men, since the latter would never have built something similar for themselves. No, the State is the author; however, he did not erect them for himself, like the University, but for the people. This infernal architecture shows very well that man is not considered by us as an individual, but as part of a biological mass baptized "people" and which the State treats its bread dough like a baker, twisting it, rolling it out, giving it the shape it likes best ...

### IN THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

I get off my hill and head to the grocery store, the one and only on our Odoievski Street, where about eight thousand people live. It's an old-fashioned little shop, with no checkout counters, but with three sleepy saleswomen, to the point where you would think they're frozen in their off-white overalls, tucked into thick pullovers (it's true it's pretty cool). Above the counter, a tattered poster depicting Lenin in the act of writing. On the same counter, some preserved fish, margarine, an unlikely salami and a huge cube of yellow butter. In the bakery sector, some chipped wooden shelves, empty, and a saleswoman reading the "Pravda".

"Is there no bread?" I ask, stupidly.

Without lifting her head or moving a single muscle, the saleswoman mumbles at the end of a long silence:

"They deliver it at five."

Four of the buyers form a silent line in the butchery sector. As if hypnotized, they look at the saleswoman with slow gestures like those of a sleepwalker, cut a piece of that indefinable salami, place it on an antediluvian scale, add a counterweight and scowly follow the oscillating needle.

"One ruble and twenty-five," she seems to be saying to herself, then takes the piece of salami off the scales and wraps it, without haste, in thick brown paper. The money is given to her, she takes it without looking at the buyer and, in the same way, she hands the salami.

Everything here seems fossilized, as if those present were as many dead people who came out of the coffin to perform a strange and almost useless rite. Everything seems to have sunk into a prolonged, interminable sleep. An attendant with a round and puffy face, dressed in a dirty quilted jacket, enters pushing a cart containing cartons of milk; is the final touch to this phantom painting. Why does he do it? Impossible to say. And why milk? In its place, human heads would do equally well

frozen or grinning metal puppets. His alcohol-worn face is dead, inert. The attendant abandons the milk, turns around and leaves.

I leave the shop and, on the street, the contact with the cold, frozen Russian nature further strengthens in me the impression that life has ended around me. And I am reminded of Sologub [Symbolist poet (1863-1927); famous author of the novel "The mean demon".]:

"The street was dead, the houses appeared to be covered with a brilliant, sumptuous and cruel shroud, like the silver brocade drapes of a luxury coffin, where the sun's rays hit the snow."

I walk in the realm of the dead. And every shrub, the corner of every house, every old woman on her bench confirms to me that I have looked at the river Lethe.

But why am I not afraid? Because I'm no more alive than that old building, that swollen-faced janitor, those buyers who lined up. I died, too, because I was born and raised here, among these lifeless snows, under the implacable gaze of a state without mercy. I am a legitimate inhabitant of this realm, I participate in this inhuman life and its dark rituals ... I pass a whole group of buildings. Dusk comes to end the short winter day, sporadic reverberations light up, the great time of day is approaching  
- eighteen, rush hour, when the inhabitants of Lassenevo return from work. The factories in Moscow close at 5 pm, but to return from the ZIL, or from other places, to our distant promised land, it is necessary to allow about an hour of travel.

There is still no subway to lassenevo, the nearest station is Tioply Stan, from which, at this moment, buses depart in all directions, struggling, packed. I park at the Via Golubinskaia stop, wait about a quarter of an hour and the first swallow that announces rush hour appears, here it is, the first orange bus, with its sides covered with snow. Advances with difficulty and is afraid

from

look inside where, like herring in a barrel, exhausted people crowd.

The bus stops, the doors creak open, and the gray-brown biological mass pours out onto the snow. A second bus arrives, then a third and soon I find myself in the middle of a compact crowd, which, with a silent obstinacy, moves towards the illuminated building of the supermarket, an oasis of hope in the darkness of the buildings covered with snow. . In the crowd, the faces are confused - limitciki, intellectuals, students - and only weariness and discomfort can be read.

At the entrance to the supermarket, a rapid and silent division between the sexes takes place: women rush into the food sector, men into the wine sector, which, thanks to the anti-alcoholism campaign, has now been separated. As a man, I automatically go to that sector too, looking through the window at the women who

they throw themselves on the packets of salami, butter, cheese, which scrape cabbage or bags of potatoes under the noses of those who stand there with their heads in the clouds.

The queue of buyers in the wine sector - about a hundred people - winds around a mound of broken crates for legumes, climbs towards the great wide open iron doors. In people's gestures, the same automatism of death. The end of the queue is almost immobile, the wind is cold, the darkness and the snow accentuate the appearance of frozen corpses of those who wait; it is only by approaching the door beyond which all their desires are found that buyers begin to thaw, to move limply, to even go so far as to steal something, but this sudden agitation does not make them any more alive, on the contrary it underlines their inertia, their indifference, their detachment from themselves. On the threshold of the door, a mild quarrel; the voices are low, voices from beyond the grave.

"That push to do, pig God?".  
"But In short, was first from you!".  
"Absolutely us. You didn't queue!" I'm a war invalid. "So? I was with the partisans. Wounded twice! ». "Hey, guys, don't let anyone pass who hasn't been in line! There will be wine for everyone. ».

"There's no harm in trying! Here, smoke! ».

Overcoming every difficulty, repelling the assailants, the lucky ones return from the place of their dreams, holding bottles of infamous pomace in their arms.

"What they sell today?".  
"Of the wine to three rubles".  
"There is neither also for we?".  
"Two crates remain."

## LOVE DECLARATION

The street full of snow, the dark silhouettes, the bottles that sparkle dull; in the night, the cold. And every night has been the same thing, for years, for decades. The fact remains that in a certain way, this warms my heart. Because? Because all the experience of Moscow's literary and artistic avant-garde shows that marginalized authors could not find a better place of residence than these new neighborhoods, these areas immersed in nothing like my lassenevo, where, around their work table or at their easel, the snows, the absence of time and the social void extend for miles around where nothing distracts them from their task.

But isn't it hard, in the long run, to live in these lifeless areas? It is heavy for the one who is content to live. For the one who creates, however, this emptiness is satisfying, it allows one to concentrate. There is no better place to observe society and these new neighborhoods are, for marginalized artists, like the Tibetan peaks for the Lamas: you can see far away, yes

they understand many things. Not to mention, then, that these are sectors of isolation in which one feels sheltered from real life, \* alive \*, sheltered from official culture, from hopes and illusions.

In the new neighborhoods live Kabakov, Prigov, Monastyrski, Syssoiev, Cuikov, Gundlakh, Zvezdocotov, Gorokhovski, Ovcinnikov, Zakharov, Volkov, Anufriev, Pepperstein, Gandlevski, Popov, Baitov, Bakstein, Jigalov, Abalolakov, Albert, Statstein Sukhotin, Lebedev, Orlov, Panitkov, Barach.

And did this help them? Undoubtedly. In the last fifteen years they have created remarkable works, both in the artistic and in the literary field, they have practically resurrected the Moscow avant-garde annihilated by Stalin in the early 1930s.

And you? Has your lassenevo been of any use to you? Of course! I've written six books. If I had lived in the center of Moscow, I would have written three times less. So are you grateful to this cold and these rabbit hutch buildings? I am grateful to this cold and to these hutch buildings. Do you like these frozen benches and the eternal old women who sit there? Yes, I like these benches and the eternal frozen old women. Do you also like empty store shelves? I like empty store shelves. The snowdrifts at the entrance to the buildings and the walking corpses? Yes, I like snowdrifts, ice, walking corpses, the absence of time. To put it in a nutshell, do you like the new districts of Moscow? Well yes, I like the new districts of Moscow. I like lassenevo? I like lassenevo. Do you like Beliaievo. I like Beliaievo. And Certanovo? Yes, Certanovo. And also Biriuliovo. Do you like Novoghireivo, Medvedkovo, Orekhovo-Borissovo? I like Novoghireivo, Medvedkovo, Orekhovo-Borissovo, Bibirevo, Golianovo. I like Bykovo, Orlovo, Vasnetsovo. I like Kabakovo, Frigovo, Syssoievo, Nekrassovo, Jigalovo, Monastyrskoio. I like Shablalovo, Lebedevo, Baksteinovo. I like Baitovo, Bulatovo, Cuikovo, Popovo. I like Erofeievo, Sakharovo, Panitkovo [Names built on those of the artists, friends of the author, mentioned above, or well-known personalities.]. Orekhovo-Borissovo, Bibirevo, Golianovo. I like Bykovo, Orlovo, Vasnetsovo. I like Kabakovo, Frigovo, Syssoievo, Nekrassovo, Jigalovo, Monastyrskoio. I like Shablalovo, Lebedevo, Baksteinovo. I like Baitovo, Bulatovo, Cuikovo, Popovo. I like Erofeievo, Sakharovo, Panitkovo [Names built on those of the artists, friends of the author, mentioned above, or well-known personalities.]. Orekhovo-Borissovo, Bibirevo, Golianovo. I like Bykovo, Orlovo, Vasnetsovo. I like Kabakovo, Frigovo, Syssoievo, Nekrassovo, Jigalovo, Monastyrskoio. I like Shablalovo, Lebedevo, Baksteinovo. I like Baitovo, Bulatovo, Cuikovo, Popovo. I like Erofeievo, Sakharovo, Panitkovo [Names built on those of the artists, friends of the author, mentioned above, or well-known personalities.].

I like Ivanovo, Petrovo, Sidorovo [Ivanov, Petrov, Sidorov are certainly the most common Russian surnames].

Ivanovo, Petrovo, Sidorovo.

## **MOSKULTPROG: A WALK IN THE SUBURBS BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE FROM FLY**

Moscow - Moscow, a sultry summer day. The appointment is for a Saturday morning at 11, in the basement of a metro station: the simplest and safest place to meet in a city that today is increasingly losing its points of reference. A glance is enough to recognize each other: anyone who skips a race and looks like they are waiting for something is certainly one of us. We are not at a situationist happening either

to a no-global flash-mob, but to a meeting of the MosKultProg group (Progulki po Moskvye), which for a couple of years has been organizing free cultural walks through the history and architecture of Moscow. There you can find students, teachers, architects, urban planning and history enthusiasts, photographers, simply curious: usually about a hundred people, but they are increasing. What unites them is the passion for exploring the margins of the Russian mega-capital, for the past of a world that is growing today, transforming itself into heart-of-sight. Once on the surface, the panorama is one of the least attractive, reminiscent of the clichés of Soviet construction added to a science fiction film scenario: concrete rectangles juxtaposed with gigantic skyscrapers freshly painted in a bizarre eclectic style, in a space devoid of natural reliefs. We are in Maryino, an exemplary suburb of the new Moscow and its contradictions, which has more than half a million inhabitants. "For many Muscovites - begins Sergei Nikitin, creator of the project and socio-urbanism expert, walking along huge sunny boulevards followed by a disciplined line that photographs and takes notes amid the disbelief of passers-by - this is a horrible place without history. But is not so". Maryino's secrets are revealed by Vadim Zudkin, our local guide: 45 years old, engineer, has lived here since 1990. "Maryino walking down huge sunny boulevards followed by a disciplined queue photographing and taking notes amid the disbelief of passersby - this is a horrible, historyless place. But is not so". Maryino's secrets are revealed by Vadim Zudkin, our local guide: 45 years old, engineer, has lived here since 1990. "Maryino walking down huge sunny boulevards followed by a disciplined queue photographing and taking notes amid the disbelief of passersby - this is a horrible, historyless place. But is not so". Maryino's secrets are revealed by Vadim Zudkin, our local guide: 45 years old, engineer, has lived here since 1990. "Maryino - he says - it was born at the end of the 80s, in full perestrojka, on the site where at the end of the 19th century there were huge basins for the purification of water destined to quench the thirst of Muscovites ". The first stop of the tour is a relic of those times, a dreamlike vision between cranes and construction sites: an old colonial wooden house surmounted by arabesques, one of the very few left standing in Moscow. Now in complete abandonment, it housed the workers of the plants. At a short distance, the bulldozers are working briskly around the new megamarket "Eldorado". To build Maryino, explains Nikitin - who is a professor of art history at the Pedagogical University of Moscow - the basins were filled in, forgetting that the subsoil was heavily polluted by the chemicals used for purification. Today the entire suburb of Moscow, in truth, rests on contaminated land: in a space that was originally located outside the urban circle, chemical laboratories and even nuclear waste deposits were built in Soviet times, then incorporated by the intensive building expansion of recent decades. The Eighties are the years in which the frightening housing crisis that still afflicts the Russian capital begins: no one wants to live in the old Soviet communal houses anymore, everyone dreams of an apartment for himself, even a small one (the current average remains two rooms per family ). In Maryino, Vadim recalls, the collapse of the USSR occurs in the middle of the works: its construction is resumed in the early nineties, the age of transition. In 2000 the subway arrives, an extraordinary event: prices rise and the area becomes ideal for housing a dizzyingly growing urban population, doubled in the last 15 years (today it exceeds 10 million). The neighborhood becomes the mecca of the new "Russian middle class", a great chimera of sociologists: new and spacious apartments equipped with every comfort, large parking lots, supermarkets, schools, churches, cinemas, even a little bit of nature that the people of Mary take from the suburban desert making the ancient lakes re-emerge (regardless of the environmental threat). "A huge change compared to the old Soviet dormitory districts (spalnyi raion)," notes Vadim. But as then, the majority of the inhabitants of the even a little bit of nature that the people of Mary take from the suburban desert by making the ancient lakes re-emerge (regardless of the environmental threat). "A huge change compared to the old Soviet dormitory districts (spalnyi raion)," notes Vadim. But as then, the majority of the inhabitants of the even a little bit of nature that the people of Mary take from the suburban desert by making the ancient lakes re-emerge (regardless of the environmental threat). "A huge change compared to the old Soviet dormitory districts (spalnyi raion)," notes Vadim. But as then, the majority of the inhabitants of the



from the big construction companies, explains Rustom Rakhmatullin - journalist and co-author of the volume with K. Mikhailov, for years he has been writing the column "Goodbye Moscow!" - is letting buildings included in the list of protected heritage go to ruin, in order to then be able to demolish them with the excuse of the risk of viability. Replacing them with restorations disrespectful of the original style, or brand new buildings of dubious taste. Moreover, the volume reads, the register of historical buildings in Moscow (which seems to contain 3000 names) has never been published. Struck by this building fury are Napoleonic buildings, Tsarist villas, modernist experiments, art nouveau buildings. Famous is the case of the Manezh, a neoclassical imperial riding school (1817) next to the Kremlin, destroyed by a mysterious fire in 2004 and rendered unrecognizable by a restoration that altered its proportions. Then the dismantling of the historic Soviet mega-hotels a stone's throw from Red Square: the Moskva of 1930 (former headquarters of the Bolsheviks) and the Rossiya of 1967 (intended for the delegates of the PCUS congresses), whose 3000 rooms will be replaced by a megacomplex of 11 buildings signed Norman Foster. Or the sacrifice of the Voyentorg deco warehouses, despite public protests. The first case of a judicial investigation into a demolition not authorized by the municipality dates back to last November: the eighteenth-century Blacksmith House. The city skyline seems destined to change forever: the mayor's office has announced that it plans to build 60 skyscrapers over the next 10 years, some with 50 floors.

from

ground.

Fighting to save historic Moscow from bulldozers are the "preservationist" groups, which in recent years have managed to create a civil protest movement against the systematic destruction of the city's heritage. Among the most aggressive are the international experts of Maps (Moscow Architecture Preservation Society), who have made headlines in Europe by sounding the alarm on the risks of disappearance that runs the great legacy of Russian Constructivism: the modernist avant-garde that was the last great Soviet architectural utopia (c. 1920-1934) before the advent of Stalin. On the other hand, the National Fund for the Rebirth of the Russian Estate is responsible for the possible recovery of the former state buildings. Since 2003, the Moskva Kotoroy Net website (Moscow that no longer exists) has hosted a large collection of vintage photos of disappeared buildings and streets, and in a short time manages to mobilize hundreds of people against demolitions. While the Shchusev Museum holds a million archival documents on the history of Russian architecture. More underground and difficult, but carried out with passion by activists, is the commitment of MosKultProg, which looks above all to "small neighborhood monuments" of less recognized historical value. "A divining job of the past", confirms Nikitin: "We want to re-emerge a forgotten Moscow, illuminating unexpected treasures a stone's throw from home that not even true Muscovites know, without which this large urban space becomes completely anonymous". An example is "Lisa's walk", which saw 160 people and two TV crews rushing in. Tragic-romantic heroine of a short story by Karamzin (Bednaya Liza, 1792),

at the Simonov Monastery. In the nineteenth century the place became immensely famous among Moscow lovers, called for this "Pond of Liza" (Lizin Prud), and also gave its name to the railway stop "Lizino". Since the 1930s, Nikitin says, the lake has been filled in to make way for a workers' building; then the area becomes the seat of the most important city industries (SIU, Dinamo, DPZ), and some zhladima, huge Stalinian apartment buildings for workers, sprout. Finally, with the arrival of the subway, whose stop becomes Avto Zavodka, "Liza's name definitively disappears from the Moscow map". Today, continues the scholar, we are witnessing yet another transformation: all these industries are in crisis and are closing, the mayor would like to demolish them, and the neighborhood is looking for a new identity: "Our walk brought to light and linked together all these historical stratifications that seemed to be islands in their own right". Often the paths of MKP are transformed into sessions of collective reminiscence for the participants, who recall disappeared buildings, changed street names and the price of bread in the small shops of the past. Another tour of the group touches the Ring of the Gardens, the historic green belt that has surrounded the city since the early 1800s, the favorite walk of Muscovites until a few years ago: today it has become one of the main traffic arteries of the city, invaded by smog and noise. Along the way is Chekhov's house, a residence of art nouveau painters, nineteenth-century palaces and an eighteenth-century hospital, but no one notices them anymore. The explosion of the car market after the collapse of the USSR radically changed the city landscape. The restructuring of the arterial roads undertaken by Luzhkov to counter the traffic emergency (with the new 10-lane highway that winds around the city, the third internal slip ring and the MKAD ring road) has canceled another portion of the metropolitan memory. In the company of Rakhmatullin Mkp he visited the neighborhood adjacent to the new ring road, where the Tsarist aqueduct passed from the beginning of the nineteenth century and up to 5 years ago: none of the inhabitants of the area remembers it, not even the elderly. A sudden removal, Nikitin observes: "Public opinion lacks awareness of the problem, and the perception of the quality of the heritage to be preserved". A walk with a literary imprint is also led by the famous poet Prigov, who told Mkp about the neighborhood where he has lived for 40 years and to which he has dedicated many lyrics: Belyaev, southwest of Moscow, cemented Brezhnevian greyness. All the most important Russian intellectuals lived here from the 60s to the 80s: there were born two very important centers for Soviet underground art, and a cinema that showed non-aligned films that did not come out in central cinemas, Tarkovsky included. In the past century, Moscow has undergone at least two radical transformations. In 1917 the Bolsheviks found themselves facing a city made largely of wood. In 1935 with the "Stalin plan" (vertical) architecture becomes an ideology of power with the mammoth Seven Sisters. Brezhnev in 1971 displaced urban growth in the extreme suburbs, creating dormitories-satellites. "But contrary to popular belief, the Soviets did not completely eliminate the pre-revolutionary architectural legacy, while heavily affecting churches, palaces and villas. Some ancient buildings have been incredibly preserved in the city to this day," Nikitin notes. Where the suburbs now stretch, nineteenth-century Moscow opened onto noble estates and

private gardens. But already at the end of the century the industrial revolution had filled this space with common accommodation for workers (as in Maryino), employed in textile or military factories. Already in 1900 Moscow was a very industrial metropolis with a great ecological crisis. "But industrial architecture - complains Nikitin -, today the subject of skilful redevelopments from London to Paris, is not yet considered a monument here". But perhaps something is changing: recently the Danilovski textile factory was converted into a cultural center, the nineteenth-century Rosa Rossa silk factory in Gorki Park becomes a multifunctional space, not far away the new Center for Contemporary Art houses important architectural studios in vintage industrialists, the ArtStrelka art gallery complex revives disused garages in the Red October chocolate factory. While old houses are back in fashion among the new rich, and the retro taste is beginning to be appreciated again.

With the freeway clogged with traffic, **the center of fly** it can be reached in two hours, or in more than an hour of exhausting travel in the always overcrowded subway , where spaces are reduced even more in winter when coats and furs increase the circumference of each one by several centimeters.

Not a bar where you can find shelter from the freezing winter temperatures or a restaurant where you can refresh yourself with a *borsch* or one *solyanka*, that sour soup with pickled gherkins and the floating lemon slice, of which the Russians are inexplicably greedy.

At eight in the morning and at seven in the evening the path created among the snowdrifts from the daily trampling of thousands of passers-by, is filled with a procession of commuters, who with careful steps - to avoid the pitfalls that the ice sheets hide under the fresh snow - they head to the subway to go to work downtown. And then nothing. Only the wind, the snow, the noise of the traffic and the incessant digging of the bulldozers. Always running. Day, night, weekend. The metal arms of the cranes that mount **ibuildings: sixteen floors of concrete panels (with windows and balconies already attached) that fit together, like Lego bricks**. Buildings built side by side so as not to waste even an inch of precious soil and which sprout every day, like poisonous mushrooms covered with cheap yellow, brown, bluish tiles. Buildings all the same. The only reference point to find a way are the chimneys that wound the horizon and constantly spit white smoke.

welcome to **I was drinking**says a real estate agency sign. Welcome to a *microraion*, or in one of the many **typical districts of the Moscow suburbs**. The atmosphere of *microraiony* it's depressing, but nobody can afford to live in the center, tells me Yelena, a 35-year-old manager who sold her one-room apartment in the center a few years ago to have a few square meters more for her two children.

"In the center we divided 35 meters into four, here we have three rooms," he explains.

Over the past decade **property prices** have increased tenfold. One square meter in a residential apartment in the central street *Ostozhenka* costs more than 40 thousand

dollars a meter, price that people like Yelena - 2,000 euros for her and 2,500 for her husband - although wealthy they cannot afford.

The only choice are the most proletarians *microraiony* where a square meter now costs about 5 thousand dollars. And this is the price of an unfinished apartment, that is, without plaster and floors, but only with bare reinforced concrete panels (this is how these apartments are usually sold).

Despite the exorbitant prices, the **apartments in Moscow** continue to sell out. There was only a short period in the winter of 2009 when the real estate market stopped for a few months due to the crisis and prices fell slightly.

But now, the real estate agents say, the market has recovered. It is on the move again and as before the demand far exceeds supply.

In fact, young Muscovites want to move from communist-era apartments, where even three generations live crammed into spaces of 50 meters. Then there are those of the regions that, enriched thanks to the high oil prices of recent years, aspire to have a foothold in Moscow.

No Russian would buy an apartment in the provinces. When one invests in the real estate market in this country, one buys in Moscow, experts in the sector say.

And so even those beehive-buildings typical of the suburbs (and not only), that mixture of public housing and condominium, are sold as luxury homes.

In the fifties and sixties **the communist regime built thousands of apartments** and transformed entire peripheral areas of the city into the so-called *microraiony*, or ***spalnye raiony* (dormitory neighborhoods)**. The aim was to provide individual housing to the millions of citizens who still lived in the *komunalki*, or shared apartments, where each family had a room and shared kitchen and bathroom with others. In the communist vision of the world, the standardization of the design and the materials used had the purpose of eliminating all forms of competitiveness.

These *microraiony* they concentrated thousands of people in small areas on the edge of the city, while the large spaces around the center were occupied by factories. AND **the Soviet tradition of massing people remained**. As well as the design. The difference is that now it is built to obtain maximum profit and unlike the Soviet period no one thinks about the safety or quality of the materials used. **Lublin, Butovo, Novokosino, Bibirevo, Strogino, Vikhino, Medvedkovo** they are neighborhoods equal to each other. Overcrowded. Palaces upon palaces without a touch of green. "People are forced to live in tight spaces, in these peripheral areas and spend hours and hours traveling to go to work. I spend three hours a day on packed public transport. I can't use the car to go to work because it would take longer," says Yelena.

## "This is life in Moscow."

According to the latest census conducted in 2002, **Moscow has 10.4 million inhabitants** - or 2 million more than 15 years earlier - while about a million people come from neighboring towns every day to work. But Moscow also attracts workers from other parts of Russia, where the economy is stagnant or declining, and

According to unofficial estimates, the city reaches 16 million daily visitors. More people means more machines. According to traffic police data, about 200,000 cars jam the city's 6,000 kilometers of roads every day, and the number could reach 300,000 in 2012. Moscow then, experts say, would stop moving.

According to a Greenpeace report, published in 2006, around 200,000 cars a year are added to **chaotic city traffic**. There *propka* (traffic jam) has become the number one problem in Moscow. City authorities say the capital loses billions of dollars a year from traffic. The cars travel at an average speed of 16 km per hour in central Moscow and 25 in other parts of the city.

There **subway** operating from six in the morning to one in the morning, it carries 9.5 million passengers a day, or many more than New York and London combined.

"I live in the 'great wall'. This is what I call my house because it is the longest one in the neighborhood », says Sergei, a 23-year-old painter, who lives with his mother, grandmother and two sisters in a three-room apartment in the Spalny raion in Strogino.

"How do we young people live here? We spend hours on the subway to go to work or to get to the clubs in the center ».

"We spend the whole day jumping from one vehicle to another to cover the distances of this megalopolis," he says.

"But despite this, Moscow has a particular energy, there is life in this city. It's the only place I could live," he adds.