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# HERITAGE MATTERS: (DE-)MOBILIZING MONUMENTS AND (MIS-)SHAPING IDENTITIES

## Introduction

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We can think of heritage as a form of negotiation between the present and the past conducted for the benefit of the future. Contrary to an inheritance, where it is the donor who calls the shots, with heritage, the recipients can choose to accept or reject the legacy, or to select what they would like to preserve among what is on offer. To be sure, the past has its own strategies: some objects, already museified or listed on some heritage register, come with their own insistent recommendation, while others seem to be proffered more by happenstance than concerted effort. The past bequeaths both intentional and unintentional objects. And the present is not always a buyer's market. Sometimes, in situations where the past becomes scarce, as a result, say, of the destruction or neglect attendant on political and cultural upheaval, the demand for heritage will by far exceed the offer, which may encourage the fabrication of sham retro objects.

Yet conceiving of heritage as an economic transaction between the past and the present has its limits. For surely, in the act of transposing and incorporating an object into the present, its relevance and meaning will change, for better or for worse. Objects, values, rituals achieve heritage status only because the present endows them with both significance and signification, which each generation will revise according to its own needs.<sup>1</sup> Alois Riegl famously distinguished between the commemorative and the present-day values of heritage. The former refer to the ways heritage conjures up certain events or persons of the past. The latter describe how heritage serves the needs of the present, materially, for example as a building still in use, or spiritually, as a piece of art that meets current aesthetic aspirations.<sup>2</sup> We could easily extend this latter category into the sphere of ideology. Countries around the world have discovered the importance of heritage to mobilize their people(s) and fashion a sense

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1. See Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris, 1984–1992).

2. Alois Riegl, "Entwurf einer gesetzlichen Organisation der Denkmalpflege in Österreich (1903)," in Ernst Bacher, ed., *Kunstwerk oder Denkmal? Alois Riegls Schriften zur Denkmalpflege* (Vienna, 1995), 81. For an English translation, see Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," *Oppositions*, vol. 25 (1982): 20–51. For a good discussion of Riegl, see Kurt W. Forster, "Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture," *Oppositions*, vol. 25 (1982): 2–19.

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of national identity, as well as to attract tourists. Heritage implies some form of collective ownership, symbolically if not legally, and thus calls into existence a collectivity or community. Heritage defines a group, and such groups can go to war over disputed heritage. The Kosovo conflict of 1998–1999 was largely fought about heritage, or rather violence enacted upon heritage was skillfully used by politicians to polarize coexisting communities and solidify ethnic identities.<sup>3</sup> Heritage thus both unites and divides.

In the western world, heritage is thought of as primarily relating to material objects, rather than to structures of thought, beliefs, rituals, or the practices of everyday life. If one accepts the anthropological definition of culture as a set of practices and signifying systems, then this material notion of heritage reveals a drastic impoverishment of, or deflection from, the whole variety of cultural forms.<sup>4</sup> More often than not, heritage is conceived of as “the embodiment of the *spirit* of the nation” and thus rests on an idealistic view of culture.<sup>5</sup> And at times it may unabashedly invoke an essentialist conception of identity, whether national, ethnic, social, or other. Yet this may be nothing more than a fig leaf. The reduction of heritage to material objects, the focus on culture as physical fabric, participates in a broader reifying and fetishizing economy.<sup>6</sup> Is heritage commodified or at least liable to commodification? The jury is out, but heritage professionals would insist that heritage rests on its irreproducible uniqueness and commands a value that is broader than its exchange value and should therefore not be subject to market forces. Heritage, then, consists of objects insulated from the market economy, although its very reification makes objects vulnerable to economic predators. The relationship between monetary value and what we could call heritage value is clearly not one of mutual opposition (for various reasons property values in conservation zones tend to be higher than elsewhere, for example). Nevertheless, as an affirmation of some intangible collective good, attachment to heritage can function as compensation for the alienation, in the Marxist sense, experienced by the nonpropertied classes.

The politics of heritage are complex. Heritage is often associated with the culture of an elite, but it also constrains property rights in various ways and articulates a public good that can conflict with private interests. Heritage can contribute to the vitality of the public sphere, as it not only affirms values that transcend private ownership, but also gives rise to civic groups that mobilize to defend valuable objects. Grassroots

3. Andrew Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (Stanford, 2010).

4. On various understandings of the notion of culture, see Raymond Williams, *Culture* ([London], 1981), 9–14. For an influential anthropological definition of culture, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 3–30.

5. Stuart Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘The Heritage,’ Re-Imagining the Post-Nation,” in Graham J. Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John H. Jameson Jr., and John Schofield, eds., *Heritage Reader* (London, 2008), 219. Emphasis added.

6. See Denis Byrne, “Heritage as Social Action,” in Fairclough, Harrison, Jameson, and Schofield, eds., *Heritage Reader*, 151.

heritage movements solidify the identity and cohesion of social groups and foster social action. The political impact of heritage should thus not be underestimated. Furthermore, heritage generates energetic public debates that strengthen the democratic bearings of a community. Gabi Dolff-Bonekämpfer proposed to recognize its “discord value” (*Streitwert*), namely the opportunity it affords to conduct a vigorous debate about the past, which helps in coming to terms with history. One can think of the debates around the destruction of the Palast der Republik in Berlin as an example of such “discord value.” In short, heritage cuts across traditional ideological polarities.

David Lowenthal has summarized five main reasons why heritage is often held in disrepute, especially in liberal quarters: “Heritage aggravates chauvinistic excess; it mushrooms into mindless incoherence; it sells what should be sacred and beyond price; it is run by exclusive elites; and it distorts the past.”<sup>7</sup> But Lowenthal also shows the contradictions behind these charges. Heritage is seen as pernicious and trivial at once, elitist, yet commercialized and populist.<sup>8</sup> In his view, the charge of chauvinism cannot be discounted too easily, although we could add that it all depends on who defines and “owns” the heritage (and against what “enemy” it is asserted). The charge of historical falsification is likewise serious, though for Lowenthal it results from a misunderstanding about the nature of heritage. Contrary to history as a discipline, the very *raison d’être* of heritage is to embrace bias as it ultimately constructs a myth of origin and continuance that necessitates delusions.<sup>9</sup> Heritage professionals have staunchly rejected this view. UNESCO has laid down basic rules of professional deontology, which ensure that heritage rests on sound history. Procedural standardization is intended to depoliticize heritage and to place it in the hands of a group of professional technocrats.<sup>10</sup> But this has resulted in cutting heritage off from the social groups that claim it as the embodiment of their identity. Such Weberian bureaucratization and objectification of heritage are part and parcel of the advances of modernity, one could aver, but then they would risk a loss of meaning. The concern here is that if heritage is defined according to bureaucratic standards and procedures, rather than pursuant to the wishes of a collectivity, it ceases to function as a looking glass of identity and becomes no one’s. Such abstract heritage could then lose popular support and legitimacy.<sup>11</sup>

Architectural heritage is particularly vulnerable given the high commercial value and potential iconic visibility of real estate. This is nowhere as visible as in contemporary Russia, where as several reports by the Mos-

7. David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), 89.

8. *Ibid.*, 104.

9. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

10. Graeme Davison, “Heritage: From Patrimony to Pastiche,” in Fairclough, Harrison, Jameson, and Schofield, eds., *Heritage Reader*, 35–36.

11. On the tension between heritage professionals, who presume to determine the value of heritage for future generations, and local communities, see Byrne, “Heritage as Social Action,” 168–69.

cow Architectural Preservation Society (MAPS) and Save Europe's Heritage have documented, listed buildings have been destroyed at an alarming speed.<sup>12</sup> In its first report in 2007, MAPS calculated that in Moscow more than 1,000 buildings had been erased from existence in the five years up to 2007 alone, including at least 200 listed ones. Such a record easily matches Soviet practice at its worst.<sup>13</sup> Former Mayor Iurii Luzhkov was clearly sympathetic to developers, to put it mildly, but interestingly he did not seem to think that he was compromising Moscow's heritage. Listed buildings have been routinely torn down, but they were replaced with modern constructions outfitted with sham historical facades, which seemed to satisfy Luzhkov's idea of historical architecture. The Moscow government's resolution concerning the dismantling of the Voentorg department store near the Kremlin, for example, argued that the demolition was necessary "due to the important urban significance of preserving [these] buildings in the historic center of Moscow."<sup>14</sup> Riegl had carefully worked out the links between the various kinds of value that historical monuments assume and the various requirements for preservation and authenticity each notion of value entails. The case study of Moscow in the 2000s indicates that chauvinistic pride in vernacular architecture is in no way dependent on the authenticity of the preserved monuments. To boost their idea of Moscow's greatness, city authorities undertook to produce a glossy remake of history, an urban landscape that mimics the past (and in so doing destroys unpredictable and uncontrollable personal memory, which is more reliant on the authentic fabric of places, including their appearance and smell).<sup>15</sup> From this standpoint, the principles developed by UNESCO and enshrined in the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964) serve as an important check on the political use of heritage for the fabrication of collective identities.

Despite its ludicrous dissembling, the sight of then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin "discovering" two surprisingly clean ancient Greek amphorae in the Black Sea at Taman in the summer of 2011 suggests that heritage matters to the state.<sup>16</sup> Heritage brings into view the likeness of past and present, and the Russian state could clearly benefit from the luster of some archaeological depth. In a country ravaged by drastic political upheavals, heritage can usefully paper over undesirable historical

12. Clementine Cecil, Edmund Harris, Anna Bronovitskaia, and Marina Khrustaleva, eds., *Moscow Heritage at Crisis Point 2004–2007* (Moscow, 2007); Anna Bronovitskaia, Clementine Cecil, and Edmund Harris, eds., *Moscow Heritage at Crisis Point*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 2009); Vitalii Stadnikov, Clementine Cecil, and Andrey Gozak, eds., *Samara: Endangered City on the Volga* (Samara, 2009); Clementine Cecil and Elena Minchenok, eds., *St. Petersburg: Heritage at Risk* (St. Petersburg, 2012).

13. *Moscow Heritage at Crisis Point 2004–2007*, 100. Somewhat different figures are to be found in Konstantin Mikhailov, "Uroki moskovskogo pogroma," *Khronika unichtozheniia staroi Moskvy: 1990–2006* (Moscow, 2006), 7.

14. Quoted in Mikhailov, "Uroki moskovskogo pogroma," 15.

15. For a more detailed analysis, see Andreas Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia* (DeKalb, 2011), 219–30.

16. See the footage "Piar-proval Vladimir Putina" at [www.utro.ru/articles/2011/08/12/991941.shtml](http://www.utro.ru/articles/2011/08/12/991941.shtml) (last accessed 21 September 2012).

discontinuities and help tap into the past to justify the present. But this sort of selective heritage also means that what is different about the past will be repressed, if not suppressed.<sup>17</sup> In an incisive analysis, Il'ia Kalinin has discussed (then) President Dmitrii Medvedev's heritage discourse as an attempt to neutralize the past while drawing on its energy. For Kalinin, the Russian government's restoration of Soviet symbols is part of a cultivation of syncretic, if eviscerated nostalgia, the enactment of de-ideologized cultural heritage. This rhetoric invokes Russian culture, including its architectural monuments, in order to glue together the different periods of Russian history and mobilize forces for the modernization of the country and the creation of the future. In so doing, it deprives heritage of its difference and heterogeneity. It is not the Soviet order that is restored, but some abstract notion of cultural eminence, embodied in the continuity of artifacts, symbols, and blood ties. Through eclectic amalgamation, this "nostalgic modernization" decontextualizes the past, obfuscating its specificity and its potential as an ideological alternative to the present. One of the functions of Medvedev's modernization appeals, for example his address to the Federal Assembly in November 2008, is to tap into Russians' patriotic aspirations and to call on them to discharge their personal and historical responsibility to their forbears, who sacrificed themselves for the sake of Russia. Thus Soviet heritage, a legacy of collective and heroic self-abnegation, is co-opted as a resource for a new national modernizing effort.<sup>18</sup> This involves a hearty dose of selective amnesia, and Kalinin also points out that in monopolizing historical memory and trying to push the "reset button" of national memory, the state also drives a wedge between collective and personal memory, which seriously prejudices any national dialogue about the lessons from the past.<sup>19</sup>

Such state uses of heritage should not in themselves compromise the value of heritage in Russia or of those who seek its preservation. Architecture has also become the lightning rod of several democratic, artistic, as well as countercultural movements. It is not without interest that architectural preservation has been at the heart of two "awakenings" of civil society in recent history. In the 1970s, popular concern for the preservation of monuments both within and outside the recently established All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments (founded in 1965 with a membership in excess of 10 million adherents in the 1970s) led to acrimonious debates in the press, to public campaigns, and to the adoption of preservation laws in 1976.<sup>20</sup> More recently,

17. Lowenthal, *Heritage Crusade*, 139–41.

18. Il'ia Kalinin, "Nostal'gicheskaia modernizatsiia: Sovetskoe proshloe kak istoricheskii gorizont," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 6 (74) (2010): 6–16.

19. Il'ia Kalinin, "Perestroika pamiati," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 2 (64) (2009): 259–65.

20. A proper history of this chapter of Soviet history is yet to be written. See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge Mass., 1998), 138–42; Katriona Kelli [Catriona Kelly], "Ispravliat' li istoriiu? Spory ob okhrane pamiatnikov v Leningrade 1960–1970-kh godov," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 2 (64) (2009), at [magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/kk7-pr.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/kk7-pr.html) (last accessed 21 September 2012); *Pamiatniki arkhitektury v sovetskom soiuze: Ocherki istorii arkhitekturnoi restauratsii*, ed.

Arkhnadzor (founded in 2009), an independent civic organization, has galvanized the movement for the protection of architecture and arguably sown the seeds of civic activism in contemporary Russia, despite being explicitly apolitical.<sup>21</sup>

For a striking example of a countercultural reference to heritage, one could recall the graffiti left by anonymous Mikhail Bulgakov aficionados on the staircase of his former apartment in Moscow. The movement started in 1984, in the depth of Brezhnev stagnation, and led to a tug-of-war between graffiti artists and city authorities, who repeatedly ordered the whitewash of these spontaneous expressions of cultural identification. The graffiti became a piece of heritage in their own right, until they were vandalized by fascist thugs in December 2006. The establishment of the Mikhail Bulgakov Museum in Bulgakov's very apartment in 2007 and the restoration of some graffiti seemed to indicate appeasement, but recent political interference in the life of the museum, as well as Bulgakov specialist Marietta Chudakova's call for street artists to come back and create new graffiti, suggest that cultural battles over Bulgakov's legacy are far from over.<sup>22</sup>

Finally for a case of heritage put to artistic use, suggesting that it is far from a fossilized cultural archive, we could look at the work of Gleb Ershov and Stanislav Savitskii, two art historians who sought to reclaim decaying constructivist architecture as a source of deliberate and unwitting artistic forms that interrogate the present. Their project "Progulki za iskusstvom" (Promenades in search of/behind/after Art) started as spontaneous excursions with like-minded friends to rediscover residues of constructivist architecture in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and especially in Uralmash, Ekaterinburg, the site of a gigantic heavy machine plant and housing complex built in the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> The project drew inspiration from a game of "Where Is Kiefer? Where Is Beuys?" which consisted of focusing the gaze to identify unpremeditated installations or objects worthy of an Anselm Kiefer or Joseph Beuys in the post-Soviet industrial landscape. These walks self-consciously referred back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Promenades d'un rêveur solitaire," as well as to Charles Baudelaire and

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A. S. Shchenkov (Moscow, 2004), 590; Jean-Louis Cohen, "Soviet Legal Documents on the Preservation of Monuments," *Future Anterior* 5, no. 1 (2008): 62–63.

21. See Arkhnadzor's "Manifesto" (25 February 2009), at [www.archnadzor.ru/manifest/](http://www.archnadzor.ru/manifest/) (last accessed 21 September 2012). In an interview posted on Arkhnadzor's Web site, Rustam Rakhmatullin frames the activities of the association purely in terms of a metanarrative of progress that is identified with increasing degrees of self-control: "Self-limitation," he states, "this is progress, whether it be in a historical city, or in the soul of people." "Sut' voprosa" (29 October 2009), at [www.archnadzor.ru/sut-voprosa/](http://www.archnadzor.ru/sut-voprosa/) (last accessed 21 September 2012).

22. See Marietta Chudakova, *Nekhoroshaia lestnitsa* (Moscow, 2009). Short version at Marietta Chudakova, "Istoriia 'Nekhoroshei' lestnitsy," at [www.bulgakovmuseum.ru/house-10/stairs](http://www.bulgakovmuseum.ru/house-10/stairs) (last accessed 21 September 2012). On the Bulgakov graffiti, see John Bushnell, "A Popular Reading of Bulgakov: Explication des Graffiti," *Slavic Review* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 502–11.

23. The project resulted in a photographic exhibit and an album, Gleb Ershov and Stanislav Savitskii, *Progulki za iskusstvom* (St. Petersburg, 2008).

Walter Benjamin's flâneur, but also conjured up Ural-born Pavel Bazhov's fairy tales about ore diggers.<sup>24</sup>

This project eschews nostalgia since it does not reify the constructivist past as a lost time of monumentalist optimism. Instead, abandoning historicist chronology, the participants deployed an expressly aesthetic gaze, inspired itself by a modernist orientation toward form as pure form, whose fantastic shapes survive in Soviet "enclaves" that have not yet been absorbed by the "glossy boot of modernization."<sup>25</sup> The provinces and the outskirts become a heterotopic, but also heterochronic periphery. What is being experienced here is the noncontemporaneity of contemporary times, the coexistent stratification of reality, which subverts historical sequentiality. There is a practice of displacement at work here, displacement from the narrow confines of a supermodernity that presumes to have superseded the past. The participants perch themselves on the ridges of a "metaposition," one not further defined, although the prefix "meta" suggests a self-conscious refusal to identify singularly with any positionality.<sup>26</sup> The constructivist past continues to exude energy, despite showing the scars of experience, the patina of time, as well as the results of social disenfranchisement. In this canvassing of reality for unexpected pockets of beauty, ideology is evacuated. If the state had been deeply involved in the creation of these constructivist sites, the authorities have now resolutely forgotten these "beggarly ruins," which contributes to their charm, as they encourage beholders to deploy an unscripted gaze and produce unintentional, if provisional meaning. And yet despite its countercultural slant, this project culminates in a discovery of national heritage, albeit proffered somewhat tongue in cheek. Through this spatial archaeology, the authors exhume "a specific Russian sense of form," described as the "spontaneous creation of masses from fortuitous, worthless material" and as the unfinished product of casual, improvised activity, which leaves space for the imagination. The Russian post-Soviet landscape is a *non finito* elevated to the principle of spatial organization.<sup>27</sup> In this light Beuys becomes an authentic Russian artist. What in the west can reside only in the hallowed halls of a Tate Modern or Centre Pompidou, is strewn about the Russian provinces, prompting the participants of this project to rejoice that "we live in a very rich country."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, by dint of its capaciousness, of its ability to signify anything one wishes, the Russian postindustrial landscape reveals its ontological superiority over excessively organized, commod-

24. The Moscow Cultural Walks (*Moskultprog*) present a related if slightly less irreverent, more historical, and more public cousin to these promenades. For a description, see Tim Benton and Clementine Cecil, "Heritage and Public Memory," in Tim Benton, ed., *Understanding Heritage and Memory* (Manchester, Eng., 2010), 33–40.

25. Gleb Ershov and Stanislav Savitskii, "Gde Kifer? I gde Bois?" in Ershov and Savitskii, *Progulki za iskusstvom*, 13.

26. Pavel Gerasimenko, "Progulka po Bateninskomu zhilmassivu," in Ershov and Savitskii, *Progulki za iskusstvom*, 28.

27. Gleb Ershov and Stanislav Savitskii, "Krugom vozmozhno iskusstvo," in Ershov and Savitskii, *Progulki za iskusstvom*, 84.

28. Ershov and Savitskii, "Gde Kifer? I gde Bois?" 12.

itized, and overdetermined western space. The flâneur finds his or her true home in the post-Soviet wasteland, a zone of unregulated counter-heritage for the liberal imagination.

Heritage matters. Much of the contemporary construction of identities hinges on it. By way of providing historical perspective, this cluster of articles intends to highlight the intricacies, indeed the messiness, of the negotiation between present and past, even in a country prone to iconoclastic rampage. Hence the authors explore three paradoxical case studies involving either a desire to visualize the past that leads to its destruction or disfiguration or the aspiration to supersede the past that lapses into dependency and conservation. Transactions between present and past lead to a repackaging of the latter that is anything but monolithic. One is reminded of George Orwell's saying in *1984* that "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past," though the ambiguities and complexities of controlling the present result in a fracturing of the past, with predictable consequences for the future.<sup>29</sup> For those with a penchant for subtlety and difference, however, this is perhaps all for the better.

29. See George Orwell, *1984*, at [gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100021.txt](http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100021.txt) (last accessed 21 September 2012).