Selecting the Past: the politics of memory in Moscow's history museums*

ANATOLY M. KHAZANOV
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Moscow's historical museums reflect a complex interrelationship of power, knowledge, and memory in contemporary Russia. Social and political changes in the country have produced enormous rifts between new and old values and memories, and the museums as mediums for the interpretations of the past are prone to manipulation by different political forces. History is contested. However, the Moscow historical museums, especially those that belong to the state, still do not demonstrate a fundamental break from Soviet interpretation of the past. At best they are only beginning to develop a multi-focused approach to the Russian and Soviet past.

It is well known that museums are never simply depositories of the past. Since nations and states remember the past not only according to their histories and myths, but also to their current political needs and ideals, museums are always actively involved in the politics of heritage. The very fact that museum curators have to decide what is worth keeping, and especially of exhibiting, and what is not, is not neutral in aesthetic or any other sense. Museums may become powerful instruments of nation building when they represent constructed national identities and symbolize the nation united under values and knowledge accepted by the majority of its members. Suffice it to refer to the story of the Louvre Museum or of the National Gallery in London (Duncan 1995: 21ff.). No wonder that the emergence and growth of the number of public museums in Europe to a large extent coincided

*This is the first part of a longer study of Moscow's museums and their relation to the Russian and Soviet past. The second installment will deal with Moscow's art museums.
The main role that was assigned to museums was propaganda, but by virtue of their specialization they were in this respect too elitist and less effective than mass media, films, and literature.

With the age of nationalism. As one scholar noted, the museum became “one of the fundamental institutions of the modern state” (Bazin 1967:169). Even the dissemination of knowledge took the form of state-organized public instruction.

This is especially true with regard to the various kinds of historical museums that connect the present with the past much more than the past with the present, and play an important role in the construction of shared histories. It is hardly accidental that in the West the creation of museums of national history is more characteristic of the nineteenth century than of the twentieth, and of authoritarian countries more so than liberal democracies, especially those with solidified political and cultural identities. The German Democratic Republic had the Museum of German History in East Berlin; while West Germany lacked such a museum other than the House of German History, opened in Bonn in 1994, which is devoted only to the history of post-war Germany. There are no museums of national history in France, England, the United States, and some other Western countries. Still, when nationalism becomes assertive, such museums appear and strive to meet its demands. There is a Museum of National History in Barcelona, and a similar one opened last year in Scotland. In Third World countries these museums began to mushroom in the post-colonial period.

Although pre-Revolutionary Russia, like the Soviet Union, lagged behind Europe and the United States in the number and quality of its museums, it is hardly accidental that one of the first public museums established in the country was the Imperial Russian Historical Museum, which opened in 1883 as part of the coronation celebrations of Tsar Alexander III. This museum was considered an important instrument of state propaganda, and was meant to symbolize the greatness and stability of the Russian Empire. Its main message was based on Count Sergei Uvarov’s famous formula: “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Peoplehood.” (His son, Count Alexei Uvarov, became the first director of the new museum). The corollary that followed from this formula was simple and clear: The Russian Empire and the House of the Romanovs existed, exist, and will exist. In other words, the purpose of the Historical Museum was to promote Russian imperial nationalism.

In the Soviet Union, museums, just like everything and everyone, belonged to the totalitarian state, but the latter did not care very much for them. The main role that was assigned to museums was propaganda, but by virtue of their specialization they were in this respect too elitist and less effective than mass media, films, and
literature. Correspondingly, the financing of museums was poor, and the employees' wages were low even by Soviet standards. More museums were opened in Moscow in the last seventy years of tsarist rule than in Soviet times. At present there are 75 museums in Moscow altogether, while there are 120 in New York, 118 in Berlin, 115 in Tokyo, and 82 in Paris (Glushkova 1997:271–2). In over seventy years of Soviet power, not a single new museum building was constructed in the capital.

Inasmuch as museums served the purpose of public instruction, they were denied any autonomous identity or existence. In this respect, there was no great difference between historical artifacts and visual arts. Museums had to represent official ideology and official culture, and the main purpose of all museums, galleries, and exhibitions was ideological indoctrination. By 1931, the Soviet government had already resolved that the main goal of history museums had to be communist propaganda, including the fight with bourgeois ideology and culture. Museums had to present history in a way that would legitimize communist rule and reinforce its authority. This is just what happened with museum exhibitions—especially those dedicated to the Soviet period, which acquired an openly didactic and politicized character. The same interpretation of the past and present and a similar set of artifacts became obligatory for all of them. Collections and holdings had to be developed in accordance with these rules. At that time, Western European masterpieces and old Russian icons were sold off cheaply to foreign collectors, while the government spared no expense in acquiring manuscripts and portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin.

In any totalitarian state, the canon is the basis of ideological stability. Any object or artifact that violates this canon is considered heretical, and any document that fails to subscribe to the canonical interpretation of history is deemed illegal. Museums always create "authenticity." But Soviet museums did not shun straightforward falsification. Historical mythology was often substituted for the documentation of events. In Soviet museums, some events were illustrated not with genuine documents and photographs, but with forgeries made primarily from theatrical and cinematic stagings. For example, visitors to almost any historical museum in the country could see a photograph of the storming of the Winter Palace, where the Provisional government was residing. This photo was presented as an original, but was in fact a still from Sergei Eisenstein's film October, shot in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.
Nevertheless, in the Soviet Union there was a difference in the status of various museums that directly affected their financing, the salaries and benefits of their employees, etc. The most privileged position was held by museums directly connected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party (the Museum of the Revolution and the Lenin Museum in Moscow, and the memorial complex to the family of Lenin in Ulianovsk). Apart from these, there were filials of the Lenin Museum located in every Union Republic which were subordinated to the republics' Party organizations. After these came those with the status of state museums (like the State Hermitage, the State Historical Museum, and the State Tretiakov Gallery). These were subordinate to their respective Union Ministries, in particular the Ministry of Culture of the USSR. However, several other ministries had their own museums. Thus, the Museum of the Soviet Army was run by the Ministry of Defense. Museums of lower ranks were subordinated to the republics' ministries of culture or even the departments of culture of regional and city soviets, and were much poorer. The criteria for divisions far from always corresponded to the wealth of the collections and the cultural importance of the museum. For example, the Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow had state museum status, while the Russian Museum in Leningrad was only a city museum.

For all the variations in status and subordination, the Central Committee of the Communist Party maintained strict ideological control over all museums in the country. To this end, the Ministry of Culture of the USSR created two so-called methodological departments: One was attached to the Historical Museum and focussed on pre-Revolutionary times; the other, attached to the Museum of the Revolution, was concerned with the Soviet period. Formally, these departments had to provide scientific and artistic expertise, and to assist all other museums, especially those in the provinces, with advice on how to better organize their exhibits, displays, etc. However, in reality they carried out the orders of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee and thus kept watch over all museums in the country, assuring that they followed the Party's guidelines and maintained ideological purity. For example, employees of the Historical Museum could be sent to Central Asia, to check whether too much significance was attached to Islam in local museum displays. The quality of expertise in such a situation was usually not very high, since as a rule an assigned task already contained allusions to the desired conclusion. But this did not trouble anybody. Most important of all was the maintenance of ideological purity and a readi-
ness to carry out any Party orders. At one time, Aleksandir Shkurko, the current director of the Historical Museum, was the head of one such commission, which concluded that the impressive ruins of a medieval German castle in Kaliningrad (known before World War II as Koenigsberg) did not have any architectural value and thus could be demolished at the earliest convenience. When I asked him how he could sign such a statement, he shrugged his shoulders and answered: "What else could I do? It was expected of me. Was I supposed to risk my career over some castle?" This is how things were in Soviet times.

In the post-Soviet period there have been changes in many respects. The world of Moscow museums, galleries, and exhibitions has become much more fragmented and contradictory, but at the same time much less a matter for official concern, support, and management. On the one hand, the financing of museums, which was never especially generous, has declined sharply. In order to survive, museums now need to obtain money themselves, using whatever means are at their disposal. The best museums in St. Petersburg, which always complained (and not without reason) that they were discriminated against by Moscow, nowadays have hired specialists in marketing and have turned their attention to the search for foreign sponsors. Several of these, especially the Hermitage, are quite successful in this endeavor. Moscow museums followed a different path. They strive to obtain patrons from among influential members of the Russian ruling elite. At the same time, there are significant changes in the museum hierarchies. In all the cities of Russia, with the exception of Moscow, museums desperately resist the desires of the Ministry of Culture to transfer them to local authorities, since this would result in the further decline of their already miniscule budgets. The museums in the capital, however, dream about changing their status from state to city museums, or at least about securing the support of the influential mayor of Moscow. Curators of the Historical Museum complained to me: "Luzhkov does not like us. He is patronizing other museums, but did not even come to the re-opening of ours." They explain the cause of such indifference by the fact that their museum has state rather than city museum status, but I think that there is another reason. The Tretiakov Gallery also has the status of a state museum, but it is in Luzhkov's good graces and enjoys his financial support. Put simply, the Historical Museum took the wrong side in the Russian political game. Above all, the museum strove to secure the support of Chernomyrdin, placing Luzhkov second on its list of potential patrons. Chernomyrdin has since
Another way of dealing with a disturbing past is to draw a line between the past and the present.

Without denying the past, it is possible to claim that it has simply become irrelevant. This is the path Spain is following quite successfully, and that some post-communist countries are trying to follow with much less success. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first post-communist prime minister of Poland, in his opening statement to the parliament declared: "We draw a gruba linia (thick line) between ourselves and the past."

However, subsequent events proved that in Poland this was much more difficult than in Spain.

Still another way is victimization of the past. National memories can (and sometimes do) cherish national defeats at least as much as victories, especially when these defeats provide an opportunity to blame others for one's own national deficiencies, problems, and difficulties. Such attitudes to the past are very common in Central and East European countries, but not infrequently they are quite characteristic of other countries as well.
Perhaps the most difficult, way of coming to terms with the painful past is its honest reckoning. Only by admitting to it for what it was, and still is, is it possible to achieve collective catharsis and, thus, to overcome it. In the late 1940s and in the 1950s, West Germans tried simultaneously to forget their recent past and to draw a line, while East German communists absolved the German Democratic Republic from any responsibility for Nazi crimes. In West Germany these attempts were doomed to failure. The world did not forget and did not allow West Germans to forget either. Besides, the younger generation of Germans wanted to know the truth. The Jewish saying "to remember is the secret of redemption," attributed to the Baal Shem Tov, became popular in the country, and was echoed by President Richard von Weizsäcker, who stated: "There can be no reconciliation without remembrance."

In spite of all the differences in the above mentioned approaches to the past, they have one common characteristic: In order to be successful they have to rely on a kind of national consensus. Such a consensus does not exist in Russia today. The ghosts of the past are present in every corner—as William Faulkner put it, "it is not even the past"—but there is no collective memory in Russia at the moment. Likewise, the construction of a new, shared history and a new identity is a project for the future. The historical museums in Moscow reflect this situation well enough.

The State Historical Museum

Let me start with the State Historical Museum, which was closed for eleven years for restoration work. At last, on September 15, 1997, fifteen of its forty-five halls were reopened to the public. At the time, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, a main patron of the museum, promised that the restoration would be completed by 2000. But his successors gave the museum no such promises, nor money for that matter. So far the museum has dipped into its own paltry funds to restore only two more halls, and hopes to restore another two in the near future. The director of the museum, Alexandir Shkurko, at one time Deputy Minister of Culture of the RSFSR, is a typical product of the Soviet bureaucratic and anti-entrepreneurial system. At present, he is much less successful in fund-raising and the museum's commercial activity than some of his counterparts in other museums, who demonstrate more flex-
ibility and better adjustment to the current situation. When the museum leased its premises to German businessmen in Russia to celebrate the anniversary of Germany's reunification, it was considered a great humiliation.

In the Soviet period, the museum's collections had been significantly enlarged to 4.5 million objects, i.e. one tenth of all objects kept in Russian museums. However, the pride of the Historical Museum was its display based on a strict, chronological, evolutionary hierarchy from the primates to the glorious Soviet people, and on the alleged integral relationship between the stages of socioeconomic and cultural development. Actually, there was nothing new in this principle, which goes back to numerous European and other public museums' displays of the second half of the nineteenth century. The only new elements were the Marxist overtones and the exaggerated attention paid to the class struggle. Omissions were as indicative as the objects put on display. The role of religion in Russian history and culture was played down, and many influential cultural and political figures were completely ignored, because in the Soviet version of Russian history they were considered reactionary. On the other hand, the displays certainly appealed to Russian patriotism and even the ill-hidden nationalism. The expansion of the Russian state and then the Russian Empire were presented as the most important achievements of the nation, on a par with the Bolshevik Revolution. Likewise, the dominant Russian culture was displayed in a way that demonstrated that it was always progressive, advanced, and civilizing. Actually, other peoples and cultures of Russia and the Soviet Union were not provided with much of a voice at all. The museum's exhibits were supposed to lead visitors through the course of history of all the peoples of the country, but in fact they were devoted only to Russian history. In this respect, there was no divorce from the pre-Revolutionary tradition. That was one of the reasons why the museum was so reluctant, or simply unwilling, to include the Soviet period in its exhibits. It did this only in 1963, on direct orders from the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Kliushkina and Sidorova 1998:393).

While much attention had been paid to ideology, the museum's premises had fallen into such a state of decay that in 1986 it was closed for eleven years for urgently needed restoration. Much water has flowed under the bridge during these years: The perestroika period, the collapse of communism, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the public debates about Russia's past, present, and future that in a nutshell can be summarized by the two almost eter-
nal Russian questions: Kto vinovat? (Who is to blame?) and Chto delat'? (What is to be done?). The directors and curators of the Historical Museum had more than enough time to reconsider its goals and concept. One might hope that they would seize this opportunity, and in a way they did just that, but in a very peculiar way, indeed. The new concept of the museum, to a significant extent, has rejected the Soviet approach to Russian history. But it does not offer anything that could be characterized as the post-Soviet revisionist approach (liberal, pluralistic, and multi-cultural) which could free the representation of national history from its official pre-Revolutionary and Soviet constraints. Instead, the museum curators preferred a retro-ideology. Their revisionism includes the glorification of Russian power, based on autocracy and Orthodoxy. Thus, the incomplete break with the Soviet past is accompanied by the desire to associate with the prettified Russian imperial past.

When the museum was reopened to the public its Director, Dr. Alexandir Shkurko, claimed that its exhibits were based on a radically new concept that would commemorate only those historical events that are not prone to manipulation (Itogi, 23 September 1997:66). I would characterize this statement as extremely naïve, if I believed in its sincerity. The real goal of the curators is to suggest artifacts that in their opinion should serve as icons of Russian national identity. In this respect, the Deputy Director of the museum, Dr. Vadim Egorov, was more frank. He stated that the Historical Museum wanted to become an ideological and symbolic center, propagandizing the principle of “Russia, single and indivisible” (Egorov 1998:54).

At present, the only halls of the museum open to visitors are the Halls of Archaeology, embracing the period from the Paleolithic through the fall of the Kievan Rus', on the whole territory of historical Russia. Remarkably, in the opinion of the exhibitors, this territory in general coincided with the borders of the Russian Empire. Compared to Soviet times, there have been very few changes in either the style of the display, which remains very old fashioned in its concept. The selection of knowledge for the exhibit is dominated by chronological and evolutionary principles, and by the idea of the linear temporality of Russia from prehistoric times. However, these halls are not representative of the new face of the museum.

All visitors to the museum first cross through a passage with a huge genealogical tree of the Romanovs. It was painted over in 1936 and has now been completely restored to its original form, as
it was seen by Alexander III during the days of his coronation. In the opinion of the Museum directors, this passage must serve as the main and central element of the museum's composition. This is of course very far from the idea that a national museum must live and change along with the nation and its self-image. However, with this passage the theme of autocracy in Russia is not completed, but is only beginning. The main place in the renovated museum is allocated to a permanent exhibit called "Relics of the Russian State," which the curators present as the miniature model for the museum in the future. Not only Uvarov's formula, but even the statement of the early-nineteenth-century Russian historian Nicholas Karamzin ("The history of the people belongs to the tsar") may well serve as adequate mottos of the exhibit, but Orthodoxy is not left out either. Portraits and photographs of the tsars, grand princes, and their retainers, the imperial throne, imperial coats-of-arms and other symbols, military regalia, documents, medals, fine silver and china settings, and other attributes of official Russia are placed alongside icons, Gospels, and portraits of patriarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. Confessional aspects of Russian culture are patently accentuated, but only Orthodox ones. Other creeds are utterly ignored.

A special display is dedicated to Nicholas II and his family. It includes even mediocre photographs. One would have to be very ideologically biased to place them among the relics of the Russian state. There are no artifacts, however, that explain why, long before 1917, Nicholas II was known as "the Bloody" throughout Russian society.

Only in the hall dedicated to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries do we meet with people other than officials. Their role in Russian history is not clarified, but rather obscured by the eclectic display of materials. Portraits of Chaadaev, Gogol, Herzen, and Kliuchevsky are displayed together with portraits of Gorchakov, Alexander II, Alexander III, Nicholas II, and even the
decidedly unremarkable Grand Prince Mikhail Alexandrovich (1832–1909). Likewise, another display holds a manuscript of Griboedov's Woe from Wit, Gorky's autograph, and a letter from Lev Tolstoi condemning the Russo-Japanese War—all alongside photographs of tsarist troops on parade in Moscow's Theater Square and the opening of a monument to Alexander III near the Cathedral of Christ the Savior on May 31, 1913.

The intentions of the curators are quite obvious. Visitors to the exhibit should take away only one conclusion: Mighty Russia was created and strengthened thanks to autocracy and Orthodoxy, and under the wise leadership of Orthodox sovereigns it achieved victory after victory. The rhetoric of things is substituted for argument in the apparent assumption that these things would speak for themselves.

But what of the opposite side of autocracy: The dreadful despotism of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, serfdom, backwardness, Cossack and peasant revolts, and revolutionary movements? On this there is nothing. Obviously, the corresponding artifacts are not displayed because they are not considered relics. There is only one very small and unimpressive display dedicated to the Decembrists.

But what about the third part of Uvarov's formula, peoplehood (narodnost')? The people are exiled to the museum's periphery. They appear only in temporary exhibitions, cheap popular prints, or folk and religious calendars. This is obviously considered sufficient to address "peoplehood."

But what about the non-Russians? After all, Russia was, and still is, a multiethnic state. They figure only from time to time in one-shot exhibits in which their history is presented in an embellished way. The exhibit "Moscow Germans: Four Centuries with Russia" (January 1999), which was sponsored by the German Embassy and the Goethe Cultural Center may serve as a good example. The exhibit paid tribute to the significant contribution of Russian Germans to the economic and cultural development of Russia, but carefully avoided the much less pleasant sides of the encounters between the two peoples. It seems that the organizers of this exhibit wanted to make the bygone century non-existent. There was absolutely nothing in it that would even hint at the two World Wars, the German pogrom in Moscow in 1915, or the fate of the Moscow Germans in the Soviet period.

But what about the Soviet Union? Surely it had relics of its own! So far, the exhibits lead one to believe that Russian history ended in 1917. The museum curators told me that they actually...
saw no need for a museum display on the Soviet period. The question is open for the moment, and will hardly be solved in the near future.

Thus, in practice, the State Historical Museum, at the expense of historicity, has again become the Imperial Historical Museum. It attempts to adapt imperial grandeur to contemporary Russian realities and strives to reaffirm national unity and self-confidence in ethnic Russian and Orthodox terms. This is completely in line with the ideology of official patriotism and mighty statehood that the Russian ruling elite is now trying to impose upon society. *Derzhavnost’*, mighty statehood, great power, is the thing, the rest is just details. In the opinion of the elite, the ideology of *derzhavnost’* should reconcile white and red, communists and their opponents in the party of power, and even the liberal statists. Thus, the Historical Museum is finding a new place for itself in the post-Soviet museum landscape.

The Former Museum of the Revolution

While the Historical Museum prefers to skip the Soviet period, some other museums willingly or unwillingly have to deal with it. The former Museum of the Revolution has seen better days. Although the sign above the entrance still bears its former title, the museum changed its name several years ago to the “State Central Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia.” However, this did not help the museum to regain its previous high status. Upon entering the museum, one can easily see that many of its halls, long in need of major repair, are still decrepit. The museum is striving to adapt to a new situation and to replenish its very modest budget through means that would have been considered blasphemous in Soviet times. In the main hall of the museum, chamber concerts are presented (before the Revolution, the beautiful mansion that the museum now occupies was home to the English Club, a meeting place for the cream of the Moscow aristocracy). Kodak has rented space in the museum, for a center for developing film. Next to this is an antique shop in the museum, for a center for developing film. Next to this is an antique shop, in which one may purchase collectibles of the Soviet era: badges, stamps, postcards, posters, etc. (Incidentally, these are now in great demand and many forgeries have already entered the collectors’ market). The main visitors to the museum are students, preparing for their final exams in history in high
school or college entrance exams. To attract them, the museum has organized special paid excursions, in which guides put forth their concept of Russian history, from the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Among Moscow's liberal intellectuals, the museum still has the reputation, and not without reason, of being a reactionary institution, nostalgic for Soviet times and giving only lip service to political and ideological pluralism. When I told one of my Moscow friends that I had spent half a day in this museum, he laughed and asked me how many times I had visited it in Soviet times. (Actually, only once, as a schoolboy, when our teacher took us there on a compulsory excursion. Incidentally, I must confess, that I have never visited the Lenin Museum, a fact I now very much regret). My friend told me, that in Moscow the pro-communist sympathies of the former Museum of the Revolution are considered obvious, which is indeed not surprising.

Therefore, it is particularly interesting to trace the changes in the museum's exhibits, which now claim to be objective representations of Russian history. It is completely obvious that the curators have introduced these changes only reluctantly and only out of necessity. Nevertheless, they are still very far away from Western concepts of representation of modern and contemporary history. Old traditions and illusions die hard. Only several years ago one curator stated that the museum was not a forum, but a shrine, where people could compare their values with standard and true ones (Ol'shevskaia 1995:20). That the very existence of standard and true values is quite dubious obviously never occurred to her.

In contrast to Soviet times, the halls and displays dedicated to the Revolution and civil war now exhibit several materials on Witte, Stolypin, Kerensky, Trotsky, and even on generals of the White Army and on the assassination of Nicholas II and his family. The materials are presented in a deliberately neutral way and often are not even accompanied by written interpretations. For the museum curators, this reluctant tribute to pluralism obviously seems excessive, and in order to rectify this, the tour guides hasten to provide visitors with typical explanations.

On Kerensky:

He aspired to carry out centrist policies and tried to reconcile the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was of course impossible in Russia.
On Trotsky:

At one time Trotsky was close to Lenin, but he wanted to delay the start of the Revolution and bring power to the Soviets through legitimate means at the Second Congress of the Soviets. Lenin held that to postpone the beginning of the Revolution would be dangerous, and called for immediate action. Of course, Lenin was right.

On the Revolution itself:

There is an ongoing discussion as to whether the events of October 1917 were a revolution or a coup d'état. The Museum holds that it was a revolution, since it enjoyed the mass support of the people.

The next hall has a name that is notable by itself, since it has not changed at all from Soviet times: "Building Socialism in the USSR (1920–1941)." The explanatory text of the displays makes pretensions to objectivity. Thus, visitors are informed that the museum now exhibits materials devoted to the struggle within the Communist Party in the period 1920–1940. It is further mentioned that as the result of this struggle, the close assistants of Lenin—Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and Rykov had left the political arena, and the regime of Stalin's personal power was established in the country. It is worth noting the curious euphemisms in this explanatory text: There was no Great Terror, but "internal struggles," there were no trials and executions, but "leaving the political arena." It is true that a few artifacts connected to the Gulag are also put on display, but these are very few and are inexpressive. As the descriptive text puts it, the main place in the exhibit is occupied by "posters, red banners, decorations, and certificates of honor for heroes of the first five-year plans to testify to the labor enthusiasm of the generation of the 1930s."

The final display of the exhibit is occupied by materials on the foreign policy of the Soviet state. Appraisals of the 1939 non-aggression treaty between Stalin and Hitler and the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940 are conspicuous by their absence. The materials on the Baltic states are presented in such a way that it seems that they voluntarily joined the Soviet Union. In all, the exhibits convey the impression that, in the pre-war period, the positive moments of Soviet history far outnumbered the negative ones.

The modifications to the exhibits on World War II are not especially strong either, compared to Soviet times. It is true, the
The descriptive text of the display says that a special place is now occupied by materials on the anti-Hitler coalition, and that they "reflect the new [sic!] views on the positive role and military cooperation of the Allies." In fact, the displayed materials are intentionally non-concrete. Absent are any kind of figures or information on the amounts of American material assistance to the Soviet Union, in the form of weapons, foodstuffs, and other materials, without which, in the opinion of some contemporary Russian historians, the victory of the Soviet Army in the war with Hitler could not have been possible.

The museum's exhibit concerning the post-war and perestroika periods of Soviet history was organized in 1989, and since then obviously has not undergone serious revision. It adequately reflects Gorbachev's concept of Soviet history at the time when he was still in power and did not want to part with his "communist principles." The writing on one of the walls may serve as the epigraph to this exhibit: "We need truthful evaluations of our history, in order to render homage to everything that had been heroic in our past, and to draw lessons from the mistakes and miscalculations."

The contemporary period of Russian history is presented in the temporary exhibit, "Russia in the Twentieth Century: Stormy Epilogue (1990-1998)." The official attributes prevail in the displays; however, there are some materials on the events of August 1991, October 1993, and even on the first post-Soviet war in Chechnya. In a sign of the times, much attention is devoted to what the explanatory text calls the "Rebirth of the Russian Orthodox Church." However, while the exhibit clearly intended to be politically neutral, the organizers have not always succeeded in concealing their anti-Yeltsin sympathies. Thus, the opponents of the former Russian president in his confrontation with the Duma in October 1993 are described as "defenders of constitutional order."

In all, the Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia still serves as the Soviet heritage-keeper and as the promoter of the affirmative version of Soviet history. The image of history that it manufactures is not all that different from that conveyed in the past by the Museum of the Revolution. In fact, it is a return to the obsolete concepts of the Soviet historians of the 1960s: "Yes, there were deficiencies and mistakes, but they cannot erase the positive aspects of the Soviet experiment as a whole." Regarding these "mistakes," the museum now provides greater details, but the essence has not changed. If the concepts of the Historical Museum...
are backward-looking, then at the Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia, history has simply stopped.

The Museum of the History of Moscow

QUITE DIFFERENT IS THE PRESENTATION of the Soviet period in the Museum of the History of Moscow. Actually, this museum, with its rather poor and not very impressive collections, never occupied a conspicuous place in Moscow’s cultural landscape. In this respect, nothing has changed. The museum has the patronage, however, of the Moscow mayor, and it strives to oblige this powerful patron. The glorification of Luzhkov and his achievements pursues the visitor to the museum from entrance to exit. One of the exhibit texts proclaims: “Today, Moscow is growing faster than ever before. Its face is constantly changing, but the peculiarity of these changes consists of the careful restoration of the historic city center and restoring destroyed monuments.” This is, at the least, incorrect, because many people criticize Luzhkov for the destruction and distortion of many architectural monuments in the capital, in order to facilitate commercial profitability and to please his own excessive and tasteless vanity (Khazanov 1998:288 ff.).

There are many similar inaccuracies and distortions in the museum’s displays. For example, in a descriptive label below photographs of the Chapel of Saints Boris and Gleb, it is stated that the chapel was rebuilt on the site where the original had been destroyed in the 1930s. In fact, the chapel was rebuilt in an entirely different location. However, the exhibits are interesting not for their distortions, nor for their excessive courtesy towards the Russian Orthodox Church—this has become almost obligatory in nearly all of Moscow’s museums. The most interesting of the museum’s exhibits is the representation of the Soviet period. The exhibit dedicated to this was created in 1995, when Luzhkov was an ally of Yeltsin and adhered to the anti-communist political line. This was taken into account by the curators. This exhibit, the central part of which is occupied by a display with the symbolic title “The Twentieth Century—Ruined Illusions (Drama and Farce),” has very little artistic value and is not well designed. It presents an eclectic selection of very different and far from always sufficiently representative artifacts: photographs, posters, badges, currency, ration cards, empty candy boxes, etc. It seems that the curator of
the exhibit simply put on display the first items he came across among the museum’s collections. But the explanatory text of the exhibit is notable for its poetics and conceptions of Soviet history. To the visitors of the museum, who, like in the Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia, consist mainly of schoolchildren, it reports:

Russia entered the twentieth century under the slogan “freedom, equality, and brotherhood,” but she was never so far from these ideals than in the past decade. The demands to obey the law and to respect human rights vanished into the debauchery of lawlessness and anarchy, nearly destroying the state. . . . For seventy years we were taught to march in formation and to sing in chorus, but through all those years sounded the call of recalcitrants. It was quiet and sad, heart-rending and desperate. It did not promise us heaven, but there was more hope in it than in the Moral Code of Communism Builders [this is an allusion to part of the Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopted at the Twenty-second Congress]. This call was destined to bring to their senses those who took demons for angels. Cooks never learned to govern the state [an allusion to the famous demagogic statement of Lenin, that in the Soviet state, any cook could run the government], but quiet conversations in Moscow kitchens eventually resulted in rallies that gathered thousands and swept over the city.

Today we are again at a crossroad, like at the start of the twentieth century. The reality of reforms has been no less shocking than the volleys of the Revolution. But historical memory should preclude the possibility of repeating past mistakes. What occurs today in Moscow encourages optimism.

Thus, we have three museums, with three different interpretations of history. The Historical Museum once again has become Orthodox and imperial. Its exhibits assert: “Ah, how good and glorious everything was in Russia before the Revolution.” The Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia still attempts to convince visitors that the Revolution was a good thing, and the Soviet period was not so bad, despite the occasional stumbles, while the post-Soviet period is much more contradictory and ambiguous. The Museum of the History of Moscow maintains the opposite; that there was little positive about the Soviet period, but the post-Soviet era—in spite of its hardships—is much better.
IT IS BOTH REMARKABLE AND strange, however, that the main preacher of the imperialistic spirit is not these old museums, but a new one: the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, which opened in 1995. It is remarkable, because the museum propagandizes the ideology of derzhavnost’. It is strange because derzhavnost’ is propagandized by the Museum in its old, Soviet garment. The museum itself is part of a memorial complex built on the Poklonnaia Hill, which was leveled almost to the ground for its construction. Much has already been written on the pomposity and artistic worthlessness of the memorial, including my own contribution (Khazanov 1998:301). Therefore I will now concentrate only on the museum itself. The building is constructed in typical Stalinist fashion. It is superfluously grand, its walls and floors lined with marble, and it is full of cold and empty portals and spaces. It is much closer to an official shrine than a museum.

The main part of the first floor is occupied by the so-called “Hall of Memory”—a large, open, empty space. On one side of it stand the “Books of the Fallen and Missing of the War,” but it is impossible to familiarize oneself with the names in them, as they are stored behind glass. In principle, the museum has a computerized version of the book available to visitors, so that anyone who wishes can access information about the fallen soldiers and officers, but in the several times that I have visited the museum, it has always been non-operational due to “technical problems” (such indistinct explanations for very different problems were a hallmark of the Soviet period). In another part of the Hall of Memory stands a Pieta in essentially Soviet fashion: A white marble sculpture of a woman, apparently symbolizing the motherland (rodina-mat’), mourning a young, half-naked man, partially covered in a garment reminiscent of an ancient toga. Between the first and second floors of the museum is a hall with busts of generals from the 1812 war with Napoleon. These are meant to symbolize the succession of the two wars, since in Russian historiography the first one is also called “Patriotic.” However, on the most visible place in the central hall stand busts of Suvorov and Zhukov, which makes the implied symbolism inconsistent. To the curators of the museum such trifles clearly do not matter. Visitors entering onto the second floor are greeted with other symbols: The “Shield and Sword of Victory,” of enormous proportions, crafted in the city of Zlatoust specifically for
the museum by commission of the Russian government. They are stored in a special mirrored display case on a reinforced bronze pedestal, adorned with branches of gilded bronze.

On the second floor of the museum is the circular Hall of Glory, which stands twenty-five meters tall and fifty meters in diameter. On its marble-lined walls are inscribed the names of those who were awarded the highest military honor of the state—the title of Hero of the Soviet Union (called now in the post-Soviet period, Hero of the Russian Federation) for deeds in the war of 1941–1945. Under the cupola of the hall are placed bas-reliefs of the hero-cities and a Wreath of Glory in bronze. The cupola of the vault is crowned by an image of the Order of Victory. In the center of the hall stands still another sculpture, “Victorious Soldier,” one hand held aloft, the other holding his upside-down helmet atop a wreath. Actually, the helmet can easily be confused for a cup, and this is what I did at first, but Russians drink vodka not from cups, but from glasses. At the foot of the statue’s marble pedestal (marble is the predominant feature of the museum) is still another sword, made in Tula for the fiftieth anniversary of the victory. On this are engraved the words, apocryphally attributed in Russian tradition to Prince Aleksander Nevsky upon his defeat of the Germans in the thirteenth century: “He who comes to us with sword in hand will die by the sword.”

The pomposity of the museum’s symbolism is very far from the aesthetics of modern democratic states. But Stalin and Hitler would have liked it very much. As my late friend, the great poet Josef Brodsky once said, “Evil, especially political evil, is always a poor stylist.”

The exhibit halls dedicated to World War II occupy only a small part of the museum. The displays are totally modern, but their perception of the causes and character of the war does not offer the visitor anything different from the myths of Soviet historiography from the “period of stagnation” and sometimes even from Stalin’s time. The concept of World War II that the museum promotes is clearly different from the views of many contemporary Russian historians. Thus, it follows from the explanatory texts of the displayed materials that it was necessary for the Soviet Union to engage in the non-aggression pact with Germany because—and I quote—“of the provocation of Japan in the Far East and the active anti-Soviet positions of the Western powers.” Furthermore, the pact “disrupted the plan to create a bloc against the USSR, gave time for the rearmament of the Red Army and modernization of military industries.” It is futile for visitors to try to find allusions
to the secret clauses of the pact between Molotov and von Ribbentrop. As in the Soviet period, there is not one word about it. However, there are photographs on display of Red Army units marching on parade in Kishinev in 1940, after the annexation of Bessarabia. The reason the Red Army was there in the first place is never mentioned. Apparently, the curators decided that the initiated know this already, and the uninitiated need not concern themselves with it. All of this is pure stupidity, since unlike the Soviet period, Russian citizens now have access to different sources of information.

The materials on the war with Finland are presented in no less false a light. Visitors are supposed to believe that the Soviet Union had to go to war because the Finns had built a Mannerheim Line (sic!), concentrated a considerable army on the Soviet border, and had rejected a proposition from the Soviet government for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

World War II is presented in a similar light. Certain events (the defeats of the Soviet Army during the first part of the war and the assistance of the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition) are played down. On display are materials depicting the atrocities of the Germans during the occupation of Soviet territories, but the Holocaust is completely ignored. There is not even an allusion to Stalin's execution of the Red Army's command staff before the war, of the massacres of Polish officers in Katyn and other places, of the deportations of entire peoples during the war, of the persecution of the Soviet prisoners of war after the victory. The Vlasov Army, the Banderites, and other cases of collaboration with the Germans are not mentioned either. There is nothing on these and more. True to the times, however, there is a display on the patriotic role and actions of the Russian Orthodox Church during the war years. However, no information is given about the role of other faiths, nor about the many Orthodox priests in occupied territories who greeted the German troops as saviors from the atheistic Soviet state. Thus, the missing parts of history are conveyed by the museum only through their remarkable absence.

The Sakharov Museum

There is only one absolutely unique museum in the capital that seriously strives to settle the score with the totalitarian past. This is the Sakharov Museum, or, to use its offi-
cial name, "The Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center for Peace, Progress, and Human Rights" (this name reproduces Sakharov's 1975 Nobel lecture). The Sakharov Museum is located not somewhere on the city's outskirts, but downtown on the Garden Ring, which encircles the central districts of the capital. By subway a trip from Red Square to the metro station nearest to the museum (Kurskaia Station) takes no more than ten minutes, with another ten minutes' walking time from the station to the museum itself. This, however, is theoretical at best, especially in the winter. The museum is located on an artificial promontory between three highways with no easy crossings. In winter, in order to get to the museum one is required to take a roundabout walk through snow-covered paths that are hardly normal for a large city. During thaws the roads become even worse, as the paths becomes covered by a mixture of melting, dirty snow and a salty sludge. This mixture, another hallmark of Luzhkov's Moscow, eats away any shoes over several months, and people must go all day with soaking wet feet. Still, the fact that very few people actually visit the museum is hardly explained by the physical obstacles. But first, about the museum itself.

Not far from the entrance to the museum, there stands a fragment of the Berlin Wall, with the inscription, "Thank you, Andrei Sakharov"—a gift of the Checkpoint Charlie House Museum. The fragment is adorned with several, in my opinion inappropriate, decorations, such as large butterflies made of multi-colored plastic. The Berlin Wall fragment in front of the Sakharov Museum is apparently meant to symbolize the defeat of communism, though there is one circumstance that adds a touch of a political advertisement to intended symbolism. This gift to the museum is by no means unique. The Germans have so liberally presented pieces of the wall to many cities and museums in different countries that one gets the impression that the role of victim, quite unusual for them, is one that pleases them very much. They are also very
happy with advertising the wall because, this time, they have sided with democracy against totalitarianism. These pieces thus become material proof of their newly acquired bona fide liberal credentials.

The museum itself is tightly guarded. As one employee of the museum told me, there is serious reason to believe that in Moscow there are people who would like nothing better than to vandalize the building. The museum does not receive any kind of support from the municipal or federal governments. In December 1999, replying to a question from *Time* magazine, President Yeltsin stated that Sakharov deserved consideration as “Man of the Century.” He called Sakharov the “father of democratic reform in Russia,” who helped many Russians to take a fresh look at the country and at the way they were living (*Moscow News*, N 48 December 15–21, 1999:2). This statement was clearly only for foreign consumption.

The museum and center were established on the initiative of the Public Commission for the Perpetuation of the Memory of Sakharov (the Sakharov Foundation), and was opened on May 21, 1996, what would have been the seventy-fifth birthday of the great humanitarian. It is one of the few independent, non-governmentally financed museums in Russia. The Moscow mayor granted the museum rent-free occupation of a small, restored nineteenth century building for a period of 49 years, but this was the end of his assistance. The activities and exhibitions at the museum and center depend entirely on donations from non-profit organizations and individuals. In previous years, the annual budget of the museum was only U.S. $200,000. With this money, the museum had to cover expenses for maintenance and protection of the site, as well as pay miserly wages to a small number of employees. Several of these work at the museum for practically nothing. However, even this modest budget is almost completely dependent on donations from foreign sponsors. In previous years, one of the largest contributions was from USAID. Each year, the museum curators worry that they will not have sufficient means to sustain the institution for another year.

The displays at the Sakharov Museum are perhaps the most contemporary in Moscow. All are done in good taste and are advanced in technological respects (this is largely thanks to a one-time donation from the Soros Foundation). The museum exhibitions occupy one large hall, which is divided into several naves that chart the movement of Russian society from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom. Two of these house temporary exhibitions. The last time I was in the museum, in February 1999, one of these exhibitions “From Contempt to Recognition,” was dedicated
to the art of "outsiders." The explanatory text of the display is remarkable in itself, inasmuch as it adequately conveys the basic concepts and spirit of the museum, and merits quotation:

In this exhibit we display paintings by people who could not adapt to the rigid rules of contemporary life and sank to the bottom of society, or sometimes landed in psychiatric hospitals. Unfortunately, we are taking only the first steps towards a social and psychological recognition of the society of these differents and unfortunates. Why is this exhibit of the works of "outsiders" organized here, in a Museum dedicated to human rights? Because social freedoms and human rights are impossible without what Pushkin called the "secret freedom," the freedom not to depend on anybody in one's spiritual life and self-expression, and without respect for the freedom of others.

Another part of the museum consists of materials dedicated to Andrei Sakharov. These are arranged in eight display cases: Genealogical records, photographs from family archives, diplomas, human rights letters and documents composed by Sakharov, secret instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and the KGB regarding the persecution of Sakharov, slandering articles from Soviet newspapers, and letters of support sent to him while in exile from many diverse people. There is also a display on Sakharov's activities in the last three years of his life, after his release from exile in Gorky.

The main part of the permanent exhibition is devoted to Soviet totalitarianism and the resistance to it. The first nave juxtaposes myth and reality. The exhibit begins with a self-portrait of the regime. Photographs and other materials recreate the atmosphere of universal exultation and joyful unity of the people under the leadership of the Communist Party. The myths of totalitarianism are presented by transparent images of Soviet holidays, military parades, demonstrations with slogans like "Communism will triumph" or "Close ranks even more tightly around the KPSS," and Party leaders displayed like ghosts against a red brick wall that symbolizes the Kremlin.

The reverse side is made of iron bars—the symbol of imprisonment. This side of the second nave is devoted to the memory of the victims of political repression. The displays exhibit the tragic history of crimes committed by the Soviet regime against its own people. Recesses and file cabinet drawers embedded within the barred wall contain photographs of the victims and "execution lists" of people buried in common graves, along with contemporary
photographs of the sites of former prison camps and relics of prison life, like a telogreika, a padded vest that was the most important piece of prisoners’ clothing or a window from a punishment barracks that was brought to the museum from Western Siberia. Visitors may also watch two audiovisual presentations: “The Gulag Archipelago” and “Deported Peoples” on a computer monitor.

The opposite wall commemorates people who resisted the regime and struggled for human rights. This section opens with a small exhibit on the strikes and uprisings that rolled through the political prison camps in 1953–1954. However, the majority of the exhibits consist of photos, faded typewritten documents, and samizdat publications. A wooden construction, resembling bookshelves from a library or archives, symbolizes the non-violent character of the dissident movement. It holds files that can be handled and read by any visitor. They contain copies of underground publications, court transcripts, appeals and protest letters written on behalf of the arrested, and other materials.

In the third nave, video monitors show films addressing current problems and human rights issues in Russia and abroad. On the opposite wall, glass panels display temporary exhibits dedicated to various aspects of the development of civil society in Russia today.

Thus, the museum is intentionally and directly involved in the memory war that is so noticeable in contemporary Russia. While the exhibits in the former Museum of the Revolution still strive to acquit the Soviet past, and in some of the other Moscow museums they try to suppress or ignore it, the exhibits in the Sakharov Museum unambiguously condemn it. In a way, the whole museum is a memorial to the victims of state terrorism and of resistance to
it, especially since a monument to the victims is still absent in the capital. In twentieth century Russian history there has been much antagonism between state and society, between official culture and the independent culture that was forced underground. Not infrequently, this antagonism took on the character of a war of annihilation—one in which the possibility of real annihilation only held true for one of the combatants. In the post-Soviet period the situation may have changed, but the opposition remains as before, with one of the adversaries, as before, much stronger than the other.

All the more regretful, but hardly accidental, is that very few people actually visit the museum. I conducted a kind of mini-sociological survey, asking around fifty Muscovites whom I know, staunch anti-communists and liberals all, whether they had been even once to the Sakharov Museum. Forty-eight answered in the negative, however all were embarrassed and felt it necessary to offer some justification: They were excessively busy or that they would hardly discover in the museum anything that they had not already known. Most of the visitors to the museum are people of my generation, those who have personal scores with the communist regime. I visit the Sakharov Museum almost every time I come to Moscow, and one day, as I stood before a display of photos of famous Soviet dissidents, I had a strange feeling, which would be difficult to explain even to myself. Siniavsky, Daniel, Brodsky, Alexeeva, Slepak, Sharansky, and others: I was acquainted with these people, several were my friends, and those who are still alive remain my friends. But I never imagined that I would live to see the day when their
The irony of the situation was that the young man was clearly disappointed with my answer, and I in turn was almost embarrassed that it did not meet his expectations. "But," he continued, "you participated in the dissident movement?"

"Yes," I replied, "Guilty. But why are you asking me about this?"

"Because former dissidents are a noticeable contingent of our visitors, and I at once guessed that you were one of them."

We talked, and the curator complained to me about the difficulties of attracting young visitors, despite the fact that, unlike the other museums in Moscow, the admission to the Sakharov Museum is free. Employees of the museum themselves call teachers of history in secondary schools, offering free tours for their students, but only a few positive responses are received. The reasons for the refusals are remarkable in and of themselves: "The children aren't interested in this;" "We don't want to get involved with politics;" or even "Your Sakharov was no hero, but a criminal."

Conclusions

The Russian authorities underestimate the role that museums may play in the formation of civil society and rational public culture, because it is still unclear to them what kind of society and culture they intend to build in the new Russia. If a function of contemporary museums is to serve as instruments of public education, one at least has to decide what this public education should consist of. If another function of public museums is the storing and dissemination of knowledge, displayed in exhibitory complexes, one should decide what is worth storing and what should be perceived as knowledge. These are very difficult questions in a country in which all attempts at reconciliation seem premature and artificial.
The overall impression of the Moscow museums is a certain confusion in the absence of firm guidelines from the state. At the moment, these museums reflect a complex interrelationship of power, knowledge, and memory in contemporary Russia. As mediums for the interpretation of the past they are prone to manipulation by different political forces. At the same time, it would be wrong to explain the nostalgia for the past, whether pre-Revolutionary or Soviet, which is quite noticeable in many museums, by their ideological engagements only. There are other reasons as well. Social and political changes in Russia have inevitably produced enormous gulfs between new and old values, memories, and traditions isolating thousands of people from their previous cultural environments. Museums serve their customers and to some extent reflect their attitudes. It would be unrealistic to assume that all those who have lived for decades under a totalitarian regime, who made their lives in it, and who have seen their success in life linked with participation in the regime's institutions, would quickly reject everything about that regime, and even more so, acquire a negative approach to their country's history (Linz and Stepan 1996:145). This is especially true with regard to those whose living standards are deteriorating and who are unable to adjust to changing conditions. History is a living thing, but those who think that they do not have a stake in the future are especially resentful when the past is taken away from them.

Be that as it may, the Moscow museums, especially those that belong to the state, still do not demonstrate a fundamental break from the Soviet interpretation of history. They are only beginning to develop a multi-focused approach to the Russian and Soviet past. It is sometimes claimed that museums reflect collective memory and national consensus on the major issues of history. I am not sure that this is always true, or that this is how things should be, especially nowadays, when one of the museums' declared goals is to reflect multiple pasts and to provide voice to previously suppressed memories. Anyway, with regard to Russia this seems to be unrealistic, given a situation in which even the Russian state is not sure of its own recent past and its current identity. There is no collective memory in Russia today, and Russians still cannot either forget or overcome their past, or even draw a line between the past and the present. Russia is a country in turmoil with an identity crisis, and the Moscow museums quite adequately reflect this. Moreover, this situation will hardly change until a more general problem is solved: How to overcome the past without denying it. Whether and when this is done remains to be seen.
References Cited

Bazin, G.

Duncal, Carol

Egorov, V. L.

Glushkova, V. G.

Khazanov, Anatoly M.

Kliushkina, I. V. and Sidorova, S. A.

Linz, Juan J. and Stepan, Alfred

Ol'shevskaia, G. K.