



A Russian rendering of The Return of Don Quixote (1952). Over the years, independent Soviet writers, artists, and intellectuals have used Cervantes's hero to symbolize their own high-minded "tilting at windmills." The tragicomic, self-deluding aspect of the role is accepted, even flaunted. "The sole advantage of Don Quixotes," Soviet writer Fridrikh Gorenshtein wryly observed in a recent story, "is that they're ridiculous and go unrecognized."

The Soviets

There are few enduring staples in the average American's diet of news from abroad. The Soviet Union is one of them. In major U.S. daily newspapers, to judge from a 1980 survey, the Soviet Union receives more of the space allotted to foreign news than does any other nation.

Yet the scope of the reporting is fairly narrow, inevitably shaped by the Soviet Union's status as an adversary and superpower, and severely constrained by Moscow's tight controls on foreign journalists. Typically, daily news stories focus on political ups and downs in the Kremlin, on a handful of Soviet dissidents, on Soviet economic gains and losses, on Moscow's diplomatic coups and setbacks around the world. So familiar have the big issues become that a shorthand list suffices to bring some particulars of each to mind: "Poland," "détente," "SALT," "human rights," "Afghanistan."

Among U.S. academics, the focus is somewhat different. Of several thousand scholars working in Soviet studies, the majority concentrate on Russian history or Russian language and literature. Economists and political scientists make up most of the remainder. Relatively few researchers work in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, or religion, fewer still in Soviet art and music or other aspects of popular culture in the USSR.

One result of these understandable preoccupations among journalists and scholars is that even Americans who consider themselves well informed about the Soviet Union—who can trace Yuri Andropov's rise to power, for example, or outline the Soviet negotiating position on arms control at Geneva—often lack a sense of how the country looks to the people who actually live there. That the USSR is a totalitarian state, or attempts to be, is well known. But, in a Russian's daily life, what kinds of accommodations must he make to exist comfortably? How much freedom does he have (and freedom to do what)? Where, if anyplace, is the "give" in the social and political fabric? How efficient is censorship? How far is "too far" for an artist or writer?

There is no simple answer to any of these questions, and the

answer to each may vary from decade to decade or year to year, or even from one person to another. As individuals, the Russians maneuver within the system in ways that at times seem peculiar, at times reckless, at times deceptively circumspect, and at times so subtle as to elude recognition.

A painting (below) entitled "Don't Babble," by Soviet "pop" artists Vitali Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, is daring for reasons a Westerner might not immediately appreciate. When pop art first appeared in the Soviet Union during the early 1970s, the subject matter consisted not of Campbell's Soup cans but of the



officially sanctioned artistic style known as socialist realism. "In capitalist life, in America, you have an overproduction of things, of consumer goods," Komar and Melamid once explained. "Here we have an overproduction of ideology." And that is what they chose to parody.

Their work, however, could never be exhibited publicly. "The Soviet government must have boundaries," novelist Vasily Aksyonov observed at a recent Wilson Center meeting. Fortunately for artist and citizen alike, the boundaries shift. Here Walter Reich describes a recent visit to the Soviet Union and the lives of the people he met. S. Frederick Starr chronicles the influx of rock 'n' roll into the USSR and the government's unsuccessful attempts to bring it under control. John Glad looks at Russian science fiction and the political implications of fantasy.

The cartoons published on the following pages first appeared in *Funny People from the Club of the Twelve Chairs* (Moscow, 1972), edited by Viktor Veselovskii and Ilya Suslov.



THE LAND OF SINGLE FILE

by Walter Reich

The doors of Soviet shops are often arranged so that only one person can enter or leave at a time. If a public hallway is too wide, grille-work is erected to make it narrower, the easier to watch and control. In every store, there is a line in front of the cashier, who gives the customer a receipt proving he has paid for the items he wants, and a line in front of the counter where the receipt is then shown and the items given. In the street, someone opens a box and begins to sell its contents. A line materializes from the masses hurrying home: a line of quiet and resigned faces, of people sometimes innocent of what is being sold but willing to stop for anything that might be available.

Lately, bed linen has been in short supply; the box might contain bed linen. Sometimes it is toilet paper. Sometimes the manager of a restaurant, not having used up his meat delivery that week or having decided to sell part of it for some other reason, sets up a box of it on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, or in the courtyard behind, inviting a line of customers who know they might not find such meat in a store.

For the foreigner, too, the Soviet Union is a land of single file—more comfortable than for the Soviet citizen, certainly more privileged, but even more controlled. If a hotel has eight doors at its entrance, only one is unlocked, with a guard posted at it to exclude those without passes. A foreigner wishing to meet with a Soviet colleague may not simply walk in off the street. Nor may he even call up and walk in. He has to make arrangements with the proper authorities, who have to give their approval for the meeting, usually long in advance, and only after they have assured themselves that the approval will not lead to trouble, trouble for which the approver might have to pay.

During a recent visit to Russia, this foreigner entered the designated doors, showed the required passes, and obtained the necessary approvals. But he also found other doors to open and nonofficials to see. And in experiencing the control, as well as in evading it, he encountered a life very different from his own.

It is very different, first of all, to be afraid to write. It is an

odd sensation for a visitor who has been a scribbler for years to realize that any scribble might be taken from him at his departure or even before, and used against him—or worse, used against someone he has mentioned by name or even against someone he has left unnamed but recognizable.

Only in the Caucasus, in Georgia and Armenia, did I feel safe taking notes in public. Though Stalin's image is still engraved on Georgian buildings, his name still attached to Georgian streets, and his memory still alive as a local boy who made good, a foreigner writing in a small hand in a tiny notebook on a park bench in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, provokes little notice. And in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, he even elicits friendly interest. "What are you writing about?" curious Armenians asked me every few minutes. "I'm writing about Lenin," I answered, sitting under a huge statue of the man.

Getting and Spending

More than one Armenian asked me for an appointment or, more precisely, pressed one upon me. "I'll meet you under Lenin's statue at 8:00 P.M.!" Or, "You'll have dinner in that restaurant? I'll find you there, don't worry!" Most just wanted to talk with someone from the outside. One, a 38-year-old engineer, brought his young son to our meeting. Learning that I was a physician, the engineer told me that he had just visited a clinic because of some pains, for which he had been given pills. After hearing about the pains—in his chest, in his left arm, and only after exercise—I told him it didn't require a physician to make a diagnosis of possible heart disease.

Had he been told that? He hadn't. Did he know what kinds of pills he'd been given? He didn't. Did anyone tell him about the need for more tests? No. About the need to reconsider his diet and habits of life? No, even though most of the food he ate was fat—butter, cheese, oil, sausage—heavily laced with salt and usually followed by tobacco. I penciled a note suggesting some tests to the doctor he had seen and wondered why this intelligent man had received only veterinary care.

Younger Armenians were more forward. A 16-year-old, like

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The painted word means "white." Westerners would consider this a harmless "sight gag." In the USSR, it is daring political commentary.

a 15-year-old before him and a 13-year-old before him, asked me if I would be willing to exchange my dollars for his rubles, or to sell him a pair of jeans or anything American. I told him I wouldn't. Why won't you? he asked. Because I'm afraid, I explained; the last thing I wanted, I told him, was to visit a Soviet jail. "Don't worry," he assured me, "Soviet law doesn't reach here." He proudly displayed a Japanese calculator watch he had bought on the black market for 150 rubles—about \$210 at the official exchange rate. I told him that in the United States such a watch could be bought, in a store, for \$25. Yes, he said, he knew that, and he was just in the process of figuring out how to get to Los Angeles. Did I know an Armenian-American girl who might come to marry him? He could make it worth her while.

Armenians often asked me, before asking anything else, how much money I earned. An electrician wanted to know how much American electricians made. And American factory workers—how much do they take home? He quickly calculated that many of them earned enough to buy a car every few months. I cautioned him about such simple calculations. Had he heard about housing costs and heating bills? Such expenditures are, by comparison, minuscule in the Soviet Union.

Never mind, he answered. The differences are still amazing.

He earns, he pointed out, 1,800 rubles a year—about \$2,500 at the official exchange rate. True, his apartment is cheap. But it is small and crowded. And true, he earns something on the side—he admitted to doubling his income by illegally painting apartments on weekends, sometimes during his regular working hours, for people who are unwilling to wait five years for their official paint jobs. But the paint costs him dearly: The middleman who sells it to him gets it from a trucker who delivers for the paint warehouse, and the trucker, who had to pay a union secretary 1,000 rubles to land his lucrative job, charges twice the official price for every can, not always of the right color, that he smuggles out.

Unrequited Consumerism

Besides, the electrician and others pointed out to me, there's more to life than a roof over your head and cheap heat. Food staples are affordable, if you're willing to spend your time waiting for them. But so much else is beyond most people's range. A small car costs about 7,000 rubles. And for the privilege of paying that sum, equal to several years of your total income, you have the choice of either waiting a decade for your name to reach the top of the car-purchase list or pushing it to the top by paying someone on the side—unless, of course, you have special connections or earn the privilege of buying a car by your loyal devotion to the factory or the party.

A man's suit, often poorly made, costs as much in Yerevan or Moscow as in New York: 125 to 150 rubles. A vinyl briefcase—leather cases are rarely seen—costs 20 rubles, and a piece of vinyl luggage, 50. A silk scarf is a fantastic luxury at 100 rubles. A color TV is 700 to 800 rubles; a stereo system, 200 to 800; a small gas range, 135; and a clothes washer, 495. Some items are tolerably priced: a man's necktie at 2 rubles; a cup of coffee, mostly ersatz but warm and very sweet, in a stand-up café, at 22 kopecks; a pack of cigarettes, 60 kopecks; and a hula hoop, 2 rubles 20 kopecks. But a soccer ball can set you back 25 rubles; a pair of vinyl shoes, the same amount; a jogging suit, if you must have one, 55 rubles; and a portable typewriter, 150.

In short, except for the necessities, those consumer goods that are available in the Soviet Union, regardless of quality, cost as much as or more than they cost in the West; while Soviet consumers have about one-fourth as much as their Western counterparts to spend on such consumption. What is worse, prices for some consumer goods, including staples, were raised shortly after Yuri V. Andropov, the new Soviet leader, came to power.

And yet, ironically, in a country where consumer goods are unavailable or exorbitantly priced, and where there is little advertising, they form the core of some people's lives, if not in fact then in desire, no less than they do in the West. The home—and mind—of one scientist I met was centered on his video gadgetry. As even a visa to Bulgaria was hard to obtain, he pointed out, there was nowhere interesting to go, and with only *Pravda* and the like on the newsstands, there was nothing interesting to read. And so, he explained, he had plenty of time to tinker with his video recorder; although, he sadly admitted, there was nothing from the official airwaves that he wanted to record.

Toasting Kiev

Which is not to say that the Soviet airwaves carry nothing to commend them. To be sure, much of Soviet television is tiresome—more tiresome, no doubt, to a Soviet citizen than to a curious Westerner. Most movies, for example, seem to be about either the Great Patriotic War or a crisis on a collective farm. In the war movies, the ideals of Marxism-Leninism lead the soldier to victory; or, if he's mortally wounded, then those ideals, expressed through his selflessness and articulated in a protracted final speech, lead his battalion to victory. In the collective farm crisis movies, the chairman, usually young and animated by those same ideals, has to do battle with those who would take the easy road.

In the war films, at least there are battle scenes to liven the action. The collective farm movies, by contrast, are filled with meetings in which the idealistic chairman argues against those of his workers whose faith is imperfect or, back in the capital, against those of his superiors whose vision is less pure. Eventually he manages, through effort and persistence, to gain his objective—to transport the bread across the frozen tundra or grow the wheat where no one thought it could ever grow—and he wins his medal, not to mention the girl.

Some television fare, on the other hand, is extraordinarily professional. For example, in celebration of Kiev's 1,500th anniversary last year, the Soviets aired an extravaganza of awesome proportions executed with utter perfection. A cross between Ziegfeld and Ed Sullivan, it offered to all Soviet viewers—all, because no other television program was allowed to compete with it—act after complicated act, as exquisitely arranged as any Bolshoi production. A hundred Ukrainian dancers were followed by 200 Ukrainian singers. As each act ended after only a few minutes on the giant, multimedia stage, the stage itself

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Refuseniks—they call themselves that, using the English word with the Russian suffix—gather Friday and Saturday evenings in front of the synagogue on Moscow's Arkhipova Street. A policeman passes by occasionally; playing children pay no attention in a yard nearby.

Inside the synagogue, old men chant old tunes. On the wall, in large letters, in Yiddish, is painted a prayer for the well-being of the Soviet government. A young woman with long red hair, carrying a small child, rushes up to the oldest of the men to beg advice. First she tries in broken Yiddish, then discovers that his Russian is as good as hers. It is a domestic problem, and she thought someone in the synagogue could help. The man hesitates. He seems unaccustomed to the role of rabbi—or psychiatrist.

Services, at least this Saturday evening, are in the small chapel on the side, the *bais hamedrish*; there aren't enough worshipers, barely a *minyan*, to make use of the main chapel itself. A middle-aged man approaches a stranger to ask where he is from. Really? America? He wants to know about Israel. Is what he has read really true, that no one can find a job there? That it is impossible to live? That everyone is leaving? That there is nothing to eat?

The refuseniks, for their part, stay outside. Most are not religious, but many speak Hebrew they have learned in small groups, groups whose teachers are harassed and sometimes arrested. A young American Jew, religious, is visiting Moscow with his new bride; they have made plans to emigrate to Israel upon their return to the States; he answers the refuseniks' questions. The refuseniks' Hebrew has a truer accent than his. While my arrival on Arkhipova Street was an accident of schedule, the visit of this American couple was the purpose of their trip. For them it was a *mitzvah* to give succor.

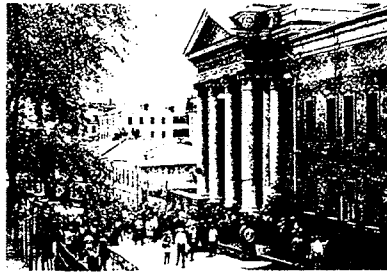
And succor they need. They look crazed. Not crazy, crazed. As Jews, they are already members of a group that has been pushed outside the life of Russia; as refuseniks, they are doubly outside. Fired from their jobs, identified as traitors, all they have is one another—and the occasional foreigner who stops in their city to tell them there is a world outside. During the 1970s, when emigration was at its peak, many Jews had applied for exit visas. In 1979, 51,320 were allowed to go. Since then, the door has virtually been sealed shut, due partly to souring East-West relations and partly to reasons that are still obscure. In 1982, only 2,688 got out. Earlier this year, the rate of

moved off, carrying away the old act and bringing in the new. If the Soviets can fight a war as efficiently and flawlessly as they can put on a show, we are all in trouble.

Still, it is not entertainment to which the Soviet media are most devoted. Television, at least as much as the newspapers, is

emigration fell to a few dozen a month. Those who have sought documents that would permit them to apply to emigrate—a group numbering at least 350,000—have grown increasingly desperate. And most desperate of all are the roughly 15,000 who have actually applied and whose applications have been refused.

One young man standing outside the synagogue, perhaps 20 years old, his speech damaged by a severe lisp, wants to know my views on religion. He is himself very religious. Not only does he wear a hat; he also wears earlocks, like the religious Jews who used to live in Eastern Europe and the Chassidim who now live in Brooklyn. Ten years ago, there was probably no one in Russia who looked like that. Where did he learn to look like that? Even now, there may be only a handful. Are his parents religious? No, he responds, not at all. What do they think of his ways? They have learned to live with them. Where did he learn the laws? He learned Hebrew, and then he read. But what about the traditions, the things that aren't in the books, the things you learn from your home, the things you have to see in order to do? He heard about them, and then he carried them out in his fashion. Does he have a job, looking like that? No, he works as an artist. An artist? Yes, he paints pictures.



One refusenik, in his late 20s, is a former engineer. After applying to emigrate, both he and his wife lost their jobs. Their applications were refused, and they have been without work for two years. He asks me to help him practice his English, which he learned while jobless. I assume he feels desperate, but he tells me that he is not. There is a little food, people help, and it looks as if he might find work as a laborer.

Two economics students carrying briefcases stop by. They do so every Saturday. One, dark, is a Jew from central Asia; the other has a Jewish father and a Russian mother. The half-Jew is upset because someone has just told him that, according to Jewish law, one can be a Jew only if one's mother is a Jew. He wants to be a Jew. I ask him why. He says he feels it in his bones.

—W.R.

a means for the transmission of information; what is regarded as information is only what the government says it is. In the Soviet Union, all people, especially the leaders, want only peace; in the United States, many people, especially the leaders, are itching for war. In the Soviet Union, collective farms and factories

are daily exceeding their most vaunted expectations; in the United States, the results of exploitative capitalism are dragging all sectors of production into an economic abyss.

When, during my visit, U.S. unemployment figures reached a postwar high, a Soviet TV correspondent in New York confided to his audience back home that the true figures were, of course, much higher than those reported by the U.S. government, as could be seen in the accompanying shots of Harlem slums, Bowery bums, and Broadway bag ladies. Yet, the correspondent added grimly, despite the inevitably dismal state of the American economy, the United States was pouring billions of dollars into arms. The screen then filled with Vietnam-era clips of American soldiers boarding troop carriers and American fighter-jets poised menacingly on military runways.

Fooling Some of the People . . .

I began to understand, watching this night after night, what I had been hearing day after day. In talking with waiters, taxi drivers, students, and scientists, I repeatedly heard that, of course, the United States is planning for war. Maybe not all Americans want war, but certain circles in America do. Businessmen do. Reagan does. He refuses to rule out first use of nuclear weapons. He is probably planning a war right now!

When I first heard that, I thought it was a line inevitably fed to a foreigner. But I began to realize that I was hearing it even from those who were willing to express their antipathy to Soviet life and their sympathy with American ways. Could it be that they really believed their own media? It could be. If the same thing is said again and again, in every place one looks, without variation or demurral, how could it not sink in?

One evening, sharing a meal with Russian intellectuals, some of whom had lived for years on the fringes of artistic dissent, and all of whom had deep reservations about Soviet politics and culture, I asked whether I had simply been taken in by those I had met, or whether my sample of contacts was too small or too skewed to reflect common attitudes. I hadn't been taken in, they assured me. The Soviet media have really been successful in presenting the government's case on the question of war and peace. Not everyone believes everything, but many believe much of it. In the large cities, perhaps 50 percent believe 50 percent of it; elsewhere in the country, among groups with little sophistication, the figures may be higher, much higher. What, I wondered, does that portend?

One of the newest fashions among Soviet youth is the sport-

ing of jackets, sweaters, or sweatshirts imprinted with the insignia of American universities: UCLA, Ohio State, Stanford. Those who cannot get the originals create their own. One young Leningrader wore a white jacket with a dark blue Y sewn on the back, the letter in a shape not to be seen on real Yale jackets.

An older fad, popular among all ages, is the wearing of lapel pins. Some of these *znachki* simply depict a monument in Moscow, Leningrad, or some other city, serving thereby to identify the wearer's home town. Most, though, depict revolutionary themes and figures. There is one of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the first head of the Cheka (forerunner of the KGB), who energetically eliminated the early counterrevolutionaries. But most are of Lenin. There are some of Lenin with a cap, some of him without; some of Lenin within a star, some of him within an iridescent circle. And there are some of Lenin as a child.

The Lenin-child struck me as odd at first, but then as altogether logical. The country is full of cities, squares, streets, and parks named for the man; of monuments built in his image; of houses where he lived, slept, ate, and wrote. Beatification and deification have been going on for some time. Lenin was not only the founder; he was the First Cause. Relics of his life are preserved and cherished, and Russians think nothing of waiting in line for six hours to view his remains.

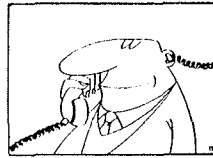
... Some of the Time

Whether Yuri Andropov will ever become the object of a similar process of sanctification is, at this point, still unclear. To be sure, attempts, albeit limited ones, were made to exalt if not sanctify Andropov's immediate predecessor. During much of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, the front pages of Soviet newspapers were plastered with his pictures and speeches, his name was mentioned frequently and everywhere, and his likeness appeared on posters and billboards almost half as often as Lenin's. The building-sized billboard renditions showed, until the very end, a vigorous man in his mid-40s, and were accompanied by a quote from him about the future or about peace. During his last few years, however, such displays were given the lie by the reality recorded by television cameras. The nightly news, though strictly edited, revealed an old man seated in place, not just aging but superannuated. Of such stuff, personality cults were hard to make. Now that he is dead, many of the billboards have come down. Brezhnev is mentioned less and less frequently, though his successor has arranged for an obscure city on the Kama River, formerly named Naberezhnye Chelny or "Dugout

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

I asked a young Leningrad radio engineer why it was so hard to find a telephone directory in the Soviet Union. The question irritated him. "Foreigners always ask me, 'Why don't you have telephone directories?' 'Why don't you have computers?' 'Why don't you have consumer goods?' Well, why do you in America *have* telephone directories? Why do you *have* computers? Why do I have to explain why we *don't*? Why is it so normal to have telephone directories?"

In the Soviet Union, at least, it isn't normal. One person I asked told me that not providing directories saved paper. Another said that it was done for reasons of security: The less access there is to information, the less likely that somebody, especially a foreigner, might use it for some nefarious end. Once, wanting to reach a Muscovite by phone, and not having his number, I asked a hotel clerk for the number of the information operator. The clerk, a middle-aged woman, who until then had always had a smile for me, suddenly looked at me with open suspicion. "The number of the information operator? There *is* no information operator!" "But how do you look up a number?" "You don't look it up; you have to have it." "But how do you get it?" "The person you want to call has to give it to you." "But what if you don't know that person?" "Then why would you want to call him? Besides," she asked, "whom do you want to call?"



—W.R.

Banks," to be renamed in his honor.

In Leningrad, another city named in someone's honor, there is an apartment house with one of the finest views in town. It is situated along the embankment of the grand Neva River, not far from the spot where the cruiser *Aurora*, whose gun supposedly signaled the start of the October Revolution, is moored. For a friend who has lived in Leningrad all his life, that building, identified on no tourist map, symbolizes the modern history of the city and the country better than any other.

"That apartment house was built some years after the Revolution for those persons who had been exiled by the Tsar. They were invited back to the country, and they were 'given' apartments in that building. In this country, by the way, you don't rent an apartment; you're 'given' it. In fact, that word has acquired such a usage here. When you see an old *babushka* lumbering down the street with oranges, and you want to know where she bought them, you ask her, 'Where were they given?'

The authorities want you to feel that everything you have is from them, that it was awarded to you as a gift, a kindness.

"Anyway, those apartments in that building were 'given' to those former exiles and to Old Bolsheviks. By 1939, at the end of the period of Stalin's great purges, the building was empty. Then loyal party officials were given apartments in that building, but workers started agitating and complaining. Why give such desirable apartments to party officials when workers have no place to live? And so there was a minor scandal, and the building was emptied again and the apartments 'given' to workers. Of course, the party officials found even better apartments elsewhere."

This same Leningrader is the most "American" Russian I know. Not that he has ever been in America, but he acts like an American in Russia. And that causes him endless trouble.

His main problem is that he likes to be open. He refuses to censor himself. While others simply accept the inconsistencies in Soviet life between what is and what is supposed to be, he makes a point of exposing them. If some act is permitted in theory but forbidden in practice, he deliberately does it and points, as if naively, to the clause in the regulations that permits it. Even—in fact, especially—at his job. The most productive worker there, he gives his superiors only grief. He is always questioning their principles. And his boss has begun, of late, to accuse him of being obsessed, paranoid, crazy.

Once, intending to have dinner at a restaurant, we encountered a line. For me, it was just another Soviet line, and I automatically placed myself at its end. My friend, for his part, walked up to the entrance of the restaurant and peered inside. He saw what those waiting patiently at the head of the line also saw: Half the tables were empty, the waitresses idle and gossiping. He called over the restaurant manager. "What's going on here?" he demanded of her. "Is this a way to treat Soviet people? Why do we have to wait in line?" She looked at him as if he were mad. The people in line shuffled in embarrassment. He was acting like an American in the land of single file. And I, the American, was embarrassed by my own embarrassment.

