

# *Falshfasad:*

## Infrastructure, materialism, and realism in wild-capitalist Moscow

### ABSTRACT

Zaryadye Park is an extravagant landscaping project-cum-multimedia attraction that opened in 2017 adjacent to Moscow's Kremlin. This article opens with a short reflection on the portents of war legible, with the benefit of hindsight, in Zaryadye's design. It navigates the thicket of aesthetics, ideologies, ecologies, and economies blossoming in Zaryadye, interrogating propagandistic characterizations of it as an ethereal terrain where infrastructure is altogether displaced by emotion, leisure, spectacle, and nature. Zaryadye has its Muscovite specificities, but it is merely one incarnation of a globally emergent architectural ideology—pseudo-ecological, infrastructure-disavowing—which I call “wild capitalist.” Looking for the locus of Zaryadye's really existing infrastructure(s), this article peers behind its *falshfasady* (false facades)—oversized tarps camouflaging the unsightly “reality” of construction work in 21st-century Moscow. Methodologically, the article makes the case for a Marxist ethnographic realism as a suitable lens for depicting reality-in-motion in the wild-capitalist moment. [*infrastructure, architecture, postsocialism, fakeness, Marxism, materialism, realism, Moscow, Russia*]

**T**his article was accepted for publication in *American Ethnologist* on February 16, 2022. On February 24, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, unleashing a brutal war that, in a matter of weeks, killed tens of thousands of people and displaced over 10 million.

The portents of this war were always evident in my field site, Moscow's Zaryadye Park, which heaves with more-or-less latent themes of fascism and militarized imperial yearning. These portents are drenched with incompatible, contradictory symbolism and ideological messaging: Soviet and tsarist, Luddite and futurist, bellicose and bucolic. They are too many to list here, but some are legible in this article's ethnographic descriptions.

At the core of my analysis is an attempt to make sense of the purported “fakeness” of Zaryadye, nicknamed Putin's paradise (*putin-skiy rai*) by skeptical Muscovites. What does this “fakeness” say about vernacular and ethnographic theoretical understandings of “reality,” and what, if any, actually existing realities do the “false facades” of Zaryadye conceal? In my analysis, I identify labor as the critical infrastructure disavowed by contemporary Moscow's escapist leisurescapes. In the wake of current events, however, it has become clear that, in the last instance, the “reality” of Russia's “wild capitalist” 21st century—a reality at once thinly obfuscated and deafeningly amplified by Zaryadye's eco-imperialist shrubbery—is the inevitability of war.

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Figure 1. The birch grove in Zaryadye Park, Moscow, September 2017. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

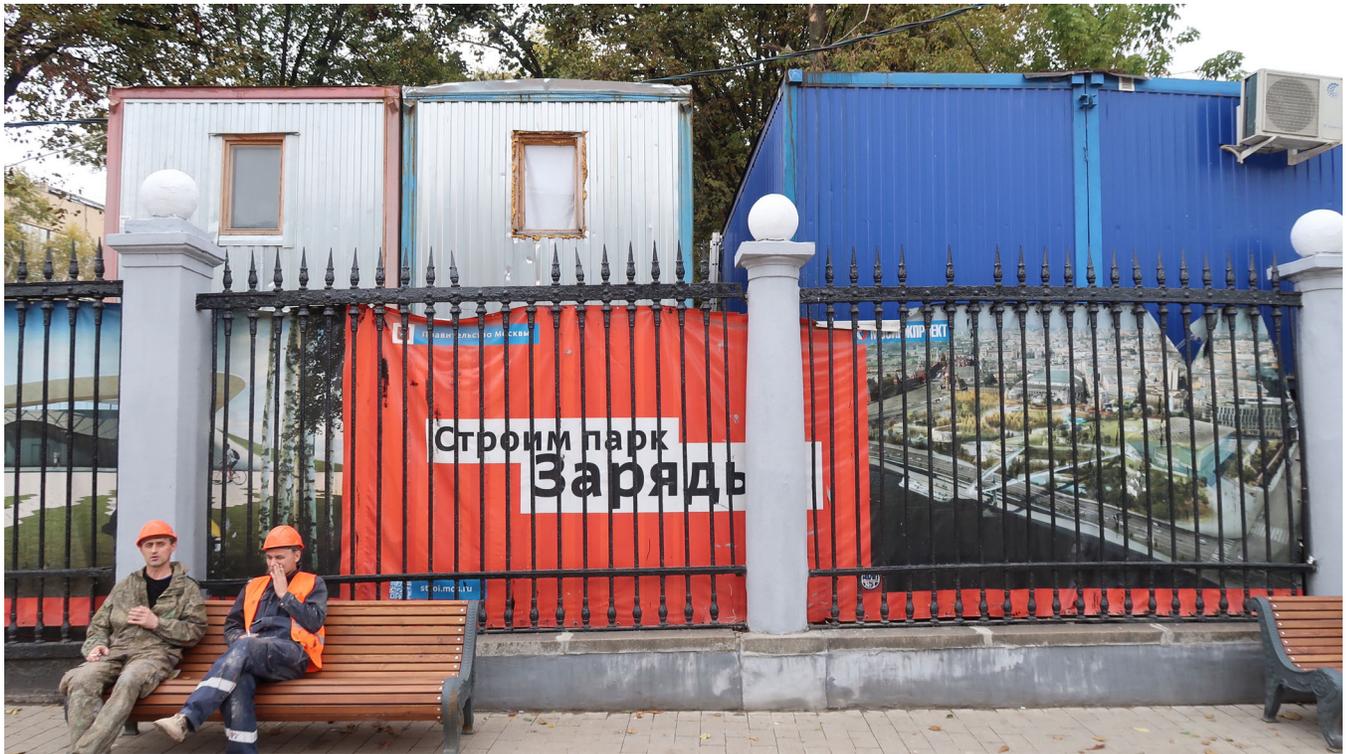
### Introduction: On the other side of the fence

“They don’t treat us as badly here as on other construction sites,” says Akhmad, a foreman from Dagestan, “because Putin is right over there, on the other side of the fence.”<sup>1</sup> The fence Akhmad refers to is the iconic, 15th-century redbrick Kremlin fortress wall, on the other side of Zaryadye Park, a few hundred meters from the edge of the *gorodok* (lit. “small town”), or temporary workers’ encampment. Akhmad is standing outside a *bytovka*, a container-like building that consists of offices, equipment stores, and (unofficial) accommodation for workers. The *gorodok* is composed of dozens of *bytovki*, set in a muddy landscape strewn with garbage, broken glass, and construction debris. The encampment lies next to Zaryadye Park (see Figure 1), a flagship new public space—cum—multimedia attraction in the heart of old Moscow, adjacent to the Kremlin and Red Square, whose opening in September 2017 was officiated by Russian president Vladimir Putin. On a subsequent visit, another worker, a lighting specialist from western Russia, tells us that the most interesting thing about Zaryadye is not in fact the park, but the *gorodok* itself—“the shit in which the workers live.”

Besides the fortress wall, several other permanent barriers separate the *gorodok* from the Kremlin—the most immediate one being the weathered cast-iron fence of the derelict Soviet military academy within whose perimeter

the workers’ encampment is located. The *gorodok*’s slum-like conditions are tightly sealed from view, however, because the fence is hung edge to edge with luscious renderings of the completed park, printed on giant *falshfasady*—plastic banners, frequently used in Moscow to conceal the messy infrastructure (and labor) of construction or repair work (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> Zaryadye occupies a 40-hectare plot vacated in 2004, when the city demolished the gargantuan late-Soviet hulk of the Hotel Rossiya. The new park is the flagship element of the city government’s audacious campaign of *blagoustroistvo*, or comprehensive public space modernization and beautification, which has been underway with gathering intensity since the 2010s.<sup>3</sup> The *falshfasad* has become one of the icons of *blagoustroistvo*, especially in its distinctive green-white striped variety (designed in 2016 by the “urban consultancy” bureau KB Strelka), reminiscent of Soviet-era beach windbreaks and deck chairs (see Figure 3). For Muscovites, the *falshfasad*’s pervasive and unceasing distribution throughout the city has become an object of fascination—and mockery.

In December 2017, a few weeks after our visit to the *gorodok*, an elite group of Muscovites—architects, critics, public intellectuals—sat down in front of another (very grubby) green-white striped *falshfasad*, installed in a contemporary art gallery, to debate architecture and ideology. One of the most animated contributions was delivered by



**Figure 2.** *Falshfasady*—featuring renderings of the completed Zaryadye Park—on the fence of the workers’ gorodok, October 2017. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Timur Bashkaev, a prominent Moscow architect, who had helped design Zaryadye together with the project’s lead designers, the New York–based firm Diller Scodifio+Renfro (DS+R). Standing in front of a *falshfasad*, Bashkaev delivered a pean to *infrastructurelessness*, marveling at how Zaryadye constituted a space, he said, *devoid* of infrastructure and devoted only to the sphere of affect, spectacle, and enjoyment. In this, he noted, Zaryadye resembles its New York progenitor, the High Line, DS+R’s signature project:

[The High Line] triggers emotions [. . .] and that’s it, there’s nothing else there [. . .] no communication, no transport, no nothing. [. . .] And so Zaryadye, its main task [. . .] [is to] trigger enormous positive emotions [. . .] colossal “wow effects.”

This article tells the story of both sides of the *falshfasad*: the *rai* (paradise) on the “right” side, a luscious terrain conjuring an affect of *ethereal* infrastructurelessness, and the *govno* (shit) on the “wrong” side, which I conceptually identify as the location of the park’s disavowed but indispensable (*infrareal*) infrastructure. Of course, the distinction between the two sides is anything but absolute, and Moscow’s *falshfasady* themselves play a mediating role, speaking to and hinting at connections and (dis)continuities between the realities they demarcate. The *falshfasad*, and its social

effect, are themselves marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, the *falshfasad* functions as it is intended: to conceal the gritty process of infrastructural transformation; to connote an atmosphere of sensory pleasure and labor-free leisureliness; and to insinuate that the city—as explicitly claimed by the ideologues of *blagoustroistvo* (Revzin 2019)—is being turned into a year-round *kurort* (vacation resort), a paradisiacal zone of sensual indulgence and vacation-like leisure. On the other hand, through its distinctive appearance, its ubiquity in the urban landscape, the long-term inconvenience it signals, and its increasingly bedraggled, be-holed, graffiti-laden appearance, the *falshfasad* draws attention to the very fact that it thinly veils something and someone: the camouflaged infrastructure of foundation pits, *bytovki*, *gorodki*, and the hard labor of migrants on which depend the infrastructureless resort-ness, emotion-scapes, and “wow effects” of Putin’s paradise.<sup>4</sup>

The ethnographic material on which my analysis is grounded was collected during 18 months of fieldwork in Moscow in 2017–18. I conducted some fieldwork alone and some in collaboration with students and colleagues at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics, as well as with a larger group of artists and curators who established an unofficial Institute of Zaryadyology. We embarked on collective field trips into the park and Moscow beyond, and we organized over a dozen public and private



Figure 3. A *falshfasad* in Red Square, Moscow, June 2018. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

discussions (including the above-mentioned gallery debate) devoted to *blagoustroistvo*, held at several venues in Moscow. By February 2018 we had generated an extensive list of Zaryadyological “core concepts”—emic ideas about Zaryadye and *blagoustroistvo*—that we put to use as points of departure for 18 artworks, conceived in response to an open call issued by the institute in February 2018. These works were displayed at *Portal Zaryadye: Not only to Hell, but also to Paradise*, an exhibition held in July–August 2018 at Moscow’s Shchusev State Museum of Architecture. This article follows the emic impulse undergirding the institute’s activities—emic in the sense of both “ethnographic theory” (Da Col and Graeber 2011) and “ethnographic conceptualism” (Murawski 2013). It does so by rooting its analytical constructions in a selection from the profusion of found “Zaryadyological” concepts encountered in fieldwork.<sup>5</sup>

As our research progressed, we focused our ethnographic energies on the design and construction of the park rather than on its everyday use. Our key interlocutors were the park’s ideologues, administrators, bureaucrats, architects, builders, and engineers, as well as the workers (gardeners, security guards, tour guides) who ensure

Zaryadye’s daily functioning. Correspondingly, Zaryadyology became primarily an ethnography of design and maintenance rather than of architecture’s everyday life. This was owing in part to the consistent awkwardness of engaging park visitors in spontaneous conversations on-site; and, further, to the fact that there was a thicker body of material to be gleaned from the long and intense half decade of the park’s gestation than from the short and halting year of its operations. Some reflections on the relationship between design intention and built effect do, however, feature in this analysis—reflections drawn from social media posts and participant observation, as well as from audience responses to the *Portal Zaryadye* exhibition (Kravchuk and Murawski 2018).

### The *matereality* of infrastructure

In what follows, I attend to the dialectical relationship between the above-worldly, *ethereal* paradise on one side of the *falshfasad*, and to the below-worldly, *infrareal* hell or purgatory on the other. In doing so, I interrogate ideologies of realness versus fakeness, truth versus untruth,

surface versus essence, “utility” versus “emotion,” and *infrastructure* versus *superstructure*, all of which bleed into each other in discussions about architecture and the city in contemporary Moscow. The resulting analysis contributes to the mushrooming ethnographic debate on infrastructure, but it excavates an explicitly Marxian understanding of the concept, underscoring the mutually determinant relationship between society’s material infrastructure or *base* and its socio-cultural-aesthetic *superstructure*. I steer the ethnographic discussion of infrastructure toward an often-sidestepped emphasis on labor, class, and conflict (Murawski 2018b). Moreover, in proffering the concept of *matereality*, I highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between a materialist notion of infrastructure and a materialist understanding of reality. This conceptual focus is ethnographically bolstered by the (often contradictory) “vernacular” or “everyday” Marxist-Leninist categories deployed by people in Moscow (on *all* sides of the *falshfasad*)—chief among them a commitment to a Marx-derived concept of the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure. As ethnographers have documented (Grant 2014; Humphrey 2003, 2005), such a Marxian lived ideology of infrastructure palpably persists in the post-Soviet consciousness.

Today, questions of urban infrastructure have been elevated to a new level of prominence in the wake of the *blagoustroistvo* campaign—launched in earnest in 2010, when longtime populist Mayor Yuri Luzhkov was replaced by technocratic administrator Sergey Sobyenin, under the avowedly “modernizing” presidency of Dmitry Medvedev.<sup>6</sup> Now, via the work of powerful “urban consultancy” firms such as Strelka KB, which have proliferated in Russia in recent years, the mission of *blagoustroistvo* is being exported far beyond the capital, to Russia and the post-Soviet space beyond. Moscow’s Zaryadye Park is, arguably, the flagship project of Russia’s *blagoustroistvo* regime, as well as its paradigmatic site, encapsulating many of the project’s broader characteristics. I use the word *paradise*—whose articulations by my Moscow interlocutors crop up throughout this text—as a shorthand for a spatial crystallization of the politics and aesthetics of the *blagoustroistvo* regime. Moreover, Zaryadye also incarnates a globally burgeoning paradisiacal spatial typology, other instances of which include sites such as Manhattan’s High Line, Singapore’s Gardens by the Bay, and San Francisco’s Salesforce Park. These sites are horizontal rather than vertical, suffused with eco-rhetorics and eco-aesthetics; they are avowed sites of publicness designed for “wild” and “unscripted” types of urban behavior. On the surface, then, they seem to depart from the typology of “hyperbuildings,” iconic structures and spectacular architectural undertakings that have received wide-ranging analytical attention from anthropologists of post-Soviet built environments (Grant 2014; Koch 2018; Laszczkowski 2016).

Zaryadye’s un- or anti-spectacular aesthetic notwithstanding, its detractors, designers, and custodians all explicitly characterize it as an ethereal paradise, suffused with sensory intensity and “wow effects” but devoid of infrastructure. As if its designers had digested and superseded the insights of recent critical scholarship on infrastructure, spectacle, and affect, Zaryadye is framed not merely as a site of “spectacular infrastructure” (Schwenkel 2015) or “affective infrastructure” (Knox 2017), but as a terrain where affect and spectacle subsume or displace infrastructure—or try very hard *to claim to have displaced* it. Why and how, then, does Zaryadye *disavow* its infrastructures, understood as tangible pieces of equipment, as means of production (including laborers themselves), or as political and economic processes?<sup>7</sup>

Concepts pertaining to the relationship between the real and the fake, the substantive and the superficial, the infrastructural and the superstructural, frequently appeared during our Zaryadyological conversations. These included *potemkinskie derevni* (Potemkin village), *falshfasad* (false facade), *post-pravda* (posttruth), and *pokazukha* (something which is just “for show”), as well as Russian renditions of the English-language expressions “fake it till you make it” and “wow effect.” Curiously enough, we also heard “*bytie opredelaet soznanie*”—the standard Russian translation of a celebrated quote from Marx outlining the relationship between society’s determining economic base or infrastructure (*basis* in Russian) and the determined political, cultural, or aesthetic superstructure (*nadstroika*): “It is not the consciousness of people that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx 1970, 11). So what is the significance of the fact that this phrase—Marx’s elaboration of his architectural metaphor of *basis* and *nadstroika* (*Basis* and *Überbau* in the original German)—is frequently encountered in everyday discussions about architecture and urbanism in Russia? How are notions of materiality, truth, reality, and utility (and their opposites) deployed there in relation to architecture?<sup>8</sup>

The truth claims—or rather (un)reality claims—made by Muscovites about architecture hint at ways of seeing beyond the chasm that rends the reality-scapes of anthropological theory. There is today a silent majority of “constructivists,” few of whom actually use this word, who take social constructedness for granted while holding onto uninterrogated “backdoor” conceptions of the real (Green 2007). These are pitted against a dwindling but vocal minority of “ontologists,” who proclaim an unending multiplicity of realities (“ontologies”) while reproducing their own idealist constructs (Graeber 2015). The question of “realism” itself is ordinarily backgrounded in the voluminous literature on these controversies. Significantly, where this has (recently) come to the fore, it tended to be in the work of scholars whose work is informed by Marx-ish frameworks,

whether critical realism (Graeber 2015) or neo-Gramscian political economy (Narotzky 2007; G. Smith 2014). Correspondingly, I make reality claims about the relationship between infrastructure and reality, labor and leisure, materiality and consciousness. I borrow these claims from my interlocutors: ideologues, constructors, guardians, and users of Zaryadye. To adapt a phrase from Zarecor (2018, 97), my interlocutors “think infrastructurally” (Zarecor 2018, 99): they are conscious that their consciousness is determined by their being, or their material realities, and they inhabit a still-socialist (Murawski 2018a) epistemic universe—one in which not only abstract concepts but also aesthetics, sensibilities, and lived realities grounded in Marxist-Leninist theory continue to circulate and reproduce themselves anew.

I take seriously and at face value my interlocutors’ vernacular Marxist “reality claims,” and I highlight the “reality concepts” they use to articulate these claims. I thus aim to make sense of *the actually existing reality* of socialist and postsocialist economy and society. Rather than interpreting the “reality effects” (Laszczkowski 2016) of Moscow’s makeover *through* theories of affect, simulacrum, or spectacle conjured by western European or North American geographers and philosophers, I ground my analysis in the vernacular materialist infrastructural thinking of my Moscow interlocutors. Building on the analyses of ethnographers of architectural fakeness and realness working in late-capitalist contexts within (Grant 2014; Laszczkowski 2016) and without (C. Smith 2020) the postsocialist world, I investigate the role of “two-faced buildings” (Grant 2014, 515)—and the “two-faced rulers” (Laszczkowski 2016, 159) they index—in “making the state feel real” (Laszczkowski 2016, 161) to its citizens. But rather than merely *describing* the “reality effects” of spectacular architectural and infrastructural projects, I also try to understand how far the categories of realness and fakeness, infrastructure and superstructure, allow one to criticize the reality that is materially effectuated by the state (and the political-economic order within which it is embedded).<sup>9</sup>

I organize my analysis of Zaryadye—and my attempt to make analytical sense of some of the questions above—with reference to several discrete but overlapping levels of its functioning, loosely corresponding to the main sections into which this text is divided. The eclectic political aesthetics and centripetal political geometry of Zaryadye are deftly expressed in the chameleon concept of “wild urbanism,” which constitutes the official ideology of Zaryadye; its political economy is a type of sovereign venture politics, a patronal gift logic that infuses the public-private partnership model of capital investment. I refer to this as “wild capitalism,” picking up a moniker ordinarily reserved for Russia’s volatile first two decades after the Soviet Union’s collapse. Its key material artifact is the glossy falshfasad, a contemporary incarnation of the fabled Potemkin village frontages of 18th-century Russia. Beyond these constitutive

components, paradise has many “other sides”—those objects and subjects of its reality concealed behind its falshfasad and exiled beyond its ethereal domain. In this text, I focus on my conversations with the migrant laborers who inhabit Zaryadye’s falshfasad-camouflaged gorodok. Highlighting the “everyday Marxist” (or vernacular materialist) categories they use to criticize the fruits of their labor, I put forward the builders of paradise—rather than its designers, ideologues, or detractors—as its immanent critics, the best-positioned arbiters of the dividing line between the fake and the real, infrastructure and superstructure, appearance and essence.

### Political aesthetics: Wild urbanism’s wow effects

At one of the Zaryadyological debates, architecture critic Anton Kalgaev touched on the idea of “wild urbanism,” articulated by DS+R in their competition-winning design for the park. This notion, Kalgaev argued, places an almost comical rhetorical premium on contradiction and complexity. Zaryadye is represented as belonging not only to the city but also to nature; it is not only “green” but also “smart”; not only futuristic but also traditional. Kalgaev identified the phrase “not only, but also” (*ne tol’ko, no i*) as the rhetorical formulation most symptomatic of everyday speech in the high Putinist period. In Kalgaev’s view, there is something sinister about this fetishizing of contradiction, something indicative of a jarring relationship to reality. In his contribution to the discussion, journalist Sergey Medvedev had already characterized Zaryadye as a “monument . . . to the New Normal, to internal colonization, hybrid war and post-truth.” Seconding Medvedev, Kalgaev described “not only but also” as “the rhetorical figure of posttruth”: a device for obscuring the true nature of things, for creating a misleading illusion of pluralism in an authoritarian context. In Grant’s (2001, 335) seminal analysis, the ludic, fairytale aesthetics of 1990s, wild-capitalist Moscow worked by conjuring “a projection of tranquility for a fragmented country.” By subtle but substantive contrast, the aesthetics of Sobyenin’s 2010s conjure a projection of dissonance, if not quite a fragmentation, at a conformist juncture.

The political-aesthetic contradictions and complexities of contemporary Russia are, indeed, programmatically gathered on the terrain of Zaryadye. The park’s core “wild urbanist” design principle boils down to bringing together Russia’s four “landscape zones”: tundra (or northern landscapes), steppe, meadow, and forest, the latter subdivided into coniferous, coastal, birch grove, and mixed subtypes (see Figures 1 and 4). In this gesture of centripetal ec-nationalism, Russia’s natural diversity is symbolically condensed in the heart of the federation’s capital—just as the Soviet nationalities were brought together in VDNKh, the Stalin-era Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy, which is today being restored to its former glory



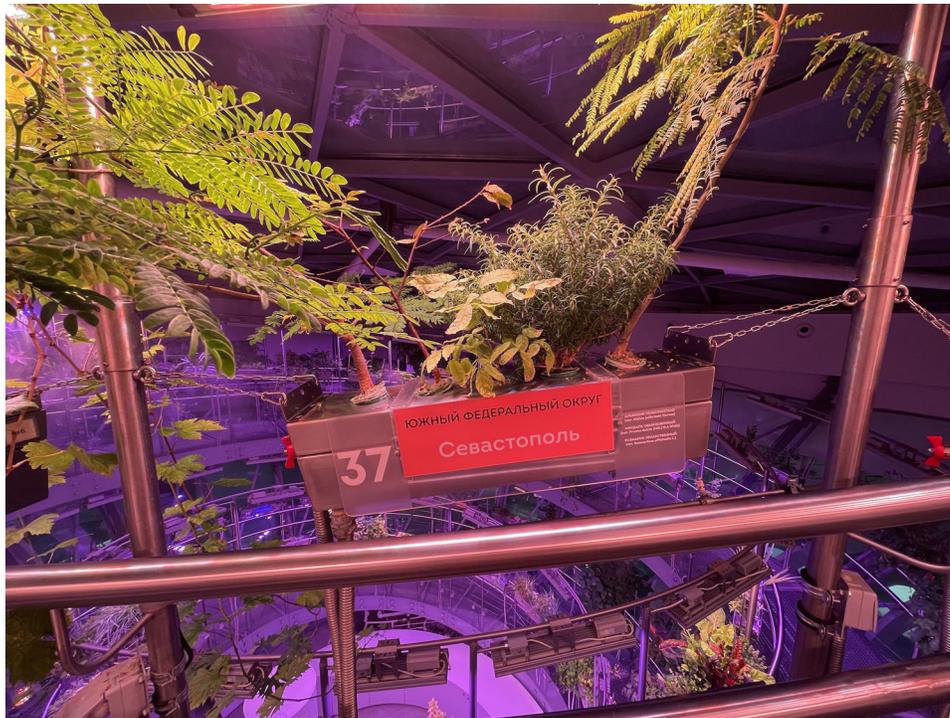
**Figure 4.** The northern landscapes, Zaryadye Park, Moscow, September 2017. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

by the Moscow municipality (Schönle 2020). The cuisines of all Russia are likewise gathered, in two spaces: a lavishly designed food court called the Zaryadye Gastronomic Center, and a monumental, cosmically themed, neofuturist restaurant called Voskhod (lit. “Dawn,” after a Soviet spacecraft). Celebrated designers of luxury interiors Irina and Olga Sundukova told me the restaurant’s motifs grew out of two “ideologies” co-concocted with the proprietor, celebrity chef Alexander Rappaport: “nostalgia for an unrealized future” and “the Soviet Union without shortages.” Gastronomically, then, Zaryadye Park becomes at once a nostalgic fantasy of recolonial Russia (Murawski 2020) and a privately financed simulation of socialist plenty (the restaurants, as well as the seven-star hotel complex being built in the corner of the park, are privately owned).

Beyond the consumption of the natural and culinary wealth of Russia and the former USSR, park visitors can enjoy a wealth of more-or-less patriotic high-tech attractions: a “four-dimensional” simulated “flight over Moscow”; a digital panorama of the history of Zaryadye, Red Square, and the Kremlin known as the Time Machine; and the Ice Cave, described by Mayor Sobyenin as “a small segment of the Russian North in Moscow.” There are regular opportunities to take selfies with actors dressed as military personnel—whether musketeers from Tsar Ivan Grozny’s time or contemporary paratroopers—hired by the park’s administra-

tion or by the Moscow State Historical Museum, which has a branch, the Romanov Boyar Chambers, in the park precinct. Lectures on ethnobotany and genetics are held in the Nature Center, the inner sanctum of which is formed by the glass-walled Florarium, bathed in plant-friendly purple light, within which metallic flower boxes housing a rotating selection of the 141 varieties of Russian national flora are spectacularly arranged along a spiraling Tatlin Tower–esque stairway. The apex of the spiral, and the vertical culmination of the Florarium’s eco-imperial narrative, are the planters containing booty flora: silk trees, prunes, rosemary, grapes, and lavender, hailing from the two administrative territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied in 2014 by Russia’s armed forces: the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (see Figure 5).

As of September 2018, park visitors can attend concerts conducted by artistic director Valery Gergiev at the new Zaryadye Philharmonic. If they do not have tickets to a concert, they can scale the steps of the open-air amphitheater, which clings to the concert hall’s sloping rear facade. Where the amphitheater’s seating ends, the slope turns into a landscaped grass hill beneath a giant curved-glass canopy. On the descent back into the park, there unfolds a stunning panorama over the Kremlin and Saint Basil’s Cathedral, foregrounded by the park’s undulating landscape. In Timur Bashkaev’s words, uttered at the Zaryadyological



**Figure 5.** Florarium, Zaryadye Park, Moscow, December 2020. This box contains booty flora from the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula of Ukraine. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

debate, “Even for me, and I am very bloody difficult to astound, the second you emerge from under this canopy, you see that view, and there is just this *colossal wow effect!*”

For many visitors the highlight of each trip to Zaryadye is taking selfies at two primary spots: the tundra peak on top of the Media Center and the so-called Soaring Bridge, which juts out over the Moscow River (see Figure 6). The latter site was described by one of my Moscow interlocutors as “the world’s longest selfie stick,” and it was derided by scholar and broadcaster Sergey Medvedev, in his contribution to the Zaryadyological debates, as a “bridge without a function, apart from taking selfies in front of the Kremlin.” The Soaring Bridge is, indeed, Zaryadye’s most congested fragment. In good weather it is often difficult to force one’s way through the huddled, bulging collectivity engaging in a sort of selfie sociality: photographing themselves and each other, adjusting poses and framings, fixing hair, self-deprecatingly laughing at their own vanity, gently haranguing passersby who stepped into their shots, or politely thanking those who waited.

Crucially, selfie-tecture—and the everyday practices it engenders—does not arise spontaneously. In fact, it is consciously designed and promoted by the architects and ideologues of paradise. An infamous article by Grigory Revzin (2016), a onetime dissident architecture critic turned “chief ideologue” of KB Strelka, is often cited (and derided) as a programmatic “manifesto” of blagoustroistvo (Medvedev

2017, 91; Yampolsky 2018, 32). Therein, Revzin characterizes the desired effect of blagoustroistvo as “transforming the street into a theater, where people constantly switch between the roles of actor and audience member.” In Revzin’s vision, the post-blagoustroistvo street should mimic the methods of “street fashion,” whereby “elite brands send models and celebrities into the streets and record the resulting number of posts on Instagram.” Revzin’s (2016) new type of street, “in its higher expression,” ought to have a “park atmosphere”: “instead of walls there should be mirrors, shop windows and advertisements, so that people can constantly but unobtrusively delight in themselves from the side.”

Echoing Revzin’s narrative, Timur Bashkaev, speaking at the Zaryadyological debate, responded to Medvedev’s diagnosis of the Soaring Bridge’s superfluousness by embracing the criticism. For Bashkaev, the value of the Soaring Bridge lies precisely in its uselessness:

We built the Soaring Bridge [. . .] [which is] expressly not a utilitarian bridge, it is expressly supposed to be an *attraction*. [. . .] There is no necessity or efficiency there, only *emotions!*

If supporting pillars had been placed beneath the most jutting-out section of the bridge, Bashkaev admitted, 300



**Figure 6.** The Soaring Bridge, seen from the Moskvoetskaya Embankment, along the Moscow River, February 2018. (Michał Murawski) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

million rubles would have been saved. But this, he said, would have been a false economy:

If you put pillars there, you would have lost all the *emotions!* I'll tell you more! According to the initial design [for the Soaring Bridge], there was a glass lift for disabled people, in the middle of the V-shape [the protruding section] [. . .] but it made it seem as if there are pillars there, so we chucked it. We got rid of the lift especially, so as not to spoil that *sensation* that there are no pillars there. Can you imagine? And *this* is what you have to understand. It's thanks to these effects that the city *lives* these days.

Superstructure and spectacle, then, are programmatically prioritized over infrastructure, and even over access. Crucially, though, as Bashkaev's words make clear, Zaryadye's wild-urbanist *wow effects* are not for everybody. The park's complex, multilevel structure is difficult to navigate for disabled people, and few ramps and lifts are provided to gain access to the most atmospheric nooks and crannies. The few existing ones are better described, in Hartblay's (2017, 12) words, as "aesthetic connotations of ramps": either out of use or ill designed to the point of unusability. On trips through the park, I often saw people attempting to navigate the ramps—whose rails were spaced inexplicably far apart, as if designed for a car—with buggies or wheelchairs. The heights of emotional ecstasy, which paradise engenders, can be attained only by the most dexterous among the able bodied.

### Political economy: The gift of wild capitalism

Sennett (2018, 73) has praised the High Line's utility for "opportunity investors . . . hoping to make money out of a particular aspect of open systems, in which a relatively small-scale event can trigger a massive change in the whole." Sennett, an enthusiast and supporter of the High Line, Zaryadye, and other kindred paradisiacal projects, notes that in Lower Manhattan, a "small investment in weedy plants . . . produced infinitely greater value in the surrounding land, renovations and new buildings" (74). For this one-time critic of capitalism's psychopathologies, the High Line is today the praiseworthy architectural embodiment of an allegedly new type of "open systems" capitalism: "In an open, opportunity-seeking way of investing . . . investors are focused on whether a particular deal can trigger other deals, rather than on whether it is profitable in itself" (74). Taking at face value Sennett's characterization, as a fellow traveler's emic description of paradise's business model, we can move toward a characterization of its political-economic ideology: both the High Line and Zaryadye are "open systems" operations, insofar as they are hybrid public-private undertakings, investments in publicness designed to generate middle- or long-term open-ended dividends, rather than straightforward, immediate profits from rent or resale. But what kinds of dividends do both projects generate, for whom, and how quickly? How does paradise—in its Moscow and Manhattan incarnations—enmesh publicness and privateness, sovereignty and capital, gift and commodity, volatility and stability, vertical and horizontal modes of economic and political governance?

The publicness of Zaryadye cannot be comprehended unless one considers the choreography of its articulation as a sovereign gift. Famously, Zaryadye was born on January 12, 2012, when then prime minister Putin took a walk with Mayor Sobyenin around the Kremlin-adjacent ruins of the gargantuan 1960s Hotel Rossiya (demolished on former Mayor Luzhkov's orders in 2004 and derelict ever since). "You know, I just had a thought. [. . .] Maybe we can create a park zone, right in the center of Moscow next to the Kremlin?" Putin shyly suggested. "That would be real good" (*Eto bylo by zdorovo*), Sobyenin casually concurred (RIA Novosti 2012). The sovereign's spontaneous act of generosity was captured by journalists from all major Russian networks, assembled in advance to record the unplanned high-level perambulation. And, as the project competition's now defunct website declared in 2012, "with this single decision, the golden land next to the Kremlin was given back to the Muscovites."<sup>10</sup>

Zaryadye is aggressively accentuated as a gift: a benevolence from the sovereign to a grateful people. Correspondingly, the expectation to demonstrate fealty to the gift, in lieu of Muscovites' capacity to reciprocate, is vigorously enforced. In the week after the park officially opened, scores

of Muscovites descended on it, and park authorities—as well as journalists and social media users—bemoaned their allegedly scandalous conduct. Muscovites were described as “wild,” “heartless” (*bezserdechnyi*), and “ungrateful” (*neblagodarnyi*) “vandals,” “barbarians,” “savages,” and “thieves.” The park’s head gardener, Igor Safyullin, was quoted in a tabloid newspaper saying that park users had destroyed 30 percent of the plants in the northern landscapes zone (S. Volkova 2017). As we surveyed the landscape several days after the opening, one park employee told me that the barbarism had reached an apogee that morning, when “someone shat in the lake, and someone else in the hedges.” The people of Moscow, the park administrator claimed, have an attitude of “I *want* to shit here, and I *will* shit here!”

Most park employees I spoke to, however, were exasperated at how the story had been blown out of proportion. “There was no barbarism!” Safyullin told me. “My words were exaggerated a million thousand times. [. . .] This impudent newspaper completely misrepresented what I said.” Real or imagined, the story stuck, and the idea of the “ungrateful visitor” continues to resonate. When exhibition guide Yana Sidikova asked visitors to the Portal Zaryadye exhibition about their first association with the park, several repeated the barbarism trope: “I’ve heard that loads of stuff was destroyed immediately after opening,” said a construction engineer in her 50s. According to another woman in her 50s, a visitor from Kyiv, “People pilfered everything. [. . .] They just soiled the whole place!”

The idea of public space in Moscow, then, is saturated with the logic of the gift, and the performance of giving and receiving is at the heart of the idea of Zaryadye—just as it pervaded both Soviet and tsarist expansionist and colonialist projects (Grant 2009; Murawski 2019a, 57–69; Ssorin-Chaikov 2006). Indeed, a remarkably similar narrative was promulgated by the Soviet press after Gorky Park opened in 1928. In the words of the *Moskovskiy Den*’ newspaper, “The public conducted itself in a beastly fashion. [. . .] We have been gifted a place of rest and leisure. [. . .] We have to learn how to behave in a cultured fashion on its territory” (quoted in KB Strelka 2017). The park was swiftly closed to the public. The rhetoric of the gift, however, is not limited to the Soviet and post-Soviet territories of paradise. At its opening the High Line was also lauded as an “extraordinary gift to the city’s future” by then mayor Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire philanthropist (Loughran 2014, 49). When critiquing Zaryadye’s institutional setup, my Moscow interlocutors frequently compared Zaryadye unfavorably to its New York progenitor. Even the organization set up in 2009 to lobby for the park’s creation, Friends of Zaryadye (*Druzya Zaryadya*), is dismissed not only as a shameless imitation of its progenitor, Friends of the High Line (FHL), but as a “fake,” established by well-connected property developers. The New York organization, by contrast, was de-

scribed by one Moscow interlocutor as “a *real* NGO, not this corrupt Russian cargo cult.” The claim of Russian fakeness and American realness barely holds up, however. FHL, in Loughran’s (2014, 49) description, comprised a “group of elite political, economic and cultural actors that came together to redevelop the High Line.” Today, it still owns and manages the High Line on behalf of the New York Parks Authority; the High Line itself is described by skeptics as a “Potemkin village of what the city used to be” (Moss 2017, 297).

The fakeness of both paradises—New York’s and Moscow’s—is plain to see. Yet their symbolic presence and political and economic effects are real. The High Line has been around longer, and the dividends of its first decade are easier to measure—primarily in terms of investment stimuli (estimated at \$2 billion) and property value increases (103 percent within a five-minute walking radius; Lindner and Rosa 2017). The High Line, then, was a relatively small investment by New York standards (cost estimates run into hundreds of millions of dollars), with enormous—and brutal—economic effects. Zaryadye’s immediate economic impact is harder to quantify. In the shorter term, Zaryadye (and *blagoustroistvo* in general) generates dividends for responsible state or state-adjacent private entities, such as KB Strelka and the Moscow Chief Architect’s office, in terms of political influence, budgetary resources, or clout in the tendering process. Moreover, *blagoustroistvo* may also generate political dividends, in the form of electoral loyalty, for KB Strelka’s sovereign patrons: in the 2018 presidential and mayoral elections, held at the apex of Moscow’s 2010s prettification campaign, the incumbents (Putin and Sobyanin) increased their share of the vote in Moscow by about a third each. Zaryadye, then, was an enormous public investment whose economic dividends were murky and seemingly negligible, but whose political and symbolic impact was substantial.<sup>11</sup>

Their horizontal, grassroots aesthetics notwithstanding, the High Line and Zaryadye are private-public paradises spun within a web of hierarchical dependencies on benevolent sovereigns and philanthropists. They are both power verticals masquerading as power horizontals—betraying, in their *modi operandi*, family resemblances to the violent and chaotic “wild capitalism” of the early post-Soviet era. The High Line functions as a private-public parasitism, in which government—in the case of the New York municipality, then actually controlled by the oligarch Bloomberg—grants the bulk of the financing, while the private sector reaps almost all the rewards and poorer New Yorkers suffer the effects of gentrification. Zaryadye functions as a public-private protectorship, in which the private sector provides substantial initial financing and reaps some dividends. In the case of Zaryadye, the private sector was embodied, at first, in the figure of eccentric billionaire Dmitry Shumkov, who bought a section of the Zaryadye

plot from the city in 2013 for an estimated 8 billion rubles. Two years later, in November 2015, Shumkov was found hanging from three neckties in his luxury apartment in a Moscow skyscraper. Ownership of Shumkov's plot was thereupon transferred to Russia's largest and most politically connected real estate firm. In the Zaryadye incarnation of paradise, the sovereign sets the terms, provides access, and grants protection.

The kindred "wildness" of the High Line and Zaryadye goes much deeper than a shared preference for weedy perennial landscaping. Both sites are written into opaque, hybrid public-private foliages of patronage, ownership, and dependence; complicit in violent and volatile logics of class, race, and gender exploitation; and conceived and sustained through performatively overstated (rhetorical or actual) gestures of sovereign giving (enacted by Bloomberg and Putin, respectively). The wild-capitalist paradises of Moscow and New York are built on distinct but related political-economic infrastructures; correspondingly, the sites themselves share similarities in design, management, atmosphere, ideology, and (selfie-tectural) etiquette.

Wild urbanism, then, is not merely a pseudo-ecological incantation. It is an uncomfortable but telling corollary to the apocalyptic notion of wild capitalism—a designation typically attached to the (allegedly bygone) 1990s era of crisis and upheaval, an era whose vanquishing Zaryadye was intended, by the ideologues of Moscow's blagoustroistvo regime, to symbolize. Its latent survival, however, surfaced in the mythical specter of a "savage" horde of vandals, barbarians, defilers, and defecators alleged to have descended on Zaryadye during its opening weekend. Further, as one of the park's Russian codesigners told me, the American phrase *wild urbanism* was initially translated literally into Russian as *dikiy urbanizm*. The translation was swiftly altered, however, to *prirodnyi urbanizm* (natural urbanism) to stem the associations with *dikiy kapitalizm*. In the illustrative words of a Moscow urban geography professor, "This is just good old wild capitalism, all over again!" For many of my Moscow interlocutors, the time of wild capitalism is far from "over." In fact, the wild 1990s are back with a vengeance: more violent, volatile, and corrupt than ever before. But in the words of one of my interviewees, a prominent investigative journalist, the violence and corruption are now "cunningly concealed under the shrubs and wild plants."

### Matereality: The shit behind the falshfasad

Muscovites routinely deploy the metaphors of the falshfasad—and the associated notion of the Potemkin village—with reference to blagoustroistvo and Zaryadye.<sup>12</sup> Writer and critic Sergey Medvedev (2017, 92), cited above as a participant in the Zaryadyological debates and derider of Zaryadye's posttruthness and superfluity, characterizes

Sobyanin-era blagoustroistvo urbanism as but a "utopia of power . . . merely the furnishing of a Potemkin façade, just the same kind of imitation façade as the avenues of Stalin's or Brezhnev's time." In the words of architect and artist Maria Kremer, who re-created an enormous billowing falshfasad outside the *Portal Zaryadye* exhibition, "The falshfasad is a parasite feeding off the existing matter of the building [. . .] consigning the real facade into the past." Zaryadye Park, Kremer says, is not merely concealed behind a falshfasad. "The most impressive of these curtains—all 150,000 square meters of it—is Park Zaryadye itself. An act of curtaining on a gigantic scale" (Kremer 2018, 14–15).

One need not travel far to encounter the "other side," whose labor—smokescreened by the falshfasad—sustains the ethereal sensory joys of paradise. It is enough to walk out the park, cross the street, wade through the falshfasady, and enter the gorodok, where Zaryadye's construction workers live, gather, and rest. Like the builders and gardeners of the High Line and of Singapore's Gardens by the Bay, the workers of Zaryadye are distinct from its users in class and skin color (Loughran 2014; Myers 2019)—they are *Gastarbeiters* (guest workers) from remote parts of Russia and the former Soviet Union, working on precarious contracts. In the gorodok, workers from Uzbekistan, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Russian provinces cook *shashliks* (meat skewers)—much like those served in Zaryadye's restaurants, where national cuisines have been centripetally condensed—on a makeshift *mangal* (barbecue). The conditions in the gorodok may not be as bad as those of other Moscow construction sites, but they are far from desirable. A Kyrgyz foreman who has lived in Moscow for 10 years denied that anyone lives on the site. The conditions don't allow for it, he explained: "There is nowhere to wash. [. . .] There is no plumbing. [. . .] We made this mangal ourselves."

Another man, an Armenian, emphasized that the pay is low and irregular, especially considering the taxing character of the labor—he was one of four workers laying and repairing Zaryadye's 40-kilogram paving stones. When I asked if anyone had been injured handling the enormous hexagonal pavers, my interlocutor beckoned over a colleague, who shook his glove to indicate that two fingers were missing. Responding to my mortified expression, both men laughed and reassured me that this injury had happened somewhere else, not at Zaryadye, and promptly changed the subject when I tried to find out more. When a worker heard that I was writing a book about Zaryadye, he said, "Write this: the last workers who stayed in Zaryadye are four poor Armenians. Everyone else left, everyone got paid, and only four poor Armenians stayed behind!"

Some workers were attached to what they had built—some even expressed pride in the tempo of their labor and in how Muscovites delight in the park. One man, a lighting engineer from Tatarstan, had a photograph of the roof of

the philharmonic as his phone screen saver. Another said, “Well, we built this, of course we like it. [. . .] Our hands. We like what we made.” One woman, however, a security guard (*okhrannik*) from Lipetsk, in southwestern Russia, living in a *bytovka* on the edge of the site, said, “I simply do not like it at all. [. . .] There’s nothing interesting here, and the bridge did not appeal to me. I don’t understand why it was done at all.” Perhaps, she said, “for city people [. . .] all this stuff is something sort of classy [*shikarnoe*], but I was raised in the country, and I don’t see anything good here.” Zaryadye, she said, “is a park for Moscow people,” and Moscow, she said, “doesn’t like simple, poor people.” Her words echoed sentiments, which I heard expressed several times, that Zaryadye failed to tap into the aesthetic sensibilities of “ordinary” people. As a museum attendant (*smotritel*) at the Romanov Boyars’ Chambers, a museum flanking the Zaryadye site, told me, “I would like there to be harmony. I would like to see some sense in things. And in this thing [Zaryadye], I don’t see any sense. I don’t see the point [*sut*] of it, in what they wanted to express here. It’s just not interesting for me.” I responded by obediently relaying the park’s centripetal wild-urbanist ideology: “I suppose they wanted to express the whole of Russia, the tundra, and the . . .” But the *smotritel* was unmoved. “Right, aha,” she said. “And from all this paradise that they wanted to give us, that’s it, only the tundra has remained. [. . .] A big tundra, everywhere.”

On November 7, 2017—the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution—we chanced upon a group celebrating a birthday around the mangal. They invited us to try their food—“much tastier than in that gastronomic center in Zaryadye,” said the Uzbek electrician on shashlik duty. “Let’s hope the smell drifts out all over Zaryadye!” A senior worker from Mariupol, Ukraine, in his 60s, introduced himself as Grigory and pointed out that they were already celebrating for the fifth day. “But actually,” he said, hesitating, “we should not be celebrating at all. Today is the centenary of the Great October Revolution!” He burst into laughter and asked us, in a serious tone once more, “And what do you think about the revolution?” Another man, a younger foreman from western Russia, walked over to us, and Grigory said, “There’s Lenin himself!” Lenin introduced himself as Kostya and asked us if we wanted to take the students to see Zaryadye. But when we responded by asking whether he or Grigory would be willing to lead such a tour, the request was met with derision. In Lenin/Kostya’s words,

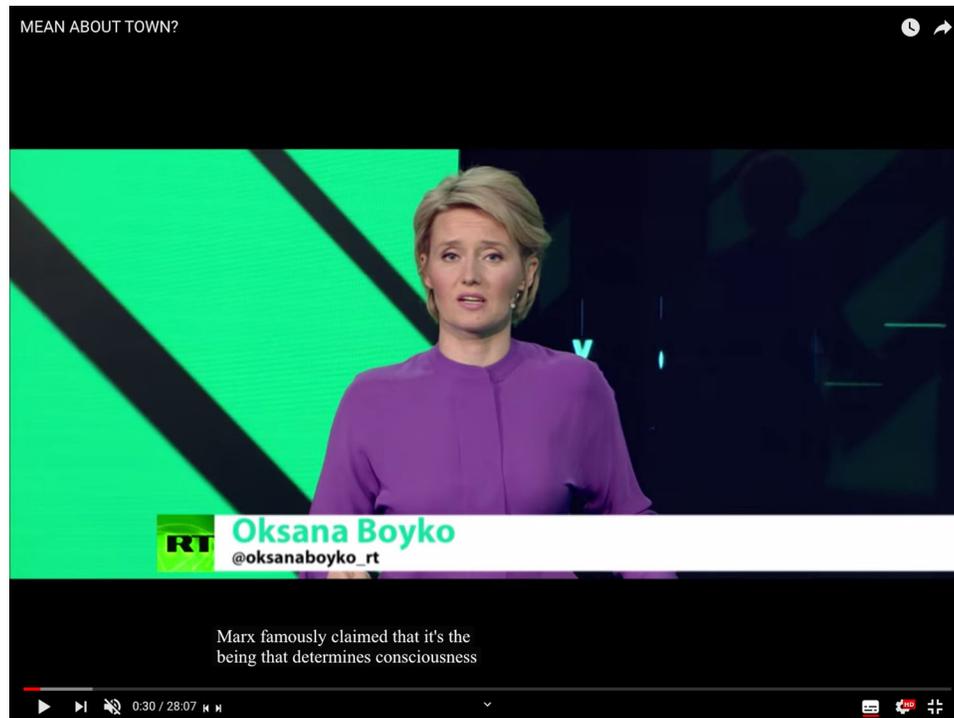
Every student from Vyshka [the Higher School of Economics] has their private Zaryadye, at their daddy’s place on Ibiza. What would be more interesting would be to bring the students here and to show them that in Russia, every building, every and any, is born from the shit in which the workers live [*v Rossii, lyuboe zdanie rozhdhaetsya iz derma, v kotorom zhivut stroiteli*]. Without this, there would be nothing!

The workers gathered around the mangal were quick to draw attention to the multiethnic nature of their group. Asked whether the builders of Zaryadye were on good terms with one another, the man preparing the meal—a practicing Muslim in a skullcap, nonplussed by the drinking but not participating—loudly proclaimed, “We are not only friends, we are like one family already! He is Armenian, he is an Uzbek, he is a Tatar. [. . .] Who else do we have here? Everyone!” For clarity’s sake, I asked, “And everyone is in it together?” Another man, an Armenian sharing shashlik duty with his Uzbek comrade, asked rhetorically, “What do you think? Russia has to be brought up from its knees somehow!” Here, my interlocutor was invoking, in a markedly sardonic tone, a political trope rooted in the slogans of 1990s nationalist politicians. Zaryadye’s laborers, in other words, are vividly aware of both the significance of their concealment amid the shit behind the *falshfasad*, and of their indispensable status as subaltern laborers, who have traveled from empire’s impoverished peripheries to build the paradise at the heart of its capital.

### Vernacular *materealism*

One legacy of the Soviet period is that, in the post-Soviet space, Marxism-Leninism remains an everyday vernacular, as Kruglova (2017) has pointed out, an everyday register that people use with varying degrees of conscious articulation. Despite the class blindness of post-Soviet Russia, then—as illustrated by the comments of the Zaryadye gorodok’s laborers—a vernacular Marxist critique of labor exploitation rolls easily off many tongues. But this everyday Marxist sensibility is not confined to the verbal domain.

Ethnographers (Kruglova 2013; Trubina 2008) have highlighted the extent to which post-Soviet Russia has normalized a (Soviet-imparted) “aesthetic regime” (Kruglova 2013, 31) of sensory appreciation for bucolic pleasure, greenery, and nature. Indeed, there is much to suggest that a fully developed communist reality ought to be suffused with sensuous pleasure, as reflected in the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, as well as those of Soviet theoreticians of aesthetics (e.g., Mikhail Lifshitz, Maksim Gorky, Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov) and of socialist-realist artists and writers who depicted “reality in its revolutionary development” (Zhdanov 1977, 21). Correspondingly, there is evidence—some of it laid out in the pages above—that the ideologues and designers of the *blagoustroistvo* regime aim, consciously or not, to tap into a manifestly Soviet-derived understanding of everyday aesthetics (albeit depoliticized and deinfrastructuralized). Moreover, they were partially successful in doing so, if measured by quantities of Instagram likes or votes for incumbents. But the project faces marked limitations, as evidenced by the skepticism or derision toward Zaryadye voiced by workers, security guards, and museum attendants.



**Figure 7.** A screenshot of “Mean about Town,” a segment on the Worlds Apart show broadcast on RT on November 29, 2018, and uploaded to YouTube. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

I would like to return to unpack the significance of one of the phrases with which I began this article. In November 2018, a discussion about blagoustroistvo was held on the English-language Russian state propaganda channel RT. Ill advisedly, I accepted an invitation to participate. To my great surprise, host Oksana Boyko (2018) began the program by citing *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (see Figure 7):

Karl Marx famously claimed that it's the being that determines consciousness [. . .] a maxim that Russian city planners have recently taken to heart with a much greater eagerness than their Soviet predecessors. As the wave of urban makeovers moves across the country, will the change in the way Russians live affect how they think?

Boyko's casual use of Marxist theory reminded me that I had heard chance interlocutors drop precisely this phrase into conversations about Zaryadye and blagoustroistvo several times during my fieldwork—sometimes in a sardonic register, to express their irritation at the prevailing state of affairs. More often, however, they did so in a didactic-normative sense to signal, for example, blagoustroistvo's positive moral impact on human beings.<sup>13</sup> A combined Google search for “bytie opredelyaet soznanie” and “blagoustroistvo” confirms this hunch, yielding over 11,000

results featuring the two phrases together (when googled on its own, the Marx quote brings up over half a million Russian-language results, versus only 20,000 English ones). “Being determines consciousness. The urban environment nurtures a cultured way of being,” reads the first line of a newspaper article about the blagoustroistvo of 35 courtyards in the Moscow Oblast city of Serpukhov (*Serpukhovskie Vesti* 2019). “The famous economist Karl Marx said that being determines consciousness,” says Andrey Chibis, the deputy minister for construction of the Russian Federation, in a press conference devoted to blagoustroistvo in the Federal Republic of Tatarstan. “In dirt and disorder,” he continued, “there is no hope for people to develop their talent” (*Gorkhoz* 2017).

On both sides of the falshfasad, then, the rhetorics and aesthetics of everyday life in the blagoustroistvo regime are saturated with a vernacular mutation of Marxism-Leninism, and the diverse ways in which these mutations linger and re-form is a topic worthy of further detailed, interdisciplinary study by anthropologists and scholars of language, aesthetics, and ideology. There is also some indication that—as articulated by the workers positioned on the wrong side of paradise's falshfasad—this everyday Marxism sometimes has critical purchase or is compatible with something like a “nascent class position” (Kruglova 2013, 48), an immanent questioning of social reality articulated by those situated in its lower depths and (barely) hidden

wastelands. As spoken by those on the “right” side of the fence, however—whether RT’s Boyko, the deputy ministers for construction, the designers of the Voskhod restaurant, or the ideologues (Revzin) and architects (Bashkaev) of blagoustroistvo—vernacular Marxism does not coalesce into a critical understanding of reality. In fact, from the point of view of Moscow circa 2020, it is clear that some modalities of everyday Marxist language constitute an integral part of the ideology and political aesthetic of the wild-capitalist blagoustroistvo regime.<sup>14</sup>

There are two crucial distinctions between the type of vernacular Marxism spoken on the right and wrong sides of the falshfasad. First, the register on the right side is noneconomic: the determining side of the infrastructure-superstructure relationship (*bytie*, or “being”) is understood in terms of tangible characteristics and aesthetic appearance (clean courtyards, dirt and disorder, colossal wow effects, park atmospheres), while the underpinning relations of production and property are ignored. On the right side of the falshfasad, in other words, the base (or infrastructure) is understood purely in *material* but not in *materialist* terms (Murawski 2018b). In the gorodok, however, on the wrong side of the falshfasad, the analysis is materialist, grounded in a conscious-class position and, correspondingly, in a dialectical understanding of the complex, extractive, unequal, and volatile—or *wild*—political economy from which architecture arises.

The second distinction concerns the understanding of (un)reality within which architecture and infrastructure function. On the blessed, *ethereal* side of the falshfasad, reality is understood in a relativist, cynical, or quasi-constructivist manner (“actually existing future,” “Soviet Union without shortages,” “*only* emotions!”). The liberal critics who berate paradise for its unreality (or posttruthness), meanwhile, do so—like the diagnosers of Russia’s essential unreality and anthropology’s unreflexive social constructivists—according to an implied understanding of “true” reality, but one whose contours remain uninterrogated. On the wretched side of the falshfasad, however, a *materealist* notion of social reality is explicitly foregrounded and explicated: reality, here, consists in the miserable, cloacal, infrareal *matereality* of the foundation pit. Reality is highlighted by the stark contrast between the fabric of life as lived on the two sides of the fence. The chasm between paradise and purgatory is dramatically underscored, from the point of view of Zaryadye’s builders, by the physical proximity between park and gorodok. The realism of this contrast is heightened to the point of grotesque absurdity by the fact that a representation of actually existing (or “present-perfect”) paradise is rendered onto the canvas that marks the dividing line.

## Conclusion: Does ethnographic realism have to be materialist?

The hierarchies marked onto the terrain of Zaryadye, I have suggested, are not unique to Moscow. They are, rather, a local manifestation of an emergent global architectural typology and political economy. Putin’s park is a peculiar but paradigmatic instance of a globally burgeoning form of hyperprogrammed, quasi-ecological, infrastructure-disavowing public space—one of many greenwashed public-private paradises blooming in the pan-planetary condition of 21st-century wild capitalism. In Moscow, however, the underside of these obfuscations is brought into blindingly sharp relief on the fabric of the falshfasad that camouflages the entrance to the workers’ gorodok: a material artifact whose existence is made possible by a combination of two seemingly contradictory factors. On the one hand, inequality is widely accepted throughout the postsocialist world, along with its visual, physical, and ideological manifestations (Humphrey 2001; Rivkin-Fish 2009; Trubina 2012). This inequality spatially facilitates the continued existence of social wastelands within the borders of the “whole” (Humphrey 2001, 334), such as the worker’s gorodok. On the other hand, this sort of anti-socialist (or *a*-socialist) laissez-faire coexists in space and time with the aesthetics and rhetorics of *still*-socialist (rather than postsocialist) vernacular Marxism: a register that can be deployed—in a strange hybrid of still socialism and the immutabilist ideology described by Fisher (2009) as capitalist realism—to consolidate the illusion that, whether wild capitalism is real or not, there is no alternative to it. Yet this vernacular Marxist register can also be marshaled to critique reality—as it actually exists—and to express a desire to change it: by reference to the unharmonious, unconvincing, unsustainable ethereality of its finished products; to the corrupt, volatile, and “wild” rent-seeking, money-laundering elite-maneuvering practices that undergird its political economy (Trubina 2020); and to the wretched infrareality in which workers produce it.

In the 20th century, the Soviet state transmuted a 19th-century materialist philosophy of class struggle and workers’ emancipation into a complex, multifaceted, cybernetically interconnected but imperfectly functioning built environment (Kurtović 2020; Murawski 2018b). In post-Soviet Russia, its hells and paradises fenced off from each other by so many falshfasady, the philosophy has been jettisoned as state ideology. But the everyday is still pervaded by the aesthetic, sensory, and embodied residues that its mutations engendered. In wild-capitalist Moscow, then, where does the social power, or the “reality effect,” of the falshfasad reside? In wild-capitalist Lower Manhattan, the hierarchies may be steeper still, but the dividing lines are

not so blatantly drawn, and a materialist, agonistic theory of resistance is not so readily available at the tip of workers' tongues. In wild-capitalist Moscow, by contrast, the semiotic power—or the reality effect—of the falshfasad may function, at times, not only to reinforce but also to rupture the contours of the political-aesthetic regime that erected it.

In a world that wears its unsustainabilities, extractivisms, and hierarchies on its sleeve, the lessons of the falshfasad have a planetary pertinence. “Wildness”—as Zaryadye and kindred projects vividly illustrate—has become the go-to aesthetic ideology of a discomfited authoritarian capitalism keenly invested in thinly veiling its own contradictions: architecture masquerades as nature, enclosure as publicness, commodity as gift, labor as leisure, and conformism as dissonance. One step that anthropologists—and scholars in adjacent disciplines—can take toward combating this ever-thickening tangle of ideological obfuscation is to move toward formulating ethnographically grounded, emic conceptions of reality-in-production: concepts that do not rely only on outdated, procrastinatory notions of social (or affective) constructivism, nor on the uninterrogated positivism of liberal cold warriors tilting at windmills of posttruth. Instead, anthropologists are well equipped to produce substantive, reflexive ethnographic realism(s)—ones that treat the (un)reality concepts (or vernacular realisms) of our interlocutors as theories in themselves rather than as nuggets of emic curiosity to be endowed with analytical value only after being thoroughly churned through Latourian, Foucauldian, or Deleuzian black boxes. These ethnographic realisms need not necessarily be of a materialist persuasion. In (post-)socialist places, however—and especially in discussions concerning infrastructure and architecture—vernacular materialisms and realisms abound and intersect.

## Notes

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1. Pseudonyms are used for interlocutors who are not public figures. All translations of Russian-language quotations are mine.

2. In contemporary usage, this term is often used to refer to banners hung from the facades of buildings under (real or illusory) renovation. Where the building is judged historically significant, the

falshfasad tends to be emblazoned with an approximated outline of the real facade. Since the intensification of Moscow's ongoing campaign of blagoustroistvo, however, the meaning of the word *falshfasad* has shifted to also refer to plastic banners pinned onto metal roadwork barriers.

3. Important recent analyses of the political effects, political economy, and political aesthetics of blagoustroistvo have been produced by urban geographers (e.g., Kalyukin, Borén, and Byerley 2015; Chubukova 2017; D. Volkova 2017; Trubina 2020; Zupan and Gunko 2020).

4. These disavowals function in the context of macrolevel processes of infrastructure (dis)investment in “post-post Soviet” Russia and globally (Bennett 2021).

5. “Zaryadyology” adapts the “palaeological” approach developed in my Warsaw research (Murawski 2013). “Ethnographic conceptualism” is a methodological practice combining conceptual art and ethnography (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013). My usage here gently shifts the term's meaning, referring to art not created according to concepts but conducted to inform ethnographic theory (Chubukova 2017; Kravchuk and Murawski 2018; Murawski 2019b; D. Volkova 2017).

6. The political aesthetics of Moscow's Luzhkov period have been characterized as “states of innocence” (Grant 2001), “capitalist realist” (Goldhoorn and Meuser 2006), and “mutant” (Paramonova 2014).

7. “Marginalized and immiserated” urban dwellers themselves play an “infrastructural” role, as vividly highlighted by Simone (2004, 408), drawing on Lefebvre but not explicitly on Marx.

8. C. Smith (2020) analyzes the relationship between “fake” buildings, infrastructure, “the underneath of things,” and the political economy of housing in Nairobi, whereas several studies have highlighted the persisting significance of the Marxian base-superstructure relationship for understanding the built environment of (post-)Soviet Russia (Humphrey 2003; Grant 2014; Bennett 2021).

9. Cultural historians have been quick to make the claim—as I show elsewhere (Murawski 2018a)—that socialist reality (and urbanism) possesses no real infrastructure and is therefore “fake.” Others have gone so far as to situate the origins of the late-2010s “posttruth” moment in Russia—the land, according to Pomerantsev (2019), where the global “war against” reality was allegedly hatched.

10. This act of staged, quasi-spontaneous gifting is remarkably reminiscent of the presentation of the Palace of Culture to Warsaw by Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov (on Stalin's behalf; Murawski 2019a, 57–70).

11. How Moscow's infrastructural policy produces political dividends is a fruitful topic for interdisciplinary research (Gorgulu, Sharafutdinova, and Steinbuks 2020; Tarasenko 2020).

12. In Russian and in derivative English-language usage, the concept of the Potemkin village refers to a surface-level simulation of order and prosperity, thinly veiling an unsightly and miserable reality (Allina-Pisano 2007; Gusejnova 2013).

13. This quotation has been regularly used with reference to architecture and urban infrastructure from the years immediately after the 1917 October revolution onward (Lähteenmäki and Murawski 2022).

14. Zarecor (2018, 105–7) observes that Ostrava's neoliberal elites facilitated their class interests by deploying the integrated institutional-infrastructural machine left behind by state socialism (which Zarecor calls socialist urbanity's “socialist scaffold”), as well as its infrastructure-oriented ideology.

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