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Generation 21st Century: New Childhood in Russia

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editorial

Although childhood may seem at first glance to be an anthropological constant, it is, as banal as it may sound, actually a socio-cultural construction subject to historical change. The end of the Soviet Union also spelt the end of Soviet childhood. Many of its attributes disappeared relatively quickly: not only the signs of this childhood, such as school and Pioneer uniforms, but also its institutions, for example the Pioneer camps and palaces. Something originally started as a project for the future has since been transformed into a part of the collective memory for ever.

It has been replaced by a 'new Russian childhood' which is slowly acquiring a distinctive character; despite the differences, there are more continuities than one might assume given the radical changes in society. One major difference is that unlike the Soviet paradigm, the new model of childhood is not an ideologically motivated construct, but rather an element in the free-market thinking of a new social class. Flanked on the one side by the exclusive, 'glamorous' childhood offered by the *nouveaux riches* to their children and the neglect, poverty, sickness and undernourishment experienced by many children in Russia on the other, this new childhood has its home in the middle class that has emerged since the 1990s.

Corinna Kuhr-Korolev's observations on parents' and grandparents' efforts to ensure a better future for their children show that the apparently new values, which stress success, education and the establishment of norms, dovetail seamlessly with the Soviet canon of values. However, not all Soviet traditions serve as a source of inspiration, as Darya Dimke's example from child and youth work shows. The few attempts to revive the independent pedagogical practices of the liberal 1960s, in particular those that strengthen children's initiative and ability to shape their own lives, have little chance in an age in which the state is increasing its power.

Literature, television and the internet all contribute to the consolidation of the new childhood. They create images, deal with values, norms and goals, and offer central characters with which one can identify. These figures shape the childhood space via the 'gogglebox' through trademarks, images and advertisements. In the early years of the transition period, the old Soviet characters faced stiff competition from the heroes of globalised childhood – the Teletubbies, Pokemons and Harry Potter and co. They have now been replaced by new Russian childhood heroes, as Larissa Rudova shows in her analysis of the new genre of children's detective novels.

Besides this pop culture component in the construction of a 'new Russian childhood', there is another approach to childhood in Russian art, *auteur* cinema and literature, which Hélène Mélat explores more closely in her discussion of film. Art employs the symbolic potential of childhood as a period in which one finds oneself, an arena for projections of the future derived from the past and a mirror of social processes. It utilises these symbols to examine authority, self-determination and the creation of meaning in a national context through the medium of art.

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR:

Christine Gölz is a literary scholar and specialist in cultural studies at the Free University in Berlin. Her current research project is looking at the semiotics of Soviet childhood in contemporary literature, film and the performing arts. She has published on Soviet childhood figures, literature's approach to childhood in war and, together with Anja Tippner and Karin Hoff, the collection of essays *Kindheit im Film / Filme der Kindheit* (*Childhood in film/ Films of childhood*) (awaiting publication).

analysis

Growing Up in Moscow: Impressions from Detached Proximity

Corinna Kuhr-Korolev

Based on her own experiences, the author, a historian and mother of two Russian-German children who has lived in Moscow since 2001, portrays the conditions under which children in Moscow's middle class are growing up today. Astonishingly, fundamental generational conflicts concerning rearing children are not evident; rather, both parents and grandparents share a position that could almost be described as an 'obsession with norms' and 'microbephobia'. The past experience of social upheaval and the current situation, which is far less stable than at first appears, means that the enormous desire for security also affects children's upbringing and significantly limits their freedom.

Are melons a fruit or a vegetable? I would hesitate to answer, but many a Russian six-year-old must know this if they want to get a place at a good primary school. Questions like these are part of the selection interview. The little ones have to be extremely skilled and knowledgeable even before they go to school: they must be able to write the letters of the alphabet, read, count, if possible speak a little English, read musical notes, play a simple piece of music on an instrument…

Education: the Middle Class Safeguards Its Future

In the matter of their children's education, Moscow's middle class is under incredible pressure. Everyone complains about this, but hardly anyone takes it into their heads to escape it. Who would put the future of their children at stake? Indeed, in Moscow, right from the beginning, everything revolves around the future – above all, professional success in later life and a fitting social status. Due to the parents' and grandparents' experience of collapse and upheaval, coupled with the extreme poverty of the 1990s and the persistence of a sharp social divide in Russia, education has become a question of survival. The Russian middle class only spends more money in one other area – real estate, which also offers security for the future. In third place is spending on health in the broader sense, that is for sport, leisure, relaxation and travelling.

One of the defining characteristics of the members of the new Russian middle class is said to be the fact that they can afford to invest in their future because they do not have to spend the greater part of their domestic budget on food, clothing and accommodation. A further attribute of the middle class (which, depending on one's definition, represents 10–35% of the population) is the higher level of education and the consciousness that one belongs to this class. The percentage of the rich is estimated at 5–8%. The impressions presented in this essay apply to the children of the Moscow middle class. The very different life of the majority of children, who grow up under difficult social conditions, often without social security or even a minimum education, will not be dealt with here.

Difficulties in Finding One's Way Around the Market For the Future – 'Education'

For a good fifteen years, the entire realm of education has been in a state of upheaval. Soviet educational institutions collapsed or underwent radical change. New, competing institutions appeared, offering very different understandings of education. Parents confronted by these rapid changes are trying to find their feet and choose the best option for their children. They invest a lot of time in the search, talk to other parents, find information on the internet and have discussions with the heads of nursery schools and schools. The financial cost can often be extremely high depending on one's demands and opportunities. Whereas a place in a state nursery school costs almost nothing, private institutions can charge $600 per month, and often a lot more. In return, they offer heated swimming pools, English lessons, medical care and above all

the somewhat vague promise that it will be easier for the child to get into the right school later on. Seen this way, a person's future happiness seemingly hinges on the choice of nursery school.

From the first visit to the nursery school to the beginning of one's career, children and parents move in a spiral of learning and investment for the future. The nursery school decides admission into the primary school, which in turn is critical for the choice of secondary school. Once children have reached that stage, coaches are hired who spend years preparing the pupils for the entrance examinations for higher educational institutions. As a result, children and young people are placed under constant pressure to perform, while their parents must cope with the added financial pressure. This is exacerbated by a highly standardised educational system that does not allow one to take time out for crises connected with growing up, or to find one's feet or oneself. This is particularly true for boys, who from the age of 18 face the threat of conscription. A place at certain universities provides a temporary exemption. Parents therefore do everything in their power to ensure that their sons have been accepted by such an institution by the time they reach conscription age.

Learn, Learn and Learn Some More…

However, it is not only the system that demands achievement, discipline and conformism. Today's parents, who attribute their professional success and social prestige to these virtues, do not doubt the rectitude of an education based on them. One can hear complaints about the complicated choice of schools, corrupt headteachers and long journeys, but there is no criticism of the lecture-style lessons, standardised learning materials or lack of opportunities for creative expression. Russian middle-class parents do not worry that their children are put under too much pressure, but rather that they are not challenged enough. For children as young as three, the walls are papered with large letters, books and games are judged in terms of their educational value and visits to numerous *kruzhki* (clubs) provide pre-school children with full-time employment. Any concerns about strain on the children are dismissed with the argument that one cannot begin to accustom a child to a disciplined routine early enough. Bad habits, once acquired, can never be unlearned. Measures are taken to inculcate in children a desire for achievement. In the *kruzhki*, marks, competitions and public performances are used as a means of motivation.

The Obsession with Norms

The enormous demand for children to do well is bound up with fear: the fear of losing social status or of not meeting expectations, and in so doing transgressing the boundaries of the normal. Although a process of individualisation is underway, Soviet collectivism still shapes Russian society. Today's parents were born between 1965 and 1980; consequently, they were shaped by the Soviet period, which entailed the adoption of a system of values and norms. The values may have changed, but the faith in norms as such seems to have survived. This is apparent not only in the creation of norms for childhood, seen as a process of development that must progress in precisely defined 'objective' phases, but also in the creation of norms for children's behaviour. For example, children still receive a highly gendered upbringing. Just as in the past, one can still hear parents say to boys, 'be a gentleman and let the girl go on the swings first' or to the girls, 'don't sit on the ground; good girls don't do that'.

The obsession with norms is particularly evident during pregnancy, birth and the care of babies and toddlers. While the father normally only receives a minor role, the grandmothers are very involved in these phases, and continue to participate in the child's upbringing later on. With the help of female paediatricians, they oversee their descendants'

weal and woe. The children's every movement is noted and commented upon, and their sleep and diet are planned and supervised in minutiae. Young mothers who do not breastfeed every three hours but rather as necessary receive the same amount of criticism as those who decide to bottle feed. There are many mandatory visits to the doctor. Those who can afford it sign a 'Contract of Care' with a paediatrician or a private paediatric clinic for the first year of their child's life. The stages of a child's development are plotted out in a schedule that allows very few departures. At the age of three months, Russian children must be able to turn around; at six months they should crawl and at one year they have to walk. Any delays and the advice of a neuropathologist is sought. An ambitious approach is taken to toilet training: this is started no later than the age of one.

The Hostile Environment and 'Microbephobia'

Even after the first year, a child's upbringing is characterised by worry and constant surveillance. Nothing is left to chance; every action is regimented and subject to comment. On the streets, one hears the incessant 'don't go there!', 'watch that you don't fall!' or 'don't touch that!'. If you overhear the litany of the playground, you might imagine that Muscovite children experience their environment as hostile, dirty and rife with the risk of infection. 'Microbes' represent an invisible, omnipresent threat. Given the dirt on Moscow's streets along with the dogs and cats roaming free and the alarming numbers of people with tuberculosis, however, this fear of infection may well be justified.

Nevertheless, there is more behind this 'microbephobia'. It is omnipresent because the multitude of ideological and cultural fragments within it creates a curious whole. It brings together the remnants of rigid early Soviet hygiene rules with elements of Russian superstition. Thus, as in the past, the 'evil eye' is still feared today. Even young couples, who would deny that they believed in it, shield

Values in Raising Children (*by Judith Janiszewski*)

A public opinion poll from 2004 showed that Russian parents are still by and large guided by so-called traditional values. Nevertheless, change has taken place and 'modern' values are becoming more important. The characteristics identified as the four most important for children to adopt are rated thus: 50% of those asked named diligence, 46% honesty and decency, 37% tidiness and cleanliness, and 34% good manners and politeness. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, respects for one's parents was at first place (65.5% of those asked). The modern value independence was far lower down the hierarchy of values and was only mentioned by 24% of those questioned, while curiosity and an active mind were chosen by 19%, obedience by 14%, respect for authority by 9%, individuality by 6% and fantasy by 4%.

However, when one contrasts the youngest generation of parents (those who are 18 to 24) to those a little older (25–34), the latter are more interested in independence (46% compared to 32%) and curiosity and an active mind (25% to 22%). The younger generation value success more: 29% esteemed the desire to succeed, while 27% admired initiative and single-mindedness

- L. Presnyakova: Transformatsiya otnosheni vnutri semi i izmenenie tsennostnykh orientirov vospitaniya, *http://www.strana-oz.ru/?numid=18&article=863*
- Y. Levada: Sovetskii prostoi chelovek, Moscow: Mirovoi okean, 1993

their infants from the eyes of strangers during the first four weeks of life. Inquisitive foreigners who blithely peek into prams soon notice that this is something that is not done. As for hygiene, every grandmother, every childminder and every mother is always on guard with a damp cloth in order to clean dirty hands or running noses. During the Soviet period, germs represented a real danger due to the lack of antibiotics, and the fear of complications was justified. This, however, is only a partial explanation of the agitation that commonplace colds or childhood illnesses continue to cause.

In addition to the fear of 'microbes', in Russia one finds subconscious fears of social contamination: these originate both in the traditional and latent rejection of 'the other' and in the fears stoked during the Soviet period of ideological contamination by 'socially dangerous elements'. This has become bound up with a feeling, which has developed over the last two decades, that public places are unsafe. It is said that in the past children could stroll through their neighbourhood without supervision even after dark and that rows of prams with children stood in front of shops while their mothers did the shopping. Now, children are never left unsupervised and they are not allowed to take a single step alone. The fear of crime or accidents is too great. Strangers who come to the playground with their children treat each other with suspicion at first. A long time is required before this can be overcome; closer relationships are established and the boundaries of the private sphere are crossed by means of invitations to visit each other's home.

Childhood and Youth as Phases Fraught With Danger

Late into the 1990s, there were bottlenecks in the provision of baby food and other products needed by children. As a result, children seemed to be in great danger as they grew up. Now there is an abundance of goods, creating a real market for children. Anyone buying baby food in Moscow today is spoilt for choice: the options range from American Quaker Oatmeal to kosher instant-*kasha* (porridge) from Israel, from Swedish milk powder to French mineral water. The worries about children, however, remain. Europe's demographic crisis arrived in Russia a long time ago. Children are becoming rarer. In addition, there have been worrying studies on the health of the young Russian generation. The most pessimistic estimates claim that almost 40% of newborn babies suffer from chronic illnesses, while only about one third of children are considered healthy. The statistics on crime, alcohol consumption and drug abuse, as well as the rise in HIV infections, among young people reinforce the feeling that children are growing up in a dangerous environment from which they require protection.

Middle-class parents in Moscow seek to guard their children from all these dangers. Moreover, a form of upbringing that emphasises control and care is deemed necessary. Indeed, many young working mothers adhere to their own mothers' conception of how to bring up children, often leaving immediate decisions concerning diet, clothing and sleep to grandmothers or childminders. There probably are conflicts between the generations, but a fundamental rift with the 'oldies' in the methods of raising children is not evident. On the contrary, one has the impression that young upwardly mobile parents have not only adopted but also extended their elders' obsession with norms. Whereas the latter only worried about food, sleep and acceptable behaviour, the former additionally place strict limits on their children's freedom in the form of educational and leisure activities.

Consumption and Individualisation

Although within the family there are clear continuities between the Soviet period and today, the conditions outside the family have changed

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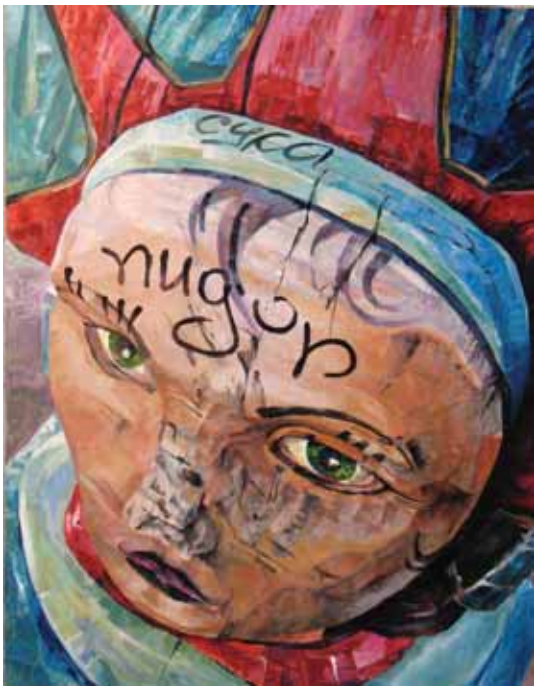
greatly. These days, children are more isolated: the number of only children is rising, and crèches are no longer seen as the best place to have children between the ages of one and three looked after; consequently, they are often cared for at home. In addition, the myriad clubs are primarily concerned with the acquisition of knowledge rather than social skills, and contact with neighbouring children is weaker because schools are no longer chosen for their proximity but rather their quality. There is not much time to play in the courtyard, and this usually only takes place under adult supervision and in clearly delineated areas. Children do not have the opportunity to extend their horizons or explore the world around them with their peers. The children of Moscow's middle class can only do this during their summer stays at the dacha, where they can come into contact with children who have grown up differently. In addition to the latent excessive demands placed upon children, there is an profligate supply of material goods and external stimuli. Many parents buy noisy toys for their children, rarely ration their television or computer use, celebrate their birthdays with organised activities or fireworks and take them to the new shopping centres on the outskirts of the capital at the weekend.



The Snow Maiden – the portrait of a vandalised fairy-tale figure (the graffiti reads suka *[bitch] and* pidor *[poof]).*

The children of Moscow's middle class grow up in a cocoon of security, care and affluence, but also paternalism, pressure to succeed and confinement. Much of this resembles developments in Western Europe, where children's freedom is also increasingly becoming restricted. In Russia, however, the situation is even worse because it is not mitigated by a concept of raising children that values the free development of the individual or promotes independence. There is little attempt to foster independent opinions in Russian children. A good child is a *poslushny rebyonok* – i.e. one that does what he or she is told. Given the excessive care received during childhood, the lack of independence and insulation from any conceivable dangers, one must ask how these children will become adults who have to find their way in an extremely dynamic society full of contradictions and in a state which possesses neither a social safety net nor the individual security guaranteed by a functioning legal system.

Translated from the German by Christopher Gilley

About the Author:
Corinna Kuhr-Korolev works as a historian and Slavicist at the German Historical Institute in Moscow. Her main areas of research are the social and cultural history of the Soviet Union, Stalinism and the history of youth. Her publications include the monograph *Gezähmte Helden – Die Formierung der Sowjetjugend 1917–1932* (Essen 2005).

about the pictures

Childhood Idols in Contemporary Art

Metaphysics in Kitaigorod. Yura and Masha is the name given by the artists Mariya Lvova and Yuri Balashov to their contemporary art project which includes photographs, paintings and texts. Enormous canvases (200x156cm) display in an almost hyper-realistic style wooden figures from Russia's old-new childhood cosmos which the artists found on Moscow playgrounds. Pavel Pepperstein, who wrote the commentary accompanying the project, speaks of 'modern-day gods and monsters'. The iconlike portraits show giant Teletubbies, Russian fairytale heroes, colossal mushrooms and fantastical animals in their original colourfulness and bearing the 'wounds' and 'marks' inflicted by time. (The artists are represented by *GazGallery, www.gazgall.ru*. All the pictures are from the authors.)

From Pavel Pepperstein, *Look the Gods in the Face*:
The playground is a territory alive with totems. Do you want to look gods in the face? Then go out into the yard and look at the wooden idols erected there. Their faces have been abused by vandals. These gods attract violence and vandalism; they offer an invitation to desecration: this is the source of their strength and their mockery. Tearing down the idols is not an act of destruction; on the contrary, it confirms their sacral, magical power. Their faces have been savaged, cut by knives, as is fitting for the faces of humiliated and abused gods from agrarian times. The old, archaic place of totems is not only alive, it also continually renews its pantheon. It has incorporated the gods of the industrial and the post-industrial world. Alongside the traditional childhood gods such as snakes, Snow Maidens, the doughnut-shaped 'gingerbread man' Kolobok, bears, wolves, piglets and Old Father Frost, one can also find robots, spacemen, Teletubbies, Pokemons and aliens.

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Russian Childhood in Transition: Children's Literature in Search of New Heroes

Larissa Rudova

Post-Soviet children's literature has been in a state of crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Popular literary genres triumphed on the publishing market pushing out serious literature. Over the last few years Russian authors have pledged to invent a new generation of heroes in children's literature. In the meantime new children's heroes emerged in the genre of detektiv and become 'spokesmen" for the new middle class and its values.

> We need our own J.K. Rowlings, our own Harry Potters! We want to find our new heroes for the new generation. (Eduard Uspenskii)[1]

'Help the Orphan!'

Post-Soviet children's literature can be compared to an orphan who has lost his loving and supportive parents together with a warm and comfortable home, and has been thrown out into the street to survive on his own. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the pitiful state of children's literature has been a common subject of discussion in the popular and academic press. There is a consensus

1 Author (* 1937) of many stories for children and famous animated cartoons' heroes such as Tcheburashka and the crocodile Gena.

among many parents, educators, children's literature specialists, and children's authors themselves that children's literature is in crisis and urgent measures must be taken to prevent its complete capture by popular culture.

There are well-founded reasons for concern about the quality of children's literature in post-Soviet Russia. Since the early 1990s its infrastructure has sustained great damage, including the loss of the Institute for Children's Reading, the closure of two major children's bookstores in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the collapse of the academic journal *Children's Literature*, the bare survival of many children's libraries, including some major ones– and this is not the end of the list. Deprived of state subsidies, many children's authors joined the popular culture industry and began working in the more lucrative genres of fantasy, horror, science fiction, and detective stories. This displacement of post-Soviet children's literature by pulp fiction raised well-founded fears that the new generation of readers was losing a sense of national history and real life. But the absence of thought-provoking texts for post-Soviet youths is not the only problem as whole genres – such as the realist short story, the long poem, and the school novella–have disappeared from children's literature.

Yet, this seemingly pathetic situation has a silver lining as there are efforts underway to find new literary talents ('new Marshaks'[2] and 'new Mikhalkovs'[3], 'Russian J. K. Rowlings and Phillip Pullmans') that would energize children's literature with creative ideas and bring the young readers the long-awaited new heroes ('new Timurs' and a 'Russian Harry Potter'). The newly founded national children's literature awards, among them the *Zavetnaia mechta* (*Cherished Dream Award*, established in 2006 and sponsored by the Moscow real estate company MIAN) and the award *Alye parusa*[4] (*Scarlet Sails*, established in 2003 and sponsored by the Russian Federal Agency of the Press and Mass Communications and by the General Directorship of International Book Fairs), play an important role in this development. According to Aleksei Gavrilov, a member of the jury of the *Scarlet Sails Award*, the 2008 competition demonstrated that new authors were ready to tackle challenging issues (e.g. conflicts between teenagers and their peers and parents) and move away from the world of fantasy and adventure toward serious real-life problems. However, while serious Russian children's literature continues to search for a new identity and attempts to regain its lost prestige, a new generation of heroes has already emerged and become the *kulturträger* of post-Soviet culture, representing the new middle class and its system of values.

The Emergence of the Children's *Detektiv*

In the early and mid-1990s the publishing market for children's literature was characterized mostly by the translation of best-selling books by Western authors, Soviet and Russian classics, and fairy tales. As publishers became gradually aware that the post-Soviet generation of readers needed books about new Russia and new heroes, the children's literature market began to open for domestic authors. The winner among the genres competing for the minds of the new generation of readers was children's detective fiction, or *detskii detektiv*. The *detektiv* had no serious rivals when it began to dominate the children's literary market toward the end of the 1990s, and young readers eagerly embraced the genre that in the absence of a stimulating school literature curriculum and serious

2 Poet, translator (1887–1964), and for several years director of the children's literature department of the State Publishing House, responsible of 'reviving' the Soviet children's literature (see *kultura* 12-2006, pp. 4/5).

3 Poet and script author (*1913), wrote many works for children, author of the old Soviet and the new Russian national anthem.

4 Named after a fairy tale like novel by Alexander Grin from 1923.

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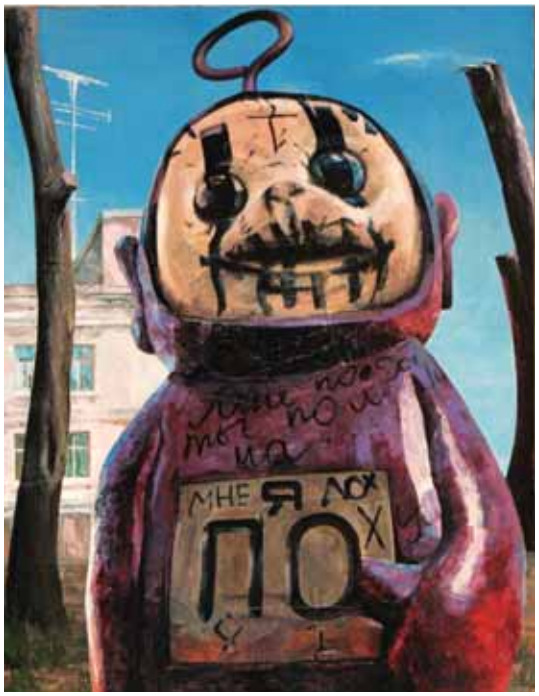
books about post-Soviet Russia became the only one that commented on the Russia they knew in a language they could relate to.

The *detektiv* had to withstand a flood of negative criticism from both literary critics and from concerned parents. However, even those adults who initially treated the children's *detektiv* as 'junk fiction' gradually realized that the *detektiv* promoted many positive values associated with Soviet literature, including family values, respect for adults and the state, good education, social awareness, and help for the needy. In a sense the *detektiv* tackled new middle-class values that, in a peculiar way, reconnected with values taught by Soviet literature.



'Peep'~ – the Teletubby Po, who has been transformed into a 'loser' by the sometimes obscene graffiti.

Since the mid-1990s the children's *detektiv* established a permanent presence on the young readers' market with such popular series as *Chernyi kotenok* (*The Black Kitten*, founded in 1996), *Yunyi syshchik* (*The Young Investigator*, founded in 1999), and *Detskii detektiv* (founded in 2000)–all by Russia's biggest book publisher, Eksmo-Press. The target reading age for the children's *detektiv* is between 10 and 15.

The lucrative detective genre attracted many post-Soviet authors who depended on the publishers' market for their income. Among the authors writing children's detective fiction are seasoned children's authors; *detektivshchiki*, or authors who specialize in detective fiction both for children and adults; there are also authors who use the popular genre as a vehicle to 'educate' young readers about Russian history and society; finally, there are those who are interested in the earning potential of the *detektiv*.

The masterplot of the children's *detektiv* includes positive and negative heroes, reduces the role of the family to the minimum, and focuses on solving a crime. The incidence of criminality in Russia is so commonplace that portraying criminals as a fixture and a ubiquitous adult substitute is not as unnatural as it would have been in Soviet children's literature. Although children can become victims of crime in the *detektiv*, they are rarely portrayed as its targets. The *detektiv* avoids violent crime and deals predominantly with such non-violent cases as theft, the illegal drug or gun trade, the smuggling of art works abroad, video piracy, apartment robberies, forgery, and counterfeiting. All children's *detektivy* in the Eksmo series end with the disruption of the criminals' plans or their arrest and thus depict crime as solvable and punishable, very much in contrast to the true state of things in Russia. The criminal world appears as real but not omnipotent or threatening to the stability of society, especially since the children's *detektiv* presents a favorable picture of law enforcement in Russia and portrays its representatives as effective, well-trained, and honest people.

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Young Middle-Class Heroes and Their Values

The collective portrait of the *detektiv*'s new heroes is reminiscent of Arkadii Gaidar's 'positive' hero Timur from his classical children's book, *Timur and His Team* (1941). Similar to Timur and the members of his team, the new *detektiv* heroes are model schoolchildren who come from privileged urban families that emphasize education, high moral standards, and work ethics. Like Timur and his friends, the new generation of heroes provides role models, and as in Soviet children's literature, the system of values of these heroes is consistently shown in contrast with the values of the negative heroes.

a) *kul'turnost'*

In Soviet children's fiction, positive heroes exhibited a standard set of characteristics among which polite behavior and obedience were the most important. These characteristics were compatible with *kul'turnost'*, or 'proper conduct in public', as the American researcher Vera Dunham put it. She argued that *kul'turnost'* was imperative to controlling individual and public life since its meaning went beyond good manners and served to enforce the only acceptable behavior that continued to define middle-class culture throughout Soviet times.

In the post-Soviet children's *detektiv*, the young investigators seem to be modeled on the notion of *kul'turnost'* as they satisfy the rules of decorum and set standards of proper behavior for kids from other social classes. The new heroes are portrayed as obedient sons and daughters, diligent students, and conscientious citizens.

kul'turnost', among other middle-class virtues, makes the young heroes superior to their peers from other social groups. For instance, among the three main characters in Dmitrii Shcheglov's children's detective series, only the boy named Max comes from an urban middle-class background. He becomes the leader of the three because he is socially and culturally superior to them.

b) social consciousness

The pervasively criminal atmosphere in early post-Soviet Russia was conducive to the detective authors' realistic portrayal of their heroes as courageous and resourceful in the face of danger. However, unlike Timur and other Soviet fictional heroes who fought the enemy in the name of their socialist state, the *detektiv* characters have no ideological goal in their fight against criminals. What guides them is their remarkable social consciousness and belief that their country should be a safe place for everyone. The authors of the Eksmo series follow the golden rule of the children's *detektiv*: entertainment should be combined with moral education.

c) the cult of education

Education remains one of the main middle-class values and the *detektiv* responds to it by portraying school as central to children's lives. Because of the *detektiv*'s generic conventions, school life is rarely explicitly described, but nevertheless figures in many plots to reflect the middle-class belief that upward social mobility depends on good education. The *detektiv*'s goal is to present the school experience positively and reinforce its essential role in 'good' middle-class children's lives. By contrast, negative characters are hostile to the idea of education and academic achievement. Thus, in Shcheglov's series, the ignorant and uneducated teenager named Wick is a high-school dropout. Shcheglov's fiction demonstrates that Wick' lack of education makes him an easy target for thugs and the mafia.

d) consumerism

The children's *detektiv* plays an important role in reflecting Russia's growing material culture and economic hierarchy. Symbols of status, usually

associated with modern technology, entertainment, and luxury goods are ubiquitous in the children's *detektiv.* The character's access to things such as cell phones, computers, foreign cars; hanging out at McDonald's; or familiarity with fine perfumes, cosmetics, or gourmet foods, establishes their place in the socio-economic hierarchy. Brand naming in the children's *detektiv* is therefore ubiquitous and provides an unmistakable middle-class flavor. The post-Soviet *detektiv* also addresses the issue of teenagers' interest in earning money in order to buy desirable objects. While Soviet children's heroes unselfishly volunteered to work for the common good, post-Soviet heroes like to work for personal gain.

e) gender stereotypes

Soviet children's literature privileged boys in the role of heroes and the *detektiv* carries on this tradition. Although girls are increasingly playing an important role in solving mysteries and sometimes become principal investigators, their treatment by the *detektiv*'s authors often rests on gender stereotypes. Thus, the talented protagonist of Chudakova's award-winning *detektiv, Dela i uzhasy Zheni Osinkinoi (The Cases and Misfortunes of Zhenia Osinkina,* 2005), travels from Moscow to Siberia to solve a murder case. Yet, it is clear to the reader that her success depends on the help of two adult men who drive and protect her on the way to the crime scene, and on a team of boys who assist her with the investigation.

The androcentric atmosphere of the children's *detektiv* also manifests itself predominantly in the domestic concerns and priorities of the heroines. In Vilmot's *The Stupid Story,* the heroine not only demonstrates her nurturing inclinations by taking care of her male friends, she is also aware of the fact that she is expected to look attractive. There is no hint in the children's *detektiv* that men and women should equally share domestic chores. Sadly, this gender asymmetry perpetuates the ubiquitous patriarchal values in post-Soviet society in which also middle-class women continue to carry their double burden of work and domestic duties.

f) the heroes's national pride

The turbulent social and economic atmosphere of the first post-Soviet decade provides the background of the children's *detektiv* against which the Soviet past is presented as secure and stable. It is portrayed with respect, and feelings of nostalgia and national pride permeate the children's detective genre.

It is not surprising that *detektiv* authors like homesick émigré characters who idealize their former Soviet life. Thus, in Natalia Kuznetsova's *Delo ne ulovimogo prizraka (The Case of the Uncatchable Phantom,* 2001), an émigré character visiting Moscow from Los Angeles praises Soviet-made gadgets as superior to the contemporary ones. Even when the Soviet past is mentioned negatively, the detective context tends to provide a positive contrast. A character in Vladimir and Tatiana Sotnikov's *U syshchikov kanikul ne byvaet* (*Detectives Don't Have Vacations,* 1999) recalls his childhood fear of the bronze bas-relief of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, whom he took for three scary blind men. Yet, the same character speaks lovingly of old Soviet songs for their life-affirming energy and sadly comments on some of the depressing songs of his generation.

While entertaining, the *detektiv* does not forget to enlighten its young readers about Russia's historical and cultural traditions. Although these excursions into the past may appear as references rather than elaborate narratives, they confirm the *detektiv*'s educational spirit, consistent with middle-class values.

Conclusion

While the search for new heroes in Russian children's literature continues, its first generation is

already firmly established. Despite their origins in popular rather than serious literature, the new *detektiv* heroes have become models for teaching young readers basic norms of moral and social behavior in post-Soviet Russia. These heroes also play a pioneering role in promoting the values of the steadily growing Russian middle class: a belief in education, *kul'turnost*, professional success, material prosperity, and respect for Russia's rich historical and cultural traditions.

About the Author:
Larissa Rudova is Professor of Russian in the Department of German and Russian at Pomona College in Claremont, California. Her publications include books on Boris Pasternak and numerous articles on 20th and 21st-century Russian literature and culture.

Reading Suggestion:
Larissa Rudova, 'From Character-Building to Criminal Pursuits: Russian Children's Literature in Transition', in L.R. and Marina Balina: *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

'It Is Good When One Is Able To Explain To A Child That Others' Convictions Should Be Respected' – Lyudmila Ulitskaya's Children's Project (*by Christine Goelz*)

Since 2006, Eksmo press has published a series of illustrated children's books called *Drugoi, drugie, o drugikh* (*The Other, the Others, about Others)* under the patronage of the renowned Russian writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya. It is aimed at children aged 12 and up and their parents and seeks to promote individual and intercultural tolerance.

The initiative promoting tolerance was planned as a common European project under the auspices of the European Cultural Parliament[1]; however, Lyudmila Ulitskaya has been the only member to take it up. She began to implement the idea for Russia in the form of a series of books. Though she received no state backing, the Institute for Tolerance, founded by George Soros, and the state-funded Rudomino Library for Foreign Literature both offered their support. The authors are young writers and specialists in cultural studies. The books range from fantasy novels about wizards to semi-fictional works juxtaposing a narrative with entries in the style of an encyclopaedia. Their subjects are the fundamental questions of life such as family, food, clothes, but also 'where do we come from?' and 'how should we live?'. The separate publications are tied together by common characters: the action revolves around a boy from Moscow called Cyril, and from the second volume onwards his Abkhazian friend Da'ut. So far, five of the planned twelve volumes have been published.

The extent to which Russia needs Ulitskaya's campaign against xenophobia and for mutual respect is made clear by the hostile, and sometimes anti-Semitic, responses which it has provoked. This was particularly evident in the negative reactions to the third volume – Vera Timenchik's *Semya u nas i u drugikh* (*Families: Ours and Theirs*, 2008). This book deals with taboo topics such as incest and same-sex marriage; one reason for the book's poor sales. According to the book market, 'Russian readers were not ready for this'; how can they be, asks Ulitskaya, when parents deny their children intelligent books?

1 http://www.kulturparlament.com/

URLs:

- *http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/kazino/44001/* (Discussion with Ulitskaya and the authors of the series with the radio station Echo Moskvy; in Russian)
- *http://lib.1september.ru/2006/21/3.htm* (Short interview with Ulitskaya, after which she presents the authors; in Russian)

'On the beach of distant Koktebel…'

Hélène Mèlat

film portrait

There are a conspicuously large number of films, many of which are very interesting, dealing with 'childhood' and 'children' in contemporary Russian cinema. These films reappraise national history and depict questions of a new identity, the state of the country and its future.

One example is the 2003 film *Koktebel* by the directors Alexei Popogrebsky and Roman Khlebnikov. It portrays a child on a journey of initiation. The father, a down-at-heel intellectual, and his 11-year-old son travel from Moscow to Koktebel in the Crimea. The story develops chronologically without flashbacks. The present moment in this curious road movie seems to be stretched out: the rhythm is often slow; the camera is frequently static, with long shots lasting up to a minute – a homage to the Soviet *auteurist* tradition, above all to Andrei Tarkovsky and his repeated depictions of childhood. At the same time, the static space signals that this is an internal as well as an external journey. The film plainly contrasts the interior to the exterior: the boy is often shown looking out of a window. In the film's semiotics, the window does not represent a mirror, in which the observer can see himself, but rather a boundary with the world which the boy wants to enter.

The openness of the space is a metaphor for the freedom typical of children. In the film, the character of the child, in its affinity to nature, is searching for weightlessness – his understanding of the greatest form of freedom. For this reason, the air possesses such symbolic meaning. The choice of Koktebel, a place of cultural imagination[1] and a traditional spa town used for gliding competitions in the 1920s and 1930s, introduces the theme of flying. This is again taken up in the picture of the albatross which the boy finds in a book in the alcoholic's house where the two travellers briefly stay, and in the boy's ability to observe the earth from above as if he was flying over it. The film repeatedly uses wide-angle camera shots, from which only the silhouettes of the characters can be seen against the backdrop of the open Russian landscape. This underlines the contradiction between man and nature and visualises what a small part of the universe the child is.

One small, but important aspect: the child's world is closed off and inaccessible, and because the child is often shown from the back, he appears to be an impregnable fortress. There is little dialogue; the hero is serious and rarely laughs. The child's maximalism is expressed in his psychological severity, not least to the adults: at one point, the boy learns that his father does not want to travel any further with him because he has found a new love in their place of refuge; the boy refuses to accept this *ersatz* family and makes his own way to conquer the fabulous Koktebel.

When the hero arrives at his destination at the end

1 In Russian culture, Koktebel is a typical *locus amoenus*. In the 1930s, the pre-revolutionary centre for the cultural elite was transformed into a state-supported resort for 'deserving Soviet writers'.

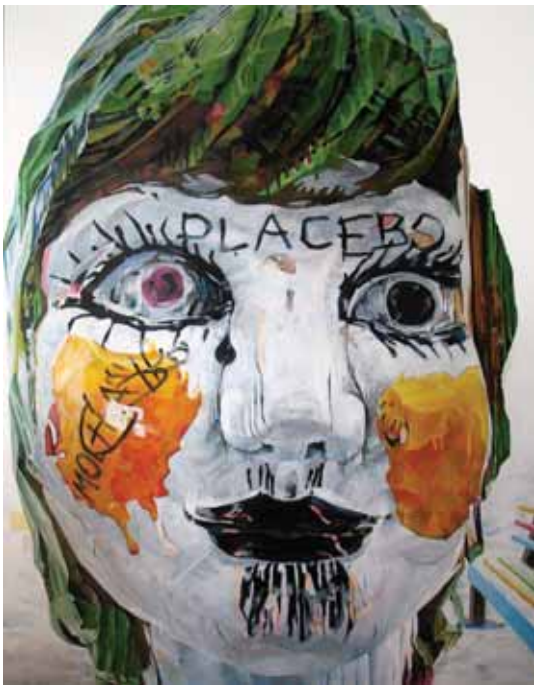
film portrait

of the film, he is again confronted with the theme of *ersatz*. A pathetic seagull, not an albatross, flies towards him. It wants to steal a piece of bread from him, but in the duel the boy proves stronger. By this stage, he has already experienced a painful initiation into the world of adults when he found the monument to the gliders destroyed. In addition, on the hill overlooking the town, when he tries to send a folded newspaper into the air like a glider, the gross and banal reality of the spa town disappoints him. The subjective camera angle from the child's point of view shows only the lower half of the body – swimming trunks, backsides, shorts and underwear visible under trousers.

The last shot shows the father and son sitting next to each other on the bank of the sea, with their faces to the audience. They are serious, almost sad. The child is now at the same eye level as his father; he has become more grown up. The end, however, is open: the wide expanse of the sea, a place of new dreams, stretches in front of the heroes.

The theme of travel and aimless wandering, which is common in modern Russian films, is a spatial metaphor for the loss of social criteria. Through the timeless topic of generational conflict and in the choice of the child, who in the end has to cope on his own, as the main character, the directors portray Russia's half-destroyed familial and social structures. The unreliability of the people whom the protagonists meet during their journey – the heroes do not always receive the help they expect – the directors show the unpredictable character of modern life. The travellers come across violence, but, of all people, it is the child that can overcome it; he rejects and protests against his father, the aggressive drinker and the brutal adult world in general.

The borderline alcoholic father in *Koktebel* alludes to fatherlessness, a commonplace in Soviet and post-Soviet cinema. In many of these films, one can sense a yearning for a strong father, or indeed any kind of masculine, figure. Some films have an authoritarian father figure, for example *The Return* (*Vozrashchenie*) by Andrei Zvyagintsev; their presence, however, has a dramatic impact on the childhood presented. In *Koktebel*, the son turns out to be more responsible than the father and takes his fate into his own hands. In this way, he resembles the hero in *The Italian* (*Italyanets)* by Andrei Kravchuk, a small boy who rejects adoption abroad and goes in search of his natural mother. In all these films, the child is no longer an object or victim; rather, he or she incorporates a new generation of heroes for our time, of neo-romantics, who change the world – and though they are small and vulnerable, they are victorious in the end. The children follow a rocky road, but nevertheless carry within them the hopes for a better future that Russia so desperately needs today.



»Stupid Ivan«, the Russian auto-stereotype from the fairytale as Placebo.

Translated from the Russian by Christopher Gilley

film portrait

Koktebel RUS 2003, Dir: Boris Chlebnikov and Alexei Popogrebsky (participation in international and national film festivals, various awards) (DVD impuls)

About the Author:

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Films Dealing with Childhood:

- *The Thief* (OT *Le voleur et l'enfant* / Vor) F/RUS 1997, Dir: Pavel Chukhrai (nominated for, amongst other awards, an Oscar) (VHS Artificial Eye)
- *The Italian* (OT *Italyanets*), RUS 2004, Dir: Andrei Kravchuk (winner of, amongst other awards, the 2005 Berlinale and the Munich Film Festival) (DVD Soda Pictures)
- *The Return* (OT *Vozvrashcheniye*), RUS 2003, Dir: Andrei Zvyagintsev (won the Golden Lion for the best film and the award for the best film by a first-time director at Cannes 2003, as well as other national and international awards) (DVD Kino)

Statistics on Children in Russia *(by Corinna Kuhr-Korolev)*

According to the State Committee for Statistics, almost 23 million children (those 16 and under) live in the Russian Federation. Many of them are in the "zone of social risk" (*zona sotsial'nogo riska*). The number of homeless children (*bezprizornye*) is estimated to be 1 million. This number rises to the somewhat unreliable number of 2–4 million if one includes the much larger group of unsupervised children (*beznadzornye*). This refers to children who have at least one living parent, but must look after themselves.
2,100 children's homes and 150 residential schools care for 94,000 children. Their future prospects are bleak: according to the statistics, 40% of those leaving care become alcoholics or drug addicts, while 40% slip into criminality, 10% commit suicide and only 10% manage to lead a more or less normal life.
1.5 million children play truant. Every year, adolescents commit 330,000 crimes; 28,000 are in camps for young offenders. 2,000 young people commit suicide annually. In Moscow hospitals alone, 1,800 young people are treated for the consequences of attempted suicide every year.
617,000 children are registered as disabled. The number of healthy children has fallen to only 34%. 40% of newborn babies have a chronic illness; for school children, the figure is 60%.
Drug and alcohol abuse by children and adolescents is great cause for concern. Among 14–18 year olds, 88% of boys and 93% of girls drink alcohol regularly; for other drugs, the figures are 56% and 20% respectively. The greater part of the between 600,000 and 1 million drug addicts living in Moscow are underage. In the country as a whole, it is estimated that 70% of drug addicts are adolescents and young adults. 90% of drug addicts in Moscow are infected with Hepatitis. The number of those infected with HIV is also rising. 6,645 children are thought to be infected throughout the country.

Sources:

- *http://www.tspu.tula.ru/res/other/Bschool/Reasons/reasons2.htm*, (accessed 28.8.2008);

• http://www.inter-pedagogika.ru/shapka.php?sect_type=11&menu_id=94&section_id=1483&alt_menu=-1, (6.10.2008); *http://statistika.ru/zdr/2007/12/12/zdr_9933.html*, (9.10.2008); *http://statistika.ru/zdr/2007/12/07/zdr_9773.html*, (9.10.2008); *http://statistika.ru/russiainprices/2007/11/14/russiainprices_9282.html* .(9.10.2008).

Children's Organisations in Contemporary Russia and Their Soviet Roots

Darya Dimke

sketch

One might think that the extracurricular youth organisations in Russia today are far removed from the Soviet Pioneer movement. The scout movement has now emerged, as have a multitude of very different children's clubs and societies. For example, in the Yekaterinburg organisation *The Caravel Press Centre and Fleet* (*Press-tsentr i flotiliya 'Karavella'*) the children are involved in sailing, journalism and fencing and take part in a number of social programmes; the Moscow organisation *Road* (*Doroga*) specialises in the study of theatre and tourism. A not insignificant number of these groups have inherited the ideology and practices of the Soviet Pioneer organisations that appeared during the Thaw and were imbued with the attitudes of the 1960s.

For their part, the Thaw-era children's groups drew on the Pioneer organisations of the 1920s. The latter were not attached to schools; membership was voluntary. They carried out 'socially useful work', for example teaching adults to read and write, organising demonstrations against smacking and campaigning against drunkenness.

In the 1930s, the Pioneer organisations were merged with the schools; this effectively deprived them of their independence and joining the Pioneers became compulsory for all pupils. Active participation in other extracurricular activities took on a secondary importance or disappeared entirely. The Pioneers' main task was no longer 'socially useful work' but rather 'studying and behaving well.' The basic workload for leading Pioneer organisations at school fell upon the shoulders of the class monitors. In principle, this remained the case until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the Thaw at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, organisations and clubs started appearing in the Pioneers' palaces and in the housing offices in the residential areas that were not connected to schools. Membership was voluntary and the organisations were very diverse, ranging from hobby groups to those helping collective farmers or planting trees in the city. Just as in the organisations of the 1920s, genuine self-government among children, as inspired by the ideas of A.S. Makarenko[1], existed within the groups. Clubs were divided into sections, each of which chose a commander to lead them for between six months and a year. Together, the commanders formed the club's council, which was responsible for important decisions. In addition, there was the institution of choosing a 'commander of the day' from the regular members in each section, meaning that everyone eventually became a commander.

University students of all subjects often became organisers of these sections; for them, this work served as a creative outlet. In effect, their pedagogical activity in the clubs constituted a type of opposition to the official system of education.

1 Educator (1888-1939) known for his concept of collective education without corporal punishment or hierarchical authority; the emphasis was placed on useful work.

sketch

Regarding their official status, the clubs were part of the Pioneer *druzhina*, as the larger divisions within the Pioneer organisation were known. It was here that the so-called 'informal pedagogy' appeared which some very different children's groups employed. These included both those that actively conducted the 'construction of Communism' within their group or different types of 'socially beneficial' work, such as collecting rubbish and organising events for children in children's homes, and those who sang the songs of the semi-legal singer-songwriters.

During the Brezhnev stagnation, lessons using this pedagogical approach offered those involved much greater opportunities for self-fulfilment than practically any other activity. The creation of one's own children's section during one's free time, and the establishment of a 'just' set of rules which one could follow, offered a form of self-fulfilment for the adult initiators similar to that experienced by those who composed music or painted, but had to work in the furnace room, sweep streets or find employment as a security guard.[2] In 'their' section they received the opportunity to create a world which adhered to those laws that they believed to be equitable. Indeed, the study of these children's organisations is, apart from anything else, extremely interesting for sociologists and historians for the very reason that they allow one to reconstruct different Soviet generations' conceptions of an ideal society.

A dilapidated Mowgli is transformed in today's context to a Shakhidka *– a female suicide-bomber – in a black headscarf.*

As a rule, the activities that took place in these sections can be divided into two categories. The first, which might cautiously be described as 'creative', was determined by the interests and abilities of those behind it. This included a wide range of activities – from mountain climbing to local history. The second category was 'social'. This, too, was often very different from section to section. It could include voluntary work to help the aged or disabled, or school patrols which ensured that neither the teachers nor the 'riff-raff' infringed upon the children's rights.

Many of the extra-curricular sections created during the 1960s and '70s have survived and continue to carry out their activities today. However, there is one important difference: the social network to which they belonged in the Soviet period no longer exists; it collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s. The sections and clubs are scattered throughout the territory of the former USSR and there is no longer enough money for them to visit each other in order to share their experiences.

The children's groups face a number of problems: lack of contact with each other, the periodic doubts raised by the schools (generated by the pupils' performance at school and the 'love of freedom' inspired by the organisations) and conflicts with local 'riff-raff'. This has led the groups to turn inward, which has given them a somewhat sectarian character.

2 These were the typical jobs artists critical of the regime took up in order to give themselves a certain degree of freedom to carry out their own creative work.

sketch

In essence, they demonstrate the attributes of a romantic world view and lifestyle, elements of which were inherent to the thinking of several generations of Soviet people.

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Darya Dimke has an MA in ethnology from the European University in St. Petersburg. She is an associate researcher at the Centre for Independent Social Research and Teaching (Irkutsk). Her academic interests include the sociology of childhood, the sociology of education, historical sociology and Soviet studies.

A Chronicle of Russian Children's Organisations *(by Christine Gölz)*

History/Perestroika: The First Signs of Democratisation
The creation of independent national children's organisations in the Soviet Republics
01.10.1990: Voluntary dissolution of the Soviet Pioneer movement at the 10th Pioneer's Rally in the Artek Pioneer Camp. The members gathered there decided to reorganise it as the *Union of Pioneers' Organisations/Federation of Children's Organisations* (*SPO-FDO*). Following an initial drop in membership, *The International Union of Children's Organisations* (*MSDOO*), as it is now known, is with 4.7 million children the largest umbrella organisation for children's associations today.

1st Phase 1991–1996: The Reorganisation of the Soviet structure
Criticism and demythologisation of the Pioneer movement, collapse of the old structure
10.01.1992 Foundation of the *National Youth Council of Russia* (*NSMDOR*). The council is structured according to democratic principles. It boasts as members 41 national, non-governmental organisations, including scouting groups, unions of child journalists, young researchers, sports associations etc., as well as 32 regional Youth Councils.
1995 Foundation of the umbrella organisation *Child and Youth Social Initiatives* (*DIMSI*), representing around 20 national and 100 regional or city-wide projects and programmes with a mainly social focus. Since 1997, the state has supported it. Between 1995 and 20005, more than 10 million children and young people have taken part in projects initiated by the *DIMSI*. Today it has 60,000 members aged 8 and upwards.

2nd Phase 1997–2004: The Stabilisation of the Independent Organisations
Despite the cuts in public funding, an unprecedented number of children's organisations sprang up. Some of these joined umbrella organisations like the *DIMSI* and, if they are independent of the state, became members of the *NSMDOR*. However, only 4–10% of children of school age are members of established groups.

3rd Phase since 2005: The Increasing Importance of Political Organisations
Whereas initially the emphasis was on youth work, recently children's groups with close links to political parties have been founded. For example, in September 2007, *Nashi* ('Ours'), the governing party's youth

association, supported the creation of a children's wing for 8 to 15 year-olds, *Mishki* ('Little Bears'). The group has a strictly hierarchical structure; one of its slogans clearly draws on the children's policy of the Stalinist period: 'We thank Putin for creating a secure future for us'.

PREVIEW:

kultura 6-2008 will appear in late December and will deal with the discourse of glamour in Russia. Larissa Rudova (Pomona College, California) and Birgit Menzel (Mainz-Germersheim) will be guest editors.