The socio-economic environment surrounding Russian architects has changed dramatically since the collapse of the USSR. A building boom began in Russia in the 2000s, and, with it, architects were free to design more independently of government regulation. In addition, the design of homes, offices, supermarkets, and shopping malls has resulted in the liberalization and diversification of the architectural style.

While the global economic depression has halted the boom, in large cities, such as St. Petersburg and Moscow, commercial construction continues. On the other hand, rapid and large-scale development brings about conflict, traffic problems, depopulation, and the destruction of historical buildings.

For example, one controversial topic in St. Petersburg that has engaged not only architects but also the citizenry has been the construction of a business center on the northern shore of the Neva River. The large architectural firm RMJM (Robert Matthew and Johnson Marshall) made the plan for this Okhta-Center, including the 400-meter-high glass office of Gazprom Neft (Figure 1). However, the local residents and experts were against because it would spoil the historic city view (Figure 2). Finally, the plan was abandoned. However, in March 2011, Gazprom Neft announced a new plan for a slightly different office also consisting of a glass high-rise in the Lakhtinsky prospect.

Architectural ambitions are (or better to say “were”) displayed prominently in the Presnensky District of western Moscow, which is referred to as "The City." As soon as people exit the metallic high-tech-style Mezhdunarodnaya
station, they enter a futuristic city such as might be found in a science fiction movie (Figure 3). The glass skyscrapers in The City differ in shape and height and appear to belong to a world very foreign to the rest of Moscow.

Future prospects for construction in the city are unclear. For instance, one of the main buildings, the Tower Russia, designed by British architect Norman Foster, which might be the highest tower in Europe, was cancelled in the aftermath of the Lehman Financial Shock. The Federation Tower (Figure 4), based on the project developed by leading Russian architect Sergei Tchoban, has been under construction since 2003, but it has not been finished yet.3
For large projects, clients often prefer to commission internationally renowned architects or architectural firms. However, behind the scenes, Russian architects have also completed unique projects over the past decade. Some of the projects that are linked to the heritage of the Soviet period are discussed in this paper.

**Studying the Past to Find New Style**

In the 1990s, the liberalization of the Russian architectural style began. However, at that time, architects did not rush to invent new styles. On the contrary, certain retrospective tendencies appeared. One reason was the pressure of the former Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov. Those eclectic-classical buildings are referred to as the Moscow or Luzhkov style.4 Furthermore, under the influence of worldwide postmodernism, Russian architects, as well as their Western colleagues, have turned towards the past, quoting past aspects of various buildings and blending them together (even sometimes inharmoniously).

For instance, the apartment building Patriarch (Sergei Tkachenko, Oleg Dubrovsky, 2002) (Figure 5) shows a bizarre montage: a spire shaped as Tatlin's Third International Tower (Figure 6) resting on top of a tiered wedding-cake-like body in typical Stalin style. Huge Corinthian-style columns used for a bank on the Novinsky Street (Dmitory Barkhin and

---

[Fig.5] Patriarch

[Fig.6] Tatlin's Third International Tower
Akiko Honda

others, 2000) (Figure 7) are reminiscent of Zholtovsky’s Mokhovaya Street Building (1934) (Figure 8). The Pompeian House (Mikhail Velov, 2005) (Figure 9) adopted the Pompeian-style endorsed in the Stalin period but even more dramatically. Its bright red color contrasts with an orthodox church next door.\(^5\) One of the kitschiest examples of faux Stalin style is probably the apartment building Triumph-Palace (2006) (Figure 10). The building style imitates that of the skyscrapers called Stalin’s Seven Sisters, which were

[Fig.7] Bank on the Novinsky Street

[Fig.8] Zholtovsky’s Mokhovaya Street Building

[Fig.9] Pompeian House

[Fig.10] Triumph-Palace
Post-Soviet Architecture

constructed soon after WWII (Figure 11).

Some architects employed an avant-garde style. The shopping center city (2001) (Figure 12) designed by Evgeny Pestov in Nizhny Novgorod has been called an architect’s rendering of a Mondrian painting. The oldest private architectural studio Ostozhenka, established in 1989, followed an ascetic Russian Constructivism style (Figure 13) in their Moscow International Bank (1995) (Figure 14). Aleksei Vorontsov’s multipurpose building on Giliarovsky Street (2006) (Figure 15) borrowed details from Fomin’s Dinamo building (1929) (Figure 16).

The studio Vitruvius and Sons in St. Petersburg designs in a manner similar to that of Sots Art. The supermarket called Barcode (2004) (Figure 17) is an example of irony. The exterior of the building is solid red with vertical lines and looks like a red barcode. The color symbolizes socialism and the barcode, capitalism, that is, two quite incompatible symbols are juxtaposed in this building.

[Fig.11] Hotel Ukraine

[Fig.12] City

[Fig.13] Shchusev’s Telegraph Office (1925)

[Fig.14] Moscow International Bank
All of these works demonstrate the architects’ interpretation and evaluation of Soviet architecture, attachment to eclectic-classical style, empathy with the avant-garde, and irony, such as the work by Vitruvius and Sons. All of them were educated in the Soviet period and have worked since then. Meanwhile, the architects of the group Iofan’s Children were born after the breakup of the USSR, and their works are also very retrospective. Their “father” was Stalin’s architect, Boris Iofan. Iofan was well-known as the winner of the Soviet Palace competition (Figure 18) and chief architect of the USSR pavilion in the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris. His "sons" utilize in their plans many images from architectural drawings from the 1920s and 1930s but do not intend to construct those buildings. In their Zeppelin Station (2008) (Figure 19) are likenesses of fanciful buildings, airplanes, and dirigibles, which were favorite motifs of the Constructivists and the Socialist Realists. Their works were displayed in an exhibition titled “Go forward to the 1930s!” in 2008. As the title shows, their work can be evaluated as a remarkable attempt to use old images in order to seek new architectural expression. However, on the other hand, due to a lack of clear irony, their works seem to show nostalgia for the Stalin era.

There are also architects who are skeptical about the construction of new buildings. Rather, they chose to repurpose an existing building and restore it, a process that is known as "conversion". Conversion used to be considered as
work unworthy of a first-rate architect. However, it is now considered to have value from the economic and ecological viewpoints. As an example of conversion, Mikhail Khazanov and other architects remodeled the National Centre for Contemporary Arts (Figure 20), reusing a devastated factory in Moscow. Aleksei Vorontsov turned Mel’nikov’s Garage (1926) (Figure 21) into a cultural center in 2002 (Figure 22).
The Ruin-Architect

A more original way of conversion is seen in the work of Alexander Blodsky, who describes himself as future-phobic and is known as a ruin-architect.7 He repurposes ruins but does not improve their dilapidated appearance. In his restaurant Street OGI (2002) (Figure 23) and café Apshu (2003) (Figure 24), the cracked walls and old white window frames are characteristic of the spaces. In the art gallery Vinzavod (2007) (Figure 25), he also made use of the dilapidated construction of a former wine factory. Damaged walls, floors, and ceilings are shown with limited repairs in his works; however, they cannot be considered as ordinary ruins. The Russian architect Eugene Asse assessed Brodsky’s works to be an attempt of “recollection and recognition.” In addition, he states:

We seem to have seen these laths, these braces, and a staircase like this somewhere before. We are familiar with their spontaneity and their brutality; and it seems they have been everywhere and always. To what place and what age do these battered tin annexes belong? And these little windows of various sizes drizzled in white paint, and his awing made of planks and propped up by slanting poles? In their timelessness and lack of specific location these objects acquire the magnificence and beauty of monuments.8
As he pointed out, Brodsky’s ruins should be appreciated as an aesthetic display separate from their original context.

Brodsky was well-connected with trends in Japanese architecture in the 1980s. When he graduated from the Moscow Architecture Institute in the late 1970s, an ossified bureaucratic system dominated Soviet architecture, and there was no room for young architects who wanted to design without restraint. Therefore, he and his contemporary, Ilya Utkin, began to secretly enter their work in foreign architectural competitions.

International competitions, especially those organized by the staff of the Japanese architectural journal JA (Shin-kenchiku) and the glass-producing company Central Glass were their favorite ones, because neither of them required competitors to send big models or to make presentations in Japan, which would have been difficult for young Russian architects. One peculiarity of the competitions helped them. The competitions did not require that the winning plan be carried out, making it an entirely conceptual competition.

At that time, using planning software was already quite common in the West, and the architects shared similar methods of designing. Therefore, the sudden appearance of the Russian architects, with their highly developed drawing skills and original ideas, was enthusiastically welcomed by the judges. Brodsky and Utkin won five times in those Japanese competitions and rose to prominence in the Western world earlier than they did in Russia.

Not only Brodsky and Utkin but also other young Russian architects were frequent contributors to those competitions. They formed an underground architectural movement in Moscow called Paper Architecture. Participants in this movement shared no particular style or philosophy, but they had one feature...
in common, i.e., nihilism, which was often expressed through images of ruins.

For example, Mikhail Filipov became known as a ruin-artist. An exhibition of his drawings of his own ruins was held at the New State Tretyakov Gallery and his art installation of such ruins was exhibited at Venice Biennale in 2000.10 A former paper-architect, Aleksei Bavykin, chose the motif of ruins in his design of an office building on Mozhaisky Street (2006) (Figure 26). His plan, called Ruins, consists of a ridge of modern glass curtain walls and a collapsed brick bridge. Unfortunately, the plan changed, but his attempt to build new ruins carries the theme of nihilism of the Paper Architecture group to the present day.

**To Plan Ruins, to Live in Ruins**

Brodsky’s critical attitude to construct is easily observed in his copperplate etchings from the 1980s to the latest installations that deal with neglected and discarded houses and objects. In the etching *Columbarium Architecture* (1984) (Figure 27), Brodsky and Utkin described a plan for a mausoleum for houses that were demolished to make way for city development. The walls in the Columbarium are filled with niches that display memorial portraits of the demolished houses. *Columbarium*
Post-Soviet Architecture

Habitable (1986) (Figure 28), which is subtitled as “the reservation for old little houses and their inhabitants in a large modern city,” has a similar but larger-scale structure. The interior of the building is covered with enormous concrete boxes. According to the caption, the people living in the condemned houses can remove their house from its location and place it into the Columbarium. However, if the owners cannot live any longer in the house standing on the concrete shelf, the house is destroyed using a maul hanging from the ceiling in order to make room for another house.11

In those etchings, Brodsky and Utkin planned a tomb for buildings or a final disposal place, namely, a space opposite from the construction site. Another distinctive aspect of their work is the theme of banality. Each small house is not painstakingly described; instead, houses are depicted in enormous numbers as banal, faceless, mass products. This banality repeatedly appears in Brodsky’s art installation, such as Gray Matter (1999) (Figure 29). In this work, he displayed numerous clay figures of mass-produced daily necessities. The cracked surface of each clay object gives it the appearance of an excavated object. Through Brodsky’s manipulation, common, disposable mass products are recreated in this non-duplicated art object and gain permanent existence. This art installation suggests his attention to banal and marginal things that are shadowed by great national projects or soon.
consigned to oblivion due to a rapid consumption society.

In his Coma (2000) (Figure 30), many small clay houses were displayed on an operating table. Black oil was gradually poured from IV bags over this clay Moscow on the table, and the clay city then sank completely within a month at the time the exhibition ended. The title, Coma, refers to the word "coma," meaning “deep sleep” in Greek, which it is also used as a medical term for a deep unconscious state. Brodsky explained, “I wanted to show (the city) as if it were in a hospital on a surgical table.” Namely, he suggests that the city entered into a coma and nearly died. In this work, Brodsky’s allegory indicates the condition of today’s city in which people could not wake up at the end of a master narrative, such as the breakup of the USSR; instead, it sank deeper into sleep.

One of his latest installations, which was displayed at the Vienna Architectural Center in 2011 (Figure 31), also contained battered mass products. In a blacked-out rectangular room, black-painted junk was put on an overhead net. At the center of the space, there was a pool filled with black oil which reflected the shadows of the objects above. Therefore, when visitors looked in the pool, they felt as if they were shut between the above and lower strata of the disposed mass products and had become a part of them.

As reported above, the daily necessities in Brodsky’s Gray Matter obtained a characteristic texture imitating an archeological find. However, in this work, he painted real products in black, and, as a result, products lost their texture and materiality, becoming a shadow in this dark room. If it is appropriate to call Gray Matter as an excavated or recalled object, this dark
Post-Soviet Architecture

matter might be regarded as an object that got buried under the stratum and was largely forgotten.

Brodsky’s theme of junk and ruins retains, nonetheless, the universal validity of changes in a social context. They indicate the inevitable loss or oblivion that takes place in the rapid life of a large modern city. Among Brodsky's works, the fluidity of the modern city is often embodied as a black river flooding it. People cannot dam up this river of forgetfulness, Lethe, because it penetrates and incorporates life very deeply. In other words, we cannot overcome constant oblivion. The only way left for us is to try to be aware that we are always losing and forgetting. Brodsky’s work creates an awareness of forgetfulness through his images of abandoned things and houses.

The idea of planning or living among ruins is supported and taken over by the younger generation. Fedor Dubinnikov, an architect in his thirties, remodeled rooms in old apartments in the Goods Concept Store (2007) and an office of his studio (2007) (Figure 32). In both rooms, the interior is painted roughly in white to accent, rather than hide, its original ruined surface. The architectural studio, Sergei Skuratov Architects, won first prize in a design competition of a residential complex on the Paveletsky riverside for a plan in which the architects left an antiquated printing factory as it stood but to be used as a cafe and a gallery (Figure 33).

Conclusion

Contrary to the dynamism of construction in metropolises such as St. Petersburg and Moscow, the projects developed by these ruin-architects raise doubts that architects should always construct new buildings for the future. The ruins
symbolize buildings that have disappeared but are used in place of new buildings. That is, the attempt to plan or to build ruins is a challenge to the common sense of architecture. Becoming an architect of ruins is a remarkable way of self-reflection for the Russian architects to objectify the recent construction boom.

Notes
1. В Санкт-Петербурге решили сохранить историческую панораму города. 09. 12. 2010. http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/166736
2. Муратов А. Об особенностях современных небоскребов. // Проект Россия. №41. 2006. С. 178-185.
3. In April 2012, a massive blaze broke out on the 67th floor of the Federation Tower East. The fire spread over 300 square meters, and it was extinguished three hours after it started.
4. Малинин Н. Архитектура Москвы 1989-2009. Путеводитель. М., 2009. С. 11.
5. Ревзин Г. Путь к фасаду-2. // Проект классика. XIV-MMV. 2005. С. 84.
6. Торговый центр «СИТИ». // TATOLIN_MONO. №9(53). 2007. С. 60.
7. Бродский А. До сих пор меня изучает, что я стал архитектором. // Проект Россия. №41. 2006. С. 81.
8. Асс Е. Проект архитектора и [или/ как] художника. // Проект Россия. №41. 2006. С. 72.
9. The first exhibition of the paper architects took place in an additional office of the magazine “Youth (Юность),” which, coincidentally, was located opposite the project office of Moscow City (Моспроект). In the press, their movement was criticized as a withdrawal from reality or from urgent tasks of a national building program. Nevertheless, the most authoritative architectural journal in Soviet Russia, Architecture of the USSR, published a special feature on the overseas activities of the young architects that year. Rappaport, Alexander G., Language and Architecture of Post-Totalitarianism, in Klotz Heinrich ed., Paper Architecture, Rizzoli, 1998, p. 12.
10. Художественная тренировка // Проект классика. XIV-MMV. 2005. С. 98-108.
11. Nesbitt, Lois E., Man in the Metropolis: The Graphic Projections of Brodsky & Utkin, in Brodsky & Utkin: The Complete Works, Princeton Architectural Press, 1991, p. 9.
12. Alrxander Brodsky Projects, Andrea Seidling and Katharina Ritter eds., in Hintergrund (50/51), Wiena, Architekturzentrum, 2011, p. 29.
13. Топ-15. // Проект Россия. №53. 2009. С. 132-137.
14. Мартовицкая А. Вокруг кирпичной площади. 26. 03. 2012. http://archi.ru/agency/news_current.html?nid=40317