

03.09.04 Day One

16.10. Meeting at "Kirovsky Zavod" metro-station. First Artem appears, then Tsaplya. Kirill and Gluklya are late. We look for a place to hand out the maps and "instructions". The "Cobweb" Café: proletarian menu with matching prices. Regulars relax at little tables after a hard day's work. The radio announces eight ambulances and four dead children in Beslan. Following a brief newsflash, pop-music and the sound of meat being tenderized in the kitchen. We talk about the conception of the *dérive*. Gluklya asks why Debord killed himself. No-one really knows. Tsaplya hands out colored felt-tip markers, notebooks, and maps.

17.00. Stachek Prospect. Pedestrian underpass. At the entrance, the sign that says "Kirovsky Zavod" (Kirov Works) dovetails with an "Alpha Bank" advert. Tsaplya shows us a portrait of [the famous revolutionary] Gaza, after whom the neighboring House of Culture is named. In the 1970s, it hosted a famous exhibition of Leningrad nonconformists. On the way, I send Polina an SMS: "Where is that side-street, where is that house? Where is that little miss what I once loved?" [=line from a Russian song whose meter cannot be rendered in English]. I am attracted to the song because of its last line's agrammatism. Oh yes, and because of all the memories of the proletarian revolutionary saga "Maxim's Youth", which rhymes with my own youth in a funny sort of way. At some point, we come up to "Kiryanov's Datcha", the Civil Registry Office where I legally registered my second marriage in 1988, was it? When I tell the others, Gluklya and Tsaplya decide to give me a present. I ask them to sing "The Blue Ball Turns and Spins" [=another song, with the same melody and meter as the preceding one], and I sing along with them with a mixture of tenderness and yearning.

17.30. Abandoned factory, reminiscent of Tarkovsky's "Stalker". Ruins of the industrial Soviet past. Light sifts through the roof-rents. Ferns and moss grow in rainspills on concrete slabs. If you squat on your haunches, you can lose yourself to the illusion of a miniature world, reduced in scale. Again, Tarkovsky. Quiet as a church. "This is exactly where we need to organize exhibitions of contemporary art", says Gluklya. All the others agree.

18.20 "Nemetskaya Sloboda" [= "German Settlement"], a housing block, built by German POWs after the war. "Idyllic" inner spaces. Paradoxical striations: year-rings in wood. All you have to do is cross the street and you find yourself falling from the early 1980s straight back to the late 1940s. I am suddenly galvanized by a feeling of euphoria, or to be more precise, I'm "disoriented", as Debord might have said.

19.00 Uzbek café on Trefilov Street. Garbage wind. Atmospheric desolation. Terrible-looking drunks at plastic tables next to the entrance. One of them comes on to Tsaplya. A woman sits among them; her face is drawn and manly, all of her movements are masculine. We go inside to avoid the rain. On TV, they're replaying the assault on the school in Beslan. I fall into a stupor at the sight of the battle. The rest of our journey takes place in its shadow. Tsaplya leads us to the monuments of constructivist

architecture: hospital, school in the form of a hammer and sickle etc. Somehow, I don't have the strength to admire them all.

21.00 Dismal drinking in the "Kolyma" café. But first, a short burst of joy at meeting the other group, soon to be replaced by a feeling of homelessness under the latent threat emanating from the drunken showdown between a construction-worker in a boiler-suit, who can barely stand up straight, and a group of young migrant-workers (Tatars?). The proprietors, far from sober themselves, have a hard time deescalating the confrontation. We wait for our kebabs for almost two hours. The belligerent construction-worker's drunk wife and their five-year-old son wander from one table to the next, looking lost. At some point, Kolya loses his composure and shouts at her she's dancing to take her kid to the toilet, he really needs to take a leak. She can hardly answer. A late dinner in a Chinese restaurant: an absurd finale to the first day of the *dérive*.

Comments. I am not going to reproduce my notes on the second day. At its end, it became obvious that the "encounter" had taken place, but ironically, we had not met with what we were supposed to. After all, this neighborhood between the Kirov Works [formerly Putilov Works] and the Baltic Railroad Station is famous for its revolutionary past. It is here that one can find the Park of the Victims of January 9th [1905], from here that the worker's columns set out toward the Winter Palace. And in the 1920s, this place saw some of the most grandiose construction work undertaken at the time, as an attempt to realize the socialist utopia. But now, instead of the majestic figures of the proletariat, we met with nothing but baleful yawning. "Scorched earth" and empty lots instead of utopia. Constructivist buildings, crumbling before our eyes, corresponded to the dissolution of the social body, turning people into flotsam and jetsam, emanating a miasma of hollow despair, giving rise to the involuntary thought that these ruins were an unbearably material monument to the frozen, petrified revolution, a "dialectic of stasis" (Benjamin). In secret, we were probably expecting something else. Yet this traumatic experience of coming in contact with reality (in the psychoanalytical sense) is priceless. For me, in any case, this was the albeit negative outcome of the *dérive*, calling for action, for critical interpretation.

P.S. It is symbolic that the notes on Day One are interrupted by references to the battle in Beslan. We all feel like hostages, for whom time has come to a standstill; our fate depends on the interplay of impersonal historical forces. How does one turn the passive voice into action? Someone else's direct speech into one's own? All of this flotsam and jetsam into a people? A people which, to quote Paul Klee via Deleuze, is already gone or does not yet exist. Now and here, between "already" and "not yet", 22.09.04.