Body Politics in Post-Soviet Russia

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The reforms of the Gorbachev era have led to radical change in the political, economic and cultural systems of Russian society. While it is some time since Gorbachev was in office, the reforms he set in motion continue today. Although he became renowned for declaring that "Perestroika (the reorganization) begins with itself?", it is unlikely that he realized how important this task would become for contemporary Russians, who have considerably extended the scope of perestroika and its reforms. Gorbachev spoke only in developments in the realms of politics and economics. Yet in Russia today, the emphasis of reform has widened to include new cultural practices and modes of exercising power. Starting in the early 1990s, Russia has become inscribed onto the bodies of the developing Russian elites through their designer clothing, expensive automobiles and mobile phones, their pools and saunas and other consumer goods, with which they are now closely associated. The State-approved asexuality of bodies during the Soviet years has been replaced by the market-approved sexuality of the bodies of the new era. The spread of the AIDS epidemic and drug-culture has occurred at the same time as the development of contemporary Russian society. These have left their traces on the bodies of thousands of Russian men and women.

There are numerous commentators charting the developments taking place in contemporary Russia, and the course of these changes is reflected in various cultural documents. They also leave their traces in language, with many new words reflecting each step of this modern Russian history. We should not forget that these changes also inscribe themselves on surfaces such as the human body. Such records are not inscribed onto a pristine body, but by a process of bodily rewriting, the copying of one text onto/by another (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Falk, 1995; Feldman, 1991; Sullivan, 2001). The class identity physically embodied by city workers and clerks in official institutions is being replaced by another class identity. The fast accumulation of riches after the introduction of privatization, starting in the early 1990s, became inscribed onto the bodies of the developing Russian elites through their designer clothing, expensive automobiles and mobile phones, their pools and saunas and other consumer goods, with which they are now closely associated. The State-approved asexuality of bodies during the Soviet years has been replaced by the market-approved sexuality of the bodies of the new era. The spread of the AIDS epidemic and drug-culture has occurred at the same time as the development of contemporary Russian society. These have left their traces on the bodies of thousands of Russian men and women.

There are many new ways to write and read the body in contemporary Russia, and many new ways of inscribing the body into the text and text into the body. There are new agents of these practices and new technical instruments to achieve them. Finally, as I will propose, there are new types of body politics in action. This paper offers some examples of these forms of body politics in post-Soviet Russia.

Successful Identities

The rise of a new bourgeoisie, known as "new Russians", has had a powerful influence on post-Soviet culture. The standard of living and conspicuous consumption of the new Russian elite allow them life-styles only dreamt of by the secret millionaires of the old Soviet order and members of its supreme party. The new free media began to regularly report on the events and scandals in the lives of the new Russians. While some of these were extreme incidents, such as murders or swindles, the gossip-columns of the tabloid press increasingly offered stories about the intimate lives of the rich. Many became household names, including politicians, successful business people, film actors and show business personalities, and even some real-life gangsters. They were often interviewed on radio and television, and their faces were constantly on the nation?s t.v. screens. Audiences were offered the sight of the magnificent private homes of the new Russians, their beautiful spouses and girlfriends, their clothes , their automobiles, and their own well-fed and pampered bodies. The rich Russian at the end of the 20th Century had full faces and full stomachs. Their lives were marked by extravagant consumption.

We should note that not all the newly wealthy followed such life-styles. In Russia in the 1990s, however, many members of this new middle class fell victim to violent crimes, including murder. The public perceived the new Russian as someone who got rich quick, and died even faster. Thus even the richest could not enjoy their new-found wealth with impunity. For this reason, many new Russians moved from less complicated approaches to life, to more flexible and effective strategies for survival. The matter of their own body well-being was foremost in their thoughts, including the problem of physical fitness.

The body, then, became one of the first sites of self-expression for the new Russian. An entire corporeal mythology of the rich new Russian was represented by jokes and satirical television shows (especially those of the successfully popular writer-satirist Michael Zadornov and actor Eugeny Petrovsky). This popular comedic image presented the new Russian as a male who was not very clever, but physically very massive. He might commonly be depicted as a young man, with the implication that his wealth has been quickly amassed by theft. Flashily dressed in brightly coloured jackets with gold chains, he would be depicted holding a mobile phone and consuming foreign beer. Such characters spoke poorly, talked smut, and frequently hiccuped (obviously from overeating and drunkenness). Characteristically, the new Russian was satirized as over-using hand gestures. Popular jokes asserted that it was necessary for him to use only two fingers.

The reality of a new Russian?s life was quite different to this popular television image. As I have already noted, the newly affluent Russian male felt compelled to move from a relatively uncomplicated life plan towards more flexible practices. New Russians found it necessary to both maintain their new living conditions and take responsibility for their own physical safety. Contemporary bourgeois body politics in Russia, as well as in the West, began with new
understandings of consumption and power. Consumption, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms, now represents not so much the assimilation of material goods, but the operation of signs (Baudrillard, 1995). The new Russian executive did not allow himself to become corpulent, but instead strenuously pumped iron, floated in smart pools, and visited a sauna. While not necessarily athletic, these new Russian bodies were not flabby or shapeless.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the Russian nouveau riche was in a state of flux. The violent nature of Russian society at the time saw the deaths of many business executives and their replacement by assistants who, in the recent past, had been heading security services for their firms. These assistants were ironically named “securities”, and these Russian “securities” have played a key role in the transformation of the post-Soviet bourgeois body politic. The majority were recruited in mid-career and were formerly officers of the army or state security services. Among them were many sportsmen and, occasionally, their ranks included those with a criminal past. These individuals were responsible not only for the direct safety of their employers, but also encouraged their bosses to train, become physically fit, and study self-defense. The opportunity to build careers based on fighting ability and brawn alone has generated a Russian employment boom in the areas of “pumping iron” and fighting skills.

This boom in fitness industries had a semi-criminal dimension. It arose from one element of youth culture which included many young men with violent tendencies. In the basements of various Russian cities, athletic halls began to appear in which young men “pumped iron”. These places were referred to as “rocking chairs” (kachalkas) and their tough-guy devotees gave the nickname “rock guys” (kachoks). Strictly speaking, these halls had begun in Gorbachev?s time, at which point young people had begun to take part in modernising and re-organising Soviet society. In some small towns, such as Lyubertsy near Moscow, these “rocking chairs” became bases from which mobile groups of youths conducted their own struggle for meaning. Young men the towns from Lyubertsy, Naberezhnye Chelny and Tolyatti successfully fought tough, gangster-style wars for supremacy over their opposition gangs. Before 1992, these groups had no strategic purpose in mind. Their victories served personal and local interests alone. Beginning with the new economic policies of Yeltsin, however, these youths found a new sense of purpose: the promise of affluence. The strong physical body now began to serve them in a struggle for the accumulation of property. From that time on, in the vast spaces of central Russia, the famous youth battles ceased. The former tough-guys turned to the realm of business. Simultaneously, gangster body politics began to merge with those carrying out “security” for the Russian business world.

Russia’s new economic policy has led to a true blossoming of the country?s subcultures. As well as those cultural practices identified with the new Russian bourgeoisie, their “securities” and representatives of youth groups, a range of other practices also began to multiply which struck a resonant chord in the public consciousness. The example I will offer here concerns the cultural practices of Russian show business stars, which have received special attention from millions of admirers, viewers, and concert audiences.

Until the 1990s, there were no “stars” as such in Russia, although there were popular actors and singers. As Russians grew more acquainted with American and European show business, however, the creation of a star system, particularly for singers and comedians, took place. The Russian film industry, on the other hand, initially found itself overwhelmed by both Hollywood and general financial hardship, and began to produce its homegrown stars later than other areas in the entertainment field. It was thus the broader (non-movie) sphere of popular entertainment that gave rise to new images of stardom. Both individual singers and pop groups rose to popularity. This rise was due as much to their outlandish behavior as to their musical skills. Masha Rasputina, who was born in a small Siberian village, came to fame as the Russian sex-bomb, fearlessly baring her body during concerts or being photographed semi-naked for various magazines. The all?male pop group “Na-Na”, with its line-up varying between four to five members, using similar tactics has hundreds of thousands fans across the country. The bodies of Russian variety stars gained popularity not only as sexual fetishes. Some stars riveted popular attention by reconstructing themselves. Alla Pugacheva, a well-known Russian singer, had been performing for twenty years when, in the 1990s, she began to subject her body to regular surgical interventions in remove body fat. Her colleague Larissa Dolina, after numerous experiences with weight loss, recreated a new image for herself at the end of the century. Singer Alexander Buinov and actor-satirist Efim Shifrin have surprised their admirers by transforming their slim figures into pumped, athletic bodies. These are only a few examples and many more can be found. What is important to note is that in the 1990s, Russian show business became the site of entertainment body politics. As well as in the West, the bodies of Russian stars began to serve as the focus of popular attention and enhancing their money-making potential. Bright and brilliant, these bodies began to reign on screens, stirring the imaginations of millions men and women across Russia. Since then, many people have begun to achieve success not necessarily through talent, but by their sexually dazzling bodies. It is no accident that between the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st Century, more and more singers in the Russian entertainment field have staked their futures on an alluring corporal image and enhancing their money-making potential.

Production of Glamorous Bodies

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the old Soviet order offered workers and farmers carefully organised leisure activities. Success at work was rewarded with permits to “rest houses” and resorts at on the Black Sea coast. There, from one to three months each summer, permit holders could holiday for the sake of their health. As well as these centres of organised leisure, there existed numerous clinics, usually located in the Caucasuses and Georgia. All cities also has numerous bathhouses, traditionally viewed as centers for washing the body rather than leisure facilities. During the 1970s, however, the popularity of the bathhouse declined, with most people preferring the privacy of their own bathrooms at home. After the collapse of the old USSR, and with the beginning of the policy of “shock therapy” (the radical strategy of social and economic transformation from 1992-1994), centralised leisure activities became impossible. Many well-known resorts rose to popularity outside Russia. The majority of urban populations, faced with problems of survival (due to poverty, financial collapse and hunger), found it necessary to build their own summer homes (dachas) and to cultivate their own country gardens. Millions of people retreat annually to these summer homes to raise vegetables for sale, and to seek a respite from city life. Against this background, the new Russian bourgeoisie pursued different ways to organise their leisure. They began to combine visits to prestigious foreign resorts with new kinds of pastimes at home. Fitness-centres became places where the dreams of a new bourgeoisie became realised. Except on medical advice or to take the mineral baths, no one dreamt of visiting Caucasuses. It was enough to get a ticket or a club card in the fitness-center.
The 1990s saw fitness-centres opened primarily in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Even today, such facilities remain focused in these cities and are comparatively rare in other areas of the country. These centres are organised into networks such as, for example, the "Planet Fitness" group. Charging high prices by Russian standards, fitness centres offer a variety of services aiming to improve and rejuvenate the body. These include various kinds of hydrotherapy, baths, saunas, tonics and strengthening procedures, every possible kind of massage, including aromatic massage, exfoliation, and other kinds of spa therapies. Additional facilities usually include a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a sun deck, a bar, and other areas intended for individual exercises or relaxing with friends. Of course, these friends will naturally all belong to the same social class.

Fitness centres in the provincial areas of Russian are only developing at the moment. Their equipment differs from that available in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Frequently they will have a gymnasium but no swimming pool. Many spa therapies are not offered. Opening hours are limited when compared to centres in Moscow, where doors will open at seven in the morning and close after midnight. Those using provincial fitness centres are, in most cases, less affluent than those in Moscow. The average user of country centres are men over the age of forty, whose pastimes centre on consuming alcohol and visiting a sauna with a prostitute. While provincial fitness centres are usually closed in the morning, businessmen in the cities usually visit before work. In this sense, these provincial centres can be seen to indicate the imperfect infiltration of the bourgeoisie as social class into the Russian provinces.

The wholesale accessibility to fitness-centres in Russia will only come about when the cost of admission becomes realistic for the general population. A visit to a fitness centre is open to relatively few families. Most people see such centres as locations of hedonistic culture, instead of places offering leisure facilities for all. A tour of a fitness-center is usually regarded as an extravagant gesture that strains the family budget. For millions of men and women in Russia today, rest and relaxation means time spent in front of the television, a visit to the coast or to the summer house.

Despite this, the rise of the fitness-centre in Russia has not gone unnoticed by the general population. Information about these centres can be found in various life-style magazines and on the internet. Almost all the people I have spoken to about this issue say that they would be pleased to visit such centers if they had the opportunity. A female student said: "I would like to spend all my time there, but I can only look at the advertisements for the centres in magazines." Respondents from different age groups repeatedly expressed the opinion that both the new bourgeoisie and show business stars regularly use such centers, which caused people to envy their lifestyles. The interest of many people in the fitness-centers is undoubtedly determined by their desire to fill their time with pleasurable activities. Fitness centres are perceived as machines for manufacturing fine, healthy, silky-skinned bodies of which the majority of people dream.

I would like to question how this practice of visiting fitness centres and clubs promotes real improvements in physical health. Accessible information on this issue suggests that generally the results of these activates are positive. It is clear, however, that without regular visits to these centres, no overall improvement in heath can take place. Irregular attendance results only in emotional satisfaction, as the person regards himself or herself as a respectable person. The person who expects to achieve serious improvements in physical condition should have an opportunity to visits centres regularly over a long period. What is one to do when there is not enough time to take part in on-going fitness activities offered by the centres? Alternatively, what if one wants a quick-fix solution to faults of the figure or the face? This is a need served by cosmetic surgery.

The development of the new Russian middle class has generated a demand for plastic or cosmetic surgery. The skills of cosmetic surgery did exist during the Soviet era. Surgeons carried out such operations in surgery clinics rather than beauty institutes, removing birthmarks, correcting lip and nose deformities, and a range of similar procedures. The achievements of the Soviet plastic surgery were comparable to those of the West. We should also note that by the end of the 1960s, the USSR had begun the first sex-changed operations, with experts developing methods of forming breast and genital tissue. With no widespread demand for these techniques, however, theory outstripped practice.

Until the 1990s, the public tended to be unaware of the possibilities of cosmetic surgery, and little information was available to the average person. The literature that did exist remained in the specialized medical field. My research indicates that the first popular book on cosmetic surgery in Russia appeared as late as 1985. This was a book by French surgeon Jean-Marc Subiran (Subiran, 1995). Since then, information on centres of cosmetic surgery and on a variety of related operations began to appear in popular glossy magazines. The first popular publication on this theme in Russia was the magazine Academy of Beauty, begun in 1998. It provided information on liposuction, dermabrasion, lifts, and other procedures. The public has perceived such body operations as the preserve of the rich and of media stars. Most stories of procedures featured those undertaken by people constantly in the public eye, such as popular singers, actors, broadcasters, and some politicians.

Consumer demand for cosmetic surgery lead to a sharp rise in the number of specialized cosmetic centres throughout the country. General surgeons began to master the skills of this new specialty. Cosmetic surgery has become a prestigious occupation, and the incomes of its practitioners have soared. Many have begun to specialize in difficult and expensive cosmetic operations, preferring them to other forms of surgical procedures. Do such preferences challenge the professionalism of doctors and put the lives of patients at risk? There is no published data available. It is generally perceived however, particularly among young people thinking of their future careers, that the occupation of cosmetic surgeon is a very attractive one.

The post-Soviet mass media in Russia has quickly moved to help generate demand for cosmetic services. It would be difficult to list all the forms this process has taken. In the last two to three years, for example, magazines such as Beauty and Health and Have a Rest are dedicated to this subject. These are affordably priced and designed for a mass audience. A large range of magazines and newspapers from healthy lifestyle publications and family-oriented magazines to youth, women's, and adult publications all offer advertisements for cosmetic surgery centres. They list services and prices, and include interviews with physicians and their patients. While those seeking procedures are therefore drawn from the various classes of society, women make up 90% of patients. This highlights not only the class aspect of politics of body beautification, but also its gendered dimension.

What operations are the most common? Now, as in past years, these procedures include operations to correct obvious appearance flaws, such as a harelip, crooked nose, ugly scars, disfiguring acne or warts. Many more
advertisements are now to be found, however, that offer various techniques to change the shape of the sexual body, the size of the penis or the form of the female breast. Among these announcements, it is possible to find examples such as:

Farewell, impotence! Prosthetic repair of the penis by American phalloprosthesis (AMS-600, 650, 700).

Exclusive technique! Wide experience in Russia! 1. Lengthening of the penis: the surgical method?2-2.5 cm, the Danish extender?2-2.5 cm, and operation+extender?4-5 cm. 2. Thickening of the penis: increase circumference by 5-6 cm.

Enlarge the breast with the best prosthesis in the world! Artificial limbs of McGhan Co (round, anatomical and drop form)”. (AIDS-INF0, 2002, no. 5, p.19).

It seems to me that the mass media is putting into practice a principle of tacit censorship. This is exemplified by the fact that I have found no reports of popular Russian stars resorting to surgically enhanced breasts or genitals. On the contrary, we are continually informed about Pamela Andersons silicone breasts and those of other well-known Western models and stars. It is difficult to believe that “the silicone revolution”, which has boomed in many countries around the world, still has not arrived in Russia. Advertisements announcing the merits of female breast enhancement (by both medical and non-medical means) are found not only on the printed page. One can find them in a range of places, including signs on fences and lampposts.

It is also important to note that for more than ten years, Russia has been at war with excess weight, with thousands of women trying various methods to rid themselves of so-called cellulite from the buttocks and stomach. In the larger bookshops and newstands?and even at small street vendor?s bookstalls?it is possible to find various instruction manuals on how to combat superfluous body fat. While this phenomenon seems to be a spontaneous struggle against excess weight, the institutionalisation of these body politics today occurs alongside cosmetic surgery and fitness therapies accessible in the specialised centers.

The results of this process have altered the consciousness of today’s Russians towards the body, radically changing the way in which physical beauty, both female and male, is represented. The traditional Russian model of a female body, a maternal body, is being replaced by the body of the playful girlfriend. The fatty pleats, obesity, and large buttocks and stomach that have symbolised female fertility and, probably, the connection with the regenerative powers of nature, now are unacceptable. On the contrary, attractiveness is now marked by physical delicacy, long legs and neck, and light body weight. Until recently, such a female constitution was thought to be imperfect, and even unattractive. Now, however, leanness is no longer considered displeasing, and such bodies are even thought of as a divine gift or a natural advantage. Today it is only in villages that the slight female body is still condemned, and older women criticise their overly-lean city relatives. We should also note that in Russia there were none of the public debates about anorexia that took place in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s (Bordo, 1995). The new standard of a female body has been accepted, along with the other changes that have occurred since the fall of the Soviet order.

Standards for the male body have also changed, but these are not so obvious. These can be seen in things such as hairstyles. The ideal Russian man is presented as having a short business-like hairstyle. He is not grey-haired. He has wide shoulders and strong hands, symbols of physical self-reliance. He is clearly dissimilar to romantic and intellectual males represented in Soviet cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. The body of the new man is strong as a rock. He is usually young, more likely, than older. He is the embodiment of an aggressive masculinity. Such images can be found in recent post-Soviet films. They can also be seen on publicity boards advertising such things as beer and cigarettes.

Contemporary mass culture in Russia represent these idealised models of female and male bodies. They portray young, resolute, and energetic bodies. Through these bodies, contemporary society represents their aspirations of today and the future: glamorous bodies without wrinkles, without gray hair, without excess weight. In Russia, the quickly developing cosmetic surgery industry serves to an embodiment of these cultural ideals.

The Culture of Body Transformation in Russia

Along with the creation of a new society in Russia, born of political torments and economic misfortunes, is the formation of new principles that are accepted by more and more Russians. An example of these principles is the maxim "it is necessary to invest money in one’s own body". Today’s body is itself a commodity. This idea was the basis used by many authors of classical political economics. Anyone who invests the body today, can expect to reap profits tomorrow. A new generation of show business stars, top-models and professional sportsmen testify to this reality.

Investment in one’s own body is relevant not only for those in the public spotlight. Many private individuals adopt the same strategy. Ordinary citizens invest considerable money in their bodies to prepare themselves for a long and active life. Many have accepted the idea that healthy hair and strong, white teeth are necessities for the future. Good skin and well-proportioned legs can be theirs in the years ahead. Physical fitness and superior health are enduring qualities. The strong, beautiful body becomes an important attribute of what today is called “quality of a life”. Curiously, these ideas about quality of life have come to the fore at a time when the majority of Russian people have been made aware of the widespread ecological crisis the country is experiencing.

It should be noted that the body politics I have mentioned so far represent only the mainstream forms of self-reconstruction in post-Soviet Russia. Alongside these, various other forms of body experimentation have also prospered. I would like now to turn to these forms of body-art.

The idea that the human body can be a spectacular canvas for realizing the artistic imagination is a very ancient one. As has been described by anthropologists, many non-Western societies still use their bodies as vehicles for aesthetic expression. The re-discovery of body-art in the contemporary West coincided with the rise of various counter-culture movements in the 1960s. Only in the 1980s did the middle class begin to appropriate tattoo-art and piercing, a
practice that was previously widespread only among the proletariat (DeMello, 2000). As with other forms of
embodyment in post-Soviet Russia, practices of body-art are also imported from the Western middle class. The
contemporary Russian art of tattooing does not seemed to be connected the tattooing practices found in closed
communities such as the army or prisons. The popular discourses of postmodern culture found in magazines for
young people such as Cool Girl, put the practices of tattoo, piercing and body-painting on the same level with the
newest forms of experimental art. Contemporary youth tattooing in Russia rarely conveys any covert messages, as
did occur with the tattoos of prisoners. The new tattooing speaks only of itself, being "expediency with the purpose"
in Kant's sense (Kant, 1995). Those who practice tattoos and piercing today see it as a radical form of self-
expression, because a tattoo on the shoulder or a metal ornament in the navel clearly testifies to the fearlessness of
its owner, to the readiness to suffer pain for the sake of establishing a unique identity. We may question, however,
whether all these young men and women actually do suffer pain. Recently salons have appeared in the large cities
of Russia that tattoo and pierce the body under anesthesia.

During the last two to three years, Russia has experienced a true boom in tattoo-art. Young men and women, as well
as students, decorate their bodies with tattoos. Frequently these take the form of temporary tattoos painted on with
henna. Younger is disposable tattoos, which they paste onto shoulders and hands. On October 27 1999, Saint Petersburg saw the first Russian festival of tattoo-art. This was widely covered in the electronic media
and was named "the first Petersburg tattoo-convention" (www.tattooconvention.ru). A Russian-language website
(www.tattoo-art.ru) is dedicated to this event. The website includes interviews with tattoo artists such as Dmitry
Hendrickson, and reveals that most tattooists have been practicing their art for two to three years. These figures
certainly differ from the length of time taken to become a master tattooist inside the Russian prison system.

Interest in bodybuilding has grown in tandem with the popularity of body-art in Russia. Magazines such as Power and
Health, Culture of the Body and others, promote information about this cultural practice today. Federal television pays
particular attention to bodybuilding completions in Russia and those taking place internationally. Posters bearing
images of world famous bodybuilders can be bought easily in bookshops and sporting stores. Sporting goods shops
catering for bodybuilding equipment, the first of which opened in Moscow and Saratov, offer a range of fitness
apparatus and remedies designed to develop muscle bulk, as well as selling educational and other videos.

Bodybuilding in Russia today attracts thousands of young men and women, as well as older adults, who train in
gymnasiums (not all of which are properly equipped for the purpose). As in the case of cosmetic surgery, the practice
of bodybuilding in Russia is accompanied by special terminology full of terms synthesized from the spheres of biology,
sports medicine and general sports jargon.

The human body is the object of various cultural experiments and projects. New to Russia are variety shows, female
and male striptease, wrestling, no-fails-bared fights in which only men participate, Thai boxing, classic and
experimental dance, and the various television shows based on the demonstration of physical strength or
extravagance. The show To Himself the Director, which has been airing for over ten years, is particularly popular with
Russian television audiences. It shows video clips often showing funny experiments with the human body, worthy of
inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records.

In the last decade, more extreme sports have gained recognition. Surfing, diving, parachute jumping, various kinds
of off-road motoring, freestyle snowboarding etc., have generally come from abroad, although some existed under
the old Soviet order. These activities frequently attract the attention of the camera, which depicts bodies sliding on
waves, soaring in air, clambering on the rocks, diving under water. Images depict the surprising abilities of these
sporting bodies.

I should also make mention of new dietary practices in Russia. The last few years have seen the introduction of
various cultures of nutrition, vitamins and mineral complexes, as well as huge numbers of preparations thrown onto
the Russian market by the global pharmaceutical and food industries. While Russians have begun to consume large
amounts of tropical fruits, nuts, bananas, and juices, the market also offers synthetic foods and bogus products that
are often dangerous to the health. The new cultures of nutrition in Russia aim to transform bodies at the biochemical
level. Many Russian men and women today have a better understanding of their own biological make-up, what they
need to treat themselves, and how to avoid harmful substances. They pay better attention to their bodies, because
the consumption of new products is a new cultural exercise. This reorganization of Russian bodies is carried on from
within, by means of the appropriation of new, useful preparations.

I shall not deal with achievements in the spheres of endoprosthetics and bioengineering, nor cyborg-technologies, as
these themes are beyond the scope of my discussion. Additionally, the achievements of Russian science in these
fields are still not significant and remain within the specialized medical field. For the time being, post-Soviet body
politics does not draw on these technologies. The popularizing of such technologies has come to us through
Hollywood, computer games, and science fiction. The cyborg is not represented in the repertoire of post-Soviet
embodiment, but is still no doubt to be found on the screen and in the imaginations of young people.

I want to emphasize that the transformation of human bodies in Russia today is wide spread. People, for different
reasons, pay attention to their appearance, their health, and to their physical condition more than they did even ten
years ago. The habit of reliance on state health systems, in place for the last two decades of the Soviet order, is over.
Today the main way to enact body politics in Russia is not through state institutions, but through the many
individuals and new structures arising to service a growing consumer culture. Organizations such as schools, the
army, hospitals and prisons do continue to contribute to the formation of what Foucault called "docile" bodies
(Foucault, 1991, p.135). Yet of greater influence in contemporary Russia are the mass media, company networks,
and centres of leisure, all of which are conduits to new types of bodiliness, of new ways of existing in a new world. It
is possible to imagine the day when many current body experiments may become outdated. That day might see the
end of extreme ways of reconstruction bodies, such as the cosmetic enhancement of genitals and the practice of
branding. It is likely that the incidence of these practices will reduce with time, being limited to smaller groups
following such body strategies. In the future, much of today's concern for body politics may be seen as trivial and of
little interest. Now, however, Russia is a society in transition, and body politics is in the foreground of its cultural
expression.

References


1 The expression "new Russians" is an ironic term. It refers only to rich males of the new Russian middle class. It is never used to refer to women.

2 The term "rock guys" includes individuals who are toughs-guys, semi-gangsters, criminal sportsmen, and racketeers.