

International transport corridors at the conjunction of geography and politics in Russia

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- The Fable of the Red Star -

*At the beginning of time, the Light of Truth, The Red Star,
reigned over the world.*

*Its light would shine down each night,
protecting humanity's dreams from the dark spirits that
roamed the earth between sunset and dawn.*

*It was a gem worn by the Goddess of Truth, Pravda.
Her vile sister, Krivda, Goddess of Lies, stole this gem
and ever since that fateful night, the world has been enslaved
in corruption and tyranny. Until a hero descends into
Krivda's underworld of spirits, liberates the Red Star from its prison
and returns it to Pravda,
humanity's fate shall be sown in nightmares and tragedy.*

1. Inquiry on places of movement and pace of space

An *international transport corridor* can be understood as a layout of possible practices that are designed to reinforce proximity rather than remoteness and to create a sense of presence instead of absence. It is, in other words, a perfect example to show how by ‘circulating traces’ power makes itself felt in space, not as a flow but as an *immanent affair*¹ that is in constant flux.

The word corridor was originally used of fortifications meaning ‘long hallway’ and first appeared in 1814.² Etymology of the word corridor goes back to the Italian word *corridore*, a ‘gallery’ and the Latin word *currere* (current, ‘to run’). In more recent meaning it is used to denote ‘a belt of land linking two other areas or following a road or river’ or ‘long hall-way’. In Russian language the word corridor is spelled *koridor* although form *korridor* is also used in the texts analysed below. *Koridor* is synonym to passage, and thereby also to words *prohod, hod, doroga, prohod, put’, kanal*.³ In the above-mentioned senses the word *corridor* denotes a durable thing that is designed to *enable movement through the space*.

Thus, I suggest that transport corridors are understood as ordered arrangements of space that are aimed to change the tempo (and often also direction) of movement in space. Corridors impose certain rhythm and synchrony to space and thus are geographical expressions of a conjunction between time and space. But unlike musical tempo that is ontologically subjective, the rhythm that corridor arrangements inflict upon practices of movement is epistemically objective. A corridor is the very metronome that constitutes what is counted as *allegro* or *adagio* in a specific environment. The pace of movement has less to do with the built environment per se, but rather it is intimately linked with practices constitutive for the ‘building of movement’.

¹ Concept ‘immanent affair’ originates in Foucault and as explained by Allen, ‘an immanent perspective conceives of power as *inseparable* from its effects. Power in this context has less to do with the extent to which people conform or comply with, say, the pronouncements of some authority than with the effectiveness with which subjects internalize their meaning’. Allen 2003, 65.

² http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/corridor?view=uk;

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=corridor>.

³ www.lingvo.ru (www-site visited in 13.01.2005).

The decisive feature of these practices is their *transparency*. The use of new technical innovations, telecommunications technology and other developments in the transport sphere (e.g. development of container transport) allows to speed up the movement of goods and people, as well as to monitor these movements in space.⁴ Technological possibilities make it possible to *gaze* the movement in space unlike ever before. The achievement of transparency, and thus, pace of space, is a benchmark that may bring a competitive edge in the competition over global transport flows.

The feature of this transparency is comparable to post-modern architecture. Thanks to high-tech glass our sight no longer needs to be obstructed by a wall or a façade.⁵ Even if the concept of wall is thus challenged, the transparency and lightness in the appearance requires more, not less, from the supporting structure. The ‘supporting structure’ of the transport corridors is a set of rules and conventions that may have a form of treaty or other type of declaration. In other words, a treaty signed and ratified in proper order creates a standing possibility for the existence of the transport corridor, and is itself a procedural step towards a common agreement on the imposition of a new status “transport corridor”.

Thus, the durability of corridors does not depend on the fact that their functioning necessitates the existence of tangible things such as certain type of buildings and transport infrastructure.⁶ The durability of space in this case is a feature of institutional fact, which means that:

‘There is a socially created normative component in the institutional structure, and this is accounted for only by the fact that the institutional structure is a structure of rules, and the actual rules that we specify in describing the institution will determine those aspects under which the system is normative.’⁷

⁴ For example, in AGTC agreement parties agree that ‘there shall be, no stops at the border or, if unavoidable, only very short stops (of no more than 30 minutes)’. AGTC 1991, Annex IV. In an inventory of AGTC standards and parameters carried out in year 2000 it is, however noted that a relevant number of border-crossing points do not meet the target value of 30 minutes. TRANS/WP.24/2000/5.

⁵ Archidea 2005, 12.

⁶ In drawing this analogy between construction of buildings and construction of institutional facts, I want to underline that “construction of social reality” in the Searlean sense presupposes existence of tangible things, even if the very “construction” derives from inter-subjective agreement to count certain things as institutional facts.

⁷ Searle 1995, 146-147.

Consequently, differentiation between external and internal of a ‘corridor’ is not visible for the eye; it does not rest on the tangible columns, facades or other built structures but on a common agreement to count specific practices and infrastructure objects as an institutional fact ‘international transport corridor’. In the UN framework, for example, it is acknowledged that ‘the corridor arrangements are set of rules governing all aspects of transport and transit of goods throughout a given route (corridor), backed by a treaty signed by all participating countries’⁸. Assignment of a new status ‘international transport corridor’ creates new possibilities and responsibilities for action (thus the word ‘institutional f-acts’) for example in the form of documentation (e.g. TIR regulation in international transport), technical guidelines (e.g. parameters for building of roads that meet international standards) and instructions concerning customs efficiency, bottlenecks, infrastructure investment etc. within the established spatial configuration.

In this very practical sense, the creation of predictable environment, an ordered arrangement of space, is achieved through the development of a body of international agreements that regulate movement between “international” or “sovereign” spaces.⁹ Cooperation in this sphere is fairly recent, for example an idea of sovereign air space emerged partly in response to the developments already taken place in aviation industry. Here, as in other spheres of transportation, the principle of sovereign autonomy on territory and free flow of commerce have had conflicting implications on certain policy issues, for example in regard to over flight rights.¹⁰

⁸ ‘Landlocked countries access: corridor arrangements’.

⁹ The three jurisdictional norms part of which have their roots in the seventeenth century and have been effectively developed since the nineteenth century cut across main international transport spheres (shipping, aviation industry, telecommunications and postal services). These norms are: state’s right of free access to international space (freedom of high seas and open skies), right of innocent passage through other state’s sovereign jurisdictional spheres, and state’s right to exclude foreign services and firms from their sovereign territories. Zacher and Sutton argue that international regimes (such as norms that regulate international shipping) are grounded on mutual interest among states and not on imposition by a hegemonic state or a grouping of the most powerful countries. Their theoretical approach draws largely on neoliberalism but also integrate certain insights from neorealism. Writers subscribe to Stephen Krasner’s definition of international regimes as ‘sets of implicit and explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations’. Although I am not using concept regime in my study, the idea of corridors as systems of constitutive rules neatly fits to this overall picture. Zacher – Sutton 1996, 213.

¹⁰ Britain was first to declare sovereignty over adjacent airspace in 1911. This was followed by most European states and by 1914 there was *de facto* norm of state sovereignty over air space. A right for innocent passage, as well other aspects of jurisdiction were developed in inter-war years, and formulated into a Convention on International Civil Aviation in 1944. The controversial issue in this

The ordering principle of corridors is mostly hierarchical and closed rather than multifaceted and open. The corridor arrangements imply for homogenization of places where landscape thus created bear certain common features; family resemblance lacking from the places beyond the corridor.¹¹ To give one example, positioning of Russia between ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ acquires in the framework of global markets a temporal rather than geographical meaning. Russia’s status as a *bridge* is thus basically reduced to the pace of movement on the trans-Siberian railway. ‘By early 1999 a container sent from a Japanese port to Germany’, writes Westwood, ‘would most likely make the trip in 477 hours, of which 292 hours would be taken by the rail transit over Russian and Belarussian railways to Brest (10 390 kilometres, of which 623 km were over Belarussian tracks)’¹².

The opening of Russian discourse on transport policy in general and the concept of international transport corridors in particular will benefit from the body of literature on the impact of geography in explaining trade and development.¹³ However, the driving force of my inquiries on the concept of international transport corridors is an attempt to understand power-space convergence in the framework of Russian politics.

2. Inquiry on modal character of power/space relation

The Soviet Red Star: violence of absolute space

The comic book *The Soviet Red Star* marked a revolution within the comics world. Since its first appearance in the year 2000, the comic soon became an international cult. The creator of comic books series *The Red Star* Christian Gosset draws a parallel

Convention is a question about transit through sovereign state territory. Zacher – Sutton 1996, 7, 91-93. Disagreement between the EU and the Russian Federation over Siberian overflights is a case in point.

¹¹ This differentiation is basically what Castells means by *space of flows* and *space of places*. See. Castells 1996 210-415.

¹² Westwood 2002, 131.

¹³ Fujimura sites recent studies that have identified variables between geography, state of transport infrastructure and foreign trade relations. According to her, it is not surprising that better access to world markets, either through means of technical development (improvements in transport infrastructure) or due to favourable geographical position reduces transport costs and thus increases relative gains in foreign trade. For landlocked countries it is thus, important to invest to cross-border transport infrastructure (including institutional arrangements such as ‘corridors’) that helps to reduce transport costs. Fujimura 2004

between the Fable of The Red Star and Soviet authorities' failed attempt to liberate the Light of Truth for all the world. The story is set in an allegorical USSR – the URRS (the United Republics of The Red Star) – and follows sorcerer heroes who are fighting to end the regime that has had them and their powers governmentally controlled since the Russian revolution. The sorcerers have magic powers but that is dependent upon the their government-issue spell components. Sorcerers use their spells, called 'protocol' to create havoc and destruction in the battlefield as well as increase industrial production.¹⁴

The comic succeeds to illustrate violence immanent in the absolute Soviet space. Russian geographer Vladimir Kaganskii addresses the same topic and identifies structural components of the Soviet space.¹⁵ The underlying logic of relation between Soviet power and space is hierarchical argues Kaganskii: 'the whole space: place and position, relations and connections, distances, directions – are differentiated according to [specific] status. Place in the space is [the same as] status in the state'.¹⁶ The main components of this 'total space' include the Soviet 'administrative-territorial division' (ATD) and the military-industrial complex (MIC).¹⁷ In short:

USSR (ussr) = the Communist Party (ATD+MIC)¹⁸

The world of the Soviet Red Star points to a peculiar interface of power and space that dominated Soviet thinking. The power is emergent in the 'protocol' that thus creates a specific kind of landscape: a patchwork of the vertical order of space. The order in the

¹⁴ 'The Fall of the Soviet Union'. (www-doc)

¹⁵ Kaganskii's starting point is not to refute traditional in geographical thought opposition between place and space, rather he presents how and why 'absolute space' subordinated place in the Soviet-era. There is certain resemblance to Lefebvre's conceptualisation of the social production of space, partly due to both of their leanings on Marxist thinking. It is possible, however, to interpret Kaganskii's work as an initial attempt to reject simple either/or logic inherent in the oppositional conceptualisation of space and place. I will later elaborate on this more thoroughly. See Agnew 2005, 89.

¹⁶ Kaganskii 2001, 137.

¹⁷ Kaganskii 2001, 170.

¹⁸ Kaganskii's formula provides a reinterpretation of Lenin's famous phrase that the Soviet power equals to the communist party and the electrification of the whole country. In the GOELRO plan introduced in the early 1920s crystallizes authorities attempt to compromise with the territory – to project centrifugal power and hierarchy over the space and chaos. Development of the electrical grids as a centralized infrastructure and emphasis on hydropower copied Western forms rather than provided a real socialist alternative to it. A decentralized plan for local electrification and village stations was debated but rejected – GOELRO plan was a political programme as well as a technological one, writes Buck-Moss. Buck-Moss 2002, 137-140. Kaganskii 2001, 170.

space is articulated in and through the set of abbreviations (USSR, ATD, RSFSR etc). The skilful use of the right words provides the agent with magical powers but the words themselves lose their meaning. Soviet passion for abbreviations was, according to Medvedev, a ‘conscious desire to hide reality under clumsy, vague and disharmonious abbreviations’.¹⁹ Authorities closely monitored the use of magical words. To know the meaning of abbreviations was a sign of political awareness – literacy, and their use required careful reading of situational context.²⁰ The use of language inappropriately, for example telling a joke ridiculing the Soviet power would in the 1930s mean a long prison sentence somewhere at the outskirts of Siberia, while telling a similar joke in the later years of Perestroika would be, most probably met with laughter.

This is just to underline that saying something during the worst years of the Stalin era, was not simply stating something – but was counted as *doing something* (against the regime) and was thus met with suspicion.²¹ Similarly, authoritative speech acts, statements by leaders of the nation on the occasion of Party Congress were instances that would, potentially, change the lives of the thousands of people. Like in the comic *Soviet Red Star* where the power of ‘protocol’ was immanent in the wording – and its use tied to the body of sorcerer, the *Soviet power* incarnated in the body of leader, a trace of physical presence which was translated through distance by the network of party offices, radio broadcasts, *propusk* system and other means. Soviet authorities, like their counterparts in other countries, realized that creation of mass consciousness required an ability to act from distance, to make far away seem close at hand and this is what finally counts as power.²²

French sociologist Bruno Latour is among thinkers who has elaborated on conjunction of geography and power; or more explicitly tie between society, geography and authority. As noted by Latour, bridging the distance is an act of power and it is made

¹⁹ Medvedev 1995, 88.

²⁰ Medvedev 1995, 88.

²¹ Oxford philosopher John Austin was first to distinguish between statements that were just meant to represent things, from statements where the actual saying something counts as doing something. Later speech-act theorists’ have elaborated Austin’s initial theory, for example John Searle whose theory on construction of institutional facts is applied in this study. See Austin 1965; Searle 1995.

²² Allen 2003.

possible through the mobilization and translation – by the ‘circulating traces’²³. The ‘trace’ is virtually ‘any element, entity or piece of documentation that can be inscribed or re-presented in some way so as to hold the mobile world “out there” constant’.²⁴ The capacity to act at a distance requires that mobilized objects, knowledges, mappings etc. ‘could be combined in some way as to produce a stable, ordered arrangement’²⁵. The act of translation is a ‘mediated exercise of power’²⁶ that, be it a radio voice of the leader, party membership, or as I will discuss later, ‘international transport corridor’, creates a particular type of (spatial) order.

Contrary to traditional geopolitical thinking in which emphasis is on *power over* space, power as understood here, is not something that can be held or possessed, it does not flow or traverse through the space intact.

‘Power as an outcome cannot and should not be “read off” from a resource base, regardless of its size and scope. Power in this sense is no more to be found “in” the apparatus of rule than sound is to be found “in” the wood of musical instruments. It is, as suggested, a relational effect, not a property of someone or some “thing”’.²⁷

An impact power makes in a particular place is what finally counts as proximity or remoteness, presence or absence. Allen suggests that ‘geography makes a difference to what we experience as power and to how it is exercised’. In other words, the very composition of space ‘serves as both a resource and the means through which power is exercised’.²⁸ Kaganskii shows how the emergence of ‘administrative-market’ in the Soviet era effectively displaced physical distance as an indicator of political importance of the place.

Peculiarity of the Soviet absolute space was, writes Kaganskii that there ‘faraway was close-at-hand, whereas nearby was distant. Distances in the landscape were not linked with the distances in physical space but were tied to the status or position in the power

²³ Latour 1999.

²⁴ Allen 2003, 129.

²⁵ Allen 2003, 132.

²⁶ Allen 2003, 133.

²⁷ Allen 2003, 5.

²⁸ Allen 2003, 10-11.

structure'.²⁹ Actual physical distance lost its significance as such and what counted was the position in the power hierarchy. This led to a paradox: in a country where space was in excess spatial relations were secondary.³⁰

Kaganskii's interpretation of the Soviet space as 'absolute' – total space is persuasive and it is largely compatible with the widely shared perception of the Soviet system's monolithic unity. By reconstructing 'absoluteness' of the Soviet space Kaganskii opens up its 'absolutely' centrifugal character. On the surface vertical, hierarchical and administrative relations subordinated horizontal, territorial and everyday practices and created them.³¹ The contours of vertical order were marked by the lack of direct connections between the regions. The connection between the centre (Moscow) and the regional centres or centres of satellite countries were prioritised over horizontal: region-to-region linkages.³² As persuasive as this interpretation sounds, it leads to a question: how were we to make a leap from tangible things that, in themselves have no semantic or what-so-ever meaning, to intersubjective sense of collectivity that they are purported to embody?

An idea of trace recycled in space seems to suggest that it is this trace that brings together *connectivity*³³ and *collectivity*³⁴. The relation between the two is in fact contingent; *connectivity* does not automatically entail *collectivity* even if collectivity does require a minimum threshold of connectivity.³⁵

Rupture of Soviet power: opening of habitual in the power-space relation

Kaganskii's conceptualisation of space-power relation in the Soviet-era seems plausible, but inadequate. The emphasis on structural properties (systemic character)

²⁹ Kaganskii 2001, 153.

³⁰ Kaganskii 2001, 153-142.

³¹ Kaganskii 2001, 136.

³² Medvedev 1995.

³³ Connectivity is here understood in a rather trivial sense as a set of networks (transport, communications technology, electric grid) that enable transferring of images, voice, things and people across physical space.

³⁴ Thacker defines collectivity as "an aggregation of individuated units in relation to each other, with the quality of the relations largely specified by the context. Collectivity presupposes spatial organization, though this spatial organization does not necessarily require spatial proximity". Thacker 2004.

³⁵ See Durkheim 1982; Mann 1986, 10; Giddens 1981, 90.

of space does not sufficiently take into account disunity and disarray at the deeper levels that was only partly visible on the surface of ‘absolute space’. To suggest an alternative reading of the ‘Soviet space’ I will quote from Kharkhordin’s study of collective and individual in Russia where he writes that:

‘Within the deeper levels, practices that created unity at the surface advanced aims different from the official ones. The practices interconnected in new and strange ways, which finally led to the reabsorption and implosion of the surface into an all-melting core’.³⁶

In his work Kharkhordin discusses split between official and hidden intimate spheres, a split that was later almost ‘automatized’. The ‘changing faces’: building of ones behaviour in accordance with the official thus retaining a hidden core of self was ‘a way to do things’. ‘In the end’, writes Kharkhordin, ‘this latter-day dissimulation came to be practiced almost automatically: sitting at a Komsomol meeting, one raises one’s arm in a ritualised vote without reflection, while being immersed in reading Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; switching if faces becomes an embodied skill’.³⁷ The central question is how the rigid surface of absolute power was fastened, how it *co-existed* with a fluid core of ritualised, habitual aspects of everyday life.

French thinker Henri Lefebvre opens up a new ground for an inquiry of space-power relation by pointing out that preceding *illusion of transparency*³⁸ is an ideology of spoken and written word to the detriment of social practice.³⁹ Lefebvre hits to the point when he asks: ‘does language – logically, epistemologically or genetically speaking – precede, accompany or follow social space? Is it precondition of social space or merely a formulation of it?’ Later he suggests that we should pay attention to gestures, traces and marks rather than intentionality of action because ‘intentionality is a late development, accompanying that of brain and hands, but traces and marks play a part in animal life from a very early date’. It is ‘an intelligence of the body’ that

³⁶ Kharkhordin 1999, 279.

³⁷ Kharkhordin 1999, 278.

³⁸ By *illusion of transparency* Lefebvre refers to appearance of space as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. This goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. An analogue to *Soviet red star* and sorcerers with their magical powers points to the existence of religio-political space that is set apart and reserved – prison camps and secret military-industrial complex of the Soviet era or, perhaps in more lucrative sense, *transport corridor* as detached from adjacent territories. See Lefebvre 1991, 28-35.

³⁹ Lefebvre 1991, 28.

by its implicit and explicit connection with the ‘realm of lived’ conditions place, and through this space – a ‘realm of conceived’.⁴⁰ He proposes that ‘Perhaps what have to be uncovered are as-yet concealed relations between space and language: perhaps the ‘logicalness’ intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spatiality capable of bringing order to the qualitative chaos (the practico-sensory realm) presented by the perception of things’.⁴¹

Lefebvre accompanies Nietzsche who argued that ‘through words and concepts we are still continually misled into imagining things as being simpler than they are, separate from one another, indivisible, each existing in and for itself’.⁴² Nietzsche’s irritation led to a solution: knowledge is always pragmatic; it is about power (vlast’) reshaped by human interest. Each instance that gives a form to what is, that is to the flux, is an instance of a particular kind.⁴³ The concealed relations between space and language to which Lefebvre hints belong to ‘realm of lived’ it is the habitual use of language that may reveal what the words as such do not express. Here I suggest an interpretation of speech act theory where emphasis is on accidental, not on systemic character of language-use, and where the use of language as suggested by Wright is understood as a sort of gesture: the rules of action, as well as plausible ways of interpreting those actions are emergent in the situational use of language.⁴⁴

This suggests towards a research analytical application where the tie between power and space is *reconstructed* through the analysis of the instances of language use. In a non-systematic, pro-habitual sense a *speech act theory* provides means to do this. This is because the speech act theory is positioned at the crossroads of (the formal logic of) practical reasoning and practices of language use in everyday action, and thus provides a means to inquire not only what is meant by an utterance, but even more importantly, what is done with it at that particular moment, under those aspects, and in that particular context.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Lefebvre 1991, 174; Agnew 2005, 90.

⁴¹ Lefebvre 1991, 16-17.

⁴² Nietzsche 1996, 306.

⁴³ Siisiäinen 2001, 105-109. On Nietzsche’s interpretation of flux see also Stegmaier 2001; 20-36; Deleuze 1992, 9.

⁴⁴ Wright 1971, 115-116; See also Searle 2001, 19-22.

⁴⁵ Wright 1982, 250; Austin 1965, 121. Margolis’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s notion *forms of life* shows a way in which to adjust Searle’s otherwise systemic interpretation of construction of institutional f-acts. Margolis 1989.

Performative utterances, at least those studied by Austin, carry with them an easily recognized script; a pattern of action that when repeated appropriately counts as authoritative action.⁴⁶ However, Bourdieu in his formulation of *habitus* concept points towards ‘creative’ inventive capacity of active agent, thus retaining an aspect of accidental (as also in Wittgenstein’s notion ‘language game’) in the definition.⁴⁷ It is in the possibility of accident and active agent that brings up contingency of power-space relation.

Friction between *vertical order of space* – a representation of (absolute) space - and representational space, a lived realm that is opened by non-literal as well as literal gestures. An emphatic reading of texts and situations is required for, in other words an ‘understanding of how something can normally be expected to go in a familiar situation’.⁴⁸ What I mean by emphatic reading and how it ties with the logic of research analysis is exemplified in the following brief discussion on how ‘international’ is represented in the context of road building in Russia and what makes these representations carnivalesque.

⁴⁶ Wispurs offers an interpretation of Austin’s speech-act theory where he emphasises repetitive character of performatives rather than presumption of consciousness-to-oneself in the act of speaking that is characteristic for Austin’s formulation. Wispur 1989, 177.

⁴⁷ Bourdieu 1990, 12-13. In Scahill.

⁴⁸ Watson 2001, 104.

3. Representations of Russian ‘international’ space



The length of Russia’s road network is approximately 900 000 kilometres of which the share of ‘federal roads’⁴⁹ is about 5 per cent, less than 50 000 kilometres. Notwithstanding this asymmetry in favour of other general roads, federal roads dominate representational space of Russian discourse on road transport.⁵⁰ The ‘mark of the zero kilometre’ (*znaka nulevogo kilometra*) is placed on the red square from where distances along the federal roads are counted. This act effectively reproduces Moscow as a locus of post-Soviet Russian space.⁵¹ In this sense, the mark of the zero kilometre has a similar function that the ‘kilowatt-hour’ had in the Soviet context. It is

⁴⁹ The decree on the classification of Russian roads was adopted in December 1991 and according to it Russian roads are divided into three types: general, departmental and private. The general roads are further classified into federal and local (regional) roads. The roads between Moscow and the capitals of the NIS countries, as well the administrative centres of the Russian regions are counted as ‘federal roads’. This has significance since roads having this status are eligible to have federal funding. Postanovlenie December 24, 1991 N61.

⁵⁰ This asymmetry has also practical significance. The level of budget financing for construction and maintenance of the common infrastructure base in Russia has remained low during the last fifteen years. According to the chief of the Road Agency Oleg Belozerov, if the situation with financing does not improve ‘the percentage of roads meeting safety standards will drop from today’s 24 percent to five percent by 2010’. The funding for Russia’s highway infrastructure, for example has plunged threefold over the past four years, from RUR 333 billion in 2000 to RUR 111 billion in 2005. At the same time, major budget financing is targeted at the few major road projects, including the construction of the road section between Chita and Khabarovsk. Radio Majak March 1, 2005; RosBusinessConsulting March 14, 2005.

⁵¹ The ‘zero point’ was opened at an official ceremony held in July 1996. Rossiiskaja Gazeta June 24, 1996 p.16; Rossiiskaja Gazeta June 26, 1996, p.140.

‘an index of culture and progress’⁵² and more importantly a trace of physical presence of authority thus mediated across the country. The festive celebration of ‘the zero kilometre’ in Moscow or the ‘zero point of the Chita-Khabarovsk road’⁵³, or traversing ‘from Lissabon to Vladivostok’⁵⁴ are examples of public actions through which Russian state exercises its authority in the space.

The imagining of a path between ‘Lissabon and Vladivostok’ rather than just between ‘Moscow and Vladivostok’ hints of an important change in the discursive level. Unlike in the Soviet-era when the Soviet space was not only seen as absolute but also largely unconnected from the outside world, the emphasis has today sifted towards celebration of interconnectedness of the Russian territory with the adjacent areas – Europe and Asia. The general impetus of corridor policies in Russia is deduced from an observation that ‘since Russia comprises thirty per cent of the territory of Eurasian continent and has a well-developed transport system, it objectively is a natural bridge providing a set of transit connections in this direction’. By linking this to the global economic trends, it is further explained that ‘Russia’s geopolitical position between two dynamically growing centres of the world trade – Europe and Asia – predestines her special role in guaranteeing the Euro-Asian connections’. Without hesitation it is, however, also acknowledged that currently Russia fails to take advantage of her geographical position.⁵⁵ The development of transport infrastructure is then associated as ‘technological means to consolidate Russia’s Eurasian character and influence on geopolitical processes’⁵⁶

An advertisement of one of the largest forwarding companies in Russia, the DGTV Group is also suggestive of the type of change in the representations of space. It says

⁵² Cited in Buck-Morss 2000, 140.

⁵³ The opening of through traffic on the federal road between Chita and Khabarovsk took place in 26 of February 2004. The ceremony marked an opening of the first direct link between Moscow and Vladivostok, and subsequently ending of the 30-year *dolgostroi*.

⁵⁴ Russian Ministry of transport organized together with International Road Transport Union (IRU) an international ‘truck caravan’ Lisbon-Vladivostok. This event took place between May-July 2004 and was to illuminate abilities of road transport in the transport of goods between Europe and Asia. More specifically, the caravan was to show that due to completion of road section between Chita and Khabarovsk it was possible to travel by road through Russia. A sequence of events taking place as well as public statements delivered in different spots on the road were published almost on-line in the web-pages of IRU and Mintrans. See e.g. www.mintrans.ru.

⁵⁵ FTP 2001, 13.

⁵⁶ Transit potential (...) 14, March 2000.

that ‘Whatever your cargo. Wherever its destination’⁵⁷, thus undermining a popular myth about Russia as Eurasia’s blind alley. This advertisement is interesting also as it opens up an interpretation of Russian space as something light (by way of reference to outer Space) where, with the help of high technology it is easy to travel. The company’s logistical centres are marked with a *star* denoting both stars on the sky, as well as maybe more implicitly the former Soviet time practice to mark Moscow with a star in the maps representing Soviet transport space (e.g. ‘Moscow as port of five oceans’ poster published in the ‘USSR in Construction’ magazine in 1937). The absence of clear borders between ‘Russia’, ‘Europe’ and ‘China’(!) is also a departure from the Soviet representation style where the border of the USSR was marked as a clear and precise boundary.

The extent of change is exemplified by the fact that still in the late 1980s the Soviet Union had only nine border-crossings and few roads that were allowed for international transport.⁵⁸ To reinforce Russia’s status as a transit country state authorities responsible for conducting the integration policies recently appealed to President Vladimir Putin to end the Soviet-era practice of prohibiting the publication of precise coordinates of places in the country. This would allow Russians to legally use satellite positioning systems and, as the Ministry of Transport especially hopes for – to make Russia more attractive as a transit corridor between Europe and Asia.⁵⁹ A being a *transit bridge* is partly conceived by creating a image of safe, fast and reliable transit route - an exercise that requires rearticulation of the space-power relation. The festive celebrations of ‘zero point’ or opening of particular road sections are new ways to address space-power problem in Russia. At the same time, as the following description will show, the events themselves carry a sense of Soviet past in the guise of Komsomol type fanfares.

New road! New life! New Russia! Carnival of movement in Khabarovsk

⁵⁷ Kommersant 23, March 2005; USSR in Construction 1937.

⁵⁸ Transport Rossii 1998, N8, p. 3. During the Soviet-era trucks heading to Baltic States or Ukraine, for example, were required to pass via Moscow even if it made a loop of several thousand kilometres.

⁵⁹ ‘Are Russians about to get accurate maps?’. 2 September 2005 Russia.profile.org.

Festive celebrations of road transport are modern equivalents of medieval carnivals as described by Bakhtin.⁶⁰ The carnivalesque features of the road caravans or openings of the new road sections result from combination of things: perfect seriousness of public authorities praising the meaning of an event mixed with their tacit silence of the details of the project and clear contradiction between their utterances and physical environment where the event is taking place. Also, performative utterances themselves; combination of body language, often self-evident, descriptive words said and the apparent *performance* of a speech act add to the sense of carnival. Although events have features of typical PR-stunts, the organization of truck caravans or massive theatrical opening ceremonies speaks of the habitual aspects of power; ways of doing things that tie power with space in the Russian discourse. An opening ceremony of the federal road between Chita and Khabarovsk in Siperia provides a means to show how these lines of thought can be applied in a particular case.

The opening of *through traffic* on the federal road Chita-Habarovsk took place in February 26, 2004 in the city of Khabarovsk⁶¹ at the time when the road was generously concealed beneath packed snow. Present at the ceremony was president Putin together with other high-level officials from Moscow. While regional media was understandably filled with descriptions of the event and president's visit, the news about the opening of the new road was welcomed with excitement and pride in Moscow as well.⁶² The federal TV channel Rossiya in its main news programme *Vesti* showed a special news-clip dedicated to the opening. It was stated that:

“Amur” (an official name of the federal highway) is not just a road from point “A”, Chita – to point “B” Khabarovsk. Now, one may drive by car on this route from Moscow to Vladivostok. It is the longest road in the world, its length is ten thousand kilometres – people living in the Far East of Russia name it, nothing less than automobile Transsib’⁶³.

⁶⁰ Bahtin 2002.

⁶¹ City of Habarovsk is a capital of Habarovsk region in Siberia. Distance between Moscow and Khabarovsk is 6147 kilometres and distance between Khabarovsk and Vladivostok is about 300 kilometres.

⁶² “Amur Oktrylasja”, Regionalnaja Sluzhba Novostei, Chita 27.2. 2004 (16:42); In the mintrans press-reliese the opening ceremony was compared with the opening of the trans-Siberian railway in 1903. Mintrans Press release June 11, 2004; ‘Dal’nii Vostok stanovitsja blizhe’. Vesti 26 Feb 2004. <http://www.vesti.ru/news.html?id=50259&tid=20361>.

⁶³ ‘Dal’nii Vostok stanovitsja blizhe’, Vesti Feb 26, 2004 14:58.

The head of Duma's committee on Energy, Transport and Communications V.A. Jazev echoed what soon became a mainstream interpretation of the significance of the event. In his congratulation telegram to Transport Minister Frank he announced that:

‘This wonderful event opens, not only a direct road link between Moscow and Vladivostok. This is linked to the development of regional economies in Siberia and Far East, and the securing of the Russia's security interests. I am sure that this event contributes to new progress in the transport sphere in general.’⁶⁴

What Jazev declines to say explicitly was that until the completion of this road section there was not direct, all-year around road linkage between European and eastern parts of Russia.⁶⁵ Even after the official opening of the *through traffic* on the Amur highway authorities have had to admit that if one travels on this new road it is better to have a heavier vehicle than a normal car.⁶⁶ But why then this extensive coverage of the opening ceremony if it was pretty obvious to everybody that what was opened was not yet really functional in a normal sense of the road? Although it can be argued that the timing of the opening ceremony was planned in advance to fit with the schedule of president Putin's campaign for the second term in office, this is not an answer to the right question. The proper question is; why was the term *through traffic* used in this occasion? What are the symbolic and practical meanings of this term? I would argue that this instance of language use operates against the background of corridor concept.

The concept of *through traffic* does not carry with it any special technical meaning related to road engineering in particular. Rather the notion through traffic operates

⁶⁴ Pravitelstvennaja telegramma February 26, 2004.

⁶⁵ For over 30 years the Chita-Khabarovsk project had carried an infamous status of *dolgostroi*. The project was approved by the Soviet government in July 13, 1966 and it was planned to be ready by the year 1980. The actual construction work had began in 1978 and until January 2003 1224 kilometres from the total 2165 km was built of which approximately 600 kilometres had asphalt-betony surface. During the Soviet period construction work proceeded with ‘socialist tempo’. Between 1978 and 1995 only 35 kilometres of road was build per year (sections nearby Chita, Blagoveshensk and Khabarovsk cities) whilst during the last half year (between autumn 2003 until January 2004) the work progressed one kilometre per day. During the Soviet period the construction work was led by the military brigades and effectively hampered after the Afghan war started. Even now, though, parts of the road construction are carried by the militaries. The project is notorious for being a black whole for federal funds and a gold mine fore unscrupulous speculators. Observers estimate that over 40 billion rubbles (1.3. bln dollars) have been spent on the road since 1978 (in 2003 prices). ‘Amur sobiraet Rossiju’; ‘Amur dlja okruga – bolshe, tsem doroga’; RRR August 31, 2004.

⁶⁶ In an interview to Russian radio station Majak head of the Russian road agency confirmed that driving on the Chita-Habarovsk road is possible mainly by heavy trucks and bulldozers. Radio Majak March 1, 2005.

against the background of corridor concept, thus implying that the completion of that particular road section opens not just a road but also a totality of international transport corridor. But to understand multiple meanings of that *road section* and its *connectivity* we need to find out what was said in the opening ceremony (and immediately before and after). Description of the opening ceremony, written by Russian journalist Andrei Kolesnikov for Kommersant newspaper is an invaluable source for my inquiry.

So what was opened in that case if not a new road and a bridge (opening of the road included also an opening of a new bridge in the city of Khabarovsk)? As it was written to the above-mentioned telegram sent to Minister Frank, the ceremony was organized for the opening of the *through traffic* on the Chita-Khabarovsk road, and not just between Chita and Khabarovsk but along the whole distance of 12 thousand kilometres from Paris, Berlin, Moscow and Vladivostok. It was especially because of this latter reason that the transport officials from Moscow had travelled to Khabarovsk. This was confirmed by the then acting minister of transport, Sergei Frank who emphasised that the road was really part of the Paris – Vladivostok road. ‘Yes’, answered Frank to Kolesnikov’s question, ‘and no one has a choice, neither French nor us. Today we have a one road. And it already has traffic. ‘Through traffic?’ asked Kolesnikov. ‘Only, yes. But we will continue construction work’.⁶⁷

After the blue-white-red colour ribbon was successfully cut by one of the road construction workers, the governor of the Khabarovsk region, Viktor Ishaev uttered: ‘And now, through traffic is opened. Soon Far East will become Near (East) (*i skoro Dal’nii Vostok stanet Blizhnim*)!’ After Ishaev’s short and ambiguous (he probably wanted to point out that with the opening of the new road eastern most parts of Russia will become closer to European Russia) speech-act a columna of trucks drove to the bridge with placates placed on the roof of each truck to which was written: ‘New road! New life! New Russia!’⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Kolesnikov 2005, 343-345.

⁶⁸ Kolesnikov 2005, 346.

A performative speech act ‘through traffic is (hereby) opened’ fulfils procedural conditions for happy performatives defined by Austin.⁶⁹ It is not a simple statement describing that ‘the through traffic is opened’ since it is uttered on an occasion of *opening ceremony* with due regard to an accepted procedure and performed by an authorized person. The formal authorization for the opening of this road section derives from the decision signed by the Head of Federal Road agency Igor Sljunjajev.⁷⁰ We may ask was this ceremonial act, performed in the presence of president Putin and other high-level officials from Moscow required since the signature of the above-mentioned decision had already confirmed the opening of the road?⁷¹ Searle gives us a partial answer when he writes:

‘Where the institution demands more of its participants than it can extract by force, where consent is essential, a great deal of pomp, ceremony, and razzmatazz is used in such a way as to suggest that something more is going on than simply acceptance of the formula X counts as Y in C.’⁷²

By insisting on the opening of *through traffic* Ishaev and other authorities were in fact referring to something beyond the practice of driving (already for two years by the moment of the opening ceremony) on the Chita-Khabarovsk road.⁷³ The razzmatazz in this case was required since the federal authorities were behaving *as if* the opening of the through traffic on Chita-Khabarovsk road marked a further confirmation of an ‘opening of the *international (road) transport corridor “East-West”*. In the following statement Minister Levitin explains that:

⁶⁹ Austin 1965.

⁷⁰ Special commission had earlier the same year travelled from Chita to Khabarovsk and based on the estimations of this commission an opening of traffic on the road section was given a green light. <http://www.rosavtodor.ru/shownewsn.php?id=714>.

⁷¹ Similar question could be asked in terms of ship naming of which Austin uses as an example of ceremonial acts. In the case of US Navy, for example, the Secretary of the Navy selects names (from those recommended in a memorandum signed by the Chief of Naval Operations) for specific ships and announces them. While there is no set time for assigning a name, it is customarily done before the ship is christened. The ship's sponsor--the person who will christen the ship--is also selected and invited by the Secretary. In the case of ships named for individuals, an effort is made to identify the eldest living direct female descendant of that individual to perform the role of ship's sponsor. For ships with other name sources, it is customary to honour the wives of senior naval officers or public officials. ‘Naming Ships’ (www-document).

⁷² Searle 1995, 118.

⁷³ Another interpretation is that since the literal meaning of the words *through traffic* denotes ‘traffic that does not want to stop in a town’ authorities imply towards what is not yet being completed. That is, the network of minor roads that provides a link between towns and villages adjacent to the highway. Since I cannot know whether there is factual evidence to support this negative interpretation it is only mentioned here at the footnotes. <http://www.freesearch.co.uk/dictionary/through+traffic>.

‘International transport corridor “East-West”, into which Transsib and the road Kaliningrad – Vladivostok belongs, already functions; and the five-years time (journalist had asked if the Chita-Khabarovsk road would be completed within the next five years) will be needed to build hard surface along the whole route length. It is another thing that currently only road sections from the westernmost border of Russia until Nizhniy Novgorod comply with the international requirements.’⁷⁴

The act of counting Chita-Khabarovsk road as a part of *international transport corridor East-West* contradicts, in fact with the definition of ‘international’ transport corridors. In the federal programme on ‘Modernization of the Transport System 2002-2010’ the criteria for selecting the actual *route* of the corridor include the following. The general rule is that the route must have *technically well equipped transport communications, it already is part of the main transport route (magistral)*, and to it concentrates *foreign trade and transit cargo and passenger flows* or there are favourable prospective for drawing the above-mentioned flows.⁷⁵

The further criteria include that the route *have significant reserves for freight capacity*, the *price and throughput time of cargo* are competitive throughout the entire freight route, *the quality of transport* (security, services, IT-technology to guarantee full information) is high, and it coincides with *the set of international transport corridors agreed by international community*.⁷⁶ The selection of the specific routes and infrastructure objects for the *corridor* consists basically of three criteria: a) type of existing or potential cargo flow (foreign trade and transit) b) technical status (expected to be high), and c) linkage with existing network of international transport corridors. Thus, these criteria successfully limit the option of possible routes into two “Euro-Asian” transport corridors and three pan-European corridors.

Thus, Russian international transport corridors, as defined in respective government policy programmes largely correspond with already existing network of transport connections. Main roads in Russian language are usually called *magistral’* where the word *magistral’* denotes ‘main direction’, trunk line (highway, railway etc) with an intensive traffic.⁷⁷ However, by using a word *corridor* (sometimes found in its

⁷⁴ ‘Tranzitnaja istorija’. Itogi 30 June, 2004.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ www.lingvo.ru; Bolshaja Sovetskaja Ensiklopedia 1974, 151.

Russian form *koridor*) and not *magistral* in connection with the development of its national transport infrastructure is an economical way to bring Russia's transport space to fore with European. In an analytical level at least it suggests that it is possible to identify a set of durable things that tie Russia and Europe closer together. However, just because temporal linkage between formulation of a thesis on the development of *Russian international transport corridors* and that of *pan-European transport corridors* is strong does not yet imply that these *corridors* are similar or even compatible in practice as well.

Moreover, whilst federal authorities are willing to integrate Russia's roads to the European wide transport network, they seem to ignore that the very same roads are part of the regional network of connections. In the case of the Chita-Khabarovsk road, the construction project is designed to create a linkage between (*Paris/Lisbon*), *Moscow*, and *Vladivostok*. The fact that it also brings cities of Chita and Habarovsk closer together is, at least in the federal level typically omitted in the discourse. In fact, in opening the *through traffic between Paris and Vladivostok* authorities were intentionally ignoring the fact that *normal traffic* between Chita and Khabarovsk, or at least along some sections of the road, had been reality for almost two years already. The recycling of Komsomol type slogans; New road! New life! New Russia! adds to sense of carnival in this case. A carnival that works against its own logic: exposing reality rather than disclosing it.

4. Closing remarks

As I suggested in the introductory chapter transport corridors are ordered arrangements of space where institutionalisation of certain practices of movement contribute to the speeding up of movement between fixed distances in space. Study purports to answer in what sense these arrangements are orderly⁷⁸; that is, what are the purposes and goals that agencies involved attach to the construction of corridors.

⁷⁸ See Bull 1965.

The modernization of Russia's infrastructure network, enhancement of cohesiveness and integration of the vast country and its opening to global markets are the goals set for the development of international transport corridors in Russia. Against the background of Soviet practices and vertical order of space the inquiry on the meaning, and more importantly, using of the corridor concept in the Russian context opens a yet unexplored way to ask how geography and politics entangle in Russia's politics.

Understanding corridors more like processes of 'acting together' rather than explicit locations in space is convenient for general purposes of inquiry, the purpose which is to ask whether the construction of *international/pan-European* transport corridors provides for the emergence of public space between Russia and the EU. Convenience of this approach lies, of course, in thus avoiding a simplification of the distance between Russia and the EU as mere geographic construct defined in physical, rather than ideational terms. As it is commonly accepted the problem of proximity lies in the latter, whereas physical proximity provides a self-evident starting point to try to overcome ideational distance manifest in the differing practices of human rights conduct, democratic governance, and market economy principles, to mention just few.

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