

Cross Cultural Ties between Generations and Countries: Visual Communication

UDC 32.019.51

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Abstract: historical buildings are part of the national cultural heritage, and so are the objects of special value. But many of them were destroyed for economic or political reasons. To understand Russia, it is necessary to rethink the notions of time and space. The article examines the art of photography as a means of visual communication that can convey information to the younger generation, as well as to other nations. Modern experience proves the need to be reminded of the value of architectural heritage and threats to its existence.

Key words: visual communication, national cultural heritage, intergenerational dialogue, cross-cultural communication

Why do we study, document and try to preserve architectural monuments of past epochs? It is traditionally considered that historic buildings are part of the national cultural heritage and are therefore objects of special value. But in fact these landmarks suffer from neglect and outright destruction for economic and political reasons. When I was growing up in the American South, these questions interested me long before I realized that Russia would become the center of my career.

In Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *The First Circle* there is a reference to a member of the Soviet elite who unexpectedly ponders the meaning of fate after seeing the ruins of a destroyed church. Some civilizations, apparently, are bound to their ruins and relics, ghosts and shadows. Russia is one such civilization, the American South is another. As the great American writer William Faulkner remarked: "The past is not dead; it is not even past."

The similarities between Russia and the American South first struck me in 1971, during my year of study at Leningrad State University. The beauty of the city, even in decay, haunted me and reminded of New Orleans, founded in 1718, fifteen years later than St. Petersburg. The original design of both cities was linked to French military engineering.

Subsequently, after I had published my first books on Russian architecture, I turned my attention to the Russian north. In the course of this work I noticed many declining Russian villages that preserved the festive and creative atmosphere of a past century. For many Russian friends it was

simpler to accept me as a representative of the American South (as seen through the novel *Gone with the Wind*), than as a citizen of the United States.

In the course of extensive travels through Russia I have often photographed war memorials that exist in almost every Russian settlement, even in small villages. Many towns of the American South have similar monuments to those who fell in battle. Raised in the South, with its many memorials to battles from the time of the American Revolution and the Civil War, I gained my first understanding of military history, which later helped me to understand Russia and the Russian mentality.

To live in Russia is to come to a new understanding of space and time. The country devours time because of its space--and the roads that cover that space. With characteristic self-deprecation, Russians will quote their 19th-century proverb: "The only thing Russia has in abundance is idiots and bad roads."

Then there is the climate. Everything takes more time when the temperature is minus 10 or 20, when every step on paths rutted with black ice is an invitation to disaster. Or in brief but fierce summers in a country that has no defense against 90-degree temperatures, except to retreat to shade and leave serious work for another time.

Over the past four decades, I have done research and photography in some very distant parts of Russia. Although my documentary research and fieldwork in the Russian north began in 1988, when I made a trip to Kizhi, my sustained work in the region began in 1995 with a trip to Vologda. With camera in hand I traveled through the territories of Arkhangelsk, Vologda and Murmansk oblasts, as well as Karelia, in order to record extraordinary architectural monuments of the Russian North that often existed under the threat of destruction: Kargopol, Ferapontovo, Solvychevodsk, Kirillov, Totma, Velikii Ustiug, Solovki

Such a large territory as the Russian North could easily have occupied the rest of my career. As a matter of fact, I continued my field work there on a regular basis with support from sources such as the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, the American Council for International Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Tulane University.

On a personal level I am especially indebted to American colleagues such as Blair Ruble (former director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies), Dan Davidson (director of American Council of Teachers of Russian, or ASPRIAL) and James Billington, Director of the Library of Congress and specialist in Russian history. A major component in my work and its dissemination has been the support of the Photographic Archives at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. In the spring of 1985 the Photographic Archives of the National Gallery proposed to create a permanent archive of my black-and-white photographs of Russian architecture. As a result of this productive collaboration, my thousands of photographs (and now color images) will be preserved for future generations.

I cannot sufficiently express the blessings that I received through my acquaintance with Aleksei Komech, formerly director of the State Institute of Art History. We became acquainted in the fall of 1979 and continued our productive relationship until his tragic death from cancer in March 2007. With the help of Komech I established contact with the Ministry of Culture, which provided support during my research travel in the Russian regions.

Among other Russian colleagues who often provided support at crucial moments, I must acknowledge A. P. Kudriavtsev (president of the state Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences), D. O. Shvidkovskii (rector of the Moscow Architectural Institute) and D. O. Sarkisiyan (director of the Shchusev State Museum of Architecture). In the Russian regions local specialists were unfailingly generous and assisted both with their knowledge and with transportation over long distances. For example, in Vologda oblast I covered hundreds of kilometers with M. I. Karachev and O. A. Samusenko. The hundreds of photographs obtained through those trips are now a major part of my collection.

But an altogether new dimension in my exploration of Russia came in 1999 when the Library of Congress and its director, James Billington, invited me to participate in a joint Russian-American

cultural and educational program known as "Meeting of Frontiers." The program is based on the premise that for all of the obvious differences in Russian and American history and culture, there are significant parallels in the Russian move east and the American move west in pursuit of a national, transcontinental destiny. The fact that these two national movements end at the Pacific Ocean is the "meeting of frontiers."

The goal of the program is to develop a bilingual Web site with a massive array of materials on the American West and the Russian East, including rare visual materials and documents from libraries in both countries. This site is available to anyone with Internet access, but the primary audience is teachers and students. My role was to photograph and document historic Russian architecture as a reflection of the Russian move east, from the Far North to the Far East, from the 15th century to the 21st.

My previous years of work as a photographer and cultural historian had given me a thorough grounding in the European traditions of Russian architecture, but now I was to see that culture in a different, Eurasian setting. On Aug. 17, 1999, I hoisted cameras, film and copies of my published work on board the train at Moscow's Yaroslavl Station and set off for the east. Ultimate destination: Siberia.

No geographical entity has more stereotypes--most negative--than "Siberia." Common usage in many languages has detached the term from its specific meaning to signify a brutish place of punishment. Yet with all the fervor of the lately converted, I now see that an understanding of Russia--in whatever discipline--is immeasurably enhanced by knowledge and experience of the north Eurasian land mass. [I should point out that my own work throughout this area benefited greatly from assistance provided by the historic preservation section at the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.]

My route followed the old path from Moscow to Vladimir and Nizhnii Novgorod, and from there to Viatka (now known as Kirov). There is a sense of boundary as the train crosses eastward over the majestic sweep of the Volga River and leaves behind the high, western river bluffs at Nizhnii Novgorod. Here is the broad conduit along which merchants from the Orient and nomadic invaders from Asia's highlands moved toward the ancient territories of the Slavs. And in the opposite direction, Russia's merchants, troops and settlers moved inexorably toward the east. Asia is still far, but Eurasia feels near at hand.

Yet this is all still Europe. Kirov itself, located on picturesque hilly bluffs overlooking the Viatka River is not even the beginning of the end of the European continent. This ancient town, first mentioned in Russian chronicles in 1374 under the name Khlynov, arose in an area along the Viatka River that had been inhabited by Finno-Ugric tribes long before the first Slavs. Here, as during my travels in western regions, local specialists were informed of my arrival and provided assistance in our mutual endeavor.

The morning express train from Moscow leaves Kirov for Perm at 8, and for most of its distance the rail line to Perm follows the Cheptsa River. The beautiful rolling hills alternate with fields and forests. August weather varies greatly in this part of the world, and throughout the eight-hour trip, massive rain clouds alternated with sunlight. Our train crossed the mighty Kama River and pulled into the Perm station on a rich, late-summer's afternoon. Perm is an attractive city with a cosmopolitan look to its main boulevards and a number of distinctive, pre-revolutionary neighborhoods. But for historic architecture, the smaller towns to the north such as Solikamsk, Cherdyn and Nyrob present a richer array of monuments. Over the course of my many eastern journeys I usually began in the regional capitals and then proceeded to older historical settlements. Local colleagues provided the transportation.

Returning to Perm and taking the night train to Ekaterinburg, I finally crossed over the spine of the Urals, left Europe and entered Asia. Not that Ekaterinburg seemed any less European than Perm. Indeed, for those interested in the history of Soviet Constructivism, the architecture of Sverdlovsk (as the city was called in the Soviet period) is the best-preserved anywhere in Russia. Not even Moscow can boast of such a dense concentration. But for all the progress of the Soviet and post-

Soviet period, Ekaterinburg is still best known as the site of the brutal murder of Nicholas II and his family in July 1918.

Here, too, local architects and preservationists arranged travel for another historic town to the north--Verkhoturys, founded as a major transit point to Siberia for early Russian colonists, who could continue down the Tura River and eventually reach Tobolsk. Throughout my journey eastward, I regularly made trips north to regain the original Siberian trail, considerably to the north of the current main line, the "Moscow Road," established in the late 18th century.

The symbol of Verkhoturys's pivotal role in extending Russian authority is its kremlin and church on Trinity Rock, high above the Tura River. What makes the Trinity Church so unique is not only its spectacular location, but also the rich combination of elements from the Italian Renaissance, medieval Muscovy, Ukrainian baroque, and a flair for ornament evident in the facade's green ceramic work. Although the interior was ransacked and has only recently been cleaned and subject to basic repairs, the exterior is in superb condition.

My introduction to Siberia proper occurred, finally, at Tiumen, also on the Tura River. Tiumen is now flush with oil money, but it has managed to preserve much of the distinctive wooden architecture of its historic center, and a number of churches are being rebuilt. Particularly impressive are the early 18th-century "Siberian baroque" churches, with Ukrainian influence.

From Tiumen I again made my way north, this time to Tobolsk, the 17th-century "capital" of Siberia. From its perch on high bluffs overlooking the mighty Irtysh River, the Tobolsk Kremlin (fortress) with its ensemble of churches and towers is one of the most impressive sights in Siberia. Most of the city's ornate 18th-century churches are still abandoned, yet a few have been restored to parish use, as has the Polish Roman Catholic church.

I resumed my Siberian journey in Omsk, also on the Irtysh River. The center of Omsk (current population around 1.2 million) has been relatively well preserved and not only conveys the prosperity in western Siberia at the turn of the century, but also suggests how much was lost by war and revolution. The theaters, hotels, banks and shopping galleries are remarkable even in a slightly dilapidated state. In addition to renovated Orthodox churches, Omsk also has two mosques, a beautifully restored wooden synagogue, and a large Evangelical Baptist church.

Driving north from Omsk, along the Irtysh River, one sees grain fields that extend for hundreds of kilometers on all sides. My objective was Tara, another early (1594) settlement that defended the route east. Only one church, out of more than a dozen, survived the Soviet era. To look at pre-revolutionary photographs of such towns is to understand how much heritage has been lost. We went off-road to villages where small log houses reminded me of photographs of 19th-century settlers' houses in the American West.

After returning to Omsk, I journeyed on to Novosibirsk, a quintessential railroad town founded at the turn of the 20th century and now Siberia's largest metropolis. Here, elaborately decorated log houses from the beginning of the century co-exist with avant-garde Constructivist architecture and pompous Stalinist buildings. Much of the city's intellectual energy comes from the nearby scientific satellite town, Akademgorodok, which has an important outdoor museum of traditional culture.

After Novosibirsk, I spent the next several days photographing other historic Siberian cities such as Barnaul, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk and Yeniseisk. In Tomsk, I was met by friends from the excellent university, the oldest in Siberia. Tomsk is famous for its turn-of-the-century wooden houses with decorative carving that is the most elaborate in Russia. Dozens still stand, particularly in the Tartar quarter, whose White Mosque has been restored for worship.

As elsewhere in my travels through Siberia, I saw a peaceful, multi-ethnic environment that seems distinctive to a region where just about everyone is from somewhere else. As is well known, many in this vast territory arrived through successive waves of exile. Yet there were many others who came as settlers, drawn by the lack of serfdom and the relative tolerance. Although it may seem strange to those used to old stereotypes, Siberia is now valued precisely for its greater freedom by many who live there.

From Tomsk I took a slow train to Krasnoyarsk, a city of dramatic landscapes bisected by

another great river, the Yenisey. Without divulging details, I can say that I traveled north from Krasnoyarsk 340 kilometers to the historic town of Yeniseisk. Here, the waters of the river are pure and the fish (tugun, sik, sterlet) is freshly caught--so fresh that it is often carefully sliced and served raw. I could not resist what my hosts had so beautifully prepared, one platter after another. The ultimate verdict--perfection, with a delicate texture that defies description!

From Krasnoyarsk, I plunged ahead to the eastern Siberian city of Irkutsk, whose center is also well preserved from the days of pre-revolutionary prosperity. I am grateful to Nadezhda Krasnaya, director of the preservation office, for every courtesy extended during my stay. It was also my pleasure to consult with Boleslav Shostakovich, a professor of history at Irkutsk University and a specialist in the history of the Polish exile community in Siberia. (And, yes, Shostakovich is directly related to the same family as the great composer.)

For all the destruction of the Soviet era, Irkutsk still has the most interesting church architecture of Asian Russia, including Orthodox churches with decorative elements that show the influence of Buddhist temples. Despite a cold snap, the Irkutsk weather in early October 1999 was idyllic, a perfect example of "golden autumn" and an ideal time to see nearby one of the world's great natural wonders, Lake Baikal. Irkutsk marked the end of my first Siberian campaign and the beginning of the second. After much winter, spring, and early summer fieldwork in the north of European Russia, I returned to Irkutsk at the beginning of September 2000 for the concluding phase of my Library of Congress work, a month that would take me to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean. During this period, I witnessed the consecration of the new Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God in Irkutsk and saw the revival of Buddhism in Buriat areas beyond Lake Baikal.

The end point, Vladivostok, had long been closed to Western visitors, but now it basked in fall sunlight--especially welcome after a series of typhoons spawned in the Sea of Japan-- that reflected the hospitality I experienced there. Local specialists in historic preservation showed me the neighboring town of Ussuriisk and the spacious part on Russian Island (Ostrov Russkii).

In 2001 I continued my usual trips in the Russian North, but an additional point in my summer program was an extensive stay in Samara and a trip to Syzran. I was particularly impressed by the Volga River valley and the Zhiguli National Park. In May of 2002 I flew to Yakutsk and then returned to Khabarovsk, where I renewed my acquaintances with local architects and specialists in historic preservation. Beyond Khabarovsk I traveled to Komsomolsk-on-Amur, which has a unique concentration of Soviet architectural monuments beginning with the 1930s and extending through the 1950s. Thereafter I traveled to Blagoveshchensk, a city rich in architecture from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Later that summer I was fortunate to visit and photograph in Voronezh and in Tatarstan, while still returning to my beloved Russian North.

Throughout these trips, I was impressed by a spirit of local initiative, especially in the study of regional history and culture. The growing interest in regional studies is essential for a strong, integrated state consisting of many autonomous parts. In my opinion a sense of local space within the vast territory of Russia is the basis for a feeling of Russianness as a whole.

I have found various means to share the photographic material and historical research gathered during my decades of Russian travels. With the support of the Kennan Institute my photographs, with accompanying Russian and English texts, have received a new life in the "Discovering Russia" series of books. In 2014 the fourteenth volume in the series was released by the Moscow publisher "Tri kvadrata". The same publisher has also brought out a series of large hardcover books devoted to the rich architectural heritage of Vologda oblast. And in May 2006 I was granted the high honor of election as an Honorary Member of the Russian Academy of the Fine Arts.

Certain critics in Russia have stated "Why is this American showing us this familiar architecture, which is so far from the best European traditions?" In my opinion is necessary to study Russian traditional and folk architecture regardless of what has been created in Europe. Contemporary experience convincingly shows that it is essential to remind of the value of architectural heritage and of the threats to its existence. But perhaps as a true son of the American South, I take too much to heart the undying value of architecture .

Bibliography

1. Brumfield William Craft The primary Russian site devoted to Brumfield's photographic work in Russia is maintained by the Culture Dept of Vologda oblast'. The site is in both Russian and English. Included in the site are a number of articles. General site address: cultinfo.ru/brumfield
The main part of the Vologda site is the Photoarchive, which currently displays some 28,000 images. Direct link: <http://cultinfo.ru/brumfield/photoarchive/index.htm>
2. Brumfield William Craft The main collection of Brumfield's work is held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The NGA Department of Image Collections has archived almost 60,000 digital images by Brumfield. The NGA also has on long-term loan approximately 40,000 B/W negatives, of which some 10,000 have been printed as 8"x10" study prints. This material is accessible at the study center in the West Wing. (Registration required). Only a small fraction of this material is currently on line. There are, however, three slide gallery special features via the following links:
 - http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/features/brumfield_murom.html
 - http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/features/brumfield_torzhok.html.html
 - <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/features/travels-ekaterinburg.html>
3. Brumfield William Craft The Library of Congress has posted approximately 1,200 images scanned from slides donated by Brumfield to LC as part of the Meeting of Frontiers Project (frontiers.loc.gov)
Entry to Brumfield site: http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfdigcol/mfcdphot.html#a_eng
4. Brumfield William Craft 182 images from the above Library of Congress site have been reformatted for the World Digital Library project. Each image is accompanied by a concise description in seven languages, including English and Russian. These images are accessible via the following link: <http://www.wdl.org/en/search/?q=brumfield&qla=en>
5. Brumfield William Craft "Russia beyond the Headlines" (the foreign internet service of the national newspaper *Rossiskaia Gazeta*) has commissioned an ongoing bimonthly series of articles and slide galleries based on Brumfield's documentation of Russia's architectural heritage. Entitled "Discovering Russia," this RBTH series currently contains a total of over 4,000 images, most of which can be displayed full screen.
Link to the entire "Discovering Russia" series: http://rbth.com/discovering_russia
6. Brumfield William Craft The site [Temples.ru](http://temples.ru), dedicated to Russian Orthodox Churches, currently has almost 1,000 images by Brumfield.
Direct link to the collection: http://temples.ru/william_brumfield.php
The site also has an interactive map showing the geographic range of Brumfield's work posted on the site: http://temples.ru/photo_stat.php?ID=1287
7. Brumfield William Craft A site founded by Pomor State University has several hundred photographs by Brumfield of the architectural heritage of Arkhangelsk oblast'. Although this site has been superseded by the Vologda site listed above and has not been expanded, it contains unique material, together with articles. The site is in both English and Russian.
Collection link: <http://www.pomorsu.ru/Brumfield/eindex.html>
8. Brumfield William Craft Created by the governor's office of Perm Region, this small but elegant gallery contains 20 b/w photographs of churches in Solikamsk
Site address: <http://www.perm.ru/culture/brumfield/>