

SIMON LIVERANI

Curtain's melt warms Russia

Despite its opening to the West, too many people still see Russia as a hostile and backward country. Although understandable after decades of Cold War, this contempt is outdated. Today, this attitude is a result of either ignorance, in the best of hypotheses, or simply slander.

No one denies that the Soviet Union was an authoritarian regime in which individual freedoms were restricted. Some may argue that the right to speak one's own beliefs and profess one's religion cannot be replaced by a guaranteed job and always having enough food on the table.

However, a famous Latin philosopher once said, "Primum vivere, deinde filosofare." Roughly translated, it means that if people have nothing to eat, they don't give a damn about democracy. I think Haitians would agree. But today, the iron curtain has been melted and turned into Coke cans. It's anachronistic to ridicule Russians and their lifestyles.

Recently an interview with an American student who lived nine months in St. Petersburg, Russia, appeared in the Daily Nebraskan. Very unlucky student, indeed — sneered at in the metro, beaten by police and thrown into a damp cell. I was in St. Petersburg for three months in 1993. Nobody was staring at me in the metro; people were too preoccupied with their own lives and couldn't care less about foreigners.

Flashing dollars on the street is a no-no, maybe more so in New York than in St. Petersburg. Overall, I found St. Petersburg safe for a city of 5 million. On the other hand, if a Russian came to Los Angeles, whom would he have to fear more, gangs or the police? Tough choice, isn't it. So let's stop stereotyping Russia; the times of the evil empire are over.

Russia today is a society in transition, a color mutation from



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red to green. This wild race toward capitalism has left many scars. There was a joke going around in Russia: What did capitalism do in five years that communism couldn't do in 70 years? Answer: Make communism look good.

Many Russians did not receive the changes well. Among the most damaged were the older generations. Some worked 40 years, only to discover that the country for which they had sacrificed their lives had gone out of existence. The pensions, not high but enough to live on during communism, can buy as much as two pounds of tomatoes today. Prices went up a thousand times under capitalism, but pensions didn't.

Many obstacles still face Russians. The main reason for problems is the absence of a legislation on various matters of private property. The infamous "privatization" of homes is a blatant example of a good idea gone sour. In the communist days, people were given free housing to inhabit, not to own.

In 1992, the government allowed tenants to purchase their homes for a token sum. This resulted in people being able to own apartments in the center of Moscow for a few dollars. It was a good idea — until the Mafia decided it was a good way to make money. Then it turned into a nightmare. Stories of elderly people being held captive in their homes, forced to sign-wills in favor of the Mafia and then killed,

are the result of a rushed attempt to cancel the past.

The ironic twist in the whole process of perestroika is that the hard-core business people of today are the same people who headed the communist party in the past. Boris Yeltsin, for example, was a powerful party leader in Sverdlovsk (a huge region in Russia). The people who today are advocating capitalism with the loudest voice made their way to the top of the communist party by pledging their allegiance to the red flag.

These are the same people who took advantage of the confusion generated by perestroika and their power positions to gain enormous wealth. The former vice mayor of St. Petersburg owns a harbor on the Gulf of Finland, a shopping center and several apartments around the city. He got everything for a few thousand dollars while he still was in the city government. And that's only one example.

To understand Russia is to let its charm come through the thick layer of ice deposited during the Cold War.

Yeltsin recently visited the United States to conclude an economic cooperation agreement. Some may argue that the main beneficiary of this accord is Russia, but in fact, the whole world will gain from Russia's stability.

Liverani is a junior advertising major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

CINDY LANGE-KUBICK

Mental? Make the most of it

The new DSM is here! The new DSM is here!

Remember the movie "The Jerk," when Steve Martin ran around in his underwear waving the phone book, excited as all get-out because he was in it?

Well, get happy, people, because the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders — DSM-IV — has been released, and chances are you're in there someplace.

I know I am — probably in several places.

But let's start with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Lately, I've been vacuuming — a lot. (Compulsive.)

Sometimes I think about vacuuming even when I'm not. (Obsessive.)

Doctor, I have an excuse.

I'm vacuuming because I have a dog. The dog has fleas. Fleas are bloodsucking parasites that lurk in your carpeting, waiting to attack someone. (Personally, I have never cared for bloodsucking deadbeats of any kind.)

When you have small, hard-shelled insects with sucking mouth parts living in your home, you have three choices: wear combat boots at all times; bomb the place with stinky, toxic insecticides; or vacuum a lot.

But to be honest, the vacuuming is starting to become a problem. It's moved beyond being a pastime and taken on the quality of an addiction.

For instance, one night last week I woke up at 3 a.m. drenched in a cold sweat because I had forgotten to suck the lint out of the furnace vents, and I was certain an army of fleas were lurking in them.

The next morning, bleary-eyed from lack of sleep, I attacked a toast crumb on the carpet because I



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thought it was a fleeing flea. (I swear it was moving, Doctor.)

I even vacuumed the dog — twice.

I'm considering buying stock in Hoover carpet bags, because I've gone through 10 in the past week.

Definitely obsessive-compulsive disorder — or worse.

It could qualify for a new category in the next DSM: subtype of phobia section, debilitating flea-bite fright.

But I refuse to believe it's pathological.

Instead, I see it as a gift from God. (Diagnosis: delusional disorder, grandiose type.)

We all have neuroses, right? Little foibles, habits, eccentricities, quirks, kinks and phobias. Why not make the best of them?

This is a free enterprise system. I'm going to turn my mental deficits into financial assets. (If the "artist formerly known as Prince" can do it, so can I.)

First I'll put out an exercise video: "Keeping Fit with Your Kirby," "Carpet Cleaning Calisthenics," or simply, "Vacuuming with Cindy."

It will feature 15 minutes of warm-ups and stretching; cord unwinding and lint removal. And then it will move to 30 minutes of intense fat-burning aerobic activity: dual vacuum stair sweeping and

shag-carpet cleaning. And finally, there will be a muscle-building segment featuring furniture moving and vacuum-handle lunges.

Next, given my expertise in mental disorders, I will branch out into the self-help field.

As an adjunct to Ask-A-Nurse, I will start a new phone line service, Dial-A-Therapist. After ringing 1-900-555-DSM4, callers will hear a prerecorded voice say:

"For more information on borderline personality disorder, please press 1 on your touch-tone phone. For an update on caffeine-related disorder, press 2 now. For the inside story on mathematics disorder, disorder of written expression or a personality disorder not otherwise specified, press 3 now. If you are not calling from a touch-tone phone or if this recording is beginning to annoy you, please hang up, wash your hands (again) and tune into 'What About Bob.'"

Seriously, friends (sign of narcissistic personality disorder — term "friends" indicates a grandiose sense of self-importance), don't let a little mental condition get in your way of a full and productive life.

But, let's talk more later; the vacuum is calling.

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