BICULTURALISM
IN ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

Pushing the boundaries of architecture in contemporary Russian and European practice and the reinvention of the private house in post-Soviet Russia

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Tanya Kalinina
15 August 2014
Contents

1. Introduction / TK 7

2. The Bicultural Practice / JM, TK 10
   How can two opposing cultures and places be linked through architecture, and what were the key bicultural moments in this process?

3. Mirror, Mirror / TK 22
   What are the underlying characteristics of the partners, and how do they work in practice?

4. Made in the USSR / TK 38
   How important is life background to the mental space of an architect?

5. Project Imagination / JM, TK 46
   How can one single event create the basis of practice for years to come?

6. Working with the Prospectors / TK 58
   How can client and architect synchronize for the advancement of both parties?

7. The Emergence of the New Russian House / TK 76
   What was the practice’s role in the development of the new Russian house?

8. The Practice Map / JM, TK 88
   How can we begin to understand the complex workings of 20 years of practice?

9. The Endeavours of Practice / JM, TK 98
   What are the practice’s activities and aspirations and how do they combine to create the essence of the practice?

10. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag / JM, TK 110
    What are the practice’s seminal key projects and what are the drivers behind the approaches engaged?

11. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy / JM, TK 136
    Who are the practice mentors and what enchainments are apparent in its work?

12. The Accumulation of Skills / JM, TK 142
    How did the practice develop professionally to become what it is today?

13. Happy Families / JM, TK 150
    What are the prevalent architectural components in the practice’s work?

14. The Black Spot / JM, TK 156
    What is the essence of the design process?

15. The Art of Elasticity / JM, TK 170
    What does the body of work comprise and what are the reasons behind it?

    How can the practice be categorized and positioned in the architectural profession?

17. Learning from Le Corbusier / TK 184
    When we look at Russian architecture objectively, what do we see?

18. A Summary of Research and Findings / TK 196
    What did the research entail, what did we discover, and how might this be applicable to other practices?

Bibliography / TK 202

Essays marked (JM, TK) are common essays and those marked (TK) are individual essays.

TK - Tanya Kalitina, JM - James McAdam
Introduction

This research is a reflection on 20 years of McAdam Architects’ architectural practice. It covers a diverse range of work, from private houses and pavilions to urban planning and strategic projects. It seeks to understand the complexities of operating mainly between two countries – Britain and Russia – and it poses direct questions about how two opposing cultures and locations can be forged together through architecture.

Part of our aim is to shed light on the implications of a bicultural practice at large. The ever-increasing mobility of people in our globalised world means that long-term cultural and professional exchange through practice are becoming normalised. The research explores in-depth how bicultural practice and design process can work: how relationships with clients, consultants and mentors, and within the practice, have developed. It also addresses how we accumulate skills that suit different locations, and types/sizes of projects.

This dissertation demonstrates how the bi-national positioning of the practice between London and Moscow has facilitated disciplinary change within Russia. This change is grounded in the specific environmental conditions and architectural community of Russia. At the same time, the research shows how the practice remains connected with an external international disciplinary perspective.

A portion of the dissertation relates to the actual practice and is common to both the founding partners, thus demonstrating the joint underpinnings of their work. Other essays relate specifically to areas of individual interest and research. In both works, different streams of practice work are analysed to reveal the different approaches and design methods used in various completed projects, competitions, and strategic initiatives.

Key projects are identified in an attempt to understand the influences of the two cultures on the mental space of the practice and its partners. In parallel, we reviewed the role of biculturalism in professional activities, teaching programs and architectural discourse.

McAdam Architects is a trans-national practice that operates through effective relationship-building. Our experiences demonstrate the productive agency of architecture during rapid and extensive political, economic and social change.

On a more personal level, the reflective process has given rise to questions about how intellectual satisfaction is realised within the bicultural practice – the safeguarding of ideas, architectural enjoyment, and how the practice could change direction in the future. These questions punctuate the text – presented in bold type – and their answers are explored within the thesis. Those which remain unanswered, we see as continuing quests that will inform our future practice.
2. The Bicultural Practice

How can two opposing cultures and places be linked through architecture, and what were the key bicultural moments in this process?
How can two opposing cultures and places be linked through architecture, and what were the key bicultural moments in this process?

‘Bicultural – having or combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two nations or peoples’. Oxford English Dictionary.

As with many partnerships, the bicultural practice of McAdam and Kalinina was established through a series of coincidences.

The first coincidence occurred as a result of Perestroika, which enabled a student exchange between Moscow Architectural Institute and Canterbury School of Architecture in 1990. McAdam and Kalinina met and plotted extended exchange studies for a semester at each of their respective schools.

The bicultural stance was set from the beginning. Both partners began to learn about the other’s culture, by living, studying, and socializing in the other’s country. This allowed cross-cultural exchange and discussion, and an early understanding of cultural differences. Crucially, there evolved an immovable trust and mutual desire which was the foundation for practice, and later, a family.

The second coincidence was Project Imagination in 1992. This bicultural link enabled the initiation and organization of seminar workshops, where 20 well-known British architects visited Moscow to run workshops with professors and students from the Moscow Architectural Institute. The key to Project Imagination’s success was the direct link it created between the architectural professions of Britain and Russia, as a consequence of McAdam and Kalinina placing a foot in each other’s cultures.

The results of this bicultural activity led to a much-increased level of connection between the architects of Britain and Russia. It was the basis for multiple exchanges and the opening of a bicultural office, run by McAdam and Kalinina with patronage of William Alsop, in 1993.

1 The definition of ‘bicultural’ invariably refers to combining of two cultures within a nation, for example: the French and English speaking peoples of Canada.
2 Perestroika: the political, social and economic changes that happened in the USSR during the late 1980s.
3 Moscow Architectural Institute: the main educational establishment for students of architecture in Moscow and Russia, with over 2,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students.
4 Canterbury School of Architecture: a small architectural school of 150 students. Now part of the University of Creative Arts.
5 Project Imagination: educational seminar where 20 British architects ran workshops for a week at Moscow Architectural Institute in 1992. See Chapter 5.
6 William Alsop: a well-known, practising British architect, noted for flamboyant designs.
That practice ran for seven years (1993–2000) and was located primarily in Moscow, but with professional input and expertise from Britain. McAdam and Kalinina were given maximum freedom to orchestrate this arrangement, and we used the bicultural nature of the practice as a means to integrate with both the Russian and British architectural communities. It led to a dissemination of professional and design methods into the Russian profession, and a trickle of information on Russian architecture and culture back to Britain.

Bart Goldhoorn\(^7\), Editor of Project Russia, summed up the general atmosphere and described the practice’s position in Project Russia no. 14 (1999) ‘A Breeze from the West’:

> Although the results of the work of foreign architects in Moscow are far from glorious, there is one architectural practice that forms an exception to the rule. The Moscow office of the British architectural firm William Alsop has managed to establish itself as a small but significant player in the Moscow architectural scene. Tanya Kalinina and James McAdam are much more the ‘faces’ of this practice than Alsop himself. It is able to operate rather independent from the London office, whereas it can rely on the infrastructure of an established architectural practice.

Bicultural practice in this context is not a new thing; practitioners from different cultures and backgrounds often join together in architectural practice. However, it’s not so common for such practices to operate literally in the partners’ two parent cultures, and for both partners to be equally engaged with the respective societies and professional circles. In this way, ours is a ‘pure’ form of biculturalism in practice. The practices of Sauerbruch Hutton\(^8\) and Ushida Findlay\(^9\) are similar to ours in this respect.

\(^2\times 2\) x 2

The specific nature of the biculturalism of the practice was summarised by Richard Blythe\(^10\), during Practice Research Symposium Six, Barcelona November 2013, as ‘2 x 2’, implying that all elements of practice were essentially a multiple of two.

This exchange model remains in effect today: two individuals, two cultures, and two locations. Consequently, there are also two distinct languages, two senses of humour, two ways of socialising, two ways of talking about things, and perhaps even two souls for those properly embedded in the two cultures. Both of us have a comprehensive understanding of both cultures, therefore biculturalism is completely instinctive to the practice.

\(^7\) Bart Goldhoorn: Editor-in-Chief of architectural journal Project Russia

\(^8\) Sauerbruch Hutton: bicultural architectural practice, whose partners are Matthias Sauerbruch (German) and Louisa Hutton (British).

\(^9\) Ushida Findlay: bicultural architectural practice, whose partners were Enaku Ushida (Japanese) and Kathryn Findlay (British).

\(^10\) Richard Blythe: Professor in Architecture andDean, School of Architecture & Design at RMIT University.
The bicultural process is clearly essential to the practice’s key projects, such as Trubnaya (1999) and the Larch House (2006). The key projects involved cultural design approaches and elements suited to their locations, whilst utilizing imported design techniques and professional methods. On reflection, we can also see the impact of these bicultural projects on the architectural professions of the two countries.

In Russia, both projects won awards. They were complimented in architectural circles and by the press – as contextually-considered architecture, suited to their habitat, with attention to detail and quality – in terms normally associated with Western European cities. Back in Britain, these projects were held in positive light as subtle interpretations of new Russian architecture. These realised projects led to McAdam being one of the first ‘western’ architects to become a member of the Union of Moscow Architects (UMA).

In parallel to the practice of designing buildings, McAdam and Kalinina were anxious to progress the educational and professional links between the architects in Britain and Russia. They were closely involved with the British Council11, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Union of Moscow Architects (UMA), and the Central House of Artists12. They initiated and participated in talks, seminars, and exhibitions which instigated connections between the countries and fostering the general promotion of contemporary architecture (of which there was a deficit at the time).

After about ten years of such activity, it became apparent that bicultural exchange dynamic was leaning heavily towards Russia. At the same time, it became clear that our Russian colleagues – a combination of young practices who emerged in the 1990s, and ‘Paper Architects’13 who were no longer ‘Paper’ – had by now successfully completed a small number of buildings in and around Moscow. For example, the International Moscow Bank by AB Ostozhenka14, and the RIA Novosti (Russian News & Information Agency) building by Sergey Kisselev & Partners15. This group, which was affectionately nicknamed ‘The Architectural Resistance’, included McAdam and Kalinina. The group was recognised as a movement towards the re-invention of post-Soviet architecture.

11 The British Council: the United Kingdom’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.
12 Central House of Artists: Moscow’s main exhibition hall for contemporary art, located on the Moscow River.
13 Paper Architects: group of Russian architects in the 1980s, who responded to the state building program by producing Utopian ideas which existed only on paper.
14 Architectural Bureau, Ostozhenka: Moscow-based private architectural practice established in the early 1990s.
15 Sergey Kisselev & Partners: Moscow-based private architectural practice established in the early 1990s.
In light of this Russian bias, we decided to encourage exchange in the other direction. Ten Russian architects who had gained traction in the preceding ten years would exhibit their work and speak at a forum on Recent Developments in Russian Architecture, at the RIBA in London. The event, entitled ‘Time for Change’ (2002), gave the new Russian architects physical exposure and contact with their counterparts in Britain. It was an opportunity to discuss what was going on in Moscow with an established professional group. Away from their home environment, the architects were open and candid on difficult topics relating to the approval system, corruption in authority, and most concerningly, the plight of the city’s architectural heritage.

Catherine Cooke summarized the event in a feature article entitled ‘Great Divide’ – Building Design, Comments and Analysis, 15 March 2002:

Time for Change has been conceived by McAdam and Kalinina as ‘benchmarking the first ten years’. The aim was to bring architects over here, so the exhibition represents ten offices rather than showing the fifty or so ‘best buildings’. Diversity was intentional. It includes for example Mikhail Filippov, one of those who started in the protest movement of Paper Architecture which astonished the West in the mid-eighties.

As well as giving Russian architects the opportunity of exhibiting a modicum of work in the West, ‘Time for Change’ also gave them an opportunity to discuss the difficulties of practicing in Moscow at the time, and the burning issue of protecting the city’s architectural heritage.

As James McAdam noted in the Introduction to the ‘Time for Change’ exhibition catalogue, ‘The Beginning of a New Era’:

… the architectural treasures of the twenties and thirties, particularly in the capital, have been neglected, and in some cases fall victim to the requirements of economic developments. Many of these constructivist landmarks are in a state of complete disrepair and are not protected by local heritage laws. The impact of ‘Time for Change’ was that contemporary Russian architecture was (briefly) being discussed in the UK, for the first time since 1926.

As a result of their commitment to this cause, McAdam and Kalinina became more closely connected with the architects of this movement.
Perpetual motion: the pendulum between two cities

For the five years following ‘Time for Change’, the practice attempted to re-balance its activities between Russia and Britain on the basis that its position was in the centre with one leg in each country. This literal and physical form of bicultural practice is rather complicated. It involves a huge amount of flying, two offices, two apartments, two cars and two wardrobes. In retrospect, it is not an efficient method of practice and distracts from the important task of designing and building.

However, this ‘pendulum’ process did reinforce the practice’s bicultural image at large. It led to both partners being regularly invited to conferences, events, and talks, as experts of the other culture, in either country. During this time the practice would swing its attentions from one city to the other, becoming a substantial operation in Moscow in 2006–2007, and then re-focusing on growth in London at the end of 2007. This was due to the relocating of the partners, to coincide with the arrival of a new family member. The economic and political pressures which followed in 2008 exaggerated the magnitude of this swing.

Today the practice is small – just ten people. The pendulum has swung West, with the main activities and projects in London or nearby, with one-off commissions in France and Israel. The bicultural exchange continues to operate, and presently functions in two main areas.

The first of these is a joint venture with a Russian Development Group, where we act as the creative element of a real estate program for development of housing projects in London. In this instance bicultural exchange is critical. The practice acts as a creative bridge between the two diverse business cultures and real estate professions. The bicultural angle is realised through the partners’ understanding of the different parameters in each.

The second is a post-graduate course for tutors at Kuban State University18, in Krasnodar19, where we are instigators and supervisors. This is a specific response to a chronic need for qualified tutors at the university. Here, the bicultural exchange works as a transfer of ‘know-how’ from our experience in Western education.

For critics and commentators, the practice is truly perceived as essentially bicultural. In London we are not British and in Moscow we are not Russian. The practice is often referred to as Anglo-Russian by the press of both countries.

Whilst practicing ‘internationally’, the practice is not global. It does not set out to export or promote a global or international style of architecture. We are not in support of the notion that an architect can be authentically responsive to a local situation via tourism, cultural overview, or metaphors.
3. Mirror, Mirror

What are the underlying characteristics of the partners, and how do they work in practice?
What are the underlying characteristics of the partners, and how do they work in practice?

James is British, I am Russian, and our partnership was established over 20 years ago as a result of a program of student exchange and a few drunken parties. In my opinion, this is the best way to form any partnership.

Male-female collaborators are not uncommon in art and architecture. Alison and Peter Smithson, Charles and Ray Eames, and Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera are all influential examples. However, not all artistic partnerships lead naturally to collaboration. Researching the lives of creative couples, I have noticed that only some of them manage to maintain their working relationships alongside personal commitment. This is due to various reasons, including situations where one partner becomes more successful or well-known than the other.

My parents must have known the risks of sharing the same profession. They are both architects, and like us, they have been together since university. While still students they made a pact that they would not work together, because that way they could not bring the troubles of work back home. They have kept this promise and always worked in different fields. Even now, as professors of architecture and urban design, they will not teach in the same unit. Inevitably they do talk about their work, but they steadfastly avoid professional exchange.

This is clearly the best way for them, as the process of designing their own home demonstrated. In 2000, they bought a small plot of land in Krasnodar and decided to design the house together. After two years sketching, arguing and criticizing each other’s suggestions, they eventually stopped talking to each other. Tired of the complaints coming at me from both sides, I had to step in. I designed them a simple house with a small pool and a veranda. The brief was already well worked-out by them and the site was specific and contained. With this information, and having worked on numerous designs for private houses, it took only a weekend to come up with a clear and simple solution, which I knew would make them both happy. The design was for two white-rendered, interlocking, L-shaped volumes, which created secluded spaces, terraces, shaded areas, and internal vistas, whilst maximizing light and use of space.

In our Moscow studio, we worked up a set of drawings and made a cardboard model to show my parents. After a few minor changes, both of them approved the design and family peace was restored. The house and the pool were completed in 2003 and they still live there today. It has been over ten years since its completion and they are delighted with the way the house works for them.
3. Mirror, Mirror

Family house in Krasnodar

First floor study

View from end of garden looking back to house and pool

Ground floor plan
However, these exercises in family mediation are very different working relationships to the one that I have with James. We were friends, colleagues and partners before we became a family. This is probably why we have never needed to restrict our professional communication at home. On the contrary, we have always complained that we do not have time at home to talk about work – there are children, friends, family, outings, cooking, and other things that constantly distract us from architecture.

In the last two years (since 2012), we have partially resolved this problem by building a house specifically for ourselves - or rather, rebuilding one. South Winchcombe Manor was first built in 1320 as a medieval hall, and then was repeatedly modified, until almost falling down. It is the perfect fusion of domestic and professional, since by bringing the project home, we can now happily spend late nights sketching and discussing how to fix the blasted thing!

Perhaps it was a strange choice for an architectural family to buy and repair such an old house – almost a ruin, but not quite – rather than building a nice modernist house from scratch. A new build would be quicker, and certainly cheaper! The reason for this unexpected decision was largely the beautiful setting – a fairytale valley in the Kent Downs’ ‘area of outstanding beauty’, with rolling hills, cows, pheasants and narrow country lanes. Winchcombe is happily situated with no other building visible from its windows. Perhaps the element of novelty attracted us, too – we have completed a few new houses for our clients, but this was something we have not done before.

We have been through many months designing a sustainable family home in the medieval building, preserving everything important and carefully eliminating some later additions. We fought hard for Listed Building Consent to make a number of minor alterations. (South Winchcombe Manor is Grade 2* listed). We made serious structural interventions that are now almost invisible, and invented window details with double glazing that seamlessly compliment the 18th century casements. We have salvaged doors and custom-made ceramic tiles matching samples found on-site from the time of Queen Anne1.

At first we tried to run the Winchcombe project in the studio, just like any other job. This worked as far as a scheme design. After that we had to take it away: there are numerous sensitive details in an historic refurbishment project. It was just taking too long to explain how to draw a traditional lintel or a Crown Post to a job architect, all the while scarcely grasping it ourselves. The process was getting too expensive for the practice – we had to understand it ourselves first, then later draw it by hand at home.

Winchcombe’s completion date is set for the end of 2014. The spaces are all formed and clear; you can feel the improvement in the layout; the dingy interiors are now filled with natural light; the entrance sequence is perfect and there are three bathrooms instead of one. It is very exciting.
3. Mirror, Mirror

But there is something else: this very intimate process of ‘home design’ has proved again our deep ability to ‘communicate’ with each other. On professional projects we are constantly sharing information – with clients through presentations and drawings; with members of design team through sketches and words; with builders; with consultants; with planners. But the strength of our practice is our communication with each other – the intimate way in which we encourage, negotiate and share information in a clear and transparent way. The personal dimension adds more to this communication, as we are able to relay frank and open ideas on the subject.

As explained in Chapter 11, James and I have very little experience working in other practices, opting instead to ‘reinvent the wheel’ while creating our own practice from the tender age of 25. In the early years, our working habits were shaped by our business environments – by our clients, our colleagues and the general atmosphere of working in Moscow between 1993 and 2007.

As one of the very few ‘Western’ architectural practices in Moscow, we benefited from an objectively impressive client list: The British Council, Reuters, British Petroleum, Goldman Sachs, etc. The work itself was not always glamorous (we built ten BP petrol stations in and around Moscow, having to adjust most of their standard details to climatic conditions of Russia), but the level of service and efficiency that these clients demanded was very high. Everything we produced had to be perfect and delivered on time with highly-professional gloss. I remember sending a 30-page Progress Report for a board meeting at Credit Suisse First Boston in London to the director of their real estate department, and getting a response at 9.00am Moscow time (6.00am in London), that the document was “unacceptable” – I had omitted two commas and misspelled one word.

James was very good at understanding the corporate requirements and implementing systems in our office to ensure that projects were delivered on time and within budget. He was also excellent at ‘corporate socializing’ (he feels at ease talking to lawyers and bankers). Those commercial instincts remain essential to the practice today, as we are in the process of starting our own development company.

2 Reuters – news agency which was very active in Moscow in the 1990s, and opened a large editorial news-room to cover events at the time.
3 British Petroleum (BP) was extremely active in Russia in the 1990s. They were involved in ‘upstream’ activities and building of the first ‘western’ petrol stations in Russia.
5 Credit Suisse First Boston: American Investment Bank which opened an office in Moscow in 1995.
Moscow’s business climate was aggressive, with exactingly high standards. Both James and I were shaped by this, and impressed these strict criteria on the rest of our staff. We made it our motto: ‘Everything leaving the office has to be perfect.’ We created a rigorous training program for all of our staff, which included strict rotation across the work streams. Every member has to work on every stage of a project — from concept to completion. This has proven a very effective way to learn. Since 2000, six new architectural practices have been opened by ex-McAdam employees who we had taken on as graduates.

Along with ‘the corporates’, we had to deal with a very different group of clients during our time in Moscow: the New Russians. These people were, according to Jeremy Melvin, “Travelled but not necessarily cultured (kultiviert) and always clever and energetic, they can pick up ideas and interests rapidly from numerous disparate influences, whether magazine, a visit to Switzerland or the French Riviera.”

What the New Russians lacked was a decent work ethic. The collapse of the Soviet system brought almost medieval master/slave hierarchy back to Russian society. These clients expected their architects to do as they were told, not to provide professional advice or pragmatic solutions. Working in this environment was impossible for James, who would not compromise his professional ethics and duty of care for a subservient role. He resented this approach and had no patience for these people. This was my field of expertise: with every Russian client I created a set of boundaries, to ensure the relationships were maintained, projects successful, and we — the architects — treated with respect. The system was not perfect but there were cases when it worked well and peace was maintained.

Our client for the House in the Pine Forest was notorious for making people wait for appointments for hours. We won this project in a closed competition, and went to meet him for the first time in his office. When we arrived, there were about ten people in his ‘priyemnaya’ (reception, waiting area). Some had been there for over three hours, and were complaining out loud about the wait. I explained to the receptionist that I will not wait for more than 30 minutes, and as the time elapsed, stood up and moved towards the door. There was general horror in some of the eyes following me, and whispers that we would definitely lose the job. The client’s secretary called me in my office the next day, in tears, as our client had been furious to find out that I was gone. We rescheduled the meeting, and he has never been late for me again. We have since collaborated successfully on a number of projects and completed the House in Pine Forest in 2000, which was well-received and published in Russia and the UK.
James and my cultural differences were boldly apparent in Russia, in our work with clients, builders, consultants, drivers, etc. James would not raise his voice on-site, therefore not conveying urgency in his requests, and would be ignored. Luckily his construction experience was often with international contractors where his measured approach worked fine. Conversely, I built quite a few projects in Russia ‘by shouting’. Obviously working in Britain I adjusted my volume on-site, so as not to alarm people.

Our differences come both from our cultural backgrounds and our personalities. As Geert Hofstede elegantly summarises in his book, *Cultures and Organizations*: “Our own culture is to us like the air we breathe, while another culture is like water - and it takes special skills to be able to survive in both elements.” In the same book Hofstede describes the Power Distance Index and Uncertainty Avoidance Index as critical indices for analyzing cultural differences. It is evident that Russia and Britain are very far apart in both of these critical indexes.

But despite the cultural differences, James and I share similar values. This is probably because we have very similar social backgrounds, albeit in different countries. We were very young when we met, so we could align our practices and our practice in broad terms and in professional terms. We were growing up together professionally, developing our ‘special skills’ of practicing together in each other’s country over the years.

Although our biculturalism is an essential part of our professional identities, and despite our shared history, James and I are different characters. As a result our personal skillsets are symbiotic:
- native English speaker vs native Russian speaker
- communication skills (Russian, English and international clients, consultants, etc.)
- logic vs intuition
- patience vs quick decision-making
- design skills (scale, different stages)
- delegation vs control
- sketch books vs tracing paper
- computer skills vs very few computer skills
- football vs figure-skating...

But there is a lot of common ground. We do share:
- work ethic
- appreciation for the clean and simple
- love for the exciting
- dislike for excess
- ability to initiate and accept new directions and ideas

We both design our projects and run our practice by talking, sketching and laughing. After 20 years together we share a bizarre sense of humour, which is a peculiar combination of both English and Russian humour, and sometimes difficult for other people to understand.

Perhaps it is similar to the sense of humour of Anton Chekhov. By the late-19th century, there were a number of British businessmen in Moscow. TsUM, the grey gothic department store behind the Bolshoi Theatre, was built in 1900 for two Scotsmen, Andrew Muir and Archibald Mirrielees. The playwright shopped regularly at TsUM, and even named two of his dogs after the owners.
How do we work together now?

There are two main principles:
- working with people in the studio: no apparent leadership (the situation is the leader)
- working with each other: reflection on/off each other and ‘relay’

Over the years, the ways James and I exercise authority in our studios have been modified and adjusted, depending on location, projects and size of studio. But these days it can be expressed in one (very old) organizational theory by an American pioneer in the field, Mary Parker Follett10: “How can we avoid the two extremes: too great bossism in giving orders, and practically no orders given...? My solution is to depersonalize the giving orders, to unite all concerned in a study of the situation, to discover the law of the situation and to obey that... One person should not give orders to another person, but both should agree to take their orders from the situation.”

Considering that in the USSR and in post-Soviet Russia the main principles of control was indoctrination (apart from a single unruly decade between 1990–2000), I had to make a long personal journey to feel comfortable in such a democratic setting as the UK.

My father is a fantastic chess player who could see five moves ahead in a game. As a child I often watched him playing with his brother or a friend, sitting motionless at our kitchen table for hours on end, enveloped by the smells of garlic and dill – essential ingredients of my mother’s perpetual cooking. Watching them play, I would feel that I could understand the game, I could follow the logic and could even spot mistakes before they did. But I never had the same feeling when I was playing myself. The game would absorb me. I would get emotional and eventually give up or throw the pieces off the board. My father’s explanation was very simple: “It is always easier to recognize other people’s mistakes than our own.” This piece of parental wisdom and all its implications were lost on me at the time.

Later, I came across Daniel Kahneman’s book ‘Thinking, Fast and Slow’, in which he analyzes in depth how and why we make our choices. To my surprise, all my way through the book, I could see the scientific proof of my father’s statement: chapter by chapter, test by test. It is always easier to recognize other people’s mistakes than our own.

Subconsciously, James and I have absorbed this maxim, and licensed each other to apply it to our way of practice, to allow each of us to ‘look over the shoulder’ of the other in a way that benefits a project or a process rather than stalling it. We can rely on each other’s help, advice and opinions at any stage of a project.

The Renaissance artists often used mirrors while painting or drawing. They would examine a picture in a mirror to see the possible imperfections, mistakes in perspective construction or symmetry from initial sketching to final strokes. Our process of working together is that mirror.

We are reflecting on/off each other to run our practice. This reflective relay pervades all of our work, enhancing the design, ensuring the quality, and protecting the integrity of the ‘Black Spot’ – the creative essence of each project that we find worthy to protect (this is described in Chapter 14 - The Black Spot).

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10 Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933): American social worker, management consultant and pioneer in the fields of organizational theory and organizational behaviour.
4. Made in the USSR

How important is life background to the mental space of an architect?
How important is life background to the mental space of an architect?

Krasnodar

“I never want to be an architect!” I declare to my parents (and the world) at the age of 14. My parents are both architects, and I have a few friends from architectural families – I’m aware that the children of architects are almost inevitably drawn to the profession, try as they might to stay away. Nicholas Boyarsky came to architecture at 25, before that he was selling books.

Architecture looms large as the institution to which my parents both belong, and I’m determined not to join them: I am going to be a fashion designer. At 17, I finish school – and its intensive English course – with excellent grades. My parents expect me to leave Krasnodar for Moscow and to study architecture at Moscow Architectural Institute (MARKHI) – the best establishment to do so in Russia at the time. Instead I join the local PTU (professional technical college) to study dressmaking, with a view to spending a year there and then joining the Fashion Design Department at Textilny Institute in Moscow. I am a socialist, and sincerely believe in ‘growing through the industry’. Having seen films like Moscow Doesn’t Believe in Tears, I know that you just have to work hard and get the good grades, which I’m confident I can. I am very good at sewing, knitting, constructing garments, and everything else to do with the hands (model-making, sculpting, engraving – as I child I had been encouraged to try a bit of everything by my parents).

Sadly, very soon I learn that no one at this PTU (no one ever), has got grades high enough to continue their studies at a university of any kind. The director explains to me in rather colourful vocabulary that their task is to train factory workers. The PTU is not a place for some stuck-up, middle class girl who corrects teachers during classes and puts ideas in other pupils’ heads. Their institution did not want me. It was a big scandal and I had to leave.

My favourite buildings in Krasnodar:
Avrora Cinema (1967, architect Evgeny Serdukov) and Dom Knigi (House of Books), built in 1972, architect A.Yakimenko.

Krasnodar was founded in 1794 as Yekaterinodar. The original name meant “Catherine’s Gift”, recognizing Catherine the Great’s granting of land in the Kuban region to the Black Sea Cossacks. In 1920, as a result of the October Revolution, Yekaterinodar was renamed Krasnodar “Gift of the Reds”.

The city originated as a fortress built by Cossacks to defend imperial borders. Cossacks (kazaks) are a group of predominantly East Slavic people who became known as members of democratic, semi-military communities located in Ukraine and in Southern Russia.

After the Revolution of 1917, Don and Kuban Cossacks were the first nations to declare open war against the Bolsheviks. Cossack troops formed the effective core of the anti-Bolshevik White Army and Cossack republics became centres for the Anti-Bolshevik White movement. With the victory of the Red Army, the Cossack lands were subjected to ‘Decossackization’ and the man-made famine of 1932–33 (Golodomor).

During the World War II, Krasnodar was occupied by the German Army between August 12, 1942 and February 12, 1943. The city sustained heavy damage and human losses.

In Russia’s 2010 Population Census, Cossacks were finally recognized as a discrete ethnicity. There are Cossack organizations in Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Poland, and the United States.
Kaluga. I spent many winter holidays in Kaluga, where my mother’s parents lived. As there was no snow in my home town in the South, it gave me a real understanding of the Russian climate. There in Kaluga, I first began to read science fiction books, and became obsessed with space exploration and futuristic shapes.

Kaluga is the birthplace of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857-1935), who was a Russian and Soviet rocket scientist and pioneer of astronautic theory. He is considered to be one of the founding fathers of rocketry and astronautics. After the World War II, my grandfather, a communications officer, was moved to Kaluga with his family. He was involved in the Soviet Space Program, and I suspect the nuclear program as well – although he never mentioned it. He was a great believer in nuclear power as an energy source.

My favourite building in Kaluga.

Moscow
My parents were very patient while watching these events. They tentatively suggested that I go to Moscow anyway, and sit the entrance exams to MARKHI. “After all”, they said, “it’s the best general education there is – a bit of fine art, sculpture, history of art, composition... And you don’t have to be an architect at the end! There are book designers, opera singers, rock bands...” Off I went to MARKHI and loved it: all of it. The first three years were brilliant, and I honed my fine art, sculpture, history of art & architecture, composition, model-making.

It was all good until we got to architecture, when it turned boring: the syllabus was archaic, there had been no variation since 1934. The Institute had no interest in upgrading the program to match the changes that were happening all around us. Luckily, although the students were bored and frustrated by the institution’s refusal to change, the surrounding world of Moscow was becoming more and more interesting.

There was a lot of political and social upheaval in the lead-up to Perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union, but one particular aspect fascinated me. This was the way in which change was manifested through Moscow’s architecture and urban design, affecting human behaviour on a grand scale.

After the Revolution, Russia had faced massive housing crises. The existing housing stock could not cope with the urbanisation of the population: people were squashed into uninhabitable basements, barracks, disused industrial properties, etc. The constructivists were the ones to tackle this problem in the 1920s. Their solutions were based on ideals of collectiveness, openness and freedom. They built a few revolutionary housing estates, where the bedrooms were the only “personal” spaces, all else (bathrooms, kitchens, readings rooms, sport facilities) was shared. The constructivists also set new rules for town planning. All internal courtyards should
have ventilation, all habitable spaces should have openable windows, and at least half of rooms in any flat should have direct sunlight. These rules were an amazing breakthrough for fighting disease, especially since antibiotics would not become widespread until the 1940s. However, the construction methods available at the time were very slow and poor quality. The constructivists’ vision could not provide the solution for the country as a whole.

From the early 1930s, Stalin had needed to emphasize to the population that although not everyone could live in individual apartments, they could at least benefit from public facilities like the metro, concert halls and stadiums. These ‘idealized structures’ were filmed and shown around the country to stimulate collective pride. More than this, the Stalinist regime exploited the communal flats for political control: “Komununakh… where people were sharing apartments sometimes as many as 9–10 families per one bathroom, were an integral part of post-war Russia.” Lack of personal space and privacy created the ideal environment for people to police the neighbours, inform on each other, and perpetuate fear and paranoia.

For these reasons, it’s impossible to underestimate the massive shift in the country’s housing policies that happened in 1964, after Stalin’s death, when Nikita Khrushchev created a new type of construction. Everything was standardised, and choices strictly limited – from design elements to construction principles – speed was the driving factor. Between 1956 and 1964, 54 million people were rehoused into their own private apartments. Finally, the unprecedented and long-awaited ‘housing revolution’ had arrived. The death of architecture was a birth of the private citizen. For the first time in Russia’s history, the majority of the people could behave however they chose in their own private space. The new prefabricated houses were built around old towns, in the outskirts, next to forests and rivers, giving residents access to outdoor space. These settlements were called microrayon.

The cultural consequences of this massive shift were enormous: a new underground culture emerged. Sitting in their private kitchens, people could listen to Vyssovsky’s songs, listen to Radio Liberty, or create a piece of art. With the regime losing its grip on society, the underground elements flourished and quickly spilled into the mainstream. Rock groups like Aquarium, DDT, Nautilus Pompilius and Kino were performing in public and making records. Boris Grebenshchikov’s “Rock ‘n’ roll’s dead but I am not yet” was coming to us from the radio. Controversial films like Aza and Interdrozhibka (Inter-girl), plays directed by Lyubimov, free television, Pozner’s – the whole country was buzzing, and the world was changing.

Against this background of change and expansion, tutors in Moscow and Canterbury organised a two-week exchange between the two universities. Fascinated and excited by the international possibilities, we pushed for further collaboration. We planned for a year-long student exchange, and after a further splendid term in Canterbury I was offered the place. At this, the institution in Moscow balked. The Ucheny Otdel refused to support a one-year exchange (one term was bad enough, and my project from Canterbury did not fit their approved curriculum).

If I wished to continue my studies at Canterbury, the Institute would have nothing to do with me. They need ‘dedicated students’, who adhered to the established syllabus, instead of running around Europe and putting ideas in other students’ heads. It was a big scandal and I had to leave.
Not Russia: Canterbury

Leaving MARKHI to study in England required a lot of preparation. It wouldn’t have been possible without massive help from numerous friends – students, architects, professors and critics[^1]. They all thought the initiative was bold and brave, and that it demanded support. With their help I managed to get a small grant from Soros Foundation[^14], as Russian money could not be exchanged for any currency in those days. And Canterbury School of Architecture decided not to charge me for the whole year’s study thanks to my ‘outstanding’ performance during the previous exchange! Through this mix of hard work and generosity, the plan came together.

Arriving at Dover by ferry felt incredible – the weather was perfect, the white cliffs were spectacular; I thought I was going to jump overboard with excitement. Studying at Canterbury restored my faith in architecture. The unit system (based on the AA ideas) allowed the practicing architects teaching there to choose their own subjects. The studio work gave a sense of community; the integrated engineering course was fascinating. And beyond the school walls there were people, mostly architects, who generously decided to ‘adopt’ me[^15]. They gave me places to stay, weekend and holiday work (and income), free lunches and a lot of guidance. With their help I successfully completed my studies, having to do RIBA Parts 1 and 2 in the single year[^16].

However, the bureaucracy of some British institutions proved no better than those back home. The admin department at the Canterbury School of Architecture forgot to submit my visa documents to the Home Office. With help from a local Member of Parliament I secured permission to stay till the end of the academic year, but not a day longer. It was a big scandal and I had to leave.

Conclusion

Perhaps as a result of these experiences, I resolved to keep a distance from any large organisation or institution. This is why I am not a General Director of Mosproject[^17], but run my own small practice with James McAdam, on our own terms.

[^1]: Alexey Mescherinov (1959-1991), Viacheslav Glazyuchev (1940-2012), Mikhail Ryabov and others were most helpful in getting me out of Moscow and into the UK.

[^14]: Created by the international financier and philanthropist George Soros, mostly in countries emerging from behind the Iron Curtain, to initiate and support open society activities including education of librarians and others; expansion of a free press, publishing, human rights, arts and culture.

[^15]: John Thompson, Theo Crosby, Ann and Johan van Schaik and many others were tremendous help during my studies in the UK.

[^16]: There was no recognition of qualification between RIBA and Russia at the time, in order to get RIBA Part 1 I had to present all my student work from Moscow to an RIBA panel in 1991, as well as doing my course work and sitting exams for Part 2.

[^17]: Mosproject: large state design and project institute in Moscow.
How can one single event create the basis of practice for years to come?

In Outliers – The Story of Success (2008), Malcolm Gladwell describes how important it is to be in the right place at a specific moment in time, and how a series of events and happenings conspire in the development of any professional career and any success story. Very rarely, a set of circumstances comes together at a particular moment to make something extraordinary possible.

The Berlin Wall had fallen in November 1989. Mikhail Gorbachev1, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had opened the USSR to international possibilities. Then in August 1991, Boris Yeltsin2 had taken over the reins and announced that the Soviet Union would no longer exist.

It was a moment of great excitement. A new, democratic Russia was about to emerge. Everyone in Russia was excited to make international connections and everyone outside was intrigued and eager to be involved. Seminars, conferences and exchanges were abundant, with both Western organizations and Russian institutions keen to capitalise on the new, tenuous contacts.

Having completed a student exchange in 1991, McAdam and Kalinina were in the perfect position to participate in and contribute to this collaborative mood. They had spent several months at Moscow Architectural Institute and Canterbury School of Architecture, respectively, and so had an understanding of what was going on in architecture in both Britain and Russia.

In contrast to the optimistic backdrop, the early nineties had been a difficult time for graduating architectural students3. There was very little work. For McAdam in particular, having graduated in 1991, it was a time of low-paid intermittent employment with various practices. Ironically, this was a hugely positive situation. Through days of anxiety and austerity, there was time to sit and strategize. Without the recession of the early nineties, McAdam and Kalinina would probably have moved unquestioningly into jobs in large practices, and never seen the light of day. Project Imagination happened instead.

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1Mikhail Gorbachev: last leader and the only President of the Soviet Union 1985–1991.
3UK recession of 1990–92: caused by high interest rates and falling house prices. The recession followed a boom period in the late 1980s.
The idea was very simple, but logistically daunting: take a group of leading British architects to Moscow, run workshops and give lectures at Moscow Architectural Institute.

For several months, the idea was discussed and deliberated when the two young architects spent weekends together in Canterbury. At the time, McAdam worked for Alison and Peter Smithson\(^4\) and Kalinina was completing her diploma at Canterbury School of Architecture. Whilst everyone generally agreed that it was a good idea, the timing and details of the proposition were only understood when discussed with Alison Smithson. Alison (who rejected small talk with anyone, let alone the office junior) took an active interest in the proposed Moscow venture. With raised eyebrows, Alison confirmed that, if the initiative came to fruition, both she and Peter would participate. As arrangements developed, Alison began to suggest and communicate with other suitable participants.

From there, the operation gathered momentum. McAdam and Kalinina were joined by fellow graduate, Nick Bell\(^5\). The event was given a name – Project Imagination Moscow. Notepaper and a homemade leaflet were printed, and invitations to take part were sent to a number of well-known British architects.

News of Project Imagination reached Catherine Cooke\(^6\), the leading scholar in Russian Avant-Garde\(^7\). On hearing the details of the proposition, she committed to lift the status of event. Catherine encouraged coverage in the architectural press, attended meetings with participants and sponsors, and advised on the content of the ensuing workshops and seminar program. Catherine thereby became a partner and co-organiser of Project Imagination, giving much impetus to the tasks at hand. Her involvement was full and hands-on. She worked until four in the morning with McAdam and Bell at her house in Cambridge, writing briefs for workshops, press releases, and making posters and leaflets for the event.

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\(^4\) Alison and Peter Smithson: British architectural practice of international renown. Associated with Brutalism of the 1950s and 1960s.

\(^5\) Nick Bell: fellow student of McAdam and Kalinina, at Canterbury School of Architecture.

\(^6\) Catherine Cooke (1942–2004): a scholar of Russian Avant-Garde and Modernist architecture.

\(^7\) Russian Avant-Garde: influential wave of modern art and architecture between 1900 and the 1930s.
5. Project Imagination

The dates were set for 2–7 November, 1992. Twenty British architects and a group of students from the Architectural Association were confirmed as participants. Sponsorship to cover flights and expenses was in place from The British Council and Ove Arup and Partners. Project Imagination had been announced in the British architectural press. The only drawback was that the team had little idea of what was happening at the other end in Moscow – and how the second part of the operation would materialize.

Kalinina had completed her studies in Canterbury and been forced to return to Moscow under threat of deportation. McAdam had visited in early autumn, and together they had announced Project Imagination to the Rector (Alexander Kudriavtsev) and other contacts at Moscow Architectural Institute. Working with the bureaucracy of a Soviet Institute was unclear and complicated, but since an order had been signed by the Rector, and tasks clearly distributed, preliminary arrangements within the Institute moved forward with relative ease.

The plan was for the entire fifth year to suspend its regular studies in order to engage in Project Imagination for a week. The professors, along with their student groups, were to team up with their British counterparts to run the workshops. Accommodation would be provided in shared rooms, in the student hostel at Leninsky Prospekt. This, and other practical matters, including preparation of work spaces, provision of food, transport and entertainment, was arranged directly by Kalinina with some little support from the International Department of the Institute. This was an unimaginable undertaking at the time, but through her superhuman efforts all practical matters passed without incident.

Finally, after months of organization, Alison & Peter Smithson, Theo Crosby and Polly Hope, Ivor Richards, Will Alsop, Ian Ritchie, Mark Fisher, Richard Horden, Jeremy Peacock, Christine Hawley, C J Lim, Nat Chard, Raoul Buschhoeten, Robert Mull, Simon Heron, George Katrodutis, Melanie Hey, Christopher McCarrthy, Mick Bundell, Patricia Hilbrandt, a journalist from the Architects Journal, a journalist from Germany, nine students from the Architectural Association and one from the Bartlett (University College London), arrived in a cold, grey, snowy Moscow for the first week of November 1992.

It was a bizarre week. To set the surreal tone, the night before the opening, there was a rock concert in the main hall at the Institute. Besides making this difficult to prepare spaces for the next day, windows were broken and the main entrance foyer was trashed!

The Russian professors, despite receiving briefing papers and workshop themes, proposed their own projects. In some cases they adapted, in others the British architects adapted to their suggestions, and in others both parties decided to do something completely different. The Smithsons were set on making a study of the city fabric and were abandoned by their headstrong counterpart, Aleksey Khrustalev; Ian Ritchie was virtually adopted by Olga Petunina in a quest for enjoyment in teaching and studying architecture; Richard Horden brought his own balloons; Mark Fisher, having looked around the building, decided that the only way forward was to design toilets for the Institute.

Project Imagination turned the Institute upside-down. The atmosphere was one of a festival. Some younger tutors commented that it was the beginning of a new era. Lectures were attended en masse – Mark Fisher drew a crowd of over a thousand students to see him lecture about his designs for Pink Floyd’s and the Rolling Stones’ stage sets. There were parties every night. There were misunderstandings over language, food and transport. There were unforgettable moments – one
evening after a dinner in one of Moscow’s obscure new restaurants, a group of at least ten participants climbed onto the back of a snow truck in lieu of more traditional transport back to the hostel.

Project Imagination was a huge and exhausting task for the organisers, who alongside engaging with chosen workshops as assistant tutors, were constantly resolving logistic problems, and running back and forth between the various buildings and spaces of the Institute. Kalinina was most distracted by this, and as a fluent bilingual architect she translated all of the major lectures at the event. This in itself was some feat!

Against the joyous atmosphere, press coverage was surprisingly serious, in that it approached the event in straightforward political and educational contexts, with little mention of the ‘festival’ enjoyed by participants. The Architects Journal released an article entitled: ‘After Six Years of Thinking Big, What Next for Russia?’ Whereas the Russian journal Architekturny Vestnik labelled the event ‘The Invasion from London’ – a moniker which Project Imagination still retains today in Moscow architectural circles.

Ruth Owens described the events in The Architects Journal, 25 November 1992:

Many of the visitors’ projects sought to divert the Russians from their broad-brush approach to one with more relevance to the world which students will have to cope with when they graduate. Raoul Bunschoten and Robert Mull from the AA set up small groups of AA and Russian students to design joint ventures as models of collaboration.

Somewhat more pragmatically, Ian Ritchie and Mark Fisher’s 24-hour design project to transform existing buildings yielded a high-tech toilet block for the Institute on a minimal floor area.

As part of a project to relate building interiors to human movement, Nat Chard and C J Lim from the University of East London recorded the movement of students acting out various situations by attaching fairy lights to their limbs and taking long exposure photographs.

Refurbishments and small scale improvements were considered by Theo Crosby’s group.

Simun Heron and George Katrodutis from the AA invited students to explore the ideas of individuality in design by responding to a given image of a building or site with slides, objects and photographs of their own. Melanie Hey took her students sketching to help consider the contexts of proposed buildings.
Perhaps most interesting of all, the Smithsons analyzed the monastic forts which ringed Moscow, exploring a Russian architecture which pre-dated influences from the west.

Going right back to basics, they were carrying a sun path diagram for 55° North – the same latitude as Edinburgh and Stockholm – as one of several tools used to understand how buildings were organized to cope with Moscow’s severe climate.

Project Imagination Moscow forged the first real connections between the architects of Britain and the new Russia, at a time when it was most needed and when both sides were interested in such exchange. It changed lives and directions for a number of young Russian architects and students, giving them tangible contacts with the British participants, and vice versa.

The results of Project Imagination were made into an exhibition\(^5\) which was shown at the Royal Institute of British Architects in November 1993. As a reciprocal arrangement, a handful of professors from the Institute were invited to the opening in London.

McAdam and Kalinina were 25 years old. They had instantly become well-known and accepted in architectural circles in both Britain and Russia. In the summer of 1993, they opened a Moscow office for Will Alsop. The exhibition now hangs in the Museum of Moscow Architectural Institute, alongside drawings by the heroes of Vkhutemas\(^5\) and the Constructivist movement, Ivan Leonidov\(^6\) and Konstantin Melnikov\(^7\).

Over the next few years there were further Project Imagination events, which took the form of workshops, seminars and other initiatives. In 1996 McAdam and Kalinina organized Project Imagination at Tbilisi Academy of Art, with Georgian architect Niko Djaparidze\(^8\). Whilst smaller in scale, the format of this event was similar to the original – Tbilisi was unknown territory and at the time, and difficult to get to. Along with McAdam and Kalinina, a group of international architects including Eugene Asse\(^9\) (Russia), Mike Russum (UK), Avie Rahaminoff (Israel), and Sotiris Papadopoulos (Greece) attended the event. They gave lectures and ran workshops alongside Georgian professors at the academy. As with Project Imagination Moscow, this is a recognised moment in recent Georgian architectural history, and was filled with memorable events and incidents.

The most recent initiative under the Project Imagination label was ‘Action: Housing’\(^10\) which first began at the Arch Moscow exhibition of 2002. This was an interactive event, where the public were invited to consult with exhibiting architects on the designs of their private projects – houses, apartments, shops and studios. The underlying idea of this was to increase awareness of the profession to the general population. ‘Action: Housing’ remains a feature of the annual exhibition today.
Project Imagination was a celebration which took place at the end of the Cold War and the opening of borders between Russia and the West.

The principles engaged through this event formed the core of the Bicultural Practice: the balanced input of two individuals and two cultures; the process of learning through exchange; the role of public activities in the creation of communities of practice; the acceptance of social responsibility; and the conviction that a good debate is often the best way to begin professional relationships.

6. Working with the Prospectors

How can client and architect synchronize for the advancement of both parties?
How can client and architect synchronize for the advancement of both parties?

Tensions within client/architect relationships are historically endemic in Russia. The architects consider the clients ignorant and only focused on economic gain; the clients consider the architects stubborn and driven by their egos. Sadly, these stereotypes are pervasive and self-perpetuating, and they are unfortunately preached at all levels. Even students at the liberal School of Architecture in Krasnodar show disregard for their clients. The general cultural background, plus a lack of communication skills and patience, has resulted in failed relationships, distrust and essentially unsatisfactory buildings. The legacy from the past 15 years is a dreadful mess in the design of the fabric of many of Russia’s cities.

As mentioned in Chapter 12, ‘The Accumulation of Skills’, one of the ways that the practice has procured commissions is through social acquaintance with business people and individuals who have also been part of the learning process in Russia’s new era. Nurturing those client relationships is a particular skill. It takes many different forms and can change over time. It can involve one specific commission, or several.

A specific instance of nurturing a relationship along these lines is our 15 years of work with a particular client group. This relationship began with a commission for the interior design of a single apartment and progressed over time to one of the practice’s most serious commissions – a new settlement for 15,000 people. The road to this project was a fast-track journey of growth and learning which the practice shared with that particular client group.

As with McAdam and Kalinina’s own story, this journey began with two adventurous graduates (a Russian and an American) starting a business together in Russia in 1992. They began by importing Marlboro cigarettes and delivering them by truck to Kazakhstan, where they were a valuable commodity. In the process of this business, a government official asked them to supply an air conditioning unit for his office – it gets hot in Kazakhstan! Naturally, the colleagues and visitors of this particular government official soon requested air conditioning units as well. So the graduates, who began by selling cigarettes, had evolved into a supplier and installer of air conditioning systems known as Business Air. As Russia’s new market economy developed throughout the 1990s they became one of the leading installers of ‘building services’ in Moscow – a successful business concern in a city where oil companies and financial corporations were in flux. At this time McAdam and Kalinina were being commissioned as architects by the same corporations.

As the reputation of Business Air flourished, their Russian partner was asked to run the project management and real estate activities for a large Russian corporation, Sobin Bank. Requirements were developing and architectural input was needed, and so he contacted Kalinina to assist with the designs.

The first official commission was for the interior design of an apartment in a very poorly-designed building where there was a problem with sales. The apartments were 16m deep with only two windows, both on the same side. The practice proposed a series of fixed and moving translucent screens set at intervals across the space to achieve different degrees of privacy, but providing some light at all times in all spaces. The idea was met with scepticism by estate agents as too contemporary for the Moscow market, but the client decided to take the risk. The apartment featured in the design press and sold immediately. Subsequently the idea was reused on other levels of the building.
6. Working with the Prospectors

As his confidence and influence grew, the same client acquired a complicated land plot in a rural area on the edge of Moscow. Whilst the geographical location, Nikolskaya Sloboda, had potential, the site was uninspiring bog land devoid of any features.

The brief was to build a new residential settlement of 48 medium-sized, detached houses with recreational facilities. They would be set around a new boating lake, for sale to the upcoming middle classes. Estate agents warned that for this site and brief in particular, a conservative approach was the only way – townhouses in the ‘English Style’ (whatever that means) were desirable. At the same time, construction costs should be carefully monitored to minimize the risk. With this complicated set of parameters established, the practice was invited to present ideas for the project.

In response to the estate agents’ strict definition of what was desirable, we decided to introduce a red herring (or Little Red Dog) to the project – a sacrificial ‘igloo’ house so contemporary and unusual that discussions with the client and agents were focused on this. The rest of the development seemed very conservative and traditional in comparison, so it was approved without debate. We fought hard to keep the ‘igloo’ house, but eventually gave up and proceeded to build the first stage of the settlement – 12 houses over 2.5 hectares. The houses are positioned in staggered formation to increase settlement density, whilst adhering to requirements for light and privacy. Unlike other residential developments of the time, we succeeded in eliminating fences around individual sites, creating a coherent sense of community and shared space.

The Practice began to look in detail at local materials and building methods to achieve a basic but contemporary design. We rejected overt reference to any single ‘style’. This project was all about making the houses work and fit together using brick, traditional sloping roofs and a modicum of glazing. The dwellings have south-facing balconies and terraces, and each has a double-height living room space, fireplace, sauna, and covered parking space.

The houses were a huge success and sold or rented very quickly. They were also featured in the architectural and real estate press with the heading: Modest contemporary houses have arrived in Moscow’s suburbia.

5. English Style: neo-classical, colonial appearance with symmetric façade and portico.
6. Little Red Dog (Krasnaya Sobachka): this saying belongs to Nikolai Ullas (1914-2009), my mother’s favourite tutor from Moscow Architectural Institute. “Put something outrageous on your drawings that would distract the examiner”. Ullas was teaching from 1952 to 2005. At the age of 78 he took a most active part in Project Imagination, and in 1993 he visited London as a part of the trip for the tutors of the Institute organised by McAdam and Kahma.
7. Contemporary: term used in Russian architectural circles to mean anything but Neo-classical, neo-vernacular or post-modern.
Nikolskaya Sloboda (McAdam Architects)
Photos by Alexey Narocinskiy 2005.
Both the client (by now known as North West Developments) and the architect were building a formidable reputation for successfully delivering contemporary projects in difficult circumstances. This may sound like a modest achievement in the current climate, but at the time it was unprecedented. The results were basic but considered ground-breaking in this environment, and most importantly, everyone involved was enjoying the process.

The next challenge concerned a plot of land which the developer found impossible to sell. We were asked to come up with a design solution in the form of a private house. The plot was on a corner site, adjacent to an electricity substation and the local administration building, with car-parking in front. It was rejected by all potential buyers as too exposed. As the site was considered commercially redundant, the client gave us complete freedom in formulating the brief, stylistic approach, and materials for construction. The only elements requiring control were the budget and program. Otherwise, it was a carte blanche.

We proposed a simple but effective solution, positioning the building with its back to the exposed corner (north), and an open courtyard to the south. In order to make the flat and static nature of the location more dynamic, we introduced a ‘spiral’ roof effect, stepping down around a courtyard, from two storeys in the bedroom wing to a single level in the swimming pool wing. It was to be a large single dwelling of 1200sqm, targeted for sale to the affluent segment of Moscow society. However, the extent of the modernity and clean lines proposed was a shock to the client. He was happy with layout and brief, but was concerned that the architecture was simply unsellable.

We pleaded our case using books of Californian houses by John Lautner8 and Charles Deaton9. We also gave him two VHS films featuring architecture of a similar family – Hitchcock’s North by Northwest and its scenes of the Vandam House on Mount Rushmore (MGM film set), and Ang Lee’s Ice Storm, which depicts an affluent suburban neighbourhood in Connecticut and shows a number of large modern houses in similar climatic conditions to those found in Moscow region.

These ideas, tempered with a ‘conservative element’ of using traditional local materials and building methods, comprised our plans for the Russian farmhouse with reference to seasonal conditions and ‘back to the wind’ design. It resulted in the much acclaimed Larch House, a breakthrough in many respects. The project was reported by the architectural press as a new way of introducing vernacular ideas back into Russian architecture and was lauded as the first sustainable home in Russia. The client liked the Larch House so much that he decided not to sell, but moved in with his family on completion.

By now, this area was becoming a popular and well-known Moscow suburb. Plots were selling fast, and a range of extravagant houses of all styles were being built in the new neighbourhood. The houses by McAdam and Kalinina stood out as clean examples of ‘modernism’ among an array of neo-classical and rustic-style villas.

However, we became acutely aware that some of the ‘modernist’ houses being built at the edge of Moscow were disappointing their owners, who found them difficult to inhabit. The houses were expensive and good-looking buildings, featuring huge double-height spaces. They were difficult to heat, with north-facing ‘winder gardens’ where nothing grows, and suffered numerous other practical issues – such as a lack of storage. Their designers were making the same mistake as their Modernist predecessors had in the 1920s and 1930s.

These failed ‘modernist’ ventures embodied Eileen Gray’s10 warning from 1929: Extrenal architecture seems to have absorbed avant-garde architects at the expense of the interior. As if a house should be conceived for the pleasure of the eye more that for the well-being of its inhabitants.

By contrast, we were trying to achieve a seamless connection between interiors and exteriors in all our houses. The design of interior spaces, integrated with the structural fabric of the house rather than being implemented later by an interior designer, was an essential quality in our projects. Kalinina especially was always committed to designing each house in its entirety, from the site layout, landscape and volume, down to integrated furniture, the bathroom finishes, internal views, and the last doorknob. Based on brief experience with Theo Crosby at Pentagram (as described in Chapter 11, Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy), the Practice knew that no detail or component was too small to affect the overall design.

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8 John Lautner: architect in 1960s California. Designer of modern houses, many of which featured in books and films.
9 Charles Deaton: architect in 1960s California. Designer of modern houses, many of which featured in books and films.

The opportunity to perfect this notion arose from a new commission from the same client. This had a similar brief to the previous project – a large house of around 1800 sqm with internal swimming pool, to be designed in its entirety, including interiors and landscape. It was to be located in the affluent part of Moscow’s suburbs to the north-west of the city. The area, which was originally the site of Soviet government dachas, had recently become a base for the *nouveau riche*. This resulted in the sporadic development of large houses of all shapes and styles of architecture. There was little attention to local culture, building methods or sustainability in the surrounding buildings.

The fundamental aim of this project was to set a new benchmark in the design of the Russian house. Known as House 20, our design used simple forms and traditional materials whilst avoiding the use of any decorative elements. The site had once been a partially-forested area, and the design was motivated by the protection and integration of existing mature pine trees into the new landscape.

The house was planned as an irregular cross-shape, affording each of the main spaces natural light from at least two sides, whilst enabling a reduction in scale and volume. The resulting four rectangular volumes were clad alternately with white limestone and red cedar planks. This external cladding was selected as a subtle reference to the building’s rural, cultural and climatic settings. The vibrant reddish-brown planks were chosen to emulate the bark of the surrounding pine trees, while the limestone cladding made reference to the stone of Russia’s traditional church architecture, its light surface illuminated by a carpet of snow in winter.

The south façade of the house opened onto a series of wood and stone terraces, which overlooked a central lawn dissected by a linear pond and fountain feature. The new and existing landscapes juxtaposed with the natural materials and clean volumes of the house to give the occupant a heightened sensory experience.
6. Working with the Prospectors

Main stair in double-height entrance hall.

Swimming pool interior.

Views showing outside of cedar-clad pool block to limestone façade of main living block. Photos by Yuri Palmin, 2007.

Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan

Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan

Houses 20 (McAdam Architects).
View looking along outside of cedar-clad pool block to limestone façade of main living block.
House 20 (McAdam Architects).
View towards end of swimming pool block.
Photo by Yuri Palmin, 2007.

House 20 (McAdam Architects).
Site plan, showing driveway sweeping around four interlocking volumes.
In 2005, as the privatization of collective farmland became widely possible, the same client and his banking colleagues formed Komstroy, and increased their ambitions once again. They conceived a plan to develop 6000 hectares of sporadic land plots around Kommunarka, a suburban region to the south-west of Moscow. They had never done anything like this before and did not know where to start, so as in previous instances they called Kalinina for advice. But the practice was also lacking experience in this field – this was urban planning in the real sense: strategic planning and economic development.

After much internal discussion we determined to write a brief layman’s description, research the field, and draw up a long-list of ten international urban planners who would be invited to present themselves in Moscow. Then, as a client group, we would select three teams to prepare an outline urban concept for the area. Presentations were made in Moscow to an invited international jury of experts including Leon van Schaik, Jim Meikle, Terry Ealey and Mick Timpson. The presenters were Albert Speer, John Thompson, and URS/Maxwan, and the eventual review resulted in URS/Maxwan being appointed. Following the successful conclusion of this process, McAdam and Kalinina were commissioned to prepare a master plan for the pilot project of the urban plan, on the condition that we would partner with a larger European practice for support.

This project became the Nikolo-Khovanskoje settlement for 15,000 people on a site of 78 hectares. We invited an old friend, Jan Stormer from Hamburg, to collaborate with us as a joint venture. As with the previous commissions for houses, our stance was to gain a full understanding of the situation and brief, and then gently push the boundaries to achieve something more progressive. The master plan, a configuration of low-rise apartment blocks, took over a year to develop. It was seen as a feasible and desirable alternative to living environments in Moscow’s suburbia.

Implementation of our design for the Nikolo-Khovanskoje settlement was halted in 2008, due to political and economic changes in project structure. However, today we continue to work with members of the same client group, including MBK Developments, on small development projects in London. Our professional relationship develops within the same, now established, pattern: complicated projects are instigated, and the Practice stretches the boundaries and ambitions to a point beneficial for both development potential and for the resultant architecture.
7. The Emergence of the New Russian House

What was the practice’s role in the development of the new Russian house?
What was the practice’s role in the development of the new Russian house?

There has always been a strong architectural community in Moscow. Some of today’s architects are especially interesting as they have emerged from the Paper Architecture movement of the 1980s. Eugene Asse, Yuri Avvakumov, Alexander Brodsky et al have now become leading architectural practitioners and advisors on the development of the profession. Alongside these disruptive voices there are also enduring, steadfast practices, established by students of the 1980s who managed to find their feet at the time of sudden change.

Unfortunately, during the 1990s these creative architects were driven from the city by Mayor Luzhkov’s policies and his insistence on the ‘Moscow Style’. As a result there are sadly no significant buildings by these architects within the city itself. However, private clients who had grown wealthy in the new economic environment of the early 1990s were beginning to commission private houses outside the city boundaries. A handful of these clients were well-travelled and open-minded, and so gave architects an opportunity to experiment with volumes, forms and materials. There is now a collection of contemporary houses of architectural merit at the edge of Moscow.

McAdam and Kalinina, as a bicultural practice which had grown in Moscow through the 1990s, were at the forefront of this development.

1 Paper Architecture: described by Sergey Sitar, in a 2006 issue of Tatlin (architectural magazine), as a movement whose “works were based on establishing architecture as pure art in comparison to discrete efforts to reform life. Projects on paper were not in accord with modernist urban development, but with modernist art, as the space presented in these projects was turned into individual and author’s vision. The problem of implementation has been solved – each paper project was an independent work of art, which did not require further implementation, and this was emphasized by unusual manner of graphics, ignoring the laws of physics and material boundaries, transferring the plot of the project from its Ancient time into an undefined eternity, from the reality into a conventional fictional town etc.”

2 Eugene Asse: Russia’s best known architectural critic and Rector of Moscow Architectural School.

3 Yuri Avvakumov: well-known architect, writer and curator in Moscow.

4 Alexander Brodsky: well-known practicing architect and artist in Moscow.

5 A form of neo-classicism or neo-vernacularism which incorporated towers, turrets, domes and arches in multi-coloured buildings of varying materials.
The Architectural Resistance
Moscow architects who have made substantial contributions to the development of the typology for the new Russian House. All projects shown below are in and around Moscow.

Yury Grigorian
architect, partner at Project Meganom
Russian director of Strelka Institute in Moscow
Villa Roza and X-park, Residential Settlement, 2002

Alexander Brodsky
practicing architect and artist
Paper Architect
Archistoyanie Rotonda, 2009
Vodka drinking Pavilion, Klaemiske Lake, 2008

Totan Kuzembaev
practicing architect
Yacht Club, 2009
Klaemiske Lake, 2009
Bird House, 2010
Pirogovo Resort

Yuri Avvakumov
architect, writer and curator
Paper Architect
Installation in Manezh, Moscow, 2004
Counter-Relief House, 1998

Alexander Shikan
architect, Founder of architectural bureau Oikothermie
Butkovsky Per 17-19, 2010

Dagno Avco
Russia’s best known architectural critic and Rector of Moscow Architectural School. Paper Architect
Krestianskaya Zastava, 2004

Vladimir Plotkin
Founder of TTO Reserv. practicing architect
Yachtsmen’s House
Klaemiske Lake, 2010

Savinkin and Kuzmin
Partners at Polo-Design. practicing architects, exhibition designers, curators
Villa O, 2006
Calamar House, 2005
Considerations for the design of the new Russian house

The underpinnings of the concept for a new private house typology in Russia are not easily formulated. The design of dachas, usadbas, and simple village houses are historically based on traditional or classical models, dating to pre-revolution times. Even the soviet dachas of the Stalin era and later are based on 19th century concepts. Regardless of size or status of typologies for private houses, common parameters prevail. They are all stand-alone and have space around them, and they are all dictated by extreme climatic conditions. They suffer long harsh winters - sub-zero temperatures, heavy snowfalls, and short days with temperatures often as low as minus 20 degrees C. Summers are warm with bright sun and rain showers, and temperatures up to 30 degrees. In this respect orientation, aspect, shelter and the dual-season lifestyle are the main drivers in the design of the Russian private house.

Most houses traditionally have a similar planning arrangement with summer spaces - porches, verandas, terraces, arranged around central (winter) spaces. Shapes and forms are dictated by climatic conditions, immediate surroundings and aspiration of the designer (owner). Houses were built of wood or stone with varying façade designs - no dacha, usadba or private house would be the same as another, although they would have similar components. Roof shapes, fenestration, colour and even fences on the street front are different.

Thus, the continuity of design can be established in the components of design – response to climatic conditions, planning arrangements, basic materials, and the building methods available.

In the design of the House in the Pine Forest (an usadba) a number of these components were instinctively considered and incorporated to the functional volumes – bay windows (verandas), terraces and a winter garden are introduced around and between core (winter)functions and spaces providing optimum solutions for light and shelter - winter and summer living.

This contextual approach was tested further in the design of a small settlement at Nikolokaya Sloboda. This project was for a row of twelve medium-sized detached houses in village format around a central pond. Staggered in plan with two different house designs, we suggest the irregular façade line of a Russian village. Floor plans, roof shapes, fenestration, materials and colour were all considered in the same way – where irregular arrangements are implemented within set parameters similar to those used for a village development. Bay windows, verandas, and terraces are again arranged around a central core of (winter) functions.

For the Larch House which is described in chapter 10, these considerations are deliberate and uncompromised. The Larch House is a structured attempt at re-inventing the Russian private house – where the ideas and concepts of the traditional dacha or usadba are fused together with modern-day living. Based on the ideas of the traditional Russian farm house, the design responds to climatic conditions with a closed ‘back to the wind’ winter volume wrapped around an open central courtyard – simply creating a summer space with verandas and terraces. The outer facades are of traditional timber planks with sparse and irregular fenestration. Gentle...
The House in the Pine Forest (2000)

Having approved and built two modest buildings in the centre of Moscow before Mayor Luzhkov’s policies took hold, in 1998, the practice was commissioned by the owner of a newly-established Russian airline, to design a large private house on an estate in 18 hectares of pine forest, to the south-east of the city. This was probably the first straight commission for a contemporary private house at this time in Russia.

The commission was for a 1200sqm dwelling with 25m swimming pool to be set on a gentle slope with views through the forest. The design was made up of two simple volumes, the main house square, and the swimming pool rectangular. They were clad in opposing white and dark grey stone with a glazed interlocking connection.

The setting of the house was the all-important driver for the design. The site was an 18-hectare forest in an undulating landscape – real Russian parkland. The idea was that the house should contrast with its surrounding landscape, thereby enhancing both. This was achieved by an approach to gentle lines. The forest was made up of timber verticals angled from the earth at between 85 and 95 degrees, so the house would be made of perpendicular lines: clean stone horizontals between 0 and 5 degrees angle from the earth.

Views from the house were also important, and were to frame the best parts of the forest, including a water-level window by the pool to stimulate the feeling of swimming in the forest. The project, known as ‘The House in the Pine Forest’ or ‘The Russian Villa’, was widely covered by the architectural press in both countries as a breakthrough in the design of new Russian house.
The practice benefitted immensely from this success. The House in the Pine Forest was the first building that we realised with maximum architectural freedom, without the restrictions of city authorities or other negative influences. This House gave us an opportunity to understand a practical direction, use of architectural form, available materials and building methods, which were then implemented and developed on future housing projects.

In the book Country Houses Today by Jeremy Melvin (2000), he compares the house to Alvar Aalto’s Villa Mairea. He also makes general reference to the influence of Palladian Villas:

Allowing the house and its inhabitants to exist within rather than above nature was a central concern of the design and has also influenced the main block. It has a central, double-height winter garden with the main living accommodation on either side, the kitchen and dining room in one side and further reception rooms on the other. That this basic parti has much in common with generic Palladian villa plans is probably no coincidence. Palladio’s influence runs so strongly through the Western tradition of country houses that scarcely an architect can be unaware of it, even if they choose to reject it.

Also like Palladio’s villas, this house had to adapt to the capabilities of the local construction industry. Detailing and features such as the internal staircase had to be kept simple, but that imposed certain practical elegance on them. Here the strategy for covering up the inevitable roughness of local masonry was to import smooth limestone cladding. This gives the house a precision and prominence within its forest setting, establishing a visual tension between nature and artefact that might prove a starting point for a revived tradition of Russian country houses.

E. Jeremy Melvin: architectural historian and writer who has contributed to many international publications. Consultant on the Royal Academy of Art’s architecture program.

7 Villa Mairea: large guest house for wealthy couple, Harry and Maire Gullichsen, Noormarku, Finland. Designed by Alvar Aalto.
Wider influences
The House in the Pine Forest set a trend amongst a modest number of private clients for embracing 'contemporary' architecture. As a result, today there are a number of interesting 'contemporary' houses, scattered amongst the neo-classical palaces, retro-castles, neo-vernacular villas, and derivations of Frank Lloyd Wright, in Moscow’s expanding, wealthy suburbs.

Further such houses were commissioned to the practice, including The Larch House10 and House 2011, and other architects with similar commissions became friends and colleagues of McAdam and Kalinina. Together, they became known the 'Architectural Resistance'. Members included: Eugene Asse, Yuri Avvakumov, Alexander Brodsky, Yuri Grigorian12, Andrey Savin13, and Savinkin and Kuzmin14.

Later, some of these architects went on to win more substantial commissions within the city and produced some modest but thoughtful buildings. But while the basic standard was incrementally raised, there were no genuine architectural masterpieces produced in this 20-year period, other than these private houses.

On reflection it’s clear that these commissions for ‘contemporary’ houses were the main outlet for these practicing architects to express their ideas, experiment with form and materials, learn and enjoy the design process, and actually realise buildings as authors. The practice felt a responsibility to advocate for this process and to lead the way by example.

9 Contemporary: this term is used in the specific context of Moscow, where anything other than the neo-classical, neo-vernacular was described using this generalisation.
10 Larch House: private house realised by McAdam Architects in 2006, described in the essays – Working with the Prospectors and Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag.
11 House 20: private house realised by McAdam Architects in 2007, described in the essay – Working with the Prospectors.
12 Yuri Grigorian: well-known practicing architect, partner at Project Meganom. Russian director of Strelka Institute in Moscow.
13 Andrey Savin: well-known practicing architect, partner at AB Architects, Moscow.
14 Savinkin and Kuzmin: well-known practicing architects, exhibition designers, curators, Moscow.
8. The Practice Map

How can we begin to understand the complex workings of 20 years of practice?
How can we begin to understand the complex workings of 20 years of practice?

This is the first in a series of chapters that analyses the practice’s work through diagrams. The function of the Practice Map was inductive, as it allowed us to look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. The Practice Map was developed through an interactive, iterative process. It was drawn and redrawn at various stages of the research.

When we began this research program in 2011 we were not quite sure where or how to begin. There were distinct areas of study: the accumulated work of 20 years, the bicultural and peripatetic nature of the practice, and the range of practice activities. Until then, we had seldom stopped to reflect on the body of work or to understand how our practice itself had evolved over time. As a practice of multifarious nature we also found it difficult to isolate specific traits in our work.

Our first step in this reflective process was to create a large, printed poster displaying the range and breadth of practice work and activities. Horizontal bands were used to represent different practice activities and project typologies. These were plotted against a timeline, with specific moments and political events identified. The poster is referred to as Practice Map 1, Practice Symposium One, Ghent April 2011.

We found this to be a useful process, as it allowed us to stand back and view the body of work and practice activities as a coherent whole. It also gave panelists and supervisors the opportunity to comment and advise on the next steps of our research.

Practice Map 2 (Practice Symposium Two, Ghent November 2011) was a hand-drawn development of that first poster, where connections and links between the works and activities were detailed. Practice milestones and influences were added.

Practice Map 3 (Practice Symposium Three, Ghent April 2012) was a further development of the poster, where contemporaries, mentors and enchainments were added, along with further clarification of the links and connections in practice development.

By this stage, the Practice Map had helped us to clearly understand that the practice revolved around three clear streams of activity: strategic visions and initiatives, competitions, and built projects. With this in mind we developed the Diagram of Endeavours, which is described in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

As the research developed, we were able to add current works, and to understand where they were positioned and how they were connected to previous activities. By the time we arrived at Practice Map 4 (Practice Research Symposium Five, April 2013) it had become a living tool for plotting practice activities and for discussing what might happen next; in other words, a tool for looking forwards as well as back.

Over the course of the research program, the practice underwent significant change. Its workload in Russia was significantly reduced as a result of the general economic and political situation, and the fact that since 2007 the partners had been located primarily in London.

The type of work became more focused, but the locations more disparate. The research process became a crucial medium for understanding and monitoring an atmosphere of internal change. There was undoubtedly a significant moment when the research was informing the future directions of the practice.

To capitalise on this development, we needed to understand not only the streams of work and connections between them, but also the exact routes, turns and crossovers for each specific project or activity. To this end we developed Practice Map 5 as a linear diagram without illustration, similar to that of the ‘Tube Map’ (an underground railway or metro map). We identified the projects and activities as stations and intersections, whose interconnecting lines precisely plotted their trajectories and described their background and developments over time.

The results were fascinating and provided new angles for practice reflection. For example, the Practice Map confirmed the important starting point of the Project Imagination seminar (see Chapter 5), and was used as a basis for Chapter 6, Working with the Prospectors, for which the route is identified in colour on Practice Map 5.

Overall, we conclude that the Practice Map was an essential tool for reflecting on the body of work, and understanding how the practice evolved over time. It was inductive as it allowed us to stand back and look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. It gave clarity in complexities, and helped us to identify key moments, links and developments.

We believe that for established practices with a large body of work, complex or specific characteristics, the Practice Map is an extremely useful tool for illustrating and clarifying practice activities, influences and contexts in a single complex diagram.

1 Tube map: The London Underground map as drawn by Harry Beck in 1931.
McAdams Architects, Practice Map 1, Practice Research Symposium One, Ghent April 2011. This diagram shows practice activities plotted against a timeline with specific moments and political events identified.

McAdams Architects, Practice Map 2, Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent November 2011. This diagram shows a development of Practice Map 1, with connections identified between projects and activities. Milestones and influences are also noted.
8. The Practice Map

McAdam Architects, Practice Map 3, Practice Research Symposium Three, Ghent April 2012. This diagram shows a development of Practice Map 2, with further detail on contemporaries, mentors and enchainments. At this stage the three streams of practice activity become clearly visible.

McAdam Architects, Practice Map 5, Practice Research Symposium Five, Barcelona November 2013. This diagram shows the Practice Map converted into a 'Tube Map' where exact routes, connections, turns and intersections are identified for specific projects and activities.
9. The Endeavours of Practice

What are the practice’s activities and aspirations and how do they combine to create the essence of the practice?
What are the practice’s activities and aspirations and how do they combine to create the essence of the practice?

This is the second in a series of essays that analyses the practice’s work through diagrams. The Endeavours of Practice was the undertaking of an introspective process. It was a detailed examination of the position of our works and activities in relation to one another, and in relation to the aspirations and satisfaction gained by the practice.

Every architectural practice has its own way of working, its own specific drivers and circumstances. Each has specific aims, objectives and aspirations for the future. We can generally refer to these matters as ‘endeavours’ in architectural practice.

Each practice’s endeavours are predicated on instances where components of practice interlock, entwine and separate in accordance with the ambition, strategy and everyday workings of that practice and its partners.

In the case of McAdam Architects, we have established through use of the Practice Map (Practice Map 3, Practice research Symposium Three, Ghent April 2012), that our work is clearly organized into three streams of activity:

A. Strategic visions and initiatives
B. Competitions
C. Built projects

To determine the exact nature of these categories we investigated what they entail and what importance they carry for the practice.

A. Strategic visions and initiatives

This activity stream covers the practice’s strategic involvement in urban planning visions, briefing documents, development strategies, teaching and consultations, workshops and seminars, exhibitions and publications.

During the research process, we realised that the practice consciously engages in these activities for both altruistic and strategic reasons, and thus that these activities could be classified as one or the other.

The motivation behind these activities can involve: the simple passing on of knowledge, assistance with educational programs, initiation of events beneficial to the architectural profession, open dialogue and exchange of ideas in public settings. These drivers are altruistic.

At the same time they can involve: an opportunity to have a degree of influence on social and professional behaviour, a possibility to broaden our knowledge base, a move to advance our position in the profession circles, and possibly be used as a stepping stone to procuring interesting commissions. These gains are more strategic.

Most of these activities have been in or related to Russia, but this is not exclusive.
B. Competitions
The second activity stream encompasses a vast and diverse range of unrealized projects which have not developed further than conceptual or schematic design. They comprise commissions for feasibility studies, design concepts, invited and occasional open competitions. They cover a diverse range of project types, as described in Chapter 15, ‘The Art of Elasticity’.

C. Built projects
The third activity stream is the most conventional in that it encompasses buildings which are designed in entirety, from inception to detail design, by the practice. In most cases these projects have been realized. They have included office buildings, private houses, pool pavilions, a church, and an incomplete department store for which construction was suspended. Most of these built projects are mentioned in this dissertation.

The Diagram of Endeavours
Following on from the inductive analysis of the practice through the Practice Map, we have continued to use diagrams to understand our practice.

In many instances, endeavours remain within a specific stream. For example, an initiative will not progress further than being a series of exhibitions or seminars. A competition will be confined to a minor publication, plan chest and model store. A built project will be restricted to a rigid brief and be realized as an architectural object not worthy of particular resonance.

The activities held within a specific stream may contain elements of both enjoyment and endurance but are often static in nature. But when the streams begin to cross, a new intensity is suddenly apparent in the dynamic of the practice. An initiative may suddenly move into the competition stream, a competition may move into the built projects stream, a built project may become catalyst for an initiative, and so on.
The Diagram of Endeavours focuses on this specific state of intensity. It is made up of three overlapping activity streams (rings) with a Circle of Enjoyment occupying the central area of the diagram and Fulfilled Architectural Enjoyment (Joy) at the very centre, where the three rings overlap.

Unfortunately, not all elements of architectural practice fall within the Circle of Enjoyment. Beyond this area is a resistant Line of Tolerance, where much of everyday practice takes place. Further over this line are Trials and Tribulations, and in the extreme, a prohibited area of Humiliation.

To further understand our work in this context we have selected four recent projects or activities which we consider as enjoyable, and positioned them into the diagram. These are: the Central House of Artists, Caesarea pool pavilion, the Nagatino Competition and the Regional Architectural Laboratory.

All four of these works are positioned well within the Circle of Enjoyment, some in the overlapping of two rings, where streams of work have crossed.
The Central House of Artists

After careful consideration we have identified one project which could occupy the central position in the Diagram of Endeavours. This is the Central House of Artists, a project which has in fact existed in each of the three rings at different moments in time.

The Central House of Artists is an outstanding example of Soviet Brutalism. The 60,000sqm exhibition hall is positioned on the bank of the Moskva River and was completed in 1979, in time for the 1980 Olympic Games. It was designed by Nikolai Sukoyan, an architect at the state design institute, MosProject 2, and was opened in 1979.

The practice has been associated with this building since the 1990s. First we exhibited at the annual architecture exhibition Arch Moscow, and subsequently became members of the organizing committee for this event. During this time we became closely acquainted with the General Director, Vasily Bychkov, with whom we regularly discussed the future refurbishment and upgrade of the building.

In 2003, the practice was commissioned to prepare proposals for such a refurbishment project, to include additional exhibition spaces and a new museum of contemporary film. The scheme for this was very simple – the museum element was to be a free-standing L-shaped structure, carefully engineered into a redundant courtyard space, with a new entrance and piazza on the riverbank. Additional exhibition space was to be provided within the existing parapets and underground. Proposals were presented and well-received by the Russian Minister of Culture, Mikhail Schvydkoy, but did not come to fruition as there were too many parties involved for the purpose of positive decision-making.

Rather than losing momentum, the practice was then appointed to assist with minor re-planning works, the design of new gallery spaces and the main foyer.
The next episode of involvement was of a different nature, as the Central House of Artists was suddenly targeted for demolition. A development company owned by the wife of Mayor Luzhkov\textsuperscript{5}, had seen the real-estate potential of a large site in the city centre. Knowing that many high-level figures detested the building, they successfully lobbied for political approval to demolish it – signed-off by President Putin in 2008. They proposed to replace it with a Norman Foster-designed, mixed-use development known as ‘The Orange’.

The architectural and arts communities were up in arms. This was one of the best examples of Soviet Brutalism and the building was well-suited for its use as a gallery. To counter the threat, we set out with a group of architects and colleagues, including Vasily Bychkov, David Sarkisyan\textsuperscript{6} and Eugene Aisse\textsuperscript{7}, to protect this building and to denounce any proposals for its demolition and replacement.

In a Building Design report by Rory Olcay, James McAdam was bluntly quoted: “It’s the best building in Moscow and absolutely needs protecting. Foster should go and have a look at it. He shouldn’t be designing a building to replace this one.”

In the same article, Eugene Aisse was quoted saying: “It’s totally wrong. Starchitects such as Norman Foster consider themselves free of obligation when it comes to the consideration of local heritage.”

The battle which ensued was lengthy and complicated, with much debate spreading through the architectural community. On this occasion the Intelligensia – artists, writers and architects – actively objected, and there was wide support to save the building, including a number of actions and installations on location.

Eventually the demolition order was revoked by President Medvedev\textsuperscript{8}, on the basis that the previous decision was not legally-founded. The life of the Central House of Artists continued again as normal. This episode was seen as a turning point in the protection of architectural heritage in Moscow.

In 2011, the practice was again commissioned to prepare proposals for the refurbishment and expansion of the building. This time it involved a complex development of new exhibition spaces, art cinemas, galleries and public amenities. The plan was to upgrade the Central House of Artists and its surroundings as the ‘National Centre for Contemporary Arts’. The scheme for this was prepared as a development strategy, in collaboration with economic advisers Happold Consulting and landscape architect Martha Schwartz\textsuperscript{9}. The concept had the support of Federal Government and the financial backing of a wealthy private individual.

The problems encountered were a repeat of the previous scheme, where the three stakeholders – The Central House of Artists, The Tretyakov Gallery\textsuperscript{10} and Moscow City Government – were unable to reach agreement on a way forward. On a positive note, the proposals for recreational areas and landscaping on the riverbank, which had featured in both the 2003 and 2011 concepts, were recently detailed and implemented by our colleagues Oleg Shapiro and Dmitri Likin\textsuperscript{11}.

In 2013, the practice was again appointed to undertake the re-planning and design of the main foyer and associated support spaces. This work is presently ongoing.

Using the Diagram of Endeavours we have been able to assess the position and status of each particular project/practice activity, and therefore consider its value to the future of the practice.

We have also noticed through the Diagram of Endeavours that our endeavours could be beneficially applied to other architectural practices and in other creative professions.
9. The Endeavours of Practice

McAdam Architects, visualisation, The National Centre for
Contemporary Arts, 2011.

Main pedestrian entrance
Underground automobile drive way
Views to water
Pedestrian circulation and access
Public to Quiet space transition
BUILDING
PUBLIC
Landscaping transition
TRANSITION SPACE
HARDFORMAL
SOFTINFORMAL
to
G

The National Centre for
Contemporary Arts, Initial
landscaping proposals by
Martha Schwartz, 2011

10. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

What are the practice’s seminal key projects and what are the drivers behind the approaches engaged?
What are the practice’s seminal key projects and what are the drivers behind the approaches engaged?

Through a combination of sub-conscious recognition, implementation of the Practice Map and Diagram of Endeavours, we have isolated three key projects which were and are fundamental to our practice methods and ambitions. These projects represent the level of professional and architectural satisfaction to which we aspire.

These three key projects have been identified at points of overlap on the Diagram of Endeavours. Their selection has also been reinforced through an analytical matrix, where a study of architectural components has shown them to have similar characteristics. We describe this in Chapter 13, Happy Families.

The key projects are:

A. Trubnaya Office Building (1999)
B. The Larch House (2006)

The projects are all in Moscow. They were built or designed between 1997 and 2006, in the period when practice activities were concentrated in Russia. Interestingly, they are completely different in function, type, materials and appearance, and were subject to different design parameters and external influences. We have studied these three buildings in detail in an attempt to understand the design drivers at work and the mental space involved in their creation.

Having chosen these three key projects, we examined them through two central questions:

Why are these projects successful in terms of practice aspirations?
What are the drivers behind the designs and how has the mental space influenced their development?
A. Trubnaya Office Building, 1999

The Trubnaya Office Building was commissioned to Alsop Architects in 1997. The brief was for a standard, corporate office building of 9000sqm, which would be rented to Western corporations involved in Russia’s oil and gas industry. The site was positioned on the corner of two backstreets in a hilly part of central Moscow. Its surroundings were mainly low-rise 19th century buildings – servants’ quarters with the occasional element of Soviet Brutalism nearby. The building was to be functional and contemporary in nature, but had to be realizable using local building methods and available materials. In Russia in the late nineties this was a serious challenge!

The eight-storey building was designed as a green-rendered, boat-like object, raised on a black stone plinth with cylindrical ‘bow’ at the lower front end, and standalone ‘rudder’ tower at the higher ‘stern’ end. The upper and lower parts of the building were separated by a continuous strip of horizontal glazing, and strip windows were staggered across the bulk of the green façade in an accelerating spiral effect around the cylinder.

After approval of the initial concept design, we invited an established local practice – AB ‘Ostozhenka’¹ – to work with us on design development and submission to the city authorities for the planning permission.

The project was approved just months before Mayor Lushkov’s repression of contemporary architecture took hold in the centre of Moscow.

Without doubt, the building contains references to Constructivist architecture². Whilst this was not the initial stylistic intent of the architect – more a consequence of the contextual nature of the location, the design process and building materials available at the time – Constructivist traits have definitely informed the resultant architecture.

¹ Architectural Bureau Ostozhenka was a successful, Moscow-based private practice founded by Alexander Skokan in 1992. They were part of the movement to promote contemporary architecture in Moscow during the 1990s.

² Constructivist architecture was a form of modernism which flourished in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s. Many works of this movement are internationally renowned and its effects on later developments in architecture have been marked.
When exhibited at Arch Moscow in 1999, an elderly visitor commented: “I remember this building from my childhood (1930s). They don’t build them like that anymore. Well done for refurbishing it!”

The Trubnaya Office Building featured in *World Architecture* by Elaine Knutt, who wrote:

*Trubnaya is very much of the city it belongs to. McAdam and Kalinina hope that it could mark the start of a new interest in modernism in the city. They pride may seem out of proportion to what would seem to be seen elsewhere as a neatly executed, modernist office block. But in the middle of Moscow’s architectural politics and its contextual bays, towers and cornices, Trubnaya is a real Russian revolution. It was voted Building of the Year at the Annual Architecture Exhibition in 1999, and the architects were awarded the first prize by the Russian Academy of Architecture.*

In terms of practice aspirations, at the time this project was close to ideal. We had successfully realised a contemporary* building in central Moscow, making clear reference to its context and surroundings, whilst utilising local building methods and materials.
Trubnaya Office Building
(Allop Architects)

Typical and Ground Floor Plans

North, East and West Elevations

Trubnaya Office Building visualization of main foyer, 1997

Trubnaya Office Building and Univermag
B. The Larch House, 2006

The Larch House was commissioned to McAdam Architects in 2004. It was as a sequel to the Nikolskaya Sloboda settlement, which was reaching completion at the time. The brief was for a large private house with internal swimming pool for a wealthy Russian family.

The site for this was a modest plot, in bog land, which had been part of a collective farm. The site was now designated for suburban development to the north-west of Moscow.

The story behind this commission is outlined in Chapter 6, Working with the Prospectors. At the time, Moscow's new wealthy population was growing, and was already well-travelled in Western Europe. A select few adventurous clients were becoming cautiously interested in building houses reminiscent of those they had seen in Switzerland and on the French Riviera.

Not satisfied with the idea of simply importing such contemporary architecture, we set out a contradictory approach – to work on a typology for a new Russian house. Our design would allude to local culture and traditions whilst providing a home for modern living. Again, it was crucial that we stay within the parameters of local building methods and materials.

The resultant design makes reference to the traditional Russian farmhouse, set out as a U-shaped plan, with closed volume wrapping around a central space. Minimal fenestration was used on the ‘back to the wind’ exterior façades, whilst internal south-orientated courtyard elevations were fully-glazed and could be opened in summer.

4 Siberian Larch is a conifer which was traditionally used for construction of dwellings throughout Russia, and was noted for its strength and durability in the harsh climate.
The house is clad in a traditional Russian building material: Siberian Larch planks. These are stained light grey and set in horizontal arrangement across the gently sloping form of the building. This, together with occasional accents of protruding red canopies and an entrance porch, give a contemporary feeling in the snow-covered environment.

The Larch House was vaunted as Russia’s first sustainable home. It featured in the publication *Sustainable Home* by Cathy Strongman, who wrote:

*McAdam and Kalinina have demonstrated how Russia’s architectural heritage can be adapted to provide contemporary environmentally conscious and comfortable homes. Such projects as this are essential if Russia’s traditions are to be preserved in the construction frenzy that is currently transforming the country.*

The developer who commissioned the Larch House liked it so much that he and his family moved in themselves on completion of the building. He then immediately commissioned another similar project to the practice.

In terms of practice aspirations at the time this project, too, was close to ideal. We had successfully realised a contemporary house in Moscow Region, based on some of the ideas and principles of the traditional Russian farmhouse, whilst maintaining the standards required for modern living and again utilising local building methods and materials.
10. Trubnaya, Larch House and Univermag

Ground floor plan

- Living room
- Dining room
- Kitchen
- Entrance hall
- Cinema room
- Utility room
- Storage & shower
- Service stair
- Serving pit
- Terrace

First floor plan

- Master bedroom
- En-suite room
- Study
- Bedroom
- Shower
- Office

South elevation showing glazed courtyard area.

Section through entrance hall and courtyard showing living room and bedroom wing.

West elevation showing "back to wind" facade with external fenestration.
Larch House (McAdam Architects). View of west “back to wind” façade with minimal fenestration.

Photo by Wallpaper, 2006.

View of north-west façade (exposed corner) and red brick main entrance arch and porch.

Photo by Richard Bonneau.
10. Trubnya, Larch House and Univermag

Swimming pool interior showing glazed elevation to courtyard
Photo by Project Russia.

View to roof terrace, from first floor study

Main entrance hall, looking towards entrance
Photos by Wallpaper. 

Living room and raised dining area
Photo by Project Russia.
C. Univermag Department Store, 2004

Following the success of the Trubnaya Office Building, the practice gained the approving attentions of Russia’s architectural circle – in particular, those opposed to the approach of the city authorities. We were invited to give talks, sit on juries and organization committees, and even to participate in TV shows.

During this time the practice was asked by a French retail developer to prepare design proposals for a new flagship department store. It was to be built in a most significant architectural location in central Moscow. The site is at the junction of Moscow’s inner ring-road, the Garden Ring, and Prospekt Sakharova. In its immediate surroundings were a number of well-known 19C edifices, not least Tsentrosoyus (Le Corbusier), The Peoples Commissariat for Agriculture (Shusev), and the Gosplan Computing Centre (Pavlov). The location is dominated by public architecture, and the Garden Ring at this point is 16 lanes wide. It is representative of Soviet urban planning in terms of scale and imposition.

The design of the building was to emulate the scale and force of the location. There would be subtle use of similar elements from, and conversations with, its lauded neighbours. As with most modern-day department stores, the main volume of the project was to be a six-storey 100 x 40m closed box raised above a transparent ground floor shop smelling of perfume. But the main façade on the Garden Ring there would be a huge 40 x 35m display window, completely glazed, with open escalators and circulation space creating intense interaction between thousands of cars and hundreds of department store shoppers.

The blank box façades were to be pixilated with a regular sequence of shop window displays, and random metallic patterns which would shimmer at the passer-by. From the top floor of the building would protrude a panoramic café in converse, echoing a similar element on the roof of the Tsentrosoyus.

According to Project Russia in their issue ‘Aliens’ 4/2004, featuring Univermag:

The department store is a simple but elegant building: a box opening up towards the Sadovy Kol’cho is hanging over the buried ground floor and its glass veil, that surrounds the structural columns, reminds of the suppressed in the process of completion ‘pilotis’ of the Tsentrosoyus building.

The department store was designed in a frantic 12-month period, with regular visits to Paris and the set-up of a small satellite office in London.
The project was watched carefully by the international press – as a potential breakthrough for contemporary architecture in Moscow.

In her article ‘View from Moscow’ in the Architectural Review of April 2003, Catherine Cooke gives a detailed overview of energetic, but not always thoughtful (and often questionable in appearance) developments in Moscow architecture of that period (2000–2004). She embraces a few rare examples of new Modernist buildings, including the Univermag department store. In that spirit, the buoyant little Anglo-Russian office of James McAdam and Tanya Kalinina, former directors of Will Alsop’s Moscow operation, has a major new department store about to go on site between the famous complexes of Le Corbusier’s Tsentrosoyuz and Shchusev’s Agriculture Ministry.

But at the same time, the site was also being watched by the conservative planning authorities. They had by now regained control on the city’s architectural program and had been ordered by Mayor Luzhkov to develop the city in the Moscow Style – a form of vernacular neo-classicism.

Project Russia decided to include the Univermag Department Store to their special 2004 issue entitled ‘Aliens’ (Chuzhie), dedicated to the work of foreign architects in Moscow. In his foreword to the issue Bart Goldhoorn, Editor-in-Chief explained the reasons behind it:

‘It is therefore no coincidence that it is only with this issue, dealing with foreign architects in Russia, that we felt confident in our ability to produce an issue featuring exclusively projects. Besides, there was no alternative: none of the works by foreign architects have yet been realized, so there are simply no finished buildings to be published.

And whether or not this will ever happen, and in what form, remains to be seen. Recent events in St Petersburg concerning the realization of Dominique Perrault’s design for the Mariinsky Opera House do not leave much hope. Even the representative of the Ministry of Culture – the client for the building – states that the architect is only there to design the façade and the interior, then it seems plausible that in other cases too, where the clients are developers, buildings will be realized without the participation of their foreign architects.

This in itself gives additional value to the publication of projects in this issue of PROJECT RUSSIA: this is the only way in which we shall have a chance to see these projects in their pristine, unobscured, and ‘uncensored’ form.

Four storeys of underground parking were constructed in 2004 at a cost of $12 million, after which point building works were suspended by the city authorities. The site remains empty.

As a project, the Univermag department store could have been a major breakthrough for the practice, and for contemporary architecture in Moscow. Whilst we were optimistic about its realisation, we had foreseen that there could be difficulties with this project. Unlike the Trubnaya Office Building and The Larch House, Univermag was on a major development site in a prominent location, attracting the interests of the city authorities and the architectural establishment at large.

Exposed retail display, on a street near Arsenal Football Club, London. This was used as a metaphor for the Univermag project: maximum exposure of goods.

Univermag Department Store (McAdam Architects). Diagramatic sketch by James McAdam for initial design stage.
Univermag Department Store
(McAdam Architects)

South-east elevation showing pixelated façade with protruding box café on Prospekt Sakharova.

South-west elevation showing display window onto Garden Ring.

Univermag Department Store, central Moscow (McAdam Architects). Photo montage of building from across the Garden Ring, showing 35 x 40m display window with exposed circulation.

Sixth (top) floor plan showing restaurant.

Ground floor plan showing open shopping floor.
What common attributes do these key projects have?

Why do they differ in appearance and style, whilst they still appear to be from the same practice?

Most of the components at work in these projects are in fact contextual. All of the three buildings studied:

- strive for suitability to a particular location or site.
- make sensitive / considered reference to cultural or architectural context.
- display an understanding of local building methods and choice of materials.
- subtly introduce a range of dynamic elements (as described in Chapter 13, Happy Families).

These three projects are considered among the partners to most clearly represent the practice does best. It is also interesting to note that for these projects:

- the practice was completely empowered as architects and lead designers for the whole of the design process.
- the partners had full control of the design process and were continuously involved.
- the initial sketches for the Larch House and Univermag Department Store were made in a regularly-frequented Paris hotel (as described in Chapter 14, The Black Spot).
- the resultant buildings (or projects) are very similar to their initial sketches.

We conclude that there are definite formulae at work in the specific task of designing buildings, where a location, context or specific parameters form the basis for a series of steps in the design process.

This could be described as an in-built manifesto or set of rules operating at a subconscious level. Through the process of research and examination, these shared, subconscious rules double as our guiding principles. The result in our case is that whilst the realized buildings are very different to one another, they are all related due to the common formulae being applied.

We are confident that similar formulae are at work in many established practices and that understanding those dynamics via in-depth study of key projects is a useful way of clarifying and developing a manifesto or set of rules from which to practice.
Who are the practice mentors and what enchainments are apparent in its work?

Today, the majority of new architectural partnerships arise from other more established practices. Young architects work alongside colleagues for several years, before winning a private commission which allows them to ‘go it alone’. Working as juniors, in the relative safety of an established practice, they learn skills and techniques which enable them to practice with some degree of confidence and efficiency. Along their journey to practice they will often have mentors – normally particular tutors or employers, who have influenced their development and future course.

By contrast, McAdam and Kalinina are rather unusual. Neither of the partners has ever spent a substantial period of time in another architect’s practice, nor have they completed a lengthy apprenticeship where practice systems and methods are learned and carried forward. Aside from a few short spells of experience with Alison and Peter Smithson, Theo Crosby, and a long-distance relationship with Will Alsop, McAdam and Kalinina have practically managed their own architectural practice since the age of 25. We have had to reinvent the bicycle!

However, along this journey, a number of specific ‘outside’ individuals have been critical to the development of the practice. We believe that these peripheral mentors have contributed a powerful combination of influences and enchainments to the work. We have identified each player using epithets for their particular roles: The Provocateur; The Enthusiast; The Advocator; The Entertainer; The Chess Player; The Ambassador; The Educator. These individuals and roles are briefly described below, with the essence of their influence highlighted in bold:

1. The Provocateur – Alison Smithson

Alison Smithson (1928–1993) was a British architect of international renown. McAdam worked for Alison and Peter Smithson for six months after completing his Diploma in 1991. During that time they gave him a clear insight of architectural ethos and the architect’s role in society. Alison was a ferocious critic of poor quality architectural and urban decisions. Her direct approach was to provoke debate and action on this. She was the first serious figure to take an interest in the Project Imagination seminar of 1992, in which instance she challenged the motivation behind the idea and basically provoked it into reality! With the Smithson’s support and participation the rest followed.

A basic understanding of the complex role of a serious architect – one who could not only design buildings, but also influence developments in society.

2. The Enthusiast – Theo Crosby

Theo Crosby (1925–1994) was an architect, editor and writer, and co-founder of Pentagram.

Kalinina worked briefly for Theo at Pentagram in 1991 when she first arrived in the UK to study. During this time she worked on small-scale interventions at the Barbican Centre. In contrast to what she had learned at Moscow Architectural Institute, a key learning point of this time was that no subject or detail was too small to be designed. Theo was an enthusiast in this respect, and along with the Smithsons, he was one of the first supporters and confirmed participants of the Project Imagination seminar of 1992.

Retaining passion and enthusiasm for these insights is critical in achieving good solutions at any scale, as well as high quality design results.

1 Reinvent the Bicycle: Russian version of phrase ‘reinvent the wheel’. Also suggesting that reinvention is key to the context of bicultural practice.


3 Barbican Centre: City of London: multi-functional performing arts centre, with adjacent housing; Chamberlin, Powell and Bon.
3. The Advocator – Catherine Cooke
Catherine Cooke (1942–2004) was a specialist in Russian Avant-Garde¹ and Modernist architecture.

Catherine appeared in the practice’s life during the initiation of the Project Imagination Seminar. She became an advisor and co-organiser, along with McAdam, Kalinina and Nick Bell. Her drive and involvement gave the event much needed status, press coverage and contacts. Catherine’s support and advice was a continuous feature to the early life of the practice. Any activities involving British/Russian relations in the profession received her undivided support.

If you believe in, and are dedicated to, a particular idea or way of doing something, support and promote it positively at any opportunity.

4. The Entertainer – William Alsop
William Alsop is a well-known, practicing British architect noted for a flamboyant approach to design.

Will was one of the participants at the Project Imagination seminar in 1992. Following this, he suggested that McAdam and Kalinina set up a branch office for then Alsop and Stormer⁵ in 1993, where they would remain until 2001. Will was extremely supportive and encouraged McAdam and Kalinina to practice with little interference. We learned much from Will in terms of how to present conceptual ideas and how to communicate with clients – with flamboyance but also with clarity.

The entertainment of clients and colleagues is a very useful asset in the establishment and development of practice.

5. The Chess Player – Valery Goloverov
Valery Goloverov is Head of School at the Faculty of Architecture & Design at Kuban State University, in Krasnodar, Russia. He is also Tanya Kalinina’s father.

Besides being an immediate family member, Goloverov became an inspirational mentor to McAdam over the years, as he observed him establish the School of Architecture within Kuban State University (Krasnodar). Over the past ten years McAdam and Kalinina have advised, lectured and taught at the school on a regular basis, and now run a six-monthly program for tutors (as described in McAdam’s dissertation Chapter 17, ‘The Rise of Kubanism’).

As in chess, even the most ambitious goal can be achieved through a complicated series of sequential moves. You need a full understanding of the parameters and conditions at work (and a lot of patience).

4 Russian Avant Garde: influential wave of modern art and architecture between 1900 and the 1930s.
5 Alsop and Stormer: architectural partnership between William Alsop (London) and Jan Stormer (Hamburg) from 1990–2000.

6. The Ambassador – Eugene Asse
Eugene Asse is Russia’s best-known architectural critic and Rector of Moscow Architectural School⁶.

Eugene established a practice partnership, ASK Architects, with McAdam and Kalinina from 1998–2001. A great protagonist for reform of the architectural profession, he showed steadfast integrity in his aim to promote contemporary architecture in Moscow, change the course of architectural education and the perception of architects in Russia. Eugene is one of the only Russian architects who is known and can converse on the international scene.

A set of defined principles, discipline, and refusal to compromise on important matters is a very useful asset in the development of a practice.

7. The Educator – Leon van Schaik
Leon van Schaik is Professor of Architecture, Innovation Chair – Design Practice Research at RMIT University.

In 2005, Leon joined McAdam and Kalinina as advisor and jury member for the Kommunarka Masterplan competition (as mentioned in Chapter 6, Working with the Prospectors and McAdam’s essay Bring on the Mega Projects). This led to an ongoing conversation about Practice Research and the architect’s role in creating social and professional environments. These discussions were the beginning of a crucial reflective process and took place in London at regular six-monthly intervals. As a natural progression of this McAdam and Kalinina joined the PhD Program – Design Practice Research at RMIT University in 2011.

After many years of intense practice it is essential to step back, reflect and analyse what one has been practicing. This way can we begin to understand what to do next.

We believe that when combined, the essence of influence from each of these peripheral mentors gives a comprehensive overview of the main external influences on the practice. These influences compliment and contrast with the innate nature of the bicultural partnership, where influence is drawn from an exchange of culture. The mentors guide the accumulation of skills, and support learning by trial and error.

Our conjecture is that overall, these components encapsulate the ethos of the practice, or at least encapsulate what we would like it to be!
12. The Accumulation of Skills

How did the practice develop professionally to become what it is today?
12. The Accumulation of Skills

How did the practice develop professionally to become what it is today?

As explained in Chapter 11, ‘Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy’, we have never spent a substantial period of time in one single practice, except for our own. In fact prior to opening a Moscow office for Will Alsop in 1993, we had barely clocked 24 months of total practice experience, most of which could be classified as student internships. So at 25 years of age we set up and ran what was in effect our own practice. We threw ourselves in at the deep end.

Circumstances in Russia in 1993 were ideally suited to this scenario. It was the beginning of a new era and across the nation graduates were walking out of universities, and together with their peers, starting their own businesses. In architecture this was an especially popular course of action – the state design institutes were in disarray due to changes in the political system, and there were no established private practices. None of these graduates knew what they were doing but that was the only way – to learn by trial and error. The negligible 24 months of work experience in Britain made us look like masters from day one.

We rapidly learned a range of skills by intuition and experimentation. Over nearly three years we taught ourselves professional practice: how to find work, how to deliver projects, and how to run a business. Not knowing any better, we divided this process into four areas: design, the building process, business management, and public activities. For many subsequent years these four elements dictated the structure for our weekly agenda.

Over the years, the learning process has continued as the practice has grown into a serious professional outfit. It has become more detailed and focused as we have tackled new types of work, new challenges, and new territories. Recent efforts to develop the London base have taken this learning process to another level, where even more specific knowledge and techniques are required in professional practice, business management, communications, and project delivery. This accumulation of further information is an intense but fascinating challenge, and always reminds us of a note in Matthew Frederick’s booklet: 101 Things I Learned in Architecture School (2007): An engineer knows everything about one thing, whereas an architect knows something about everything.

Design

Designing buildings, urban areas, and interiors are skills in which we are both very confident. Even when we have lacked experience in a typology, we have relied on Intuitive Rationale to overcome difficulties. It is most likely that we learned the basics at Architecture School (or even earlier) and they were then developed through practice and the constant engagement in new design challenges. This learning is an ongoing process.

Details concerning the practice’s design approach and methods underpin all chapters in this dissertation.

The building process

We learned about the building process through exhaustive trial and error. It took thousands of hours of experience, site visits and meetings to develop skills and confidence in this area. This, along with stamina, stubbornness, and relentless negotiations with builders, was the only way to achieve satisfactory architectural results and worthy completed buildings.
12. The Accumulation of Skills

Business management
As with many architects, business management is not our strong suit. We began the practice knowing absolutely nothing in this respect. How to find clients, calculate fees, agree terms and run an efficient office was a complete mystery. Achieving clarity in these things was a slow process, and initially came from working with very corporate organizations, such as Deutsche Bank² and BP³. Through working with these companies and their other consultants, such as Ove Arup and Partners⁴, we learned how to be professional, competent and efficient in the delivery of services. As a result, we were able to market our experience to a wider client group.

The development of client relationships has been key to this process. It goes without saying that without this the practice would never have got off the ground. The practice has over time developed two discrete streams of commissions – the first through social acquaintance (where business people and individuals have also been part of the learning process in Russia’s new era) and the second through large, international corporations who require trustworthy hands on the ground and where remote electronic contact will suffice for project execution.

Broadly speaking, the practice still operates within these frameworks today, regardless of location.

Public activities
The practice was involved with public activities since inception, with the Project Imagination seminar. Since then, both partners have been involved with a steady flow of lectures, teaching, exhibitions, conferences, judging and even TV shows. These activities are indicated as a strip on the Practice Map.

For both McAdam and Kalinina, our first public activities involved occasional teaching at Moscow Architectural Institute and annual participation in the Arch Moscow exhibition at the Central House of Artists. As the practice developed, projects were realized and published, this role expanded to include more participation in the media at large.

The first major breakthrough followed the success and press coverage for the Trubnaya Office Building. At this time, McAdam specifically was invited as speaker to numerous events and debates. These included talks at the Union of Moscow Architects and the British Embassy, concerning the future of architecture in both Britain and Russia. The Practice also featured in a Russian TV documentary, in a weekly series Architectural Gallery⁵, presented on the Culture Channel by Irina Korobyina⁵. The program focused on the life of a foreign architect in Moscow and on the recently completed Trubnaya Office Building.

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² Deutsche Bank: was extremely active in Russia in the 1990s. The bank had a large contingent and occupied the Shepkina 4 Office Development in entirety.
³ British Petroleum (BP) was extremely active in Russia in the 1990s. They were involved in ‘upstream’ activities and building of the first ‘western’ petrol stations in Russia.
⁴ Ove Arup and Partners: international, multi-disciplinary engineering group, active in Russia since 1993.
⁵ Irina Korobyina: then presenter of TV program Architectural Gallery. Important figure in Russian architectural circles. Now director of the Serpukhov State Museum of Architecture.
12. The Accumulation of Skills

In 1999, McAdam was invited to become a member of the Union of Moscow Architects, and in 2000–01 he was asked to teach a diploma unit at Moscow Architectural Institute.

Kalinina’s public activity was of a similar nature. After the success and press coverage of the Larch House, she was invited regularly as a designer on the TV show – ‘Kvartirny Vopros’ (Russia’s version of Britain’s ‘Changing Rooms’). This experience was very rewarding as it would normally involve the refurbishment of apartments for struggling families and people who were very grateful for the design implemented. Furthermore, the experience was an important moment in understanding how to present and talk about designs on television. The shows were a huge success, repeated several times, and resulted in multiple requests for Kalinina’s involvement in other media engagements.

In 2005, Kalinina was invited to take a substantial role in a TV documentary about Russians living in Britain. This was for the English language channel of Russia Today, which was to produce a series of ten films, entitled ‘The Chosen Ones’, under the direction of documentary filmmaker, journalist and friend, Mike Payne. One of the films, ‘The Architect’, was filmed in London and featured the lives of three Russian architects.

As well as starring in the documentary, both Kalinina and McAdam consulted on the contents of the film and assisted the director with a historical biography of the life and work of the architect, Berthold Lubetkin. This gave the documentary contextual depth. Lubetkin was a Russian émigré who lived and worked in London from the early 1930s. He was very successful in Britain, realising a number of renowned buildings including Highpoint and the Penguin Pool at London Zoo. Sadly, even today Lubetkin is virtually unknown to the architects of Russia. The film was shown on numerous occasions to an international audience and is now used as an exemplar for documentary filmmaking in Russia.

The scale of public activities has expanded for both partners in recent years. They are regularly invited to speak at conferences, judge competitions and awards, and give talks and lectures. They are often invited to consult, judge and speak at the World Architecture Festival (Barcelona, Singapore) and Kalinina is a regular member of the Awards Jury for ‘World Architecture News’.

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6 Changing Rooms: weekly TV show for interior design and DIY to living rooms.
8 Berthold Lubetkin: Russian émigré who was a renowned architect in Britain in the 1930s.
9 Highpoint: housing project realised in Highgate, London by Berthold Lubetkin.
10 World Architecture News: online architectural news feed which runs an annual awards programme.
Alongside these public activities, both McAdam and Kalinina have a continuing involvement with architectural education. Together, they have consulted on the developments of the new Architectural School in Krasnodar, and jointly supervise a professional development programme there for tutors.

McAdam was involved in the establishment of the new Moscow School of Architecture (MARSH), where he advised on the structure of the course and assisted communications with the Cass School of Architecture, at London Metropolitan University.

Kalinina is presently an external examiner at the University of East London.

The Accumulation of Skills was discussed at Practice Research Symposium Four, Ghent, in November 2012. The understanding of this process was an important moment in our research.

This understanding highlighted to us that the struggles experienced in developing the practice were directly related to the arduous process of self-learning. It also confirmed that the four groups of skills identified are fundamental to the practice’s development, and they continue to be used today as a method of understanding activities.

Part of Kuban State University, Krasnodar.
What are the prevalent architectural components in the practice’s work?

This chapter describes an analytical study of the practice’s body of work. This study was generated following a review of Practice Map 1, at Practice Symposium One, Ghent, April 2011, where it was noted that the body of works can seem strikingly different in appearance and form.

In the course of 20 years of practice, McAdam and Kalinina have accumulated a substantial portfolio of more than 150 architectural works. This includes over 20 realised projects, at least 50 competitions and a number of initiatives and consultations. The body of work is multifarious and covers a wide range of typologies, functions, sizes, budgets and programmes. No particular practice style, use of form, or material is immediately dominant, yet when viewed together as a set of photographs the projects have a symbiosis, whereby they form a coherent body of work.

To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, in workshop arrangement with Leon van Schaik, we grouped our works into visually similar projects, identifying the groups through recurring elements or particular traits in the designs. For this purpose we used printed project cards which make up desktop calendars and are printed by the practice on an annual basis. Examining the works through this medium, we realised that the works are easily divided into ‘Happy Families’.

Each ‘family’ has dominant elements in form and appearance from the following:

- Interlocking boxes
- Cylindrical forms
- Pixilated facades
- Urban mega-blocks
- Spirals
- Organic forms
When the ‘Happy Families’ are viewed as separate groups, a coherent design approach becomes apparent. Interlocking boxes are the largest family and are particularly evident in the practice’s residential work. A good example of this is House 20, where four volumes of different material interlock to form a single composition. Pixelated façades and cylindrical forms also feature heavily: the former is prevalent in the practice’s larger commercial and public buildings, such as the UniVemag Department Store and the latter in free-standing objects, e.g. the Trubnaya Office Building. Occasional rogue families are apparent in organic forms and spirals, where shape or symbolic statement is dominant in a brief, location or approach. This can be seen at work in the competition for the Oslo Opera House.

The results of this exercise were discussed at Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent, in November 2011. There, it was noted that this exercise was enlightening in terms of grouping the works and understanding which architectural elements and forms were in operation.

However, this still left open the question, of how the works are different and yet part of one extended family – the practice. It is worth pointing out that, later, at his final examination for the Practice Research program (Ghent, April 2014) Tom Holbrook talked about the similar notion of ‘Continuity behind Variety’.

Though informative, the ‘Happy Families’ exercise was essentially reductive, in that viewing these traits as static, contained elements did not reveal how a multitude of elements, design techniques, or external pressures may combine or move across varying project works. For this purpose we pursued different and more detailed investigations.

1. House 20: McAdam Architects project for private house designed by Tanya Kalinina in Moscow Region, 2005-2007
2. Univermag: McAdam Architects project for department store in central Moscow, 2002-2004
3. Trubnaya office building in central Moscow designed by McAdam and Kalinina (Alsop Architects), 1996-1999
14. The Black Spot

What is the essence of the design process?
14. The Black Spot

What is the essence of the design process?

This essay looks directly at the workings of the practice – how it operates, how we design, and the spaces in which that design takes place. We investigated these workings through a series of intense internal conversations, with regular input and questioning from our supervisor, Leon van Schaik. This conversational process developed over Practice Research Symposiums Three, Four and Five, in Ghent from April 2012 to April 2013.

Our process of collaboration is based directly on the notion of biculturalism – combining the cultural attitudes and customs of the partners in practice. In this way, the practice as a microcosm of biculturalism, where two individuals from different cultures have learned alongside and adapted to each other, and practiced as one entity for many years. This format works through a continuous exchange of information, ideas, and opinions between the partners – Conversations. It gives us the luxury of being able to stand back and view from a distance, as well as being able to focus at close range. We can combine cross-cultural knowledge with specifics of a location or context, achieving an international architecture infused with a sense of local culture.

The key to articulating this exchange is the interaction between the partners. As individuals, we have many different and opposing characteristics. But underpinning these is a core of common traits and values, with a dynamic licensing process positioned at the threshold, in which each partner empowers the other to pursue distinctive and individual design pathways. Supplementing this, a relay process operates between us to optimise our complementary skills.

To elaborate on this collaboration, it is important to understand the processes of practice – what is important to us and how we work. All topics begin with conversations between the partners. These conversations range from high-energy discourse and arguments to pragmatic question-and-answer discussions. They can last for five minutes or two hours and can yield immediate result or require a repeat episode. This hub of conversations between the partners produces multiple offshoots of activity. These offshoots (or sub-conversations) concern ideas, initiatives, future practice, and everyday problem-solving. They often engage input from others – mentors, advisors, partners, and colleagues. In turn, these sub-conversations feed back into further discourse between the partners.

There is a self-perpetuating cycle of development at all levels. This mechanism alleviates the need to wait for something to happen in the traditional sense of a commission. Instead, our own momentum allows us to plan ahead and move forward with initiatives and programs which form the base of the practice.

Collaboration with others is focused on specific activities. This usually is arranged on a project-by-project basis, where relationships with partners (clients, consultants, other architects) are specifically developed in joint venture format. This generally fosters a creative and incentivised atmosphere for those involved. The actual practice also works in this way, with the two partners at the centre of a close group of colleagues, who are engaged for their specific skillsets and desires. There is no particular hierarchy or structure, with all members working directly with the partners and interacting with each other on a daily basis. Some of these colleagues have remained within the practice for many years, reaching a position of associate or senior architect, where they are given limited license to practice within the practice. There is no formula or stage process in this licensing – it is simply based on trust and years of collaborating with a particular individual. Over 20 years of practice there have only been two or three such instances. In reality, the two-partner bicultural core does not allow full access to the central conversation hub, as this is based on a personal and longstanding interaction.

As described in the previous chapters, this is a practice where design formulae and specific practice methods are intuitively rather than consciously defined. In this situation, there is always a danger that external (and more experienced) forces may wield powerful influence on project development.

To retain creative control in these situations, we believe that there is a subconscious but sophisticated ‘security system’ at work within the practice. The primary function of this system is to ensure the protection of any original main idea or concept. It is possibly the most crucial architectural action undertaken by the practice partners. During development, we refer to this main idea as the Black Spot, as it holds the key to a success or failure in terms of architectural results.
The Black Spot is the essence of a project. It normally originates from one of the practice partners, working in isolation. After consultation with the other, this essence is subtly adjusted until it becomes a principal idea or concept, supported by both partners. The partners’ role throughout a project is to protect it from negative external influences and irritants, and allow it to flourish through positive forces and developments. Negative forces can arise from any number of sources – for example, planning authorities, client bodies, political interference, economic pressures, rogue consultants and technical difficulties. These forces conspire to distort the original idea.

The process of protection could be described as ‘architectural policing’. The partners will set a carefully defined ‘field of resistance’ around the Black Spot. The distance between this ring-fence and the Black Spot will depend on the project. Apart from the occasional nudge, our close colleagues and consultant team will normally stay within this ring. Occasionally, we will elicit input from the wider circle of characters involved – a discerning client, an imaginative engineer or someone in authority who supports a conscientious approach.

The level and complexity of protection required will depend on the particular project, its susceptibility to external forces, the number of people involved, and the status of the practice in the project. It will also vary at different project stages. For example, the amount of protection the Black Spot requires in the design development stage of a private dwelling, such as the Larch House, will normally be limited to dealing with a discerning client and a handful of trustworthy colleagues and consultants. However, during the building process this policing often increases, due to the level of coordination and detail that is required during construction to achieve a high quality result.

On the other hand, a new building project in a city centre, such as the Univermag Department Store, will be subject to attack from the early stages of design from the city authorities, conservationists, rival developers, and even other architects. But once the project is approved and there is legal basis for construction, the policing can be reduced to a sensible monitoring role, as the building process has fewer complications.

The Black Spot changes, evolves and mutates throughout the process. For us, it is never static – it travels in space and time and can even move between projects. In this state it is fragile and susceptible to attack, and so must be given maximum attention.
taught since the 1960s. This is described in Chapter 4, on Kalinina’s childhood, Made in the USSR, when ‘the rustle of tracing paper could be heard from the kitchen’.

When the Black Spot is fully-conceived and the partners are satisfied with its integrity, the material is passed on to a trusted associate or project architect in the studio. From here it can safely be developed into an architectural concept with the essence of the idea intact. This shaping and development of the Black Spot is still monitored on a daily basis by one of the partners.

Where does the design process take place?

This origination of the Black Spot normally takes place in isolation.

This process very rarely takes place in the office, where the distraction of phone calls, e-mails, meetings, and interruptions by others are all too frequent. This is not to say that the process needs any fixed location. It tends to occur in transit or in completely uninspiring places – at the kitchen table, in a basic hotel room, on a train or aeroplane.

Having studied this phenomenon, we can confirm that the origin of the Black Spot takes place most productively when one is able to spend uninterrupted time, usually in a totally familiar environment, and alone. Subsequent development of these ideas and concepts also progress best in such locations. Depending on the level and complexity of the project, the Black Spot will return to the same isolated locations several times, before being released into the studio.

Some surprising locations have become a venue for this process and for key discussions on practice development. For example, The Hotel Aramis on Rue de Rennes in Paris, where initial ideas for both the Larch House and the Univermag Department Store were conceived. This hotel is a most uninspiring place, with basic rooms and backstreet views. Yet it was the perfect crucible for the origination of the Black Spot.

Obviously not all of the practice’s work can be described in this vein. Much of it involves straightforward analysis, pragmatic solutions and technical advice, where an all-consuming creative idea – a Black Spot – is not a pre-requisite. But for most works in the competitions stream, and a number of built projects, the Black Spot is a vital element.

One particular project which epitomizes this process is the Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary in Krasnodar, where the resultant building is almost identical to the original designs proposed.
The Church of St Barbara & the Holy Rosary

This was a rather unusual commission. It materialized from the unrelenting efforts of an Armenian Catholic Community which desired, more than anything, to have its own church in Krasnodar, in the south of Russia. To effect this plan, the local priest Father Andrzej Moravski approached Valery Goloverov* for assistance in locating a suitable land plot and finding an architect who knew how to design a Catholic church.

It was to be a traditional church next to a small lake on the edge of the city. It was to have a main church hall with seating for an 800-strong congregation, a belltower, entrance lobby, choir loft and usual raised apse area. Adjoining the church would be a modest residence for the local priest and occasional visitors.

Following an initial site visit and review of the brief, McAdam and Kalinina set about the task of preparing an initial design proposal. The idea was very clear and simple – a clean, white, boat-shaped volume floating towards the lake, with narrow slots of fenestration to create atmospheric lighting conditions, and a central belltower which would allow a shaft of light to play against the backdrop of the altar. Father Moravski was ecstatic when presented this concept, and despite concerns about budget and building capabilities, he was determined to hold on to it.

The boat-shaped space extended back as a simple rectangle, the actual church occupying two thirds of the volume, with the lower level residential block at the rear. At the centre of the church, the belltower was half of an ellipse in plan and continued down through the building to form a niche in the apse behind the altar. Elevations were to be white-painted render with occasional horizontal bands of glazing. Above the entrance was to be a cross-shaped window, which cast light onto a double height, semi-circular entrance hall with open stairs either side, leading up to a choir loft. Entry to the nave was either through a low central passage or around the perimeter to the side aisles – depending on ceremony and events. In the apse behind the altar, the niche which formed the base of the bell tower allowed a gentle shaft of light to flood in from the glazing above.

*Valery Goloverov: Kalinina’s father. Then Chief City Architect of Krasnodar, responsible for architectural and planning control. Also known as The Chess Player, see Chapter 11.
The next step was for McAdam and Kalinina to present the architectural concept to the Papal Envoy, Father John Bukovsky, at the Holy See (Vatican) Embassy in Moscow.

There had been no major deviations from the original ideas, which now had the full support and protection of the Papal Envoy, the local priest Father Moravski, the Chief City Architect Valery Goloverov, and the Catholic Community involved.

Over the 18 months that followed, the church was built by the local Catholic community. Local architects assisted with the approval process and sourcing of local materials. Finance was self-generated by the community.

Any and all local people who were even remotely connected to building took a hands-on role in the construction process. McAdam and Kalinina made occasional site visits where they approved important design decisions, such as the shape of the entrance steps and the position of glazing slots.

Overall the finished building—volume, appearance and spatial qualities included—was almost exactly in accordance with our original designs. The community building team made all efforts to achieve this. However, as is often the case, some questionable details were implemented on-site: the belltower was six metres too short because the scaffolding used was unstable at the required height; the random asymmetric arrangement of horizontal glazing was given symmetry as it was believed to be a mistake on the drawings; external shiny zinc rainwater pipes with decorative hoppers were installed to the elevations rather than the internal pipes specified. Although this was frustrating, these deviations were simply caused by technical limitations and inexperience.

The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary was inaugurated by Father Bukovsky in November 1999.

It featured in Project Russia no. 22 ‘Religion’ in 2001.

Within the context of the Black Spot, the significance of this project is that it is almost a literal representation of the original idea and concept proposed. It is a realization of the purity of the Black Spot—a community project, fully supported and protected by those involved, and only minimally diluted by technical limitations and construction skills.

From this introspective part of the research we gained a better understanding of how the practice process works and in particular the operating methods engaged by the partners.

The main subject of this process is the conception and protection of a project idea or essence. We have referred to this as the Black Spot. Through this investigation we had a number of revelations: that we are the sole guardians of the Black Spot; that the inception of the Black Spot involves both partners working in a ‘relay’ fashion; that the Black Spot is developed in locations of isolation; that after release to the studio for development, the Black Spot is still monitored by the partners.

We found these discoveries enlightening and believe that the questions posed could be used as a prompt for understanding the inner workings of other practices and creative professions.
The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary (McAdam Architects).

Completed building from across lake: Main entrance doors, high-level cross window, horizontal glazing slots and glazing to belltower all visible. Photo by James McAdam, 1999.

Day of Inauguration, November 1999: Interior view from choir loft. Altar with shaft of light shining from above to illuminate the Apse behind. Seated to right of Altar are Papal Envoy Father Bukovsky, local priest Father Moravski, and three regional representatives of the Catholic Church.
15. The Art of Elasticity

What does the body of work comprise and what are the reasons behind it?
What does the body of work comprise and what are the reasons behind it?

This is one of a series of chapters which reflects on the practice’s body of work as a whole. It has been generated via a review of Practice Map 1, where it was noted that the type and scale of works was diverse.

When looking at the body of work en masse, one of the most striking factors is the multifarious nature of the buildings and projects viewed. It is immediately apparent that there is no particular specialization in a building typology or architectural technique.

Over the 20 years of practice the body of work has included: office buildings, mixed-use complexes, residential blocks, public buildings, petrol stations, retail centres, sports facilities, private houses, ... consultation, and development strategies. These project and building types also vary widely in size and scale – from a small pool pavilion and two-bedroom apartment, to a 6 million sqm trading and expo centre, and even the expansion of a city.

This diversity is a key consequence of working in Russia (an emerging market), at the moment when a new era was just beginning, where broad-based skills were required rather than specialization. Due to its professional origins in Britain, the practice was considered experienced in the field – we had access to information and contacts with many of the specialists required in the building design process. Together with an understanding of language, culture and working methods, the practice boldly established itself as an organization with ‘know-how’. These circumstantial advantages more than compensated for our youth and relative lack of practical experience in the beginning.

From its inception, the practice was bombarded with requests and commissions, some of which were quite unusual. In 1994, we were asked to design a ‘high security motorway service station’. The client’s request was to design a facility on the main highway, where truck and car drivers break their journey for a rest and something to eat. A familiar brief, except... the service station would be surrounded by a 4 metre high wall, and have a single guarded access point. It would not advertise itself to the highway, for fear of being targeted by the criminal aspect of society – it was only to be used by those who knew about it.

Each month would bring a new set of design challenges: over time this became the normal condition of the practice. We developed the ability to adapt, research, and respond to a wide range of demands. This in turn led to more expansion in project and building typologies.


Golden Angel Film Festival. Design of temporary facility for international film festival to be held in Dvortsovaya Ploschad, St Petersburg, 2006 (McAdam Architects).

Salekhard Hockey Stadium. Concept for new stadium and sports complex, Siberia, 2011 (McAdam Architects).
While this range and diversity was initially a necessity, it also became a desirable attribute to our work. The practice built a reputation for being highly capable, and able to tackle a multitude of varying design tasks.

This subject was discussed at length at Practice Research Symposium Two, Ghent, November 2011, where this quality was labeled ‘Elasticity’ by Kate Heron. Elasticity has been a perpetual feature of the practice’s work. Apart from the basic list of typologies mentioned at the beginning of this essay, we have also completed designs for a major passenger air terminal, a hockey stadium and sports complex, a Catholic church, and temporary structures for an international film festival.

The film festival, planned to be directed by Andrey Konchalovsky, was to be held on Dvortsovaya Ploschad, the main square in front of the Hermitage. For the practice, it was a most extreme project in terms of adaptability and research, as it diverted focus away from architecture into the spheres of fast moving events and complex logistics. We were fortunate to be able to draw on the advice and input of a friend and colleague, Mark Fisher, who had unprecedented experience in these fields. The design was completed in 2005, but the event was suspended as the city authorities would not approve the location. The director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky emotionally pronounced: “beer-swilling filmgoers should not be allowed to party in the living room of St Petersburg!”

This idea of this Elasticity has much in common with the notion of the role of the ‘Generalist’. This has been discussed on numerous levels throughout the research process. At his final examination for the Practice Research program, Ghent in April 2014, Tom Holbrook described the work of his own practice as diverse and varied. He alluded to the fact that they “were Generalists rather than Specialists, and that as Generalists it was difficult for [our] practice to progress with its main interests in large-scale initiatives and infrastructural projects in the UK.” He went on to discuss how the role of the architect should be re-imagined to return the profession to one of its original roles as purveyor of visions for the built environment.

We considered these observations both astute and accurate. In light of Tom’s words, and our own experiences, we surmise that Elasticity is the key point of interest, where the ability to adapt, research and respond allows the practice to quickly turn its attentions to a variety of situations. We do not believe that this is a common trait, but one formed by a set of conditions in a specific environment.

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2 Kate Heron: Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Westminster, London. Panel member, Practice Research Symposia, Ghent, Barcelona, 2011–present.
3 Andrey Konchalovsky: Russian-American film director and producer, who worked in Hollywood before returning to Russia in the 1990s. Important political and cultural figure in Russia.
4 Dvortsovaya Ploschad – main square in front of Hermitage in St Petersburg. Location where infamous film and images of 1917 Revolution were shot.
5 Hermitage: Russian State Art Museum, St Petersburg.
7 Tom Holbrook: practicing architect, Director of 5th Studio, Candidate of Practice Research program, RMIT University.
How can the practice be categorized and positioned in the architectural profession?

Thinking about the practice’s activities and the body of work, and considering the findings of our research, we must pose a basic question: What type of architect are we?

The practice is involved in a wide range of buildings and project typologies with no particular specialization. It has operated in a number of locations, taking into account different localities, but with an international base or approach. Yet it is not a global or international business where services are simply exported or sold via a branch office.

At Practice Research Symposium Six, Barcelona, November 2013, Kester Rattenbury (viewing the work for the first time) hit the nail on the head, surmising that: “the practice was one which strived to be conventional but operated in very unconventional circumstances.”

In many ways we strive to be a conventional practice, where architectural commissions are received and professional services carried out in a studio producing designs for building projects. However, due to our background, our specific circumstances and location of work, a straightforward conventional practice is far from attainable. Consequently, we often find ourselves trying to engineer situations in which to practice ‘in a normal way’ – by instigating projects, educating clients, or initiating a grand plan which will influence change in years to come. This theme of creating a ‘normal’ situation in which to practice is a trait in the practice’s activity, and is analogous to that of creating our ‘own culture’, and our own unique professional environment.

In an attempt to create this ‘normal situation’ as a precursor to project work, we often engage in structured activities like brief-writing, development strategies, consultations, educational programs, seminars, exhibitions and publications. It is an entrepreneurial approach, where we intuitively identify opportunities and set out a specific road map or strategy to move them forward. Not all of these ideas materialize, but some do, and they will often develop into serious undertakings and sometimes assist in enabling conventional practice.
The 19th century architect

In consideration of our preferred activities and professional techniques, we have realized that in many ways the practice aspires to that of the 19th century architect: an entrusted professional who stands at the centre of a project team and design process – the master architect and the lead consultant for the project. We prefer to develop relationships with our clients (individuals) who will treat us almost as business partners, and will entrust control of the whole process to the architect.

A good example of this desirable partnership was the new pool pavilion and additions to a private house in Caesarea, Israel (2011–2012). A site, verbal brief and budget were expressed at the beginning of the project, with monthly updates during the process, and a hand-over of keys at the end. The client – with whom we have worked on four occasions – was trusting, virtually absent, and ultimately very happy with the results.

Part of this project was for a swimming pool and pavilion in the garden of a large house in a small coastal city in Israel. The pavilion is a rectangular, single-storey volume, 25 metres long and four metres wide, and is positioned parallel to a new pool, with views directly west towards the Mediterranean Sea. Half of the pavilion is open pergola structure for external dining, while the other half contains an enclosed fitness room, showers and changing facilities. The materials used are a simple combination of local Jerusalem stone, cedarwood shutters, and retractable glazed doors.

We have worked in this (19th century) manner on numerous occasions. Following discussions at Practice Symposium Four, Ghent, in November 2012, we realised that this was a practice specialisation. We have subsequently taken this role further, forging a partnership with a real estate fund. This partnership, known as MBBK Developments, allows us to creatively select sites and properties for development in London, as well as being in control of the design process.
16. What Architect?

Plan of Pool pavilion, Caesarea.

Pool pavilion, Caesarea. Pergola on west elevation, showing Jerusalem stone cladding.

Collaboration

In further investigation of our preferred activities and professional techniques, we have also realized that we have a preference for collaboration as opposed to competition. The reason for this is a combination of the desire to foster exchange and relationships in the profession, and the pursuit of common sense practicalities. For example, when the practice is involved in a large-scale urban project, if a specialist is required, or if it is clear that the project would benefit from a varied design input, we will readily involve other architects. Equally, where we are involved in initiatives, seminars, and events, we will often invite other architects to participate. Besides making a richer contribution by involving others, we find that collaboration is of huge benefit to the practice in terms of social and professional development.

A good example of this sort of collaboration was the reconstruction of the Red October Chocolate Factory in central Moscow, where the practice was appointed to propose a master plan and development strategy in 2006. For this project the practice prepared a general plans, briefing documents and invitations to eight European architects to design buildings for the Red October site.

The project was for a large residential development on the site of a 19th century chocolate factory, located on an island immediately south-west of the Kremlin. The development was to become the most desired and prestigious place to live in Moscow, and would represent a landmark in architecture and modern living. The brief was to provide 500 high-spec residential units, totalling around 100,000 square metres, including 150 loft-style apartments and 350 new flats, along with shops, cafes, galleries and private sports facilities, along a central boulevard.

We were initially given an open brief, as master planner and advisor, assisting the client to formulate a development strategy and to understand the best way forward with this high-profile project. First we commissioned two surveys – one to establish which buildings on the site were of historical value (and to make sure they were listed), and the other to address transport and parking issues which were an inherent problem of Moscow development. As diagrams for the master plan concept evolved, we divided the site into eight building plots.

The plots were based on the existing pattern of the factory layout and incorporated nine existing buildings. We then proposed to invite eight selected architects to design the buildings, and went through a logical pre-qualification and negotiation process with the client. We chose a combination of practices from Britain, Russia, France, and Germany to design the buildings. Subsequently we prepared detailed briefing documents and assisted the client with the appointment of each participant.

This was a ground-breaking moment for Moscow real estate development. It brought Red October and the city at large to the attention of the international press and instigated positive discourse on the subject of ‘regeneration’ within the Russian architectural profession. We benefited from this in two ways, firstly by forging contacts with other architects, in particular Jean Nouvel and Jean-Michel Wilmotte, with whom we have continued discourse today; secondly by furthering the notion of collaboration, where the exchange of ideas and varied contributions were crucial to a sensitive development of the urban environment.

5 Red October Chocolate Factory 19th century factory located on peninsular between Moscow River and Canal in central Moscow. 6 Architects appointed to design buildings at Red October: Ateliers Jean Nouvel, Foster and Partners, Wilmotte et Associes, Jan Stormer Partner Meproject 2 workshop 11, Project Meganom, Wilen Associates, McAdam Architects.
On further reflection we have found that collaboration, and the Communities of Practice* that form through collaboration, are essential features of our practice. Besides the example of Red October, we have collaborated as partners on projects with a number of architects, friends, and colleagues. These include: Eugene Asse, Valery Goloverov and Irina Goloverova*, Alexander Skokan (AB Ostozhenka); Jan Stormer*, Aleksey Ginzburg*10, and Will Alsop. We have found this process to be enjoyable and rewarding in almost all cases.

The subject – What Architect? – was investigated and discussed at Practice Research Symposium Four, Ghent, November 2012. There, we recognized that the two dominant roles of the practice were that of the 19th century architect and the Collaborator. On reflection we can see that there is a coherent link between these roles and the practice work. Logically, the private residential projects are normally the work of the 19th century architect, whereas the larger urban planning or regeneration projects are done in collaboration.

However, the main revelation from this process was to understand that in either case, the practice strives to be conventional. We endeavour to create ‘normal’ situations and social environments within which to practice.

We would suggest that such investigation can give clarity to the operating modes of an architectural practice, and that in the course of research this is worthwhile exercise in understanding its role in the context of a professional environment.

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7 Communities of Practice: group of architects or creative professionals of like mind, who work and communicate on a similar level.  
8 Irina Goloverova: Kalinina’s mother. Architect and urban planner, Krasnodar, Russia.  
9 Jan Stormer: well-known practicing architect, Hamburg, Germany.  
10 Aleksey Ginzburg: practicing architect, Moscow. Grandson of Constructivist architect, Moisey Ginzburg.
When we look at Russian architecture objectively, what do we see?

One of the most interesting consequences of our bicultural situation is the possibility to step back and look at both Russia and Britain from a distance. Through our mutual observations, it seems clear that cultural relationships (as opposed to political or social ones) are the key to furthering any mutual activity between the countries.

British-Russian cultural and political relationships have always been volatile and interesting. In the 16th century, Ivan the Terrible was furious when one of Elizabeth I’s relatives refused to marry him, and Romanov Tsar Alexey expelled all English merchants in 1649 because he was shocked by the execution of Charles I. The story of the British Council’s involvement with Russia perhaps exemplifies the relationship at large. They first opened an outlet in the Soviet Union in 1945 at the end of WWII, but had to close it in 1947. It re-opened in 1967, but the first information centre only opened in 1992. Incidentally, the Project Imagination seminar (described in Chapter 5, Project Imagination) was the British Council’s first project in the field of architecture after Perestroika. Unfortunately the British Council was all but closed again in 2008. But they persist in retaining their presence in Russia, and their maxim remains: Culture brings people together in ways that conventional government-to-government diplomacy cannot.

Architecture occupies a zone between politics and culture, stretching into both areas, to an extent dependent on the status of the project. Broadly, we believe that in the UK, architecture generally occupies a more cultural than political position, but in Russia it is much closer to the political end of the spectrum.

Why have so few international architects managed to build something meaningful in Moscow?

Rather than trying to encapsulate the detailed political or cultural reasons for this, we believe it is useful to look at one successful international competition in Moscow that resulted in a completed building: the world-renowned landmark of Modernist Architecture, Tsentrosoyuz, designed by Le Corbusier and completed in 1936.

Upon his victory in the third stage of the competition in 1928, le Corbusier wrote, I shall bring to this task all that I have learned in architecture. It is with great joy that I shall contribute what knowledge I possess to a nation that is being organized in accordance with its new spirit.

It is not very well-known that throughout the project, the great maestro had a dedicated Russian partner, Nikolai Kolli, who was highly involved in the project from the beginning to the end. Kolli studied under the well-known architect Ivan Zholtovsky, and in the late 1920s he became a member of the Soviet OSA Group alongside with the Vesnin brothers, Moisei Ginzburg, Ilia Golosov and Ivan Leonidov. They formed the core of Constructivism. For four years (1928–1932) Nikolai Kolli lived part-time in Paris, working on the Tsentrosoyuz and helping Le Corbusier to progress the design for the project.

We know that the building’s construction period was long and complicated, and that Le Corbusier was not entirely happy with the completed building. His revolutionary heating system was rejected in favour of standard radiators. But we can confidently say that, thanks to Kolli’s almost religious dedication to the project, the building is not too far from the original design. In fact any architect working on a project in a far-flung land would be perfectly happy with such an outcome, even nowadays.
Sadly, since 1936 we have not seen this spirit or collaboration, or any comparable architectural result, in Moscow. This rare window of architectural opportunity in the late 1920s and 1930s casts a long shadow over architectural progress in Russia.

At this point it is important to briefly describe recent Russian history and culture. A lot has changed in Russia since 1936. In fact, Russia has been very much on the move for the last 150 years. It has been through two World Wars and had a total change of religion, twice. It has changed its enemies and friends, borders and values, and continues to do so. The problem with such rapid and tumultuous change is that it is easy to forget who you are, where you came from, and what is important.

There is a lot of controversial news about Russia, which creates confusion and misunderstanding. But we believe there is one important thing to remember: Russia is an old country, but a very young democracy. European countries like Britain took several centuries to slowly build a democracy. Russia on the other hand has experienced a different development. After 250 years of Mongol Rule it had 200 years of slavery. As a result, Russia missed out on the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, the introduction of major social, political and economic reforms, scientific innovations, and the creation of free citizens. Slavery was only abolished in 1861. The transformation from serfs into citizens began only then.

By the end of the 19th century, the Russian people were finally uniting to form a nation. The art flourished dramatically, with glorious results. This time was the Golden Age of Russian culture—the works of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Chekov and many others emerged from this rapid cultural flowering. Then, just as Russia was getting to its feet in the beginning of 20th century, the country was torn apart by violent economic and social upheaval. It was the end of the short-lived Russian Empire.

In 1917, Vladimir Lenin and his Council of Peoples Commissars created a radical new policy called Proletkult. It dictated every part of society culture: cities, housing, education, production, and art and architecture. It's said that Russian art and architecture of that period was the only avant-garde movement in history to be written into government policy. Proletkult was specifically intended to create ideas and forms for a physically- and socially-recomposed Russia. A large number of constructivist buildings were realized during this period, including Le Corbusier’s Tsienetrosyuz.

Constructionism was replaced by Stalin’s ornate classical style in the late 1930s. The new Stalinist style screamed power, stability and order. Its buildings became iconic for Moscow and an integral part of its skyline.

This classical style was abandoned in the 1960s as Khrushchev declared a war on ‘architectural excesses’¹⁰. My parents were students of architecture in Moscow at this time, and had great hopes for a return to modernist architecture. Instead, Russian architects endured three decades of a system-built housing program, and the designs of faceless Soviet civic buildings.

Even in those difficult ‘pre-fabricated’¹¹ times there were a few architectural exceptions—some of them fantastic examples of Soviet Brutalism¹², extravagant and even science fictional. These buildings are scattered across the former Soviet Union, and are unknown to the rest of the world.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, Perestroika, Gorbachev’s Nobel Prize¹³, and the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred in rapid succession. In the early 1990s, Yeltsin attempted to steer the country into democracy and free market economy. This is often referred to as ‘The era of the Oligarchs’, when a group of individuals closely connected to the Kremlin privatized most of Russia’s resources in a massive re-distribution of wealth. This was a time of ‘Wild capitalism’, where everything was allowed and the State had no control. Our practice witnessed this process and related chaos first-hand when we set up our architectural practice in Moscow in 1993.

8 Stalinist style: empire style or socialist classicism from mid-1930s to 1950s.
10 A reference to the decorative neo-classical style of the Stalinist era.
11 A reference to the Khrushchev era, when architecture was dominated by the industrialised construction industry and most buildings made from pre-fabricated concrete panels.
12 Soviet Brutalism refers to the Brutalist architecture movement which flourished in the Soviet Union from the 1960s to the early 1980s. It was particularly encouraged as the state-style for public and administration buildings.
13 The Nobel Peace Prize 1990 was awarded to Mikhail Gorbachev “for his leading role in the peace process which today characterizes important parts of the international community.”
During the period that followed, the ‘Moscow Architectural Style’ was manifested by the city mayor, Luzhkov. He imposed a form of neo-classical Russian architecture, redolent with towers and turrets. This period was terribly detrimental to the city, leaving a legacy of truly ugly buildings and horrendous transport problems. There was a complete disregard for valuable historical buildings, up to and including the demolition of some Constructivist masterpieces.

Today, despite political tensions and the aggressive nature of the authorities, Russia shows signs of improvement in the built environment and regard to architecture, especially in Moscow and other large cities. This manifests in several ways: the inception of new international competitions; new regulations on historical preservation; the upgrade of the public realm in Central Moscow; the opening of independent and international architecture schools.

**International competitions:** With a recent change of mayor and chief city architect, the city authorities are introducing architectural competitions for all major public building projects. These include Moscow Agglomeration, for which McAdam Architects was one of the shortlisted participants.

**New regulations on historical preservation:** This is a most significant shift and involves an Approved Register of Listed Buildings and a Decree for Protected Areas of Historical Value in central Moscow. This is especially important after the destruction of the previous ten years, when an estimated 700 buildings of historical worth were demolished, including the Voentorg Department Store, Hotel Moskva and Hotel Rossiya. We were vocal detractors of this, and lobby constantly for the protection of historical buildings (from all eras).

**Upgrade of the public realm in central Moscow:** Very recently, the subject of public realm and city landscaping has arisen. These are on the whole instigated by the city authorities. A small number of landscape projects have been realised, including the river bank in front of the Central House of Artists and parts of Gorky Park, the former based on a proposal by McAdam Architects, and the latter involving Shigeru Ban.

**Opening of independent and international schools of architecture:** Two new architectural schools have appeared in Moscow in the past five years. Strelka Institute is a privately-funded, post-graduate school, directed by Rem Kolhaas. Strelka is quite influential in the architectural community and assists in the organization of the city’s international competitions. Moscow Architectural School is a private diploma school which is accredited with the Cass Faculty of Art & Design at London Metropolitan University. It was opened in 2012 by Eugene Asse (Rector). The school’s main concern is to develop socially-responsible architects. McAdam provided advice and consultation in the establishment of this school.

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14 Gorky Central Park of Culture and Leisure is an amusement park in Moscow, named after Maxim Gorky. It was designed by Konstantin Melnikov and completed in 1928.

15 Shigeru Ban, Japanese and international architect, famous for his innovative work with paper. Designed a pavilion in Gorky Park from cardboard tubes in 2012.
In addition, McAdam and Kalitina are presently involved with a professional development program for tutors at the Krasnodar School of Architecture, Kuban State University, which was established in 2005.

These positive changes are making a difference, albeit on a very small scale. Students are beginning to ask questions, rather than following orders or memorizing textbooks. This tendency is emerging not only in architecture – it is visible in other areas as well. These new developments and contributing to the ongoing creation of democratic society in Russia.

This is complicated and sometimes painful process, but it is imperative.

International discourse and debate beyond political borders are critical to this process – with Russia it is vital to pursue open exchange. In the arts, collaboration between Russia and the international community is developing apace. We can see evidence of this in film, drama, and visual arts. Moscow now has an established International Art Biennale, celebrating an open dialogue and exchange of ideas.

In 2013, the curator for the Moscow Biennale was Catherine de Zegher. The exhibition was enormous, showcasing the work of 72 artists from 40 countries, of which 30 works were specifically-prepared for the event. But perhaps this success is due to the fact the arts are not motivated by business and politics – or at least, not as much as architecture is. It is an interesting dilemma; business and politics in architecture are a sensitive barrier to international collaboration, but crucial for its survival.

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16 The Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art is one of the most important Russian cultural events and was founded in 2003.
17 Catherine de Zegher: curator, director of Museum of Arts in Ghent.
As soon as you remove the business or political elements, but leave the artistic and creative, the architects start to enjoy themselves much more. The collaboration becomes productive and the national character shines through.

A good example of this is the ‘Archstoyanie’ Festival – an annual workshop event where a number of artists and architects from different countries gather to design and construct objects and perform in the Russian countryside. It was initiated by the artist Nikolai Polissky, who started the process in 2000 and finally opened the Festival in 2006.

This was a community project. The objective was to save a beautiful Russian village, Nikola-Lenivets, which had no employment opportunities and was rapidly losing its small population. Now the villagers are employed by the Festival to build the structures from local materials like timber, straw, twigs (and snow), and look after them throughout the year.

This has had an amazing regenerating effect on the village and on the participants of the festival. Russian national character is woven through all of the works, in harmony with their international origins.

The festival, like Project Imagination, creates a forum for dialogue and for professional and artistic interaction between Russia and the rest of the world. As long as this discourse continues, common ground can be found, and the Russian people will not become hostages of their own inhibitions or of their Government.
18. A summary of research and findings

What did the research entail, what did we discover, and how might this be applicable to other practices?
What did the research entail, what did we discover, and how might this be applicable to other practices?

The following is a general summary of the research undertaken throughout the program, over a period of three years (April 2011 to August 2014), including participation in Practice Research Symposiums on a six-monthly basis in Ghent and, latterly, Barcelona.

As a direct continuation of this study of bicultural practice, I have attempted to analyse my partnership with James McAdam. This chapter is entitled Mirror, Mirror – a reference to how Renaissance artists would use a mirror to see possible imperfections in their work. This essay briefly explores husband and wife partnerships, in particular the arrangement between my parents, who are both architects. It looks at how we work together, our different qualities and skills, and how our different cultures clash and complement each other in practice. Through this investigation I have explored how we ‘license’ each other to practice. Each of us looks ‘over the shoulder’ of the other, in a way that benefits projects or process in the practice. We can rely on each other’s assistance and help, advice or opinion at any stage.

To further understand the origins of the practice and the mental space of the partners at work, we have undertaken brief biographical studies to establish any links between personal background and subsequent architectural practice. This is described in Chapter 4, Made in the USSR. Here I have reflected on my background and life in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter includes episodes of being surrounded by architecture, not wanting to be an architect, studying in Moscow and exchange at Canterbury School of Architecture. This exercise has clarified the main reasons why I am in this practice today.

During the process of reflection, with use of The Practice Map, we have identified key moments in practice development. Besides the partners meeting as students during Perestroika, we have identified the Project Imagination seminar as an all-important single event which created the basis for the practice for years to come. This event, which was initiated at specific moment in time and history, took 20 British architects to run workshops at Moscow Architectural Institute. It was a ‘pure’ bicultural activity giving us immediate professional status and connecting us to architectural circles in both countries – Communities of Practice with which we are still involved today. The principles engaged through this event formed the core of the bicultural practice: the balanced input of two individuals, the process of learning through exchange, the role of public activities in the creation of communities of practice, the acceptance of social responsibility, and that good debate is often the best way to begin professional relationships. What we have learned, and what others could too, is that we do not wait for a community of practice to eventuate, we instigate this from the outset.

One of the main focuses in the practice research was to understand the links and connections between projects and people involved over time in the life of the practice. The practice has worked through different projects and times with the same client group. This is described in Chapter 6, Working with the Prospects. Here we describe how practice and a long-term client developed in parallel. The client would increase risk and the architect would push the boundaries of design at each step. This relationship began with the design of a small apartment and led to the master plan of a settlement for 15,000 people. It also included a range of private houses which are a large proportion of the Practices realised work. This relationship also became clear through the development of The Practice Map (Chapter 8), as we were able to see how projects and activities interrelated.

As a continuation of this study we have considered in depth at our work on private houses. We wanted to understand how these had developed and what our role was in the Emergence of the New Russian House. We identified one specific project which was probably the first of its kind in Russia, ‘The House in the Pine Forest’. We have looked at its origins, components and restraints and tried to establish how and why it was influential on the design of private house in Russia. In this vein we have also identified a small group of architects, and discussed how they have been involved with this process and how a community of practice evolved.

We began the research process using The Practice Map. This was an essential tool for reflecting on the body of work and understanding how the practice had evolved over time. It was an inductive tool that allowed us to stand back and look at the practice activities as a whole, enabling us to draw motivation from reality. This Map was discussed and developed throughout the research, through overlays and enhancements. It gave clarity in complexities, and helped us to identify key moments, links, and developments. We believe that for established practices with a large body of work, or complex/specific characteristics, a Practice Map is an extremely useful tool for illustrating and clarifying practice activities, influences and contexts in a single complex diagram.

From the Practice Map, we moved on to examine The Endeavours of Practice and clearly identified three streams of work in the practice: Strategic visions and initiatives, Competitions, and Built projects. We discovered that these three streams were often interconnected and to show this we proposed a Diagram of Endeavours. We added lines of resistance to represent levels of practice experience: Joy, Enjoyment, Tolerance, Trials and tribulations, Humiliation. Through these filters we could assess the position and status of a particular project or practice activity, and thereby consider its value to the future of the practice. As a test, four current projects were positioned on this diagram, and through this test we were able to see that one particular project, The Central House of Artists, was potentially within the very centre of the diagram, enduring ‘Joy’. Our view is that such a
influences is a good way of understanding the roots and components of practice.

During the research three seminal projects were chosen as clear representations of practice drivers and design approach. These were: Trubnaya Office Building, The Larch House and Univermag Department Store. These projects were very different in type, function, volume, appearance and materials, and yet they emerged from the same practice. We studied these projects in detail – their locations, restrictions, forms, materials and the practice’s design approach to each. Through this process we determined that these projects were connected by common attributes: suitability to a particular location, considered reference to their architectural/cultural context, understanding local building methods and materials, and subtly introduced dynamic components. They were completely related by drivers, design approach and practice methodology. We went on to examine why these projects are considered successful and realised that in each case: we were the lead designers, the partners were continuously involved, and the resultant buildings were similar to initial sketches.

There are definitive formulae at work in the specific task of designing buildings, where a location, context or specific parameters form the basis for a series of steps in the design process. This could be described as an in-built manifesto or set of rules which operate at a sub-conscious level. Through the process of research and examination, these shared rules double as a set of guiding principles. The result in our case is that whilst the realised buildings are very different to one another, they are all related due to a common formula being applied. We are confident that similar formulae are at work in many established practices and that understanding these dynamics via in-depth study of key projects is a useful way of clarifying and developing a manifesto or set of rules from which to practice.

Looking at the life and history of the practice, we surmise that we have no specific mentors, but have taken influence from a broad collection of individuals – peripheral mentors: The Provocateur, The Enthusiast, The Advocate, The Entertainer, The Chess Player, The Ambassador, and The Educator. We describe these influential individuals in Chapter 11 as Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy: These characters have all contributed significantly to different areas of practice development. The ‘essence’ of influence from each of these peripheral mentors gives a comprehensive overview of the main external influences on the practice. Their influences compliment and contrast with the innate nature of the architectural character, where influence is drawn from an exchange of culture, and with the accumulation of skills through learning by trial and error. Overall, these components clearly encapsulate the ethos of the practice, or at least encapsulate what we would like it to be! We suspect that there are many practices which have relied on peripheral mentors or indirect influence for insight and encouragement. On conclusion of this exercise we are convinced that an abstract method of identifying these characters, roles, or influences is a good way of understanding the roots and components of practice.

Using similar principles, we have attempted to clarify how the practice’s skill set developed professionally. This is described in Chapter 12, The Accumulation of Skills. Investigating this subject we realised that almost all of our practice skills were consciously self-taught. From the beginning, these skills were divided into four professional areas: design, the building process, business management, and public activities. Here we have studied these areas and can summarise that the practice: designs using intuition; has learned the building process by building, has learned business management from a corporate culture; and has engaged in public activities to a greater extent, to further the practice and as a form of Altruism. This confirmed to us that the struggles experienced in developing the practice were directly related to the arduous process of self-learning, and that the four groups of skills identified are were fundamental to the practice’s development and continue to be used today as a method of practicing.

In a quest to understand more about the architecture of the practice, we embarked on a exercise where we divided the body of works into similar architectural groups: interlocking boxes, cylindrical forms, pixilated facades, urban mega-blocks, spirals, organic forms. We entitled this exercise Happy Families (Chapter 13). This allowed us to identify the architectural components in operation, but left open the question: how are the works different and yet part of the same family? In search for an answer we pursued different and more detailed investigations. However, we are convinced that for a practice with a large and varied body of work, there is benefit in using such a tool for the ordering and comprehension of the architecture involved.

As part of this introspective process we looked to investigate the actual process of practice, to understand the operating methods of the partners – what, how and where does practice take place? The relevant chapter is called The Black Spot, a metaphor for the main idea for a project. Through sketch diagrams and conversations we have suggested that there is a ‘security system’ in place which is policed by the partners. We have also described the isolated locations where designing takes place, and how the two partners use different work methods. We have highlighted a particular project – The Church of St Barbara and the Holy Rosary – where an almost literal representation of the Black Spot was achieved through a community project, fully-supported and protected by all involved. We experienced a number of revelations at this point: the partners are sole guardians of the Black Spot; the inception of the Black Spot involved both working in ‘relay’ fashion; the Black Spot is developed in locations of isolation and on release to the studio; the Black Spot is monitored by the partners. We found these discoveries exciting and believe that the questions posed could be used as a prompt for understanding the workings of other practices and creative professions.

A simple question remained: why is the body of work was so multifarious? Our conjecture here is straightforward – we believe that it is because the practice beginnings coincided with the very beginning of a new era in Russia. The location
required us to be 'generalists' – architects who could turn their hands to designing a range of project types. We refer to our adaptability as the Art of Elasticity – the ability to adapt, research and respond allows the practice to quickly turn its attentions to a variety of situations. We do not believe that this is a common trait, but one formed by a set of conditions at a specific moment.

These non-specific characteristics in turn led us to ask a further question: What Architect (are we)? How might we be classified? The most precise and straightforward answer to this is that we strive to be a 'conventional practice', but operate in unconventional circumstances. In this way we contrive 'normal' situations and social environments in which to practice. On detailed observation we believe that the practice inhabits two roles in this respect – one of the '19th century architect', where the architect stands at the centre of a project team, and the other of a 'Collaborator', where the architect is part of a larger project structure. For the former we have cited the example of the Pool Pavilion in Caesarea, Israel, and for the latter, the Red October master plan and briefing documents. Such investigation of roles can give clarity to the operating modes of architectural practice. In the course of research it is a worthwhile exercise to understand its role in the context of a professional environment.

One of the most interesting consequences of the bicultural situation is the possibility to step back and look at both Russia and Britain objectively. For example, if architecture occupies a zone between politics and culture, it is clear to us that in Russia it is closer to politics whereas in Britain it is closer to culture. We have posed the question – why have so few international architects managed to build something meaningful in Moscow? Rather than listing cultural differences and endemic problems, we have focused on Learning from Le Corbusier, who completed Moscow’s Tsentrosoyus building with Nikolai Kolli in 1936. In the context of our own practice, we have studied how that building was achieved through collaboration, in the spirit of the nation. In view of this accomplishment, we have looked at the general trends and problems in architecture since that time. We have also made an assessment of recent developments: international competitions; new regulations on historical preservation; upgrade of public realm; and the opening of new schools of architecture. We have arrived at the following decision: international exchange only works in a true sense when it is purely cultural. As soon as politics or business are directly involved, collaboration becomes complicated. It would seem that events like Project Imagination can create a forum for dialogue for professional and artistic interaction between Russia and the rest of the world.

In conclusion, I would like to make the following statement:

This research reflects on 20 years of practice. Throughout the research process, we have developed what was previously tacit knowledge, evolving consciously-articulated and tested conclusions. We have reached a new understanding of the characteristics and complexities at work in the practice, and their impact on the architectural profession and within our community of practice.

To summarise, I would like to highlight the three focal points explored through this research process and found fundamental to our practice:

1. Understanding the nature of our practice (as bicultural)
2. Understanding the role of the practice in facilitating a disciplinary change in Russia
3. Understanding my personal role in future development of our bicultural practice and as a mediator between the two professional communities

Understanding the nature of our practice (as bicultural)

The bicultural aspect was fundamental to the establishment of the practice and was its driving force for many years.

We have decided through a process of reflection that ours is a ‘pure’ form of biculturalism – where two individuals, two cultures, two locations scenario is at work. We believe that this quality has been present ever since our initial exchange, Project Imagination. There, via the scenario of ‘the Stranger and the Host’, both partners benefited from a bicultural arrangement which continued to motivate and shape our work afterwards.

Even today, this exchange goes on, in a similar format to its beginnings. We continue to mix our two background cultures, creating a third, unique culture as a result. We now articulate the interactions between ourselves as a dynamic licensing process, in which each partner empowers the other to pursue independent pathways.

Our work is contextual – not in the stylistic sense, but in that we take a considered approach to cultural, social and historical orientations. We have uncovered guiding principles that drive our designing, with location-specific parameters forming the basis of our process.
In the future, biculturalism in practice will surely become more commonplace – and not just in architecture. The general mobility of people in our globalised world means that the opportunities to benefit from long-term cultural and professional exchange through practice will be widespread. It may not take such a literal 2x2x2 form as ours, but is bound to develop as people move from their birthplaces to other countries and even to different continents. The social implications of this dynamic and sensitive way of working could be beneficial to the way international architecture is considered and practiced.

As we have found the way through our practice to give form to an extraordinary period of cultural transformation in Russia, we believe that others might find our research useful in their own quests.

Understanding the role of the bicultural practice in facilitating a disciplinary change in Russia

The fundamentally bicultural nature of our practice, and its bi-national positioning between London and Moscow, led us to facilitate a disciplinary change within architectural community and within profession itself. Our practice and our work are both grounded to the specific environmental conditions and architectural community of Russia. At the same time, we remain connected to an external international disciplinary perspective. A good example of this is our project the Larch House, whose spatial arrangements and form originated from the planning of the traditional Russian farmhouse, forged with requirements for modern-day living, attention to detail and professional services.

In Russia, we have implemented change through all four areas of our practice activities: design process, building process, business management, and public activities. One of the examples of our input into the professional environment in Russia is our work on private houses. Our project ‘The House in the Pine Forest’ was probably the first of its kind in the country. The completion of this house and the series of publications that followed had a profound effect on the architectural community in Moscow. It provoked a lot of discussion about the typology of the private house in Russia and about the general directions for the profession. Our practice felt a responsibility to advocate for this process, as we strongly believe that there could not be any positive development without an active discourse.

The other angle of influence and change that we effected within this are concerns our strategic initiatives. Over the last 20 years we have come up with a number of strategic proposals for the city of Moscow, of various scales. Most were rejected at the time as too progressive, but some of them were then implemented three, five, or even ten years later.

Looking back at these initiatives through this research, we understand that as a bicultural practice we have an external international disciplinary perspective. The city, the clients or the society are not always ready for our ideas, which are so far beyond their everyday experiences, but they might get there at the end. And although it is very frustrating, it is vital to continue pushing the boundaries. We feel a responsibility to bring new ideas and concepts to society that so desperately need them, sometimes without even realising.

Understanding my personal role as a mediator between the two professional communities

We are self-taught practitioners, and through the research process we have explored the benefits of not being apprenticed in the traditional ways. Instead, our work relies on intuition, on disparate and peripheral mentors, and on learning by experience.

One of the most positive consequences of our bicultural situation is the possibility to step back and look my own country from a different perspective. For me it is very difficult, almost painful, to see Russia taking course with which I do not agree and have no power to change. But despite recent events I firmly believe that an inevitable process of democratisation is still happening in Russia, it might be slowing down or even paused for a short time, but it could not be completely stopped or reversed.

For this reason, it’s crucial for me to clarify my own personal role in the process of collaboration between architectural professions in Russia and Britain. I see myself as a mediator between the two cultures. I feel that for as long as there are people like myself to continue professional and cultural dialogue, common grounds can be found, and the Russian people will not become hostages of their own inhibitions or their Government. The methods and tools we use, and our determination to explore the workings and complexities of practice, could empower others to examine their own work independent of specific cultural restraints.

Ours is a small practice, run and enjoyed by its two partners. Innovation is a core trait of small practice, whereas risk management is the method engaged by large practices. A small practice is able to create opportunities and initiate projects.

Our research shows that the nimble, bicultural practice can play an important role in a globalised world. I am convinced that our research can encourage others to pursue such practice.

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