Environments and Media Aspects of Moscow Subway

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ABSTRACT

The modern Moscow subway is a complex and multi-structural phenomenon. It's carrying with pride the architectural heritage of the Soviet era, and today subway and its media environment are in constant formation, the current interest and the modern are layered. Of all the aspects of the life and functioning of the modern subway, we're focusing on the media environment, the functioning of its historical, educational, entertaining components. In turn, the media environment consists of a conglomerate of aspects that to one degree or another form and expands the functions of the subway as an integral civilizational organism. First of all, we are talking about the information field (primarily visual content), architectural and decorative solutions in its historical and modern components, cultural, educational, and entertainment programs.

Elements of media reality are located on horizontal connections; they are not self-sufficient and capable of life because of tight integration into the structure of media reality. The layer of modernity in the Moscow subway is internally ambiguous, is expressed in attempts to illuminate numerous aspects of the life of a city dweller, to integrate interactivity, to increase immersiveness, and even to veil the official visibility of the subway by informal interaction with the passenger.

Keywords: visual culture, city, Moscow subway, socio-cultural medium, media, environment, immersiveness, interactivity

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern Moscow subway is a complex and multi-structural phenomenon. As rightly remarks I. V. Kondakov, "the history of culture in general, and the history of the culture of Russia in the twentieth century, in particular, is built not as a linear sequence of states ('chain' or 'relay race'), but as a non-linear construction that embodies not only the historical movement of forms but also their value-semantic 'growth'" [1]. This feature is visible when we are referring to the media concept of the modern subway. It's carrying with pride the architectural heritage of the Soviet era, and today subway and its media environment are in constant formation, the current interest and the modern are layered.

The Moscow subway today is an integral part of the official, ceremonial culture. Of course, this culture is inherent in imperialism and the translation of the ideas of mass mobilization culture (labor, revolution, heroic history), with references to empire and classicism in their modification into socialist realism.

New stations are constructed with the features of the parade: though new architectural projects cannot boast of the richness and quality of materials (marble, mosaics, frescoes are not used), there is a clear tendency to think through the original design, "play out" recognizable art forms, often avant-garde (like the subway station "Rumyantsevo" and "Salaryevo" with the undisguised quotation of the works of Pete Mondrian). The appeal to the work of avant-garde artists and designers is so obvious as if the passenger is invited to take part in an intellectual quiz and find out the sources of inspiration of the architects of the new stations.

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So, the Moscow subway is a complex organism, the heart of which is the transport function. The "shell" of this fundamental component is the architectural-plastic environment, within which the media reality "sprouts". In turn, the media environment consists of a conglomerate of aspects that to one degree or another form and expand the functions of the subway as an integral civilizational organism. First of all, we are talking about the information field (primarily visual content), architectural and decorative solutions in its historical and modern components, cultural, educational, and entertainment programs.

The information field is a kind of news feed, a digest of everything about everything that is designed to satisfy the basic need of a modern city dweller for information. In addition to the role of the mouthpiece of official culture, this aspect of media reality acts as a contextual urban advertisement of everyday events and the image of the city itself. Along with the desire to preserve the historical and design appearance of stations and trains, there is an obvious tendency to the total filling of empty spaces with information content like the fight against "empty" zones.

The active inclusion of the Moscow subway architecture in the historical aspect of media reality is realized, first of all, by museum-exhibition and excursion projects, by the launch of restored historical trains. The cultural and educational concept is actively used in the thematic design of some trains. Wagons outside and inside can be decorated with photo materials, graphics, texts dedicated to anniversaries, holidays and socially significant events (Christmas, March 8, space flight of Yuri Gagarin, World War II), social projects ("Thank you, donor!", "Striped Express" is dedicated to the rescue of the Amur tiger), the arts (trains "Moscow Art Theater", "The State Academic Maly Theater", "My Marshak", "Soyuzmultfilm", etc.).

The entertaining aspect is dissolved in most of the new elements of the subway media environment, but it is realized mainly through the screen content.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The Moscow subway, as an architectural, cultural, aesthetic phenomenon, was repeatedly analyzed in science. In his work "Culture 2", V. Paperny noted that in parallel with the emergence and development of the Moscow subway, its phenomenon was comprehended so [2]. I.N. Holomstock in the aesthetic solution of the stations saw a pantheon of archetypes sacralized within the framework of Soviet ideology [3]. O.V. Kostina examines the architecture and monumental art of subway stations in the context of the socio-historical development of Russia [4]. A kind of encyclopedia of research on the phenomenon of the Moscow subway can be called a monograph by M.S. Valdez Audriosols [5].

In most of the Russian studies, often the emphasis was on the ratio of plastic and mythological. As rightly stated N.V. Dubrovina, "The driving forces of socialist realism are the class antagonism and ideological demarcations, a demonstration of the inevitability of a 'bright future'" [6]. Curiously, modern foreign research is largely concentrated not on the cultural nature of the subway, but on its uninterrupted functionality [7], [8], [9] and ways to ensure it [10], [11].

III. UNDERGROUND CITY

The key aspects of the media reality of the Moscow subway can be conditionally classified according to the "territorial" criterion (transport system, stations, lobbies, trains, screen reality), with an orientation to certain cultural and aesthetic accents. Each layer of the subway media environment to one degree or another has immersive and interactive characteristics.

Inheriting the key attitudes of the Soviet paradigms, today the Moscow subway is also positioned as partially independent of the ground urban environment. Of course, in the official "ideological" promises, the subway appears as an integral part of the city, but in reality it is emphasized in some way isolation and advantages, a higher level of culture than other types of public transport. One way or another, the Moscow Subway can be regarded as a city located below the surface of the earth.

Curiously, that it was never perceived as the "bottom" of the urban infrastructure. Largely due to the unique plastic and artistic design of the stations, the ornate communication system, and centralized structure. But the Moscow subway is a category of no less scale than the Moscow, and it's an alternative, new, actually more democratic heart or arteries, one of the symbols of the capital, which, unlike the Kremlin and Red Square, every citizen sees and uses in his daily life.

So, the subway represents "a city in a city" and lives according to the laws inherent in the urban environment. K. Zitte in his work "The Artistic Fundamentals of Urban Planning" (1889) postulates that the city acts as a bearer of cultural norms and spiritual values, but he can also point out a thesis that is equally relevant even a century later: "If you could visit places more often, it's beautiful whom you enjoy, it would be easier to endure the hardships of life and wage an eternal struggle with everyday troubles" [12]. And this mission is fully fulfilled by the Moscow subway. But, as we noted above, with the change of cultural landmarks, the "ideological" course of the subway is being corrected, but with the preservation of the super-task, which was formulated back in the 1930s: "so that this building lifts a person's spirit, makes his life easier, gives him rest, pleasure" [13]. Thus, the concept of the future was internally implied in the Soviet subway, even more precisely, the Stalin period. The modern Moscow subway also has it but is fundamentally different, located in a different system of genres and cultural coordinates.

In everyday media culture, the trend of idealization and "futurization" of the subway is largely preserved. True, now it is interpreted in advertising products following under certain genres and their carriers: in the subject medium (printed forms of catalogs, banners), in the media environment — on Internet sites, in

applications for smartphones, etc. Today the Moscow subway is a kind of modern, high-tech city. Ubiquitous interactivity is realized through INFO-SOS columns, screen panels with sockets for charging smartphones and other electronic devices. Of particular note is the obvious immersiveness, which is often associated not with the subway, but with separate "special" projects, however, this quality is very actively implemented in the subway, given that "immersiveness is primarily associated with the object-spatial simulated medium, which is designed to draw the viewer into itself. The possibility and necessity to perceive the work 'from within', being in its space, on its territory, is positioned by the creators of immersive works as a unique aesthetic experience and the main message of the art form" [14].

The naturally occurring immersiveness of the subway is partially enhanced by the increased interactivity compared to the Soviet era and is positioned as a unique experience in the media environment. "The combination of realities and the meeting of stories, … the integration, rethinking and re-opening of archetypes" [15] are largely relevant for the media environment of the Moscow subway both in their holistic positioning and in the perception of its fragments — stations, vestibules, passages, cars.

IV. STATIONS, LOBBIES

A special role in modeling the media reality of the Moscow subway today is played by the plasticity of Soviet-era architecture. So, the researcher notes that "the decorative design of many Moscow subway stations is closely related to the organization of passenger traffic, is a consequence of the station's arrangement as a traffic space. The plastic of the arches and walls not only repeats the direction of movement but also reveals the morphology of the station space, the entire subway. Movement is becoming a formative factor in the Moscow subway" [16]. However, in today's reality it is possible to ascertain the presence of a paradoxical situation: by launching new trains, rather quiet, equipped with air conditioners, allowing to move freely in the train, an illusion of the lack of movement in principle is created.

The subway car is a kind of capsule hovering in an abstract space, as hovering in it and "accidentally" delivering passengers to the points they need. The tunnels are different, the directions of movement are different also, but visually they are indistinguishable. The rapid movement in dark tunnels is always directed towards the light of the station, to the possibility of entering the lobby from and to the surface. On the other hand, movement in a capsule train is visually correlated with movement outside the earth's atmosphere, with overcoming outer space, and high-quality sound insulation in new trains reinforces this effect. Curiously

that such a quick movement over rather large distances no longer gives rise to constant admiration for the level of scientific progress, it is more and more familiar and ordinary.

The subway's media environment is focused on constructing not only the image of a very modern subway, "transport of the future", but also the features of an ideal passenger – to the extent of an intelligent, reasonably informed, and most importantly, active, interested, generally contented with human life, and potential – not a rebel, and the employee and consumer. The subway, as it were, composes a new media mythopoetics of a large city and its population.

Thus, the media reality of the subway creates certain communicative accents, builds a certain poetics of object-subject communication between the subway and the passenger, at the same time claiming the status of an animated thinking creature, and not just a high-tech structure.

V. TRAINS

Let's take a look at the trains themselves. Today there are several types of them, which contribute in some way to the emergence of a game for passengers: which train will come now? So an individual can wait a couple of minutes for an "interesting" train. There are several types: thematically decorated, "vintage" (here, we can perceive tangibly the historical past of the Moscow subway and its active incorporation with modern media reality), numbered (partially modernized), new ones "Rusich" and "Oka", and ultramodern "Moscow".

Thematic (or named) trains are a separate layer of the cultural and educational element of the subway's media environment. This and decorated following under a specific topic, train gallery, dedicated to anniversary dates, historical trains, etc. Trains are decorated not only outside but also inside.

Immersiveness in thematic trains is exaggerated, but at the same time, the simulated "reality" gravitates to dialogue with a passenger in the "classic" museum mode. For example, in 2019, the "Akvarel'" (Watercolor) train was launched on the Arbat-Pokrovskaya line, on the walls of which 35 watercolor works on the Red Book plants of Moscow were exhibited. On one side of the train, the seats were dismantled, and the paintings are arranged in a row, according to the principles of traditional exhibiting in museums. Inside the train there were completely no posters, banners, the simulated environment was emphasized restrained.

Thematic trains include not only the visual stream but also the verbal line. The design elements of trains following under a particular topic are specially created

"clothes", "accessories". Outside the train is also pasted over with a membrane, partially announces its contents, partially supplements it visually. Unlike "Akvarel'", thematic trains are glued not only outside but also inside. The composition does not change its configurations: the seats remain in their intended places, even the mounted screens work in the same mode, broadcasting the same content for the subway. But there are no empty places, every centimeter of iron and plastic is filled with an image corresponding to the topic: the same removable "skin", only now inside. Thematic "content" includes quotes, inspirational inscriptions, and information segments.

Trains of a new generation are "Oka" and "Rusich" (equipped with information boards, air conditioners, a lower noise level is observed compared to the number trains) and "Moscow" (with sockets, touch interactive screens). Such trains give an increased level of physiological comfort: they have soft seats, reduced noise levels, air conditioners, the ability to freely move to a neighboring car.

The newest "Moscow" trains are the most technologically advanced of all the above. Their "cosmic" appearance contrasts strongly with the visuals of the historical subway stations, which is not leveled at all. "Moscow" is a layer of high-tech, hyper-modern media reality of the subway.

VI. Screen Environment

In this article we will not analyze the screen environment in detail, however, its key parameters need to be described, because the screens and the content broadcast on them are forming the most of the virtual "appearance" of the Moscow subway.

Some types of screen media can be arbitrarily designated in the Moscow Subway in the vestibules and directly in the cars (one is built in the gap between the window and the door, where the subway or advertising schemes, the second is small in size, is located on the top panel above the seats, and interactive panels were traditionally located sockets). Here we'll talk about screens in vestibules.

Most stations also have interactive Info-SOS posts installed, which interestingly combine references to the functions of a fairy magic "hollow" or, for example, Slavic idols, to which, as you know, our predecessors sent their "requests" as well awaiting a response. Monitors located in the lobby, usually installed on the "legs", can be placed in the center of the hall between the tracks or at the end of the lobby. This type of screens undoubtedly resembles a Soviet bulletin board, but can also be associated with a hut on chicken legs or Ali Boba's cave, which certainly contains a certain secret.

In the appearance of new stations, with a predominantly smooth, brilliant and vivid visual solution, screens (and internal content) are fitting in more successfully and harmonize, corresponding to the appearance of the stations. But these screens are fitting into the visual concept of historical stations difficultly. Black shiny racks, multicolored content seems alien, brought from outside. There is no monumentality here, which contrasts with the solidity of the marble stations. Screens are distinguished by the ease of their installation and dismantling if necessary, while each element of the historical station is integral, each part is tightly adjacent to each other. Thus, we can talk about the resulting conflict between the aesthetic and cultural context of the architecture and the media "skin" of new visuality. There is a gap between the monumental-plastic solution and the carriers of virtuality (in fact, representing a new ideological content of our time).

However, as O. Kostina states about the Soviet architectural heritage of the Moscow subway, "the fragmentation of plastic understanding by the architect of the inner space of the subway is becoming the norm" [17]. The modern realities of the subway space partially inherit this tendency towards fragmentation from the Soviet past, but it looks different. New stations and adjacent spaces are created in a unified style, and the effect of visual fragmentation finds itself in a built-in screen environment above the physical environment. The screens and the content broadcast on them form the media imprint of the subway in virtual space, similar to the neural system of a developing underground "organism".

Headings silently replace each other on screens installed in carriages, foyers, and on platforms; information, cognitive and entertaining programs, or rather, brief headings, go in a continuous stream. Thanks to this filling, all of these screens are perceived as varieties of TVs with the sound turned off (or as if muffled), working almost like at home, in the background. Together with free Wi-Fi and outlets for recharging gadgets, they inform passengers of the status of users of the media environment, in which most passengers are outside the metro. All this should make moving underground more comfortable, calm and "productive" as if the path in underground transport is no different from being in the same place in one of the city's interiors.

VII. Conclusion

So, the historical, cultural, educational, entertaining environment reveals itself in the media reality of the modern Moscow subway. According to the "territorial" attribute, we can distinguish the general "urban" (we are talking about the underground self-regulating city "Subway"), which in turn is segmented into separate (albeit included in a single aesthetic system) zones:

stations and foyers, rains and screen environment. Each of them possesses the qualities of immersiveness and interactivity, which has an indisputable influence on the formation of media reality.

Elements of media reality are located on horizontal connections, they are not self-sufficient and capable of life because of tight integration into the structure of media reality. The layer of modernity in the Moscow subway is internally ambiguous, is expressed in attempts to illuminate numerous aspects of the life of a city dweller, to integrate interactivity, to increase immersiveness, and even to veil the official visibility of the subway by informal interaction with the passenger.

The aesthetics of the Moscow subway today, undoubtedly, reveal the continuity of Soviet achievements, but the key aspect is the emphasis on modernity, partly ordinary (accessible to everyone), partly gravitating to high art. But it is indisputable — a comfortable, accessible environment for everyone, which you can admire, or you can just relax, have fun or stay in comfort.

Thus, even Soviet culture ideologically thought the subway was an integral part of the city, partly museum, partly utilitarian. And the Moscow subway became the embodiment of that "bright future". Today, the picture of the "world" of the subway, its patterns are shifted. Rather, it is a space separate from the city, not just fast city transport, but something special – a ramified city under an endless roof, a city where the space of civilization has no gaps, it is solid, multifunctional.

Today, the media reality of the Moscow subway portrays it as a high-tech "living" organism that coexists with the terrestrial urban environment. And getting into it can get an individual spectacle: view a summary of current news, get into the historical part, partially private environment or thematic. And all this on the way from point A to point B.

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