Urban Interventions in Moscow
Alena Zaytseva

“If you can’t see progress in small things, there is no need to look for it in large”
A.P. Chekhov. Boring story

Public space in Moscow today mirrors a growing diversity and intensity of public communication: the tendency among the city’s inhabitants to participate more in ongoing urban and social processes. Urban interventions are evidence of this fact. People do not seem willing to wait for the government to solve issues anymore, as they are becoming more inclined to do so themselves.

The catalogue, being produced as a result of research, covers the variety of informal intervention, highlighting specific semantic gaps in Moscow urban culture. Using public space as a platform for highlighting personal ideas on how the city should work and what it should look like, small interventions cause big change in the urban atmosphere. The work of an “urban art partisan” becomes a part of the cityscape, interacts with people and apparently makes them reconsider some parts of their everyday lifestyles, behavior and values.

Informal urban intervention is a visualized statement in public space that is rooted in a personal sense of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of urban life. Residents of the city take up this cause in an effort to affect policy and minds and to participate in creating a picture of just how things should work in the city. Intervention is a tactical instrument that utilizes outdoor art in order to reshape the city’s conditions and identity. The power of urban interventions is the ability to focus an individual’s attention on something, shedding light on a topic that was previously unknown or unnoticed. Through this process, it is possible to push society to re-think some issues. Refreshing attitudes and re-focusing social optics, people can become less indifferent and more devoted to their own city; this process makes them “active customers” who are involved in city development. Among the wide range of urban visual practices, which includes tagging, social activism, political protests, stylish lettering and murals, sensible urban intervention is a niche that is occupied mostly by young, well-educated locals. These urbanites do not remain indifferent; they reflect on the problems of the city.
Urban Interventions in Moscow
Alena Zaytseva

“If you can’t see progress in small things, there is no need to look for it in large”
A.P. Chekhov. Boring story

Public space in Moscow today mirrors a growing diversity and intensity of public communication: the tendency among the city's inhabitants to participate more in ongoing urban and social processes. Urban interventions are evidence of this fact. People do not seem willing to wait for the government to solve issues anymore, as they are becoming more inclined to do so themselves.

The catalogue, being produced as a result of research, covers the variety of informal intervention, highlighting specific semantic gaps in Moscow urban culture. Using public space as a platform for highlighting personal ideas on how the city should work and what it should look like, small interventions cause big change in the urban atmosphere. The work of an “urban art partisan” becomes a part of the cityscape, interacts with people and apparently makes them reconsider some parts of their everyday lifestyles, behavior and values.

Informal urban intervention is a visualized statement in public space that is rooted in a personal sense of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of urban life. Residents of the city take up this cause in an effort to affect policy and minds and to participate in creating a picture of just how things should work in the city. Intervention is a tactical instrument that utilizes outdoor art in order to reshape the city's conditions and identity. The power of urban interventions is the ability to focus an individual's attention on something, shedding light on a topic that was previously unknown or unnoticed. Through this process, it is possible to push society to re-think some issues. Refreshing attitudes and re-focusing social optics, people can become less indifferent and more devoted to their own city; this process makes them “active customers” who are involved in city development. Among the wide range of urban visual practices, which includes tagging, social activism, political protests, stylish lettering and murals, sensible urban intervention is a niche that is occupied mostly by young, well-educated locals. These urbanites do not remain indifferent; they reflect on the problems of the city.
Urban atmosphere "mechanism"

Urban atmosphere is the result of individual perception of the city as a whole, including urban hardware, movement in the city, the people themselves and urban culture—the essential manifestation of the aforementioned concept.

The urban atmosphere "mechanism" is determined by the inseparable interconnections of all its components. Even the tiniest change in any of the elements makes the entire system move. This is how urban atmosphere is developing. Every individual involved in urban intervention can affect the direction and development of the “mechanism” of urban culture.

Hardware is the physical framework of urban life. Comprised of roads, squares, public spaces, buildings and objects, infrastructure is the basic element of urban space. The environment naturally controls and shapes the model of human behavior. Moscow’s post-Soviet restrictive environment shapes local society. In turn, society influences the content of the city in such a way that today Moscow’s urban atmosphere is neither attractive nor hostile for residents and newcomers. Urban interventions, which refresh urban content and endow city spaces with new significance and self-awareness, become a tactical instrument for shaping urban framework. The interventions succeed in marking focal points, making the environment less monotonous, obscuring annoying objects, highlighting the value of architectural heritage and creating spaces of remembrance that are an alternative to the traditional ones.

Movement concerns everything connected to transportation inside the city. Today, roads, parking lots and sidewalks are occupied, and Moscow is an urban space that is overcrowded by cars. People are pushed out of public spaces by noise and the poor ecological situation. Moreover, the lack of space makes the city unattractive for pedestrians. Without fundamental changes, the situation will only deteriorate, spiraling downward. The unattractiveness of the pedestrian lifestyle pushes more people to get behind the wheel, even for short distances, leading to more and more serious traffic jams and pollution, which renders the city even less attractive for pedestrians. Keeping this tendency in mind, civic initiatives directed to breaking this “spiral” are multiplying. Moscow lacks a cycling tradition, as much as infrastructure. The development of cycling as an alternative means of transportation relies on personal initiative: at present there is no special infrastructure and no sense that it is safe ride bicycles in the city. In spite of this, people every day promote cycling with their personal examples. Cycling tends to be associated with a careful and attentive attitude to the city, openness and eco-friendliness. In contradiction to this, motoring is becoming synonymous with egotism and stress, spurring even greater pollution. The current state of affairs provokes a situation where Moscow’s urban society is divided into two conflicting camps.

The People. The residents of the city make up the human dimension, which includes interrelationships, connection with the urban environment, behavior and personal values. The life of most Moscow residents can be described as following the “home-work-home” route. In this mindset, the shopping mall is a cultural leisure activity, and individuals are moved through the key points of life in their personal automobile. The traffic jam has become a cultural phenomenon in Moscow. People do not know the city where they live. As a result, few people are interested in current problems, and in any event they are not involved in current city development because they cannot see beyond the current traffic jam that they are stuck in.
Hardware is the physical framework of urban life. Comprised of roads, squares, public spaces, buildings and objects, infrastructure is the basic element of urban space. The environment naturally controls and shapes the model of human behavior. Moscow's post-Soviet restrictive environment shapes local society. In turn, society influences the content of the city in such a way that today Moscow's urban atmosphere is neither attractive nor hostile for residents and newcomers. Urban interventions, which refresh urban content and endow city spaces with new significance and self-awareness, become a tactical instrument for shaping urban framework. The interventions succeed in marking focal points, making the environment less monotonous, obscuring annoying objects, highlighting the value of architectural heritage and creating spaces of remembrance that are an alternative to the traditional ones.

Movement concerns everything connected to transportation inside the city. Today, roads, parking lots and sidewalks are occupied, and Moscow is an urban space that is overcrowded by cars. People are pushed out of public spaces by noise and the poor ecological situation. Moreover, the lack of space makes the city unattractive for pedestrians. Without fundamental changes, the situation will only deteriorate, spiraling downward. The unattractiveness of the pedestrian lifestyle pushes more people to get behind the wheel, even for short distances, leading to more and more serious traffic jams and pollution, which renders the city even less attractive for pedestrians. Keeping this tendency in mind, civic initiatives directed to breaking this "spiral" are multiplying. Moscow lacks a cycling tradition, as much as infrastructure. The development of cycling as an alternative means of transportation relies on personal initiative: at present there is no special infrastructure and no sense that it is safe ride bicycles in the city. In spite of this, people every day promote cycling with their personal examples. Cycling tends to be associated with a careful and attentive attitude to the city, openness and eco-friendliness. In contradiction to this, motoring is becoming synonymous with egoism and stress, spurring even greater pollution. The current state of affairs provokes a situation where Moscow's urban society is divided into two conflicting camps.

The People. The residents of the city make up the human dimension, which includes interrelationships, connection with the urban environment, behavior and personal values. The life of most Moscow residents can be described as following the "home-work-home" route. In this mindset, the shopping mall is a "cultural" leisure activity, and individuals are moved through the key points of life in their personal automobile. The traffic jam has become a cultural phenomenon in Moscow. People do not know the city where they live. As a result, few people are interested in current problems, and in any event they are not involved in current city development because they cannot see beyond the current traffic jam that they are stuck in.

Urban atmosphere "mechanism" is determined by the inseparable interconnections of all its components. Even the tiniest change in any of the elements makes the entire system move. This is how urban atmosphere is developing. Every individual involved in urban intervention can affect the direction and development of the "mechanism" of urban culture.
Architectural heritage and culture of memory.

Urban interventions highlight and emphasize the value of architectural heritage for the city and for every resident. The official culture of rememberance is standardized. If it is a historical person, then he or she appears in the form of a bronze monument. If we are observing a victory in a war, then we receive a parade of military technique. Urban artists create an alternative. By moving the accent from the tank to the soldier, the artist creates something more humanistic, which is capable of eliciting emotional empathy.

Elimination of monotony

The day-to-day route, or home-work-home, makes the urban environment merge into one routine. The appearance of unexpected objects in a habitual environment gives the spectator a chance to actually see the city and intensively experience it instead of just mindlessly roving his or her eyes over the surface.

Annoying or unsightly objects

Items falling into this category include fences, air conditioners, advertisements, light-boxes and other “excess” objects found in the urban landscape.

Marking focal points

Marking focal points functions to create an alternative way of navigating around the city. This practice fixates not just street names or house numbers, but defines “places of power”, or areas of the city where people gravitate that are notable for their energy and significance.

Architectural heritage and culture of memory.
Architectural heritage and culture of memory. Urban interventions highlight and emphasize the value of architectural heritage for the city and for every resident. The official culture of rememberance is standardized. If it is a historical person, then he or she appears in the form of a bronze monument. If we are observing a victory in a war, then we receive a parade of military technique. Urban artists create an alternative. By moving the accent from the tank to the soldier, the artist creates something more humanistic, which is capable of eliciting emotional empathy.

Elimination of monotony
The day-to-day route, or home-work-home, makes the urban environment merge into one routine. The appearance of unexpected objects in a habitual environment gives the spectator a chance to actually see the city and intensively experience it instead of just mindlessly roving his or her eyes over the surface.

Marking focal points
Marking focal points functions to create an alternative way of navigating around the city. This practice fixates not just street names or house numbers, but defines "places of power", or areas of the city where people gravitate that are notable for their energy and significance.

Annoying or unsightly objects
Items falling into this category include fences, air conditioners, advertisements, light-boxes and other "excess" objects found in the urban landscape.
**Movement**

**Proliferation of cars**
Lack of parking lots and lots of cars improperly parked on sidewalks and pedestrian crossings result in common stress and pollution as a result of endless traffic jams. According to some, bad infrastructure and city management is to be blamed. But, from another perspective, the decision to get behind the wheel is always a personal choice.

**Cycling**
The number of people who use a bicycle not only as a recreational tool but as a means of personal transportation enlarges day by day. People are uniting and demanding that the city provide them with good conditions for cycling all over the city. This trend is a result of a great flip that Moscow society has made in the past three years and started with a tiny urban intervention made by one active person.

**The People**

**Communication.**
Establishing long lost connections between people is an instrument for evolving collective decisions about the future development of the city. 'Togetherness' as a promoting power is something which urban art partisans are trying to launch at different levels, including in the pod’ezd, or entry hall, of a particular condominium in a neighborhood, in the yard outside those apartment buildings, at the level of the entire neighborhood and, finally, at the level of the city itself. Collective action can qualitatively influence the city’s atmosphere.

**Values.**
Artists use urban interventions to make people rethink some issues, question the constraints of mass production, consumerism and capitalism itself. They force people to question certain values and beliefs—to question themselves.
Movement

The People

Values. Artists use urban interventions to make people rethink some issues, question the constraints of mass production, consumerism and capitalism itself. They force people to question certain values and beliefs—to question themselves.

Cycling

The number of people who use a bicycle not only as a recreational tool but as a means of personal transportation enlarges day by day. People are uniting and demanding that the city provide them with good conditions for cycling all over the city. This trend is a result of a great flip that Moscow society has made in the past three years and started with a tiny urban intervention made by one active person.

Proliferation of cars

Lack of parking lots and lots of cars improperly parked on sidewalks and pedestrian crossings result in common stress and pollution as a result of endless traffic jams. According to some, bad infrastructure and city management is to be blamed. But, from another perspective, the decision to get behind the wheel is always a personal choice.

Communication.

Establishing long lost connections between people is an instrument for evolving collective decisions about the future development of the city. "Togetherness" as a promoting power is something which urban art partisans are trying to launch at different levels, including in the pod'ezd, or entry hall, of a particular condominium in a neighborhood, in the yard outside those apartment buildings, at the level of the entire neighborhood and, finally, at the level of the city itself. Collective action can qualitatively influence the city's atmosphere.
People are staging urban interventions in Moscow to:

- initiate civic involvement and communication between people, make people speak out
- endow the urban environment with new meaning: highlighting the value of historical heritage, creating alternative spaces for remembrance, rediscovering history, explaining the background of things in the city, marking “places of power”
- reclaim public spaces from cars, advertisements, annoying objects
- creating new trends in urban culture
- make people view the situation from another angle: remove monotony, moving from ignoring to noticing and reacting, rethink their attitudes
- call on the public to take more responsibility: start self-organization, being conscious, demand reform
- sharpen the focus on social, political, environmental issues
- ridicule something: behavior of the authorities, consumerism, etc.

Bibliography

All photo materials used in this book belong to artists indicated in the left lower corner of each picture. Back cover quote is from advertising company “Think different”, Apple Inc., 1997. Image source: http://www.wopp.biz/images/07bebedf35f67985441280119thifik.jpg