Moscow’s experiment in urban reconstruction is predictably grander but equally contradictory as it aspires to be the headquarters of a particularly wild type of capitalism. Ever since the first rumblings of perestroika, there has been a steady stream of ambitious bureaucrats and party hacks running away as fast as possible from their Soviet identities. Forming a fragile alliance with gangsters and capitalists they sought not so much to dismantle the state as to quarrel over the spoils and to ensure the transition from a state capitalist system to one where private capital accumulation could be given a moral, legal or, if need be, illegal foundation.

This did not, however, stop them from trying to dismantle the symbols of the Soviet past. For it is one of the "principal spoils of the victor" on the ascension to power, to puncture the skyline and to seize, occupy or destroy the buildings, lands and urban spaces symbolic of the previous regime.

Like teenagers ridding the room of the remnants of childhood, first to go were the statues of fallen heroes leaving gaping holes in the middle of squares. As the busts of Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin, and Lenin were being dumped in a park, the new censors rushed up and down the Aquariums spraying the red banners white, and in place of the slogan "invest your labour in the State and we will guarantee you socialism" substituted "invest your money in the bank and we will guarantee you a 1,000% profit". Hammer and sickle street lamps flickered their last, the roadside exhibitions of heroes and heroines of labour disappeared under dust, and the gable end tributes to Lenin were replaced by Marlboro Man.

Of late, the process of cosmetic reconstruction has descended into...