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## The Theory of the *Café Peripheral*: Laghidze's Waters and Peripheral Urban Modernity

**Theories of the *Café Central*.** One of the most celebrated writings on cafés in general is Polgar's *Theory of the Café Central* [1926], essentially a feuilleton-manifesto written from within the world of the eponymous Viennese café. The theory is not surprising: the café expresses a certain kind of modern urban public subjectivity. I am only interested in the title. Why does the *Café Central* need a theory? And what kind of theory would a *Café Peripheral* need? A café like, for example, Laghidze's Café, a soft drink café in Kutaisi, and later Tbilisi, throughout the twentieth century expressed Georgia's aspirations for European urban modernity. However, since it was located in a periphery and not the metropole, it could not help but express the deeply felt absence of the very modernity it sought to express. An incarnation here and now of an urban modernity better instantiated elsewhere, it is constantly threatened by its physical situation on the periphery.

There are actually a lot of 'theories of the Café Central', taking 'café central' in a wider sense: cafés that happen to be central to places stereotypically thought to be central to self-congratulatory social imaginaries like 'European urban modernity'. In much postwar social theory, such public places for commensal

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drinking, what Ellis elsewhere calls ‘architectures of sociability’ [Ellis 2008], are emblematic of the tenor of interaction characteristic of modern urban public life in general:

The early coffee-house was associated with a certain kind of social interaction — what sociologists call a sociability — of which the distinctive feature was an egalitarian and congenial mode of conversation. This model of sociable interaction has been, since the 18th century, central to theories about the city and public culture, but also about our knowledge about the modern individual, drawing on the perception that through knowing each other, people know themselves [Ellis 2002].

Whether these are eighteenth-century English coffee houses, nineteenth-century Parisian cafés or twentieth-century Viennese *Kaffeehäuser*, such institutions are taken by many modern social theorists to emblematised and typify some period, some key moment or juncture, of Western urban modernity. Architectures of sociability like coffeehouses become the laboratories of new modes of sociability and subjectivity, which then become deterritorialised through their homologous propagation in textual circulation. Each such architecture of sociability is associated with a specific genre of sociability, but analytical significance is conferred on the assemblage by its association with a more sublime dematerialised and deterritorialised genre of print circulation: for the English coffee house, nothing less than the public conversation of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters is writ large therein, for the Viennese *Café Central*, the intimate *fin de siècle* Bohemian discourse of the *feuilleton*, for the Futurist cafés of Russia and Georgia, manifestos. The mysterious teleological alchemy of the term ‘modernity’ is that these very different architectures of sociability all become, retroactively, steps in a long march to Western urban modernity. If you want to find urban modernity, *cherchez le café*.

The occidentalist theory of the café central defines European urban modernity by the symptomatic presence of certain characteristic forms of architecture of sociability, but at the same time defines an orientalist space of backwardness by the absence of these attributes. Many of these architectural forms have their origin, and their staple drinks, in Ottoman urban life, their Eastern origins have long since been forgotten, they have become naturalised citizens of the landscape of Western urban modernity. Whatever claims are made for their sociological importance, and these are many, it remains that they are emblems of modern Western urban life. To *lack* these places is to be by turns non-Western, not modern (either peripheral or colonial), not urban; to create them in such places is to attempt to reverse these conditions.

### A Theory of the *Café Peripheral*: Georgian Futurist Cafés in Tbilisi

Tbilisi has become a fantastical city. A fantastical city needed a fantastical nook as well, and on one fine day, in the courtyard of No. 12 Rustaveli Avenue, poets and artists opened the 'Fantastic Little Inn' [Grigol Robakidze, 1917, cited in Ram 2004: 368].

To create a café elsewhere, other than in its European metropolitan home, is an ambivalent act — perhaps a slightly fantastic one. Fantastic because it expresses a modernist aspiration for an absent modernity, a 'peripheral modernism' [Ram 2004]. To create a café is an attempt to incarnate an elsewhere in the here and now, which, once created, can only seem like an intrusion of the fantastic into the everyday world of the periphery.

Cafés and other forms of commensal socialibility form a central, if often 'backgrounded' element of Georgian modernist theory and practice. Representing both a domain of picturesque ethnographic everyday life (Georgian *qopa*, Russian *byt*) as well as a site for the revolutionary change of that everyday life, Georgian modernist artists particularly seem to have been drawn to populating their paintings with public places of commensal drinking and sociability, whether *cafés* in European Paris or *dukans* in Oriental Tbilisi. Their artwork depicting such scenes of commensality in turn reflexively adorned the walls of their favorite *dukans* and *cafés* [Tsitskhvili, Tchogoshvili 2006: 98, 135].

Within this modernist representational ecology of architectures of public commensality, we find writ large (very large) teleological narratives of progress emanating from centre to periphery: The European café represents the apex of an occidental civilising or modernising narrative; 'other', Oriental, architectures and practices of sociability represent a picturesque form of everyday life that form the raw materials for modernist art or modernisation. The periphery of Zdanevich's sketch belongs to the ethnographic oriental picturesque, here we find *dukans* and *supras*, with figures mostly seated on the ground, by contrast, in the centre, seated at a table, thoroughly modern boys and girls, and thoroughly modern forms of sociability like romance. The first thing we note is that the figures in the oriental periphery are seated on the ground, while the Western couple in the centre are seated at a table. There is something odd about them being seated there, until we see that they are seated on a specific kind of chair, the Thonet no. 14 chair, which is the café chair par excellence (appearing, for instance, in the cartoon of Laghidze's below), a fact telling us that this scene is abstracted from within the confined space of a café. Within this representational ecology of commensality, the figure of the café represented aspirations for European urban modernity; the absence of the café, or the presence of the *dukan*, represented the absence of all these things, life on the picturesque periphery.



Figure 1. K. Zdanevich’s ‘Old Tbilisi Sketches’ (1920) is a typical Georgian modernist treatment of the urban space of Tbilisi by populating it with scenes of ordinary public commensality: (clockwise from the top) a dukan, a stand selling kephyr and ‘sweet limonat’, men seated around a table-cloth (supra) drinking wine, a man and a woman seated on the ground drinking wine in traditional dress, and in the centre a boy and girl in more modern clothing seated at a table holding hands. The sketch produces a synopsis of the whole ethnographic range of the ecology of public drinking.

The *café peripheral* is the predicament of ‘peripheral modernism’ writ large (on ‘peripheral modernism’ in Tbilisi see [Ram 2004]). Precisely the absence of the architectures of sociability diagnostic of Western modernity, the Parisian café, is what marks places like Kutaisi and Tbilisi as being peripheral, provincial *not (yet) modern, not (yet) urban, not (yet) European backwaters*. For these bohemian writers and painters, the stereotypically exotic and oriental Kutaisi and Tbilisi were typified by the *dukan* (an Arabic word, denoting in

Georgian something like a tavern in which wine is the typical beverage), while the stereotypically modern and European Paris was typified by the café. For Kutaisi modernists like Grigol Robakidze, the predicament of the European modernist on the oriental periphery in Kutaisi is perhaps that they were forced to make the *dukan* function as a *café manqué*.

These young people, who violated the peace of Kutaisi streets with their new voices... The modernist style of perception of the outside world, manifested in poetic texts, was their creed. And thus Kutaisi *dukans* turned into Paris literary cafés, where together with the harsh sound of the music-box and the obligatory *mravalzhamieri*, names such as Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine, [...] were uttered [Grigol Robakidze, cited in Tsitsishvili, Tchogoshvili 2006: 97, 133].

Georgian modernists were not only interested in representations of cafés, they were also quite interested in the café as a form of practice (belonging to the sphere of everyday life, practice), in which they could enact their modernist aspirations. This interest in commensality, in cafés and dukans, is partially due to the crucial role that specific architectures of commensality have in creating a specific kind of 'everyday life', the *qopa* of bohemia is marked by the café, as opposed to the *salon* — the diagnostic of *meshchanstvo* [petit-bourgeois culture], just as the *qopa* of the peripheral Kutaisi bohemian is being forced to use an oriental *dukan* as a Parisian café. The Kutaisi modernist Robakidze explicitly makes the café central to the *qopa* of Tbilisi Bohemians, for instance Kote Marjanishvili.

The café is a house — (a more suitable one) — for a bohemian [...] Bohemia is entirely a category of everyday life (*qopa*) [...] In Bohemia are born schools and manifestos. Bohemia is the salon of artists and poets. In the salon there's the 'dandy', in bohemia — a 'malcontent' [...] Bohemia is the negation of *meshchanskaya* everyday life [Robakidze 1926: 2].

The café peripheral stands at a double disjuncture. Opposed on the X axis of orientalist social imaginaries to the oriental *dukan*, and on the Y-axis to the *salon* of *meshchanstvo*, it defines a space and a form of everyday practice opposed to both: Bohemia. Take the founding of the café *Kimerioni* in Tbilisi in 1919 by a group of Georgian modernists centering on the Blue Horns group, as reported by one of its members, Tician Tabidze [Tabidze 1922]. First there is the deeply felt need for the Blue Horns to have *their own* café. Then, the name of the café, *Kimerioni*, gestures to a fantastic 'elsewhere', ambivalently invoking the Chimera or Cimmeria, an imaginary beast or an imaginary place. This sets it alongside other such Tbilisian cafés with fantastic names,



'*Fantastic Tavern*', '*Land of the Argonauts*'. Then there is a second peculiar double disjuncture that makes the Tbilisi a place as fantastic as a Chimera or Cimmeria in the imaginative geography of the period:

By 1919, Tbilisi was indeed a fantastic city, situated on a double periphery to two metropolitan elsewheres, Russian and European. Tabidze introduces his narrative of the opening of the café Kimerioni with an image of Russian refugees fleeing war-torn St. Petersburg for Tbilisi: 'Cultured people kissed the earth before our eyes in Tbilisi and wept, when they saw electric lights, as if people awakened from the grave they were unable to stand air and light' [Tabidze 1922: 1]. These refugees are found weeping in the warm well-light cafés of Tbilisi, recounting the horrors of St. Petersburg, of the cold, of a life where human life felt lower than that of an animal. On this axis, during the Russian civil war, metropole and periphery were reversed: St. Petersburg had become a dark, frozen city, and Tbilisi, a city of electric lights and cafés.

But even so, there was always a place ever more modern, more urban. Georgian modernists like the Blue Horns, since they were Georgian, therefore peripheral, modernists, explicitly imagined themselves as cosmopolitan exiles from such centres of urban modernity as Paris: 'Our homeland is Paris!', they cried at the opening of *their own* café, the Kimerioni, in 1919, thus indicating that creating their own bohemian café in Tbilisi was really only a proxy for actually going to a proper café in Paris: 'We should meet up in Paris: it is as if we are sitting in a wagon, dirty and unwashed, we are going to Paris, there is the land of artists...' [Tabidze 1922: 2]. Even in that happy moment they could not help but see the absence, the lack, an elsewhere, Paris, that could be only imperfectly made present here, in Tbilisi, and the medium of this imperfect transfer is precisely the café. The presence of the café *Kimerioni* here only suggests a brighter world of metropolitan cafés somewhere else.

The birthplace of many of these Georgian modernists like Robakidze and Tabidze was the provincial West Georgian city of Tbilisi, a city noteworthy not only as being the birthplace of Georgian modernism, but also a very different café, Laghidze's, which represented ambitions for modernity no less than the more famous literary modernists. This café spawned no literary movements and harboured no bohemians, therefore has no mythic history, but I would argue it represents a shared form of modernist intelligentsia practice, whose goal is the progressive transformation of everyday life. After all, in the socialist period the poet Evgeny Evtushenko famously compared the 'secret' of Laghidze's waters with the 'sorcery' of Tabidze's poems, thus aligning the seemingly incommensurable worlds of material and verbal production of these fellow Kutaisians [Sigua 1980: 4].

According to their shared progressive framework, civilisation, or if you prefer, modernity, was something located not merely in the future temporally, but also spatially — in the West, in Europe. The core of this progressive ideology (which forms the ideological core of the Georgian 'new intellectuals' today) is predicated on very durable orientalist essentialisms such as progressive Europe versus backwards Asia, and it is precisely the gap between European aspiration and Oriental reality that gives the intelligentsia their historical mission. Writing at the same time as the opening of Laghidze's café in Kutaisi, one writer defined the predicament of the Georgian intelligentsia in this way: 'Among us the mission of the Georgian intelligentsia after the end of serfdom was — the development of the diverse national life into European forms' [Jorjadze 1901: 2].

The intelligentsia also saw themselves as mediating other gaps, of course, notably the gap between the people and the state. The main difference between the intelligentsia of the 1860s and the 1890s, of course, is that the latter are much more interested in the state of civilisation amongst themselves, in their urban environment, than the people in the village. But members of the intelligentsia such as Mitrophan Laghidze, even if not explicit revolutionaries, always phrased their civilising projects in a sense as being in competition with those of the imperial state. Laghidze's café shared with the Russian Imperial state a kind of colonial ideology of a 'civilising mission' with respect to Georgian urban public life (evidenced in the case of the state by monuments like the Tbilisi opera house). Laghidze's café not only incarnates an aspirational model of modernity, but also at the same time draws attention to the failure of the state to modernise the periphery: the image of Laghidze's café is mobilised again and again in the Tsarist period to represent a condition of civilised urban modernity threatened by leakage from its uncivilised urban surroundings, whether sewage systems, lack of public lighting, or lack of public order. In the socialist period, the same relationship of exceptionality and futurity is revalorised, Laghidze's is adopted by the soviet state as a model here and now of the radiant future of cultured consumption of communism, so successfully, in fact, that Laghidze's in the postsocialist period becomes a haunting image of 'past modernities'.

### Soft drinks and sewage

The Laghidze's waters café and factory became emblematic of Georgian modernity because it opened in the capital of the West Georgian province of Imereti, Kutaisi, in 1900, at the dawn of the twentieth century, but also because it was like all that is perceived to be modern: novel and atypical of its place and time. In some ways, the café echoed the atypicality of Kutaisi itself: in some ways a small

provincial backwater to Tbilisi, Kutaisi was also a birthplace of avant-garde and modernist movements in Georgian art [Mchedlidze 1993: 6–7; Magarotto 2006], just as Laghidze’s café was the simultaneous birthplace in Georgia of modern forms of urban public sociability, soft drinks and electrical illumination (in 1904). Of these, the most often remembered is the café’s electrical illumination (here remembered as gas lamps) which led here, as elsewhere, with ‘the formation of a distinctively modern sense of space’ [McGuire 2004]:

I remember the first time gas lamps were lit in Kutaisi. They were introduced by Laghidze, who hung them across his fizzy water plant, near the city gardens. The light of the maps attracted people. Kutaisi ‘society’ would meet around the tables set directly on the pavement, just across from the plant. Kutaisi was considered to be an aristocratic city where lived the few surviving impoverished Imeretian [West Georgian] nobles, making up the so-called ‘high society’ [Kutaisi poet Kolau Nadiradze, cited in Magarotto 2006: 46, 74].

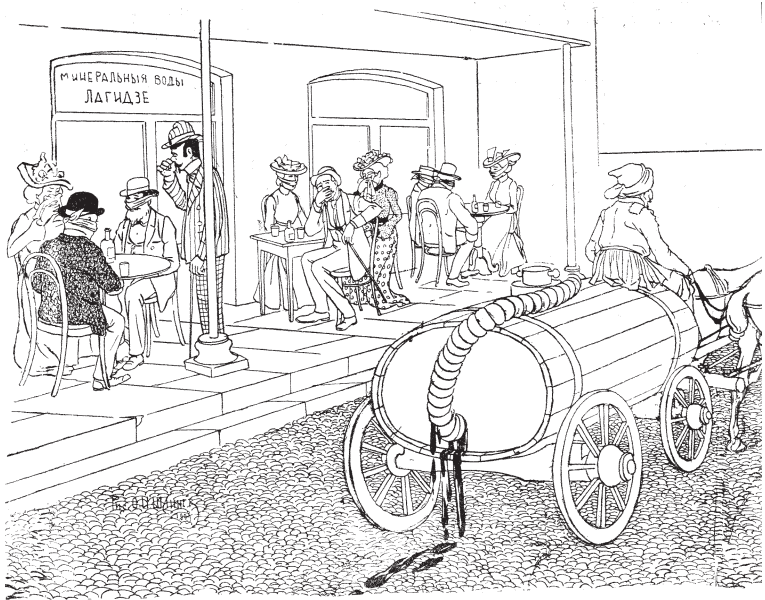
Laghidze’s café, prominently located on Kutaisi’s large central boulevard [Sigua 1980: 9, n. 2], was memorable because it was unique for its time and place. The café was easily outnumbered (in 1913) by a large assortment of other dining and drinking establishments, some relatively ‘European’ (restaurants, buffets), some more typically Georgian or ‘Oriental’ (*sardapis, dukans*) [Mchedlidze 2002: 10]. But it is first and foremost Laghidze’s prominent location that, combined with its novelty, makes it a powerful image of Kutaisi’s aspirations for urban public modernity. But it is precisely its exposed situation on the porous boundary of the central boulevard that allows it to typify in a satirical cartoon the more general problems of ‘Kutaisi entertainment’, in which the problematic underachievement of normative European modernity was writ large.

The central problem of ‘Kutaisi entertainment’, the cartoon suggests, is that backwardness of village life intrudes on the genteel urban public life of the city, as a villager carrying what appears to a tank full of sewage in a primitive cart is leaking this malodorous waste in front of a local café, whose sign reads (in Russian) ‘Laghidze’s Mineral Waters’ (in nineteenth century parlance, mineral waters included both ‘natural’ mineral waters and ‘artificial’ ones (soft drinks)).<sup>1</sup> The cartoon draws attention to the gulf between the aspirations for ‘European’ modernity (represented locally by Laghidze’s café) and the fact that throughout this period Kutaisi lacked any kind of sewer system or other provisions for urban sanitation [Mchedlidze 1993: 87–88; 209–210]. The problem of ‘Kutaisi entertainment’ is emblematic of the more general problems of modernity on European

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<sup>1</sup> This was true in British usage till the 1960s as well. [Editor].





ქუთაისის უკანონო.

Figure 2. ‘Kutaisi entertainment’ (1903)<sup>1</sup>

peripheries: public urban spaces have different functions, entertainment and sanitation, which are kept separate in a European metropole like Paris (for Georgians at that time Paris was the paradigmatic model of modernity), but which are juxtaposed in jarring contrast in a derivative, peripheral outpost like Kutaisi. Laghidze’s café in Kutaisi is not, after all, the Parisian Café it seeks to be, any more than a Kutaisi *dukan* is. Indeed, according to the ideology of the times, to make it so would require nothing short of a transformation of all aspects of public urban life, a standardisation and segregation of things like genteel entertainment, and sanitation, orderly city and disorderly village, and Europe and Asia.

The cartoon above is part of a more general genre of the period, and with one exception the cartoons are all by one single cartoonist from the same publication, one in a vein which is generally called ‘critical realism’; a critique of the status quo and the Tsarist state is *implied* by realistic portrayal of the generally sad state of things here and now. The implied point of contrast for such critiques is usually the model provided by a largely imaginary ‘normal European modernity’. Such critical realist portrayals of public urban life in Georgia from this late imperial period dwell on caricatured images of failed modernisation, a state civilising mission that never delivers its promises. And such

<sup>1</sup> Cnobis Purceli. 1903. No. 2238. Suratebiani Damateba. No. 143. P. 4.

images always achieve this by showing improper mixtures of the modern, urban space with elements more typical of a backwards village space. Cartoons depicting Georgian ‘urban modernity’ as a failed or defective one are common themes, dwelling in particular on technological emblems of modernity, transportation as well as sanitation, for example the common cartoons mocking the public transportation systems of Tbilisi, specifically the ‘K’onk’a’<sup>1</sup> district Tramway system, such as these, which are common motifs which associate the failures of imperial modernity with failures to produce orderly, European, civilised, urban public spaces and amenities (for comparisons with other such cartoon representations in Central Asian Jadidism see [Khalid 1997]). Such cartoons airing dirty laundry amongst the literate intelligentsia, while critical of the state, also form the basis for an intimate joking register of self-recognition among urban elites.

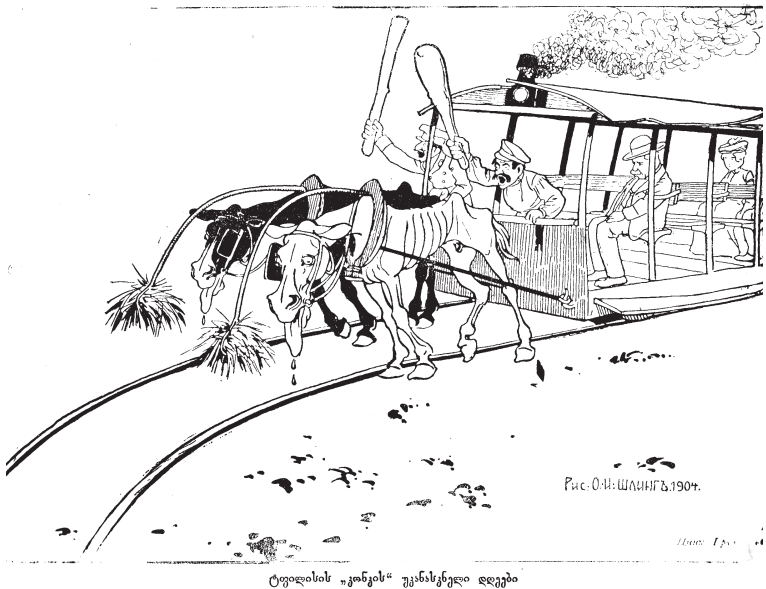


Figure 3. ‘The last days of Tbilisi’s ‘K’onk’a’ Tramway’ (1904)<sup>2</sup>

The K’onk’a Tramway, more than any other public urban institution of Tbilisi, is the butt of all such self-parodies, because it reveals a central problem of Georgian urban modernity. It is a hybrid of the village and the city, traditional village carts drawn on modern urban tracks, themselves cracked and rusty. It stands for a failure to achieve that ordering of spatial difference that seemed to define European

<sup>1</sup> From the Russian *konka*, a horse-drawn tram. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Cnobis Purceli. 1904. No. 2523. Suratebiani damateba. No. 277. P. 4 (same artist).

urban modernity. It represents not merely a passive backwardness, but worse, a failed attempt at modernisation. Laghidze's mineral waters store here appears not in its own right but as a kind of exemplary civilian attempt to civilise and order public urban space as 'European' and 'urban', which comes up against its opposite in the obdurate West Georgian cart-driver, the fecal drippings of whose sewage cart stand for everything opposed to civilised life. In fact, just as railroads, tramways and especially the socialist Metro stand as visual metonyms for claims of public urban modernity from the Tsarist through the Soviet period, we see primitive wheeled carts of various kinds standing as visual shorthand for backwardness of the village. Just as the K'onk'a tramway is a curious hybrid of a tramway and a village cart, the cart is the master image of the backwardness of Georgian backwater and its Russian metropole alike. As early as 1861 the Georgian nationalist Ilia Chavchavadze made the Russian postal cart into a symbol of Russia's own failure to progress, by having a European traveller, a Frenchman, appear, only to criticise it: "The whole of Russia travels like that? Ha, ha, ha," he chuckled, "Who in the world will ever catch up with them?" ([Chavchavadze 1871]; cited in [Manning 2004: 44]).

Western modernities constitute themselves as the normal case of modernity by treating the opposition of between public and private, village and city, as a natural state that is the normal condition, deviations from which are chaotic, pathological disruptions of this normalised, naturalised normative order. By contrast, modernities in peripheries like Tbilisi or Kutaisi are posited, and posit themselves, as being aspirants to, not possessors of, this idealised Western order, always striving for, never achieving, a proper separation and ordering of these spheres. Georgian categories of modernity, urban publics, are always haunted by the fact that it has an exemplary model elsewhere, retreating over the horizon, ever visible, ever out of reach. The soft drink café, Laghidze's waters, is ordered here with defective public transportation systems like the K'onk'a tramway as expressing an aspiration for urban modernity, an escape from the backwardness and idiocy of village life, that never quite arrives.

**Soft drinks and electric light.** In Tabidze's striking image, Russian émigrés fleeing the October revolution and civil war in Russia came wept and kissed the earth when they saw the cafés with electric light in Tbilisi [Tabidze 1922: 1]. By 1919, cafés with electric lighting were already taken for granted aspects of the urban cityscape. But only a few years earlier electric lighting represented in itself an almost fantastic innovation. The clearest single way that Laghidze's café represented European civilisation was that Laghidze's café was the first establishment in Kutaisi, and probably much of Georgia, that had electric lighting. Electrical lighting was the technological sign par excellence of modernity in the period, embedded in a narrative in

which illumination becomes a central organising metaphor for civilisation or modernity:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, artificial light was routinely viewed as the supreme sign of ‘modernity’ or ‘civilisation’... At its crudest, but also most powerful, the European past is dark and gloomy, and its historical present, formed over the nineteenth century, is glittering and radiant... Electric light was the ‘culmination’ of a century’s relentless drive towards spectacular radiance, generating a ‘fairyland environment’ or ‘celestial landscape’. [Otter 2008: 1–2]

As McGuire [2004] notes, ‘even from the first, electric illumination exceeded a purely functional role’, electrical lighting was as often initially as much a matter of public spectacle as public utility. Similarly, Laghidze’s use of electrical illumination at his café was clearly intended to be in part a spectacle, but even the functional aspect of this electrical illumination represented a kind of ‘excess over and above any pure functionality’ for Laghidze, because the power used to illuminate the café was in fact created in the first place as a by-product of the power needs of Laghidze’s ice-factory (before the arrival of which, residents of Kutaisi used snow piled up in a cave for refrigeration [Sigua 1980: 11]). The power plant built to produce ice generated so much electricity that by 1904 Laghidze was selling the excess (along with the ice) to the city for public urban lighting of central places like the central boulevard, the theatre and for the lighting of private houses in some neighbourhoods of the city. Until the creation of alternate electrical supplies under socialism the Laghidze’s electrical plant in fact provided for all the electrical needs of the city, public and private [Sigua 1980: 10]. In 1911 the Laghidze company applied for a license to build a pavilion in a city park at which would be sold beer, mineral waters and soft drinks. The pavilion was to be transferred to the city as owner 15 years later. Among the amenities included was that the pavilion would be lit with four 500-lightbulb lamps using Laghidze’s own electrical reserves, and that three times a week there would be orchestral performances, linking technical modernity to European culture [Mchedelidze 2002: 10].

Electrical lighting turned Laghidze’s café into an establishment that could operate well into the night. It is difficult to imagine nowadays what kind of figure would be made by such a single brilliantly lit café beside a park in the midst of an otherwise dark city lit by the dim glow of household lanterns and candlelight. Laghidze thus not only transformed public space, but also created night-life in Kutaisi. In Kutaisi, as in Paris, night life, aristocratic society’s ability to keep later hours, reinforced ‘the social gulf between the leisured classes and the working population, but also the difference between the

metropolis and the provinces' [Schivelbusch 1995: 142]. Laghidze's light provided a lone beacon of 'commercial' lighting in a city, in which the Tsarist state had neglected to create any form of uniform and homogeneous 'public', 'street' or 'police' lighting for purposes of surveillance [Schivelbusch 1995: 142–3]. Public light, and with it night life, neglected by the state, spread in Kutaisi from commercial light, unlike in places like Paris:

What we think of as night life includes this nocturnal round of business, pleasure and illumination. It derives its own, special atmosphere from the light that falls onto the pavements and streets from shops (especially those selling luxury goods), cafés and restaurants, light that is intended to attract passers-by and potential customers. It is advertising light — commercialised festive illumination — in contrast to street light, the lighting of a policed order. Commercial light is to police light what bourgeois society is to the state. [Schivelbusch 1995: 142]

It followed that the public social life of Kutaisi was almost entirely dependent on the Laghidze's factory and more specifically, its fuel supplies (which were in turn dependent on the unreliable transportation infrastructure provided by the Tsarist state mocked above). One writer, commenting on how Kutaisi had emptied out that summer (as Georgian cities often do, with people returning to their ancestral villages), noted that even Laghidze's was empty, an index of how barren the cityscape became in the summer. In case of Laghidze's factory, this writer added, the reason was that because of a railroad closure, there was no fuel oil to produce electricity for the electric lamps, or, had there been electricity, 'if there had been even a single butterfly left in Kutaisi', that's where they would have been [Cnobis Purceli 1903b: 2].

What this last report reminds us of is that the new forms of public space and time ('night life') created by electrical lighting quickly become a presupposition, something which is only noticed in its absence. Technology is born as a marvel, but just as quickly vanishes into the seen but unnoticed fabric of everyday life. Laghidze's café and electrical plant quickly became the invisible technical 'base' upon which the visible 'superstructure' of Kutaisi social life depended.

Just about exactly a century later, the lights went out in Georgia. Much of the period of my fieldwork in Georgia was in these dark cities, in which certainly there was no public 'police' street light (partially because of expense, partly because the street lamps themselves had been claimed as scrap metal like many other public utilities), and very little in the way of commercial lighting either. The public spaces of postsocialism were dark and dead, even after the curfews of the early nineties were lifted. If the arrival of electricity

heralded a new kind of modern public life in 1900, the sudden absence of electrical illumination in the early 2000s was just as quickly experienced as social death. One boast of the Rose Revolutionary regime on billboards throughout Tbilisi becomes understandable: ‘Tbilisi will be a city of light!’

**Soft drinks and hooligans**

<i>sasmelebis met'oke var</i> —	I am the rival of drinks —
<i>ghvinis, ludis, ts'qlis da rdzisa,</i>	of wine, of beer, of water and milk,
<i>xileulta esencia</i>	the fruit essence
<i>mit'ropane laghidzisa.</i>	of Mitrophan Laghidze.

— Part of a poem by well-known Georgian Kutaisi poet and nationalist Akaki Tsereteli greeting the opening of the Laghidze soft drink café in Kutaisi in 1900 [Sigua 1980: 9]

It is easy to forget that Laghidze’s sold only soft drinks (‘artificial mineral waters’), and it is easy to forget how revolutionary that would be in itself in the Georgian context. Again, the oriental *dukan* and the *supra* raise their heads. The various ways that Laghidze’s represented an alternate form of public sociability, specifically as a ‘rival of wine and beer’, are summarised in a newspaper report from *Cnobis Purceli* under the heading ‘News from Kutaisi’, about a night of public entertainment in the Laghidze’s waters factory. According to the local correspondent, already by 1903, Laghidze’s artificial waters

have been embraced strongly by both men and women, more by women, however. Drinking waters has become the fashion [*moda*]: whether you want to or not, still you consider yourself obliged to buy at least one bottle of waters, even if you don’t drink even one glass of it. Even though money is spent pointlessly, but it can’t be helped. Still a man can cool his heart with cold waters. Only beer has become a nuisance: often men who have gotten drunk at a feast visit the factory and stubbornly demand beer. Then they start swearing and cursing with obscene words and sometimes they even picks fights, by which means they cause a great annoyance to society [*sazogadoeba*]. The police however are nowhere to be found, to pack these young hooligans off from there, where it is necessary. At the very same time, five or six policemen guard the police station, you would think the whole treasury was stored there... [Cnobis Purceli 1903a: 3].

As this newspaper report (and the cartoon above) makes clear, Laghidze’s linked together a specifically feminine form of cultured public comportment and fashion (*moda*), identified with genteel ‘society’ (*sazogadoeba*), which was opposed, specifically, to a rather plebeian masculine behaviours of public drunkenness and subsequent beer consumption. In a manner akin to the sewage cart above, private



masculine wine consumption produces a certain public excess, in the form of drunken hooligans wandering the streets demanding beer, who disrupt the civilised feminine public order embodied by Laghidze's café, also pointing up the ways that the state, in the form of the local police, were not performing an effective role in helping to create an ordered public space. In a manner akin to the lighting of public streets with private electricity, here the activity of intelligentsia civilisers to civilise their own public space points to the failure of the state to do the same. In fact, by its association with privileged aristocratic forms of consumption, particularly those people who formed an exemplary group, *sazogadoeba* 'society', urbanised Georgian aristocrats were indeed exemplars of *moda* ('fashion'), even as they themselves were imitating foreign (Parisian) models. Such 'genteel' comportment in society, particularly associated with women and society, was not merely a bearer of stylistic distinction (*moda*) but also represented, as made clear in the quote above, a kind of 'civilising process', a set of standards of feminine genteel public comportment opposed to masculine and plebeian public drunkenness, hooliganism, fighting and swearing. The former was associated with drinking waters, the latter with its 'rivals': wine and beer. This rivalry, of course, continues under socialism, and is central to the socialist appropriation of Laghidze's as part of a general civilising mission.

### Soft drinks and the socialist future perfect tense

Laghidze's unusualness was a property it retained throughout the socialist period. The first time I came to Tbilisi in 1992, I, like many visitors, fell in love with the Laghidze's waters store in downtown Tbilisi at 24 Rustaveli Prospect. I was not alone, as there were always lines at Laghidze's. Laghidze's Café differed from all the other fast food places that typified the socialist landscape, and indeed, represented a kind of architecture of sociability that differed from the usual dreary socialist fast food places not only by what it served, but how it served it, especially those places that served those drinks that Tsereteli called its 'rivals', wine and beer.

To become convinced of the truth of these words [sc. that Laghidze's is wine and beer's rival], it is enough that we enter the recently opened store 'Tbilisi's waters' on Rustaveli Prospect ... The old and the young both come here, to drink the remarkable waters with syrups and to taste the hot *khachapuri*, which is baked almost before the eyes of the users. This pleasure costs all in all about 50–60 kopeks. But 'Tbilisi's waters' is not at all just a 'fast food' café. Here they hurry no one and you can sit for a while at a table, talk, relax. These places are especially attractive to children and young people.

([*Komunist'i* 1986: 4],  
translated and reprinted from *Vechernaia Moskva*)

The model of sociability represented by Laghidze's waters was an unusual environment in which one could relax, sit, and talk. It was fast food, yes, in that it was served promptly, but it was a tasty affordable fast food one could consume in an unhurried fashion, commingled with other activities, talking and sitting.

The seamless transition of Laghidze's from tsarism to socialism illustrates the way that socialist consumption is strongly informed with a sense not only of emulation of the bourgeois capitalist West, but also a desire to imitate, and spread to the people, the patterns of consumption that belonged only to aristocratic 'society' in the tsarist period. Laghidze's plays a special mediating role, a reminder of the aristocratic past and a prefiguration of the coming world of communism. Not a specifically socialist achievement, Laghidze's became a naturalised citizen, even a utopian model, for public life, a 'radiant future', that was coming to be under socialism, a good that was freed from its aristocratic shackles and returned to the people by socialism. Laghidze's represents a model *for* socialist consumption, representing a form of 'cultured consumption', opposed both to the grim practicality of socialist fast food and the masculine sociability of beer, and the ritual elaborations of the alcoholic supra:

You won't even need a rouble, here [at Tbilisi's waters] you will kill your thirst and have a snack with pleasure: hot *khachapuri* and followed up by Laghidze's water — it really is an unusual thing. A beautiful interior pleases us, convenient furniture and Old Tbilisi's unrepeatably vista, too. In addition, cultured service, culture of relationships. And all this — thanks to non-alcoholic, more exactly fizzy water with syrup. And what waters!

([Stanco 1986: 5], translated from *Khimiya i zhizn'*).

As this quote makes explicit, Laghidze's café is an excellent example of the architecture of sociability associated with the Soviet concept of culturedness (*kulturnost*), a state directed program of 'directed desires', beginning in the 1930s, which sought to fuse together two seemingly incompatible programs for consumption inherited from the Tsarist order, the materialism of 'bourgeois' (actually aristocratic) feminine *moda*, and the ascetic anti-materialism of masculine intelligentsia *kultura* [Kelly, Volkov 1998], the *qopa* of *meshchanstvo* and the *qopa* of bohemia.

There was no doubt, of the two basic forms of fast food establishment offered under socialism, places like Laghidze's, patronised by men, women and children alike, represented *kulturnost*, the 'bright future' of cultured consumption under communism. By contrast, those that served beer, frequented only by men, were unadorned and represented uncultured plebeian mass consumption of the present. Both of these,

in turn, different as forms of public 'fast food' consumption in relation to the model of private feasting with wine offered by the *supra*.

Laghidze's as a model of sociability differed from the formal private ritual sociability of wine and the informal public ritual sociability of beer in yet other important ways. At Laghidze's, soft drink consumption expresses abstract equality in public, drink consumed for no other purpose than to drink, talk pursued for no other purpose than to talk. Women and children were quite at home at Laghidze's. In this sense places like Laghidze's were very much unlike restaurants or bars, the homes of male camaraderie expressed in the form of *supras*. For me, a foreigner, places like Laghidze's were also refuges from the iron law of hospitality of the *supra*. One of my problems in my early fieldwork was finding such places where I could meet a friend and not become encompassed by the demands of the law of hospitality, places where I could eat and drink for their own sake, and talk merely to talk, and come and go as I pleased. Indeed, one of my host families saw my practice of lunching at Laghidze's an affront to their hospitality! By simple experimentation I discovered that some, but not all, coffee shops, tea houses or soft drink shops were immune to the law of hospitality expressed by the *supra*. Of the many different kinds of architectures of sociability at the end of socialism, Laghidze's provided an almost unique refuge from its 'rivals', wine and beer, a veritable temple of *kulturnost!*



Figure 4. Inside Laghidze's in Tbilisi (2002)

### Soft drinks and ghosts of modernities past

If at some time in the past you were a devoted consumer of 'Laghidze's Waters', then, it is possible that the clear glasses, the cones filled with multicolored syrups, the tap for soda water, the heavy, cool marble countertop, the mosaic on the wall, the gentle tinkling of the spoon during the mixing of the syrup with the water, the rinsing wheel for the glasses, like a tiny fountain, all became for you indivisible characteristic features of this brand. Now, imagine, if all at once we were to change every last one of these symbols. It is possible, that a new brand would appear. But the old one would surely die. [Ak'opiani 2007: 59]

Imagined in the retrospective discourse of postsocialist consumerism, these little details of the sociotechnical assemblage of the Laghidze's café, from the (once commonplace, by now almost extinct) late socialist Georgian 'traditional modernism' of the décor to the technical manner of presentation, that in the socialist period exhibited socialist *kulturnost*, become the charming and distinctive attributes of capitalist 'brand'. The change in the apperception of Laghidze's café echoes the arrival of a new hegemony of consumerism, and the many changes in the postsocialist cityscape that attended it.

Coming back to Tbilisi in 2001 for the first time in almost a decade, I was stunned as I wandered around a city that had changed in so many ways. The chaos and crime of the early 1990s had been replaced by a more civilised public order, and at the same time socialist economies of deficit had been replaced with real, permanent capitalist style poverty and unemployment. A friend of mine who knew me well from the early 1990s and my single minded love of Laghidze's, asked me if I wanted to go on my 'Hajj' to the soft-drink Mecca, the Laghidze's store on Rustaveli Prospect. I enthusiastically agreed. The place was empty. Under socialism there was always a line and the place teemed with people. Now the marble walls and tables, which made the place cool in the heat of Tbilisi summers, took on a somber tone, reminding me of a soft drink mausoleum. I joylessly drank my tarragon-flavoured pop, which was as good as ever, but instead of the single variety of fresh, piping-hot cheese bread that had been the trademark of Laghidze's in the past, now there many kinds of cheese bread, but not all of which were hot, or even warm. In general, the place was a ghost of the Laghidze's I had known. Each year I visited Laghidze's out of piety, but each year it seemed that Laghidze's store, once a joyous prophetic vision of a future world of socialist culturedness, was now a sad spectral haunting from the socialist past in the capitalist present.

Although I did not know this, I was not the only one silently mourning Laghidze's. Of all the unlikely fellow travellers, I find my thoughts and feelings about Laghidze's articulated most clearly by a Georgian

corporate brand manager, a 'new intellectual' typical of Georgian post-socialism, a kind of intellectual who are stereotypically associated with an absolute loathing bordering on the pathological of everything associated with the socialist past. Reading an essay with the rather non-descriptive title *Brendingi-II* (Branding-II, Ak'opiani 2007), I was surprised to find a very introspective autobiographical consideration of Laghidze's Waters as a brand running like a connecting thread through what is otherwise an unremarkable and derivative commentary on the multivalent semiotic ubiquity of the category of brand. The bulk of the essay was an utterly derivative exposition of a common theme in contemporary global brand literature, a kind of 'brand animism', the idea that brands can be treated as being in essence prosthetic extensions of the human (as appears to be the case here) or even autonomous living beings animated by their relationships with consumers.

But what is odd is that this otherwise unremarkable manifesto of brand animism is first of all exemplified by not by a brand as a *living object*, but by brand as a *ghostly haunting*, using the example of Laghidze's Waters:

Whenever I walk past 'Laghidze's Waters' on Rustaveli Prospect, I feel simultaneously a desire and a sadness, at the same time, a feeling of frightened shame takes control of me. It's as if I walked past a friend who in their time was exceptionally talented and good-humored, who, now, dressed in rags, is begging me for alms and apparently can't even recognise me. [Ak'opiani 2007: 58]

Laghidze's Waters is indeed an animated object, but an object animated by sadness, shame, and nostalgia seems like a haunting ghostly presence, very different from the kinds of animation that brand theorists like to talk about. She could drink a bottle of Coca-Cola, she admits, but what she desires is a glass of Laghidze's 'Chocolate Cream'.

Why then, does she not enter Laghidze's Waters? Why drink a dead bottle of Coca-Cola instead of the living magical fairy-tale waters of Laghidze's? The desire is still there, but the place too is haunted with a series of repressed emotions. She analyses the haunting of Laghidze's in what is almost a parody of a typical brand manager's summary of a brand personality in terms of a set of bullet-pointed and bolded adjectives denoting desirable associations the brand excites in the consumer (e.g. the brand Orange is 'refreshing, honest, straightforward, dynamic, friendly'):

What is it now that prevents me from realising this desire? The fact that, the moment I enter 'Laghidze's Waters', instead of feeling carefree and light-hearted, I am overpowered by sadness, dejection, fear, shame and despair.

**Sadness and dejection** — at seeing a dying friend.

**Fear** because this last safe harbor, could easily turn to dust and ashes very soon, for what are to me completely unacceptable reasons.

**Shame** because I haven't even lifted a hand, to prevent my friend from becoming a beggar.

And **despair** — since we, who secretly love [Laghidze's Waters], are not so few in number, but why are we so sluggish? Why don't we take care of what we have? Why do we regard it as coldly as someone who tears up by the roots centuries old trees that he himself did not plant? Why do we not try to preserve the ambience [iersaxe] of the old city and why doesn't it move us, when a foreign culture levels our culture traditions? Why... Why?... Why. [Ak'opiani 2007: 58, original emphasis]

Because of the way that Laghidze's Waters store represents all that was best about socialist urban life, and is associated with so many memories of times and places, Laghidze's continued operation represents a ghostly haunting of postsocialist urban spaces, bringing back repressed emotions and sadness for all that was lost with the transition, as well as the loss of one's own biographical youth. The survival of the café into postsocialism triggers both a desire (which turns out to be an impossible desire to relive one's own youth) and a reappearance of a repressed sense of loss (a repressed realisation that the socialist city was, perhaps, in certain respects, a happier place). Perhaps this is why all such remnants of socialism trigger



Figure 5. Laghidze's store in 2009



such a hostility for other intellectuals of her generation, the Rose Revolutionaries, who think that erasing such places permanently will once and for all erase this ambivalence (as I have argued elsewhere, [Manning 2009]). And, sure enough, erase it they did. Laghidze's Café on Rustaveli Prospect, an empty, haunting reminder of socialism, finally succumbed to the zeal of the Rose Revolutionaries, who deny emphatically that anything worthwhile could have been produced by socialism, and was privatised as storefront real estate in 2008. A café that once was a harbinger of an aspiration for modernity under tsarism and even socialism, becomes instead a haunting reminder of these futures past.

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