

From Russia, with love

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The Moscow International Security show 2003 (MIPS 2003) held from 16 to 19 April was the reason for my first visit to Russia.

Having read and studied a lot about Russian culture in high school, reading Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Mayakovski for literacy exams, I was wondering what should one expect from Russia today, and, even more interestingly for me, what could one expect from the Russian CCTV industry?

Back in the days when I was preparing my thesis at university on CCD cameras, back in 1981 in Macedonia, I could not use the original works of the “fathers” of CCD technology D.F. Barbe and R.A. Chapman, which were published in the inaccessible and expensive specialised books in the

English language (at least this was the case for me living in the then Socialistic Republic of Macedonia). The only alternative I had then was to rely on some affordable Russian translations of their work. So even though I studied English as a second language and did not understand Russian, I bought myself a Russian dictionary and battled through some very basic and rough translations of the CCD theory, as explained in Russian. Most of the translation was based on pure logic and common sense, as the CCD theory has a lot of mathematics, quantum physics and electronic formulas, and certain areas required me to use my own calculations and modelling, although the fact that the Russian language uses Cyrillic letters similar to Macedonian helped me somewhat. The important thing was that I finished the thesis, and passed my work with the highest mark,

most of which was thanks to the available Russian literature.

Twenty two years later I was really looking forward to seeing Russia. My visit was organised by Murat Altuev from the company ISS, he is part of a new breed of Russian businessmen, who in turn decided to translate and publish my book, and later on also decided to have the CCTV focus magazine translated in Russian. We only knew each other via e-mails and Internet and had never met in person.

On my arrival at Moscow airport I was very pleasantly surprised to meet a young and sincere businessman, with a background in computers and programming, who run a company with over 40 employees, drives a Mercedes and uses the latest Sony Ericsson P800 PDA mobile phone with a bluetooth ear-piece. Is this supposed to be Russia today, I was wondering? Well yes, and add to this picture a very hospitable bunch of people who all extended that hospitality to me during the show and out of it, Anatoliy, Stanislav, Lida, Liza, Anastasia and Nikolai.

There was no trace of images I used to see on TV about Moscow being full of beggars and unemployed people. I was wondering how much of it was "capitalist propaganda" (as the Soviets used to then call it) and how New York or Sydney with their own share of beggars which we don't see that often on TV, are not very different.



After my book was translated into Russian last year I had a very special feeling about the flow of written text and the borderless thirst for knowledge. Over twenty years ago I used books printed in Russian to learn and study the basics of the then new television imaging devices, and now the Russians were eager to learn about CCTV from my own text. Some may criticise me for saying this, but I have feeling that the Russians want to read much more than their English colleagues. How else can I explain the fact that the first print run of the book was sold out within six months and a new print run, three times larger, was prepared for the MIPS 2003. Even the CCTV focus magazine, when translated into Russian is printed in quantities larger than the English version you are reading now.

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The crowd at the main entrance to the MIPS 2003

The MIPS show was organised in the Moscow complex "Olympijskij", and I was very surprised to see how large it was. Many international companies had stands (booths) there, including companies from UK, Germany, Italy, Korea and US. To my surprise there were quite a few local companies, most of which were importers of known brands, but also quite a few original Russian CCTV manufacturers and integrators.

I had heard that Russia has some very smart

software developers, and this proved to be correct. At the MIPS 2003 I saw some very interesting and original solutions, such as intelligent PTZ camera that follows people moving in the field of view, original IP cameras made in Russia, face recognition, anti-terrorist video picture analysis, intelligent digital video recorders etc. From the many discussions I had with my hosts I concluded that there was no problem in developing and producing any particular intelligent solution in CCTV. Russia simply has no problems in finding young and talented software and hardware

developers. Perhaps the only obstacle the Russian CCTV industry faces now is getting through to the world market and following some kind of planned global marketing strategy. On the basis of what I saw at the MIPS 2003 I will not be surprised if in the next 5~10 years we hear more and more about good quality products made in Russia. I discovered that there are already some known brands in the world of computers, CCTV and digital



The Russian CCTV focus team

products (compression software and video compression cards) that actually come from Russia but you may not be aware of it, since they are offered through US, Korean or European dealers.

There was no doubt that the ISS Press people had done their best for a very professional preparation for the show. I was almost embarrassed to walk around the show and see the various show exhibitors because of a number of large posters that were put up, with my face staring down, inviting all interested to come and talk to me at the Conference Hall No.1 on 17th April, from 2:30 to 3:30 PM, where I was to talk about the book and the CCTV focus magazine.

With my Russian CCTV focus magazine team we had a very interesting conference with many people coming to say hello and ask various questions about the book, about the Australian CCTV experience, the future of digital CCTV and alike. Some very interesting questions and discussions arose from a variety of CCTV people, which proved that the Russians know what CCTV is and where it is heading. I also learned about the strange and very interesting television standard in Russia, the broadcast stations use the SECAM standard, while CCTV has gone along with the PAL.

There was no doubt in my mind that Russians are also going through the same issues we face daily in Australia or elsewhere in the world. The digital video fever is present there too, and there are many things that we can yet learn from each other.

Before and after the conference many people were stopping and looking for me to say hello and show me their appreciation for my CCTV work done so far. No doubt, this was a pleasant and priceless feeling. I autographed many books and did give a few interviews for the Russian magazines, web sites and other media. I felt like a celebrity in the true sense of the word.

Another very interesting fact to prove Russian advancement in CCTV and the digital millennium, was the fact that they had organised a PTZ controllable web camera up in the Olympic stadium ceiling which could be accessed by anyone (it happened that this was organised by my highly capable ISS hosts). I used this opportunity and sent an SMS message to my wife and kids with the web address of the wavelet server so that they could see me from Sydney. Even for them it was very easy and simple to move the camera around and see the show ambient on-line. There were a few cameras around the exhibition and one outside showing Moscow's streets which proved a very simple, practical and efficient use of modern technology, eliminating borders between people.

I only had a day or two to see a little bit of Moscow outside the show, and in short - I was impressed. There was no shortage of nice and expensive cars, driving along side the locally



At the Press Conference

made Ladas and Volgas through the very wide streets. Moscow is a nice and sunny place (at least while I was there, although slightly chilly in the mornings), with millions of people going about their daily business, usually with a cheap metro where each underground train station is a masterpiece exhibition hall in its own right. I did see The Red Square of course and the Kremlin, and as you can see we even decided to put it on this issue's cover page as well, since they do have CCTV cameras just above the main entrance, which is the main criteria for our covers. There are shopping centres and boutiques as in any other large metropolis, and to my surprise, I could find almost anything I wanted. Since I just got my new bluetooth mobile phone back in Sydney a few weeks before going to Russia I was surprised that I could buy a bluetooth earpiece in one of the main underground shopping centres near Red Square cheaper than back home. The shopping



The magazine contract exchange with Murat Altuev

centre reminded me of the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney. It had all of the known boutique names. If one had the money, there is certainly no shortage of places to spend it.

One of the most impressive parts of my short stay in Moscow, outside the MIPS show, was the visit to the Tretyakov gallery. There were a

number of incredible paintings and sculptures displayed there, from Russian artists from the 10th to 20th century. A true treasure trove of artists and paintings unknown to me. I have always been an art lover, visited many famous exhibitions throughout the world, but could not avoid the feeling that I had a big hole in my knowledge of art. Russian art was the missing piece. An unforgettable experience from the pictures at the exhibition.

And after it was all over, I still have very vivid memories from my first visit to Moscow and I am definitely going to try and visit it again, I hope soon.

Long live the "Okhrannoe Televidenie" (which is CCTV in Russian). [•]



Moscow metro