In early December, 2002 I stepped onto a Moscow city bus in the northeastern section of town and hoped I would notice my stop. There is nothing easy about finding your bus stop in the middle of the Moscow winter – only those who have ridden the same line for months if not years will know where to get off. It is more a matter of feeling than knowledge or even vision. For once sitting – or more likely standing – on the crowded bus, you are encapsulated within a shell of ice and frost on wheels. The windows are as transparent as a frozen lake. If you are lucky you will find yourself near an ice and frost covered window, out of which you have no immediate hope of seeing, but upon which you can begin to work with your warm breath and thumb. Look around and everywhere you will see people working on the windows in this manner: old babushki with their handbags full of groceries, teenagers with their walkmans, factory workers in blue overhauls, and business men in suits all nonchalantly breathing onto the closest window space and rubbing it with their mitten covered thumb.

On this day I was having very little luck creating my window within the window (it is not always as easy as it may sound!), but luckily Olya had told me exactly how many stops there were between the metro station where I got on the bus and where I should get off. When I finally stepped out of the bus I entered a world of gray. While this is often the case in wintery Moscow, the industrial northeast section of the city – the metro station where I caught my bus is called Elektrozavodskaja or Electrical Plant – lacks any of the color, found for example in extravagant churches, old aristocratic estates, or even parks, that on occasion breaks the gray monotony. The world into which I stepped from that bus more closely resembled a toned down version of Malevich’s Black Square than any of the bright and vivid socialist realist paintings – all the more so since I was the only person on the street for as far as I could see.
Finally out of the grayness I made out the image of Olya at the other end of the block, walking from the opposite direction that I was heading. I was lost and late, and Olya was a little distressed. “So, you finally made it,” she said in a kind but agitated tone of voice. As we entered Shkola Budushchego – Raduga (The School of the Future – Rainbow), she told me that the other teachers were waiting for me in an office. We rushed into the newly constructed building and temporarily left behind the world of gray, snowy coldness outside. Quickly we took off our several layers of jackets, extra sweaters, scarves, hats, and mittens and hung them in the coat room just around the corner from the front door. Children of all ages scurried about as they jostled to be the first out the door after a long day of school. As I tried to scrape off as much snow, ice, and dirt from my stiff leather boots as possible, Olya slipped into a cozy looking pair of indoor shoes. We then hurried off to meet some of her teaching colleagues for a group interview.

I had come to Moscow to talk to people about their moral conceptions and to find out how living through the post-Soviet period shaped the way they conceived of, spoke about, and experienced morality. When I first arrived I thought it best to meet with groups of Muscovites and in this way be able to observe how individuals work together to dialogically articulate their respective moral positions. But as this group interview with Olya and her five teaching colleagues finally convinced me, discussing morality in groups tends to lead to a group agreement on moral concepts and articulations. One might think this agreement is the result of the articulation of an already held commonly shared notion of morality, and as such provides an excellent opportunity to record if not a Russian notion of morality, then at least a Muscovite one.

The process, however, could be viewed differently. It seemed that over the course of the interview the individuals shifted their moral positions not necessarily toward some so-called pre-given Russian morality, but rather toward the subjective moral position of the head of the department Tatyana Pavlovna, a 37 year-old articulate and domineering figure who sat at the end of the room upon a stool that raised her a half meter above the rest of us. In this way I left the interview feeling as if I knew more about the power relations within the department than I did about any of their individual moral positions or how morality is negotiated among them. While this in itself is certainly interesting, it presented a problem for my research – how best to allow individual Muscovites the opportunity to articulate their own moral