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Between Modernism and Socialist Realism

Soviet Architectural Culture under Stalin's Revolution from Above, 1928–1938

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Stalinism in architecture was abolished two and a half years after Stalin's death, on 4 November 1955.¹ What was known as Socialist Realism was struck down by a joint statement of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet government following year-long consultations with representatives of the profession. Using language reminiscent of the modern movement's critique of eclectic historicism, the Soviet communiqué called for nothing less than a reintroduction of modernism in terms strikingly consonant with those of the *Athens Charter* of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).²

In contrast to this swift return to mainstream modernism, the Stalinization of Soviet architecture in the 1930s, following the Sixteenth Party Congress, had been a much longer and more complex undertaking. It not only sparked intense debates among architects, it also met resistance from the public, who continued to admire the modern architecture that had been conceived by the avant-garde in the 1920s. Open support for progressive architecture was felt as late as 1937, one of the harshest years of the Terror, or the Great Party Čistka (the massive purge of party ranks).³

Emblematic of the slowness of the effort to Stalinize architecture was the repeated postponement of the First Congress of the Stalinist Union of Soviet Architects (initially scheduled for 1934 in the wake of the Soviet writers' assembly). This was caused by the difficulties that the com-

munist leadership of the union experienced in controlling the union's decision-making process. For the same reason, the Soviets asked CIAM to postpone the Moscow meeting scheduled for 1933. The Politburo's sustained desire to host such a congress in Moscow in the years to come, while it dismissed modernism at home, illustrates the complexity of the architectural discourse that Stalin started in 1928 with his Cultural Revolution, or Perestroika (reconstruction). The fact that the party operated in strict secrecy further complicated the maneuvering.⁴

The difficulty in agreeing what Socialist Realism ought to mean in architecture was compounded by the divergent stylistic preferences of the party's top leadership. Such ambiguity opened a space for some architectural diversity, which was widened by the degree of tactical tolerance that was accorded Constructivist architecture until the end of the 1930s. The two most notable examples of such diversity were the Vesnin brothers' Moscow Palace of Culture, inaugurated in 1937 (its striking modernist interiors are virtually unexplored to this day); and Moisej Ginzburg's all-but-forgotten 1938 sanatorium at Kislovodsk, whose signature modernism was hidden in the forbidding mountain range of the northern Caucasus (Figures 1, 2).⁵ A reassessment of the last version of the Palace of the Soviets (1934), a hyper-Stalinist project of oppressive monumentality, offers another unexpected illustration of the surviving spirit of both modernity and modernism in the Soviet Union under Joseph Visarionovič Stalin.⁶ Appropriate recognition of the importance of these

projects entails a new interpretation of this historic turning point in Soviet architecture—and in Soviet culture at large. This reconsideration of this phenomenon, which completely reshapes heretofore accepted interpretations, including those in the sole, pioneering book on the topic (1994),⁷ is based on newly available Soviet archives.⁸

The effort to sustain the Russian modernist cause in the 1930s was launched in the dramatic events that surrounded the 1928 competition for the Lenin Library, when the modernists appealed to the party to help them defend modern architecture. The response was the creation of an architectural organization composed of party members, the VOPRA (the All-Union Society of Proletarian Architects), which, one year into the Cultural Revolution could not but be sponsored behind the scenes by the party leadership. More than endorsing a principled position, VOPRA, an essential tool of Stalin's Perestroika of cultural and economic policies, sought to monopolize the terms of the debate.

The Lenin Library Competition: The Debate

Having replaced Lenin's New Economic policies (the NEP) in 1928 with centrally mandated five-year-plans, Stalin embarked on an effort to control the modernist art movements that had flourished in the previous decade.⁹ The intention was not so much to impose a particular style as to replace spontaneous architectural expression with effective control. What mattered was to adapt "reality" to a perceived historical plan, allegedly entrusted to the Bolshevik leadership. Existing spontaneous movements were to be gradually infiltrated and reined in. By 1930, without ever renouncing modernity and modernization per se—a declared ideological premise of the Revolution—Stalin's ruling party took into its own hands what until then belonged primarily to the artistic professionals. Supplanting independent initiative, direct and indirect dictates from the power centers were to define everyday reality, ultimately draining intellectual discourse of all substance.¹⁰

Toward the end of the 1920s, the nouveaux riches of the NEP (the so-called "Nepmen") were gaining influence on architecture in proportion to their growing economic power. A telling example was the 1927 Italianate GosBank by the classicist Ivan Žoltovskij (1867–1959), a well-established architect of the Tsarist era.

By the early 1930s, the place of the nouveaux riches was taken over by a new type of parvenus, the "professional revolutionaries," meritorious apparatchiks and decorated citizens who populated the heights of Stalin's meritocratic world. Not surprisingly, they opted for reactionary archi-

ture, analogous to that preferred by the Nepmen. As a result, at the turn of the decade Soviet progressive architects found themselves squeezed between the nouveau riche NEP elite, whom they had resisted since the mid-1920s, and a rising class that also favored conservatism. That seemed to leave little space for innovative architecture.

In the spring of 1928, coinciding with the national competition for the Lenin Library in Moscow, the progressive *SA* (*Sovremenaja Arhitektura*: Contemporary architecture) the official journal of the OSA (Society of Contemporary Architects), published a letter by a group of young architects from the Ukrainian city of Harkov calling for help and support from the Moscow modernists (Figure 3).¹¹ The group was fervently devoted to avant-garde architecture and was distressed at what they perceived as mounting conservatism in their town, which was increasingly dominated by pre-revolutionary architects who kept the younger ones at bay. In a desperate attempt to break the grip of academic architecture, which threatened to monopolize the profession, they formed the Inicijativnaja Gruppya to resist the trend. Their appeal fell on fertile ground. The leaders of Soviet modern architecture shared their concerns, and the turbulent competition for the Lenin Library, one of the decade's most prestigious projects to be located in the heart of Moscow across from the Kremlin walls, dramatically exposed the same issues.

The competition was juried by the Moskovskoe Arhitekturnoe Obščestvo (MAO), a pre-revolutionary Moscow architectural society reinstated in 1923. It was organized in two parts. One was open to the entire profession, the other only to invited architects. Because of its conservative jury, the open contest for the library attracted fewer than ten entries. In addition to the four invited architectural teams, including the Vesnin brothers Aleksandr (1883–1959), Viktor (1882–1950), and Leonid (1880–1933), who introduced Constructivism in architecture with their 1923 Palace of Labor, the entrants included several well-established academic figures from Tsarist times. Out of four invitees, only the Vesnin team had radically renounced their conservative pre-1914 architecture. The other invited participants were the conservative engineer Il'ja Rerberg, already active in the previous century and derided in *SA* for his post office on Tverskaja Street, a historicist building awkwardly stripped of its ornament (Figure 4); the Ukrainian Vladimir Ščuko (1879–1939); and the designer of the permanent Lenin mausoleum Aleksej Ščusev (1873–1949), an architectural chameleon who was accused later in the decade by the Secretary of the Union of architects, Karo Alabjan (1897–1959), of having "an anti-Soviet way of looking at you."¹²



Figure 3 Aleksei Gan, cover of SA (*Sovremennaja Arhitektura*), fifth anniversary (June 1930)



Figure 4 Il'ja Jerberg, post office, Moscow, in SA 2 (Feb. 1928), captioned "How not to build"

The new generation of architects that grew out of the 1917 upheavals was trained at the Moscow VHUTEMAS (later VHUTEIN), one of the most innovative schools of art and architecture in Europe. The school offered the students the possibility to choose between *masterskie* (master workshops) directed by artists and architects adhering to different modernist orientations, and a traditional academic curriculum run by established classicists.¹³ The young Harkov architects, most probably trained through these new programs, were outraged that the list of invited architects for the library failed to reflect the new forces in the field. To resist countrywide reactionary trends of this sort, the VHUTEIN's Scientific and Technical Architectural Club called for a public debate at its premises on Miasni-

tickaja Street, in the vicinity of the designated building site for Le Corbusier's Centrosouz.¹⁴ Ironically, this was also the street where the Vesnin brothers had built Moscow's Central Post Office in 1912 in a fashionable Byzantine style.

The public response to the call was overwhelming. Huge crowds of Moscow students, professors, and architects attended the meeting, turning it into a plebiscite against "architects who were active before the Revolution and who belonged to aristocratic and bourgeois circles."¹⁵ One speaker pointed out sardonically that Soviet architecture seemed to be undergoing its own "Renaissance," with new projects and buildings boasting Palladian façades.

The debate ended with a unanimous resolution emphasizing the need for a "systematic and relentless struggle"

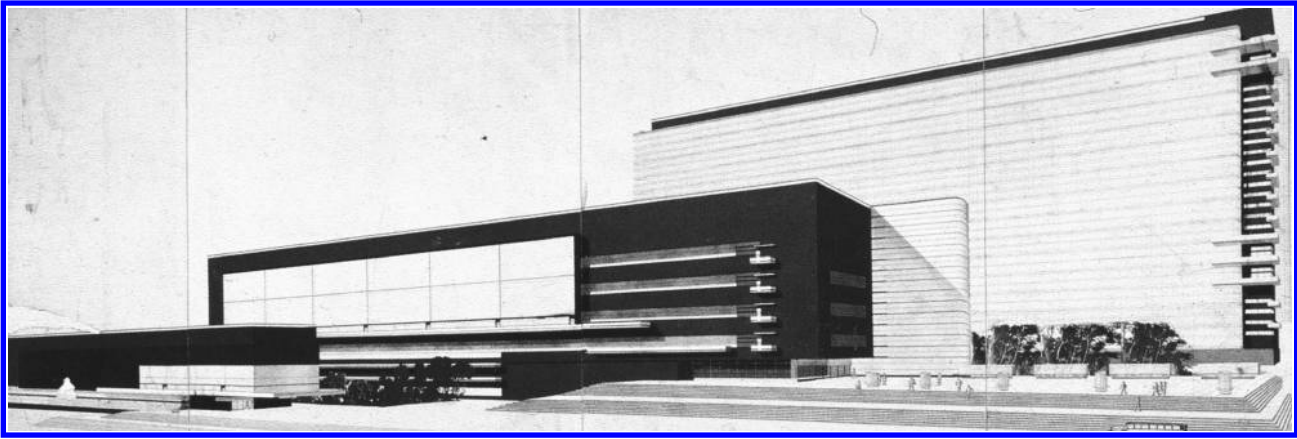


Figure 5 Daniil Fridman, Dmitrij Markov, and Vladimir Fidman, first-prize competition design for the Lenin Library, Moscow, 1929

against what the assembly regarded as “the indifference of the profession” to the country’s actual conditions and against the rejection of contemporary materials and innovative constructive systems.¹⁶ The declaration stated emphatically:

[We are] AGAINST ignoring the new social and existential phenomena in architecture,
 AGAINST ignoring contemporary materials and constructive systems,
 AGAINST going back to old forms of “national” architecture
 AGAINST building in the “styles”
 AGAINST an orientation toward “reactionary artistic old formulae”
 AGAINST the hegemony of the most reactionary architects in the provincial cities and the republics of the union, i.e., where a struggle against the danger from the right in architecture is indispensable.¹⁷

What most worried the document’s signatories was a “tendency, increasingly evident in the whole country, toward a revival of the old forms of ‘national’ architecture, and toward the reintroduction of the ‘styles.’”¹⁸ Most strikingly, the resolution of the assembly “[called] on the party and other organizations leading the Cultural Revolution to take an interest in the problems of architecture, and to organize discussions on the contentious issue with a broad participation of the party membership and the Soviet public opinion.”¹⁹ The resolution concluded that only one thing could solve the crisis: to attract “young architectural forces that have grown and learned their trade in a new revolutionary society.”²⁰

The call for party intervention indicates how unaware many were at that time (and would remain for most of the decade) of the actual nature of the Revolution from Above.

The Bolshevik party, especially its Moscow branch—a center of resistance to Stalin—was still perceived in 1928 as inherently progressive, ready to support the avant-garde. However, the revolutionary disguise of Stalin’s pronouncements electrified many, and even brought a sense of vindication after years of perceived corruption by the despised Nepmen.

The resolution was published in the press. New protests flooded the editorial board of the *SA*. The journal reported that the immense majority of the architectural community had already decried the erection of the Central Telegraph by the engineer I. I. Rerberg—just two blocks from the Kremlin. Other critics chastised Žoltovskij’s Gosbank in Moscow and his obsolete Palace of Friendship in Mahač-Kala. Also attacked were the Palace of the People, built in a Byzantine style in Erevan, Armenia, as well as the Moresque style of the Baku train station in Azerbaijan.

Deaf to these protests, the jury published its final verdict after the second round of the library contest. The scandal was now complete. Not only had the jury turned down the previous round’s prizewinners—the architectural team of Daniil Fridman, Vladimir Fidman, and Dmitrij Markov, with their elegant modernist solution rendered in a graphically innovative blue monochrome (Figure 5),²¹ but, as the protesters saw it, they had rewarded the worst, by Ukrainian Vladimir Ščuko (1878–1939) (Figure 6). Ščuko was a pre-revolutionary academic architect who belonged to the oldest of the three generations competing for commissions at the end of the 1920s. His building’s entry consisted of a peristyle of fourteen square columns with diminutive capitals, all veneered with black granite. The columns supported a massive attic of white marble sculpted like a Roman sarcophagus and bearing the name of Lenin. Beyond the



Figure 6 Vladimir Ščuko and Vladimir Gelfreich, Lenin Library, Moscow, 1929–41

entrance hall, visitors were faced with monumental stairs framed by columns and classical sculptures.

In contrast to Ščuko's pompous and intimidating building, Fridman, Markov, and Fidman's winning design from the first round comprised three inviting, transparent library units, clearly conveying the message that they were repositories of knowledge open to all. While forming small plazas and groves, the three buildings of the library were deployed in an ascending hierarchical sequence, away from the noisy boulevard that separated them from the Kremlin walls. With a touch of classicism, such as discreet cornices, the library aptly combined mainstream European modernism with some typical De Stijl devices that were inspired by J. J. Oud's or Walter Gropius's early work. Frozen in dynamic balance, the volumes were veneered with dark blue ceramic tiles and huge glass curtain walls. Alternating awnings and balconies along the building's edges gave the third, tallest structure—containing the book stacks—a sense of refined elegance. Irregularly distributed balconies, recesses, and strip windows articulated its massive glass volume. A slender, elongated glass tower, streamlined in the Mendelsohnian fashion, dramatically marked the main, ceremonial entrance, acting like a lit billboard at night.

The smallest building, directly related to the street with an independent entrance, contained reading rooms for peri-

odicals. The central library structure, intended for research, projected a huge three-story prismatic bay window. Resembling a giant glass bookcase, the bay allowed optimal lighting to the main reading room, while offering readers a commanding view of the Kremlin palaces and churches. From the street, the bay allowed passers-by an inviting view of its internal activity. The library's contrasting permeable and reflective abstract forms acted as a neutral urban link between eighteenth-century Moscow and the medieval Kremlin. Unlike Ščuko's artificially inflated verticality, accented by aimless giant orders, the first-place design in the first round had offered the simplicity and directness of large horizontal volumes. The one spoke with provincial tiredness, the other with cosmopolitan modernity.

Joining the controversy that filled the pages of the professional magazines, the party daily *Pravda*, the government daily *Izvestija*, and the communist youth paper *Komsomol'skaja Pravda* (none yet fully under Stalin's control) assailed the jury for selecting Ščuko. The criticism directed against the jury became ever bolder. Obviously reflecting the Moscow Party Committee's anti-Stalinist orientation, *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, the official city magazine, published a formal protest by the three leading modernist architectural societies, OSA, ASNOVA, and ARU.²²

The temperature rose when the editorial board of *Stroitel'stvo* published an open letter to the competition jury and to its president, the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatolij Lunacharsky, saying: "Lunacharsky has to tell us why Ščuko was selected, and to explain to us why no young architects were invited. We will publish the answer in the next issue of our journal."²³

Lunacharsky never responded. The failure to answer, uncharacteristic of a man as highly cultivated and open-minded as Lunacharsky, probably indicates that the jury had retracted its first-round verdict under pressure from Stalin's strongman Lazar Kaganovič (1893–1991), who would soon be put in charge of the reconstruction of Moscow. His predilection for gaudily classicized architecture was to become common knowledge. On his way to the upper echelons of the Politburo (second only to Stalin), Kaganovič, a Georgian of Jewish descent and son of a shoemaker, was one of the new "professional revolutionaries" Stalin was quietly bringing to Moscow from the far-flung republics to gradually replace the early Bolsheviks in strategic positions of power. Gifted with extraordinary organizational skills, Kaganovič simultaneously held several key positions in the apparatus. Unconditionally devoted to Stalin, to whom he owed his career, he was equally brutal and arbitrary in his decisions.²⁴

The call for the party to support innovative modernist architects, the challenge sent to the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, and the media's readiness to support the protesters all speak of the depth of the attachment to modernism among an enlightened public, and of the widespread will to fight for modernism at the time when the country was inexorably sliding toward totalitarianism.

The VOPRA

The response of Stalin's Politburo to the appeals and protests came two months later, with the launching of a parallel architectural society, the All-Union Society of Proletarian Architects (*Vsesojuznoe Obščestvo Proletarskykh Arhitektorov*, VOPRA). VOPRA is often associated with the RAPP (Revolutionary Association of Proletarian Writers), created spontaneously in 1925. Although both invoke a proletarian ascendancy, the former was an independent movement, while VOPRA, exclusively composed of party members, was inevitably an instrument of the Revolution from Above, started with the abolition of the NEP in 1928.²⁵

The creation of this association reflected the party's effort to regain primacy in the debate. The new architectural group, a Trojan horse amidst autonomous architectural associations, had the party apparatus behind them,

which the authentic avant-garde architectural societies did not. Therefore VOPRA could spread and consolidate itself almost instantaneously throughout the key republics and centers of the Soviet Union (Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Leningrad, and Tomsk). This was a feat that the forty Moscow members could not have achieved on their own in such a short time.

The controversy about the Lenin Library remained inconclusive. Stalin had more immediate political crises on his plate and was probably not particularly interested in Ščuko's project, leaving it to Kaganovič. Like many other major competition projects, the Lenin Library remained paper architecture for several years. With Kaganovič fully in charge of the reconstruction of Moscow by the mid-1930s, Ščuko's library was finally completed in 1938, probably by political detainees of the Gulag. Across from the Lenin Library, the Kremlin's towers were newly topped with red stars made of gilded ruby glass. Lit at night, their dominance encapsulated symbolically the victorious totalitarian system, as Stalin now explicitly associated his regime with the Kremlin of the Tsars.

In all likelihood inspired by Kaganovič himself, VOPRA was founded in 1929 by a number of young communist architects from around the country, including the Armenians Karo Alabjan (1907–1959) and Gevorg Kočar (1901–1973), and the Russian Arkady Mordvinov (1896–1964). They later participated as a team in the competition for the Palace of the Soviets, proposing a forthrightly modernist project. All the first leaders of VOPRA were former students of Aleksandr Vesnin's *masterskaja* at the VHUTEMAS, and all were practicing modernist architecture. Mordvinov had even been briefly on *SA's* editorial board, and was later replaced by Ivan Leonidov—something Mordvinov never forgave him. He coined the derogatory term *Leonidovščina* to indicate alleged vacuous formalist architecture. The term was adopted in the lexicon of architectural criticism under Stalin as a scarecrow.

In what appeared as a paradox, given its support from the new regime, VOPRA immediately joined the protests against the results of the Lenin Library competition. The reasons were complex. Between 1929 and 1933, when the second round of competitions for the Palace of the Soviets was held, it was still difficult to assert in public that proletarian architecture could be anything but modern, that is, rational and functional. The opposite would have sounded counter-revolutionary. Therefore, even though it was created as an instrument of the revolution from Above, at this early stage VOPRA could only affirm the modernist cause, Kaganovič's personal conservative taste notwithstanding.

VOPRA was charged by its covert sponsors not so much

with attacking or defending particular architectural positions, but with monopolizing the debate, irrespective of the cause of the day, with the party supporting it. By the time the Lenin Library was built ten years later, VOPRA members, who had vehemently protested Ščuko's classicist winning project in 1929, had been long adorning their own buildings with classical orders. Most VOPRA leaders had been in the Bolshevik party since 1917. By 1929, however, their party cell was fully mobilized, first for subversive work against independent architectural movements, then against the VHUTEIN, and finally against the journal *SA*.²⁶ Evidently enacting a strategic plan defined by the party, VOPRA first promoted, in April 1930, the creation of a confederated Union of all architectural societies, the VANO (Vsesojuznoe Arhitekturnoe Naučnoe Obščestvo—All-Soviet Architectural Scientific Society), with a Moscow branch called MOVANO. The idea of assembling the various movements into a federation was, in fact, first proposed by OSA's Presidium early in 1929, obviously to maintain some control over the inevitable. Since this was not its initiative, however, VOPRA rejected the idea.²⁷ The procedure exemplified the way VOPRA simultaneously undermined the independent organizations and tried to monopolize the architectural discourse. This did not prevent VOPRA from sponsoring the VANO a year later, with the party's blessing, taking the first step toward creating a single architectural organization that would be easier to infiltrate and control. However, unable to impose themselves on the other federated modernist groups, which were not keen to waste their time in VANO meetings, VOPRA reversed itself and began virulent attacks against it. Another more insidious problem was that VANO members were expected to prepare reports about the activity of each confederated group. However, probably because VOPRA overlapped with the architectural party organization (whose meetings and membership were secret), VOPRA refused to comply.

Their attacks on VANO notwithstanding, VOPRA architects used their VANO membership to claim the right to place some of their own members on *SA*'s editorial board. Probably following a behind-the-scenes top party directive, VOPRA's leader Alabjan managed to have *SA*'s neutral, professional name—"Contemporary architecture"—changed into the ideologically charged *Revolucionaja Arhitektura (RA)*. The new name was consonant with the unfolding Revolution from Above. But not a single issue of *RA* ever appeared, although it was announced on the back cover of *SA*'s last issue with a flashy design by Gan calling for subscriptions (Figure 7).²⁸ By the end of the year, the nascent journal had folded. Like a virus implanted into a cell, VOPRA was gradually undermining and destroying the institutions of the avant-garde from within.



Figure 7 Announcement of *RA (Revolucionaja Arhitektura)*, on back cover of *SA*'s last issue (June 1930)

Just a few months later, in January 1931, a new journal, *Sovetskaja Arhitektura* was founded as the bureaucratic Organ of the Department of Housing at the Institute of Economy of the Communist Academy under the enlightened editorship of Nikolaj Mil'utin, known for his theoretical work on the Linear City (Figure 8). Alabjan took the position of deputy editor. From the old *SA* editorial board, only Ginzburg survived. Avant-garde artist Varvara Stepanova replaced Gan as the journal's designer, suggesting that, although an increasing number of modernists were being displaced, modernism was not yet attacked frontally. Gan was arrested six years later, and he is believed to have died in 1942 in the Gulag system.

Stalin's grip on power was strengthened, if not completely assured, at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930. By 1932, the Central Committee issued a decree replacing VANO with a single monolithic architectural organization,

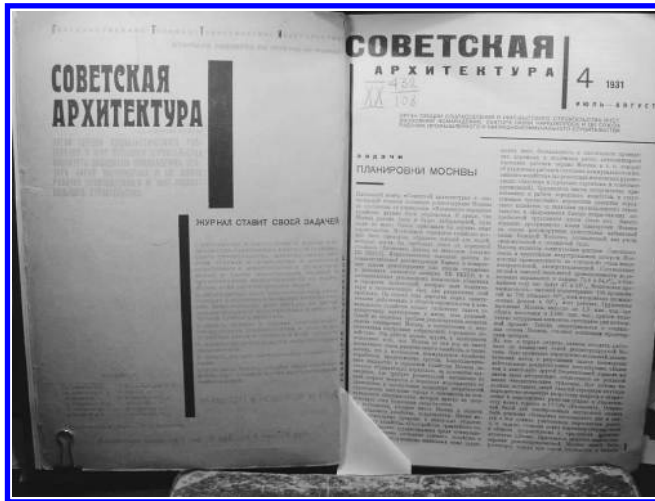


Figure 8 *Sovetskaja Arhitektura*, July–August 1931, designed by Varvara Stepanova

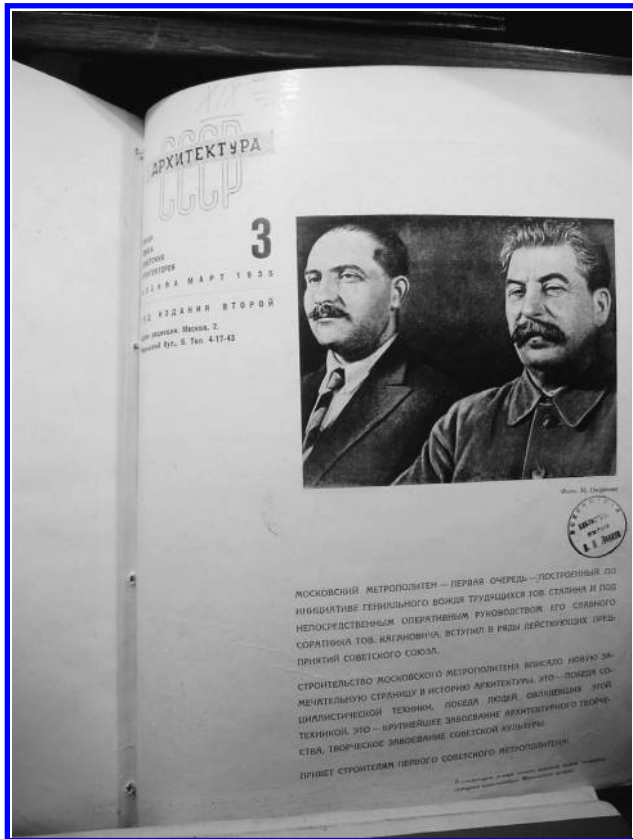


Figure 9 Lazar Kaganovič and Joseph Stalin, depicted in the official journal *Arhitektura SSSR* (March 1935), designed by El Lissitzky

the official SSA (Sojuz Sovetskyh Arhitektorov). The journal *Sovetskaja Arhitektura* was replaced by the single-minded *Arhitektura SSSR*, the organ of the SSA, with the former VOPRA leader Alabjan installed as chief editor (Figure 9).

Although architects had been expecting such a party takeover for some time, papers of the RGALI (Rossijskij Gosudarstvenij Arhiv Literaturi i Iskustv: All-Union Association of Architects) show that it nevertheless caused considerable shock, as meeting after meeting was held to discuss how to cope with the situation. The control mechanism established through VOPRA helped the bumpy transition. A compromise was achieved between the Constructivists represented by Viktor Vesnin, and the leaders of the former VOPRA, Mordvinov and Alabjan. Vesnin assumed the presidency of the SSA, while Alabjan became its executive secretary, his real power lying in the secret role the union's party cell would play over the coming years. Mordvinov took a position in the Ministry of Enlightenment, once occupied by Tatlin and other avant-garde artists under Lunacharsky. From this position, he coined the term *Leonidovščina* in an internal speech at the commissariat in February 1933. The term would become a key reference in the diatribes against the formalists that followed. None of the former editorial board members of either *SA* or *Sovetskaja Arhitektura* were invited to join the board of the *Arhitektura SSSR*.

This victory of the Revolution from Above over the architectural profession encouraged the Politburo to turn its subversive actions into a system. Manipulation from behind the scenes in the name of a historic purpose, similar to the Bolsheviks' clandestine activities before they seized power, was a favored method of control throughout the



Figure 10 *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy* (May 1928), front and back covers

1930s. From the moment Vesnin became head of the new official All-Union of Soviet Architects (SSA), he was secretly monitored in the name of “revolutionary alertness” by his shadow figure Alabjan, a mere “executive secretary.” Alabjan, whose party cell received instructions directly from the top, that is, from Kaganovič, played the role of the *eminence grise* within the Union.²⁹ His role as chief editor of *Arbitektura SSSR*, rounded up his power.

This manipulation, which Kaganovič practiced with the help of the party members in the union leadership, was facilitated by the secrecy of all party meetings, as well as the secrecy of the party membership lists. In principle, only party members were supposed to know who was in the party and who was not. Although cynicism and raw ambition motivated some, members regarded their party as a historically mandated vanguard, and genuinely believed the party was not only implementing a revolutionary plan, but also fulfilling a transcendental historic imperative embodied in the leadership. Perceiving themselves as both agents and accelerators of history, communists claimed that ultimately history was on their side, regardless of possible mistakes or temporary setbacks. This determinist claim reflected a peculiar transhistoric, metaphysical conception of the party. Secrecy added an aura to the imaginary revived class struggle against long dismantled social groups that Stalin had called for since 1928. Such fiction opened the door to arbitrary acts. Many modern architects saw themselves as loyal

supporters of the cause, and at the same time as defenders of a compelling architectural legacy.

Foreign Architects and the Perestroika

The bold polemic around the library competition—the last large-scale public defense of modernism in Stalinist Russia—gained an international dimension when Bruno Taut published an article in the February 1929 issue of the official city of Moscow building journal *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, on the occasion of his trip to the USSR (Figure 10).³⁰ The article did not support the modernists, as one would have expected, but exalted the official party line. This was not unusual. Most visiting foreigners at the time felt compelled to do the same. The sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, for example, wrote to Le Corbusier in October 1935, on the eve of the infamous Moscow trials: “What I found here goes beyond all my expectations. I am fascinated by the scope and audacity of everything they do here in each and every domain.”³¹ From Bruno Taut to Frank Lloyd Wright, Hannes Meyer, André Lurçat³² and Alfred Agache, Westerners who visited the Soviet Union, and were ready to speak, almost invariably lauded Stalin’s policies, or at least echoed his vacuous statements.

Taut’s attack had a twofold aim. On the one hand, he opposed the Rationalists and their Gestalt psychology, which they deployed to explain the role architectural space

and form had in revolutionizing the mentality of its users; on the other, he chastised the Constructivists, who endorsed some CIAM principles uncritically. Significantly, the same attacks were aimed at the avant-garde by both MAO conservatives—responsible for the Lenin Library competition³³—and by VOPRA “Proletarians.” The term *formalism* (abusively borrowed from the now-repressed literary Formalists), began to be applied against all those who were to be eliminated.

The great exception to the chorus of Stalinist apologists was the French writer André Gide, a communist fellow traveler, who dared to say the king was naked in his *Retour de l'Urss*.³⁴ He was subsequently brutally attacked and ostracized as a traitor to the cause by a large segment of French intellectuals and leftists in general. Among the foreigners who attended the First Congress of Soviet Architects in 1937, only the architect Francis Jourdain, a member of the French Communist Party, warned against the dangers of academism.

Discussing the Lenin Library competition specifically, Taut complained, “even the better architects had not freed themselves, in one way or another, from some form of academism.”³⁵ The German architect added, in a thinly veiled attack on the Vesnin brothers, who had used some pilotis and a huge ceremonial entrance staircase similar to Ščuko’s in their library project: “Many who consider themselves free of mistakes [of academism] in reality did not go very far; all they [did] in essence [was] an imitation of Western architects, especially Le Corbusier.”³⁶

Not surprisingly, Le Corbusier lauded the Vesnin project: “I have been lucky enough to study the Vesnin brothers’ Lenin Library. Magnificent, alive, gay, smiling, happy. A truly serene house of work and meditation.”³⁷ The main compositional principle the Vesnins followed was a balanced distribution of geometrical volumes articulated by a variety of openings. They combined horizontal and vertical accents, large and elongated, flat and fragmented, and square window openings. The strikingly innovative feature was the zigzagging pattern of vertical openings of the main reading rooms, open from floor to ceiling and half folded like an accordion to allow added light through reflection and direct exposure to the southern sky.

Taking advantage of the occasion, Taut not only echoed Soviet accusations against the modernists, but also implicitly brought to the fore the simmering internal conflict within the so-called modern movement between the central European modernists and Le Corbusier.³⁸ These disagreements of principle also surfaced in Hannes Meyer’s sarcastic attack against Le Corbusier’s Centrosojuz in Moscow.³⁹ But the tone of both Taut and Meyer probably

expressed a degree of jealousy as well. Indeed, no “Western” architect, with the exception of Le Corbusier, had been given the opportunity to build a major architectural work in the heart of Moscow. Mendelsohn’s factory in the outskirts of the Soviet capital did not enjoy the benefits of exposure in such a prestigious location.

Taut’s highbrow critique of Soviet architects mirrored that issued by VOPRA more pointedly. He chastised VHUTEIN’s alleged “penchant for purely artistic enterprises,”⁴⁰ which was tantamount to the sin of formalism. He claimed to be “surprised to see [in Russia] two [competing] groups: those who deal with forms and ‘play’ with constructions, and those who think that solving structural issues is all that matters.” The Western architect concluded with a puzzling statement that “early signs of logical solutions, free of any prejudice in the design process, are budding among Soviet architects, and I hope that for the major part they will find the correct path.”⁴¹ While sounding like a half-hearted acknowledgment of the modernists, his condescending judgment echoed VOPRA’s own formulaic defense of the “correct (‘Proletarian’) path,” that is, of Stalin’s General Line. Taut may not have been aware of the weight and possible consequences of his words, but he was ultimately endorsing the demise of the vanguard that the “Cultural Revolution” had started.

The “Correct Path”

In a reversal of Lenin’s policies, all members of the reconstructed Politburo embraced intensive industrialization and the forced collectivization of agricultural land, no matter the costs. Artists of Sergej Eisenstein’s and Vsevolod Pudovkin’s stature lyrically immortalized industrialization and collectivization in their films.⁴² But the disagreements about what constituted modernity in architecture complicated matters significantly. Stalin favored the image of modern American corporate architecture, such as the Empire State Building, which projected power and stability. Kaganovič, Stalin’s right hand, was sentimentally attached to classicism with “proletarian content,” as seen in Alabjan’s Red Army Theater (1934–40), where hammers and sickles adorned the pseudo-Corinthian capitals, and column shafts were shaped like five-pointed stars in plan. The Red Army Theater was an incisive illustration of the taste in architecture of the Politburo’s second man, while it also reflected the *architecture parlante* of the French revolutionary classicists of the late eighteenth century—much appreciated in Russia even before the Revolution. The strongman had looked over the architect’s shoulder as the latter labored to fit a theater into a five-pointed star-shaped floor plan in

response to the party leader's desire. Upon returning from the USSR, Frank Lloyd Wright recounted in the *Architectural Record* his conversation about the theater with a somewhat embarrassed Alabjan. With the good-natured, self-deprecating humor Armenians are proud of, he had pointed at the endless peristyle that wrapped the five arms of the building, assuring Wright that he had put his entire repertoire of classical columns into that theater, and was now done with it.⁴³ All humor aside, Alabjan's verbal sally suggested that most architects believed that this return to historicism was only a temporary ill.

Closer to Stalin's taste was the recently completed sober and unadorned government building, just across from the Hotel Moskva, by Arkadij Langman—one of Stalin's favorite architects. Free of any ornament, the building's façade was characterized by a powerful rhythm of alternating vertical bands of window openings and blind strips. Stalin saw the high-power corporate gloss in Langman's architectural vocabulary as lending a modern edge to the Soviet capital. Contrasting that, the residential and commercial quarters built under Kaganovič's control, just around the corner on Tverskaja Street (by then renamed Gorky Street), boasted nineteenth-century style historicism, designed by former Constructivist Andrej Burov. The Hotel Moskva itself, completed in 1936 and facing the Kremlin, was a synthesis of the two trends: a compromise between Stalin's and Kaganovič's preferred styles, with a banks of round-headed windows and a wealth of cornices competing with stern, uninspired, modern banality. Its "American" character was immediately visible to Frank Lloyd Wright, who declared mischievously that the hotel was exactly what he had been fighting against all his life in the United States. Designed by Ščusev for dignitaries visiting Stalin, the hotel became, despite its mediocrity and awkward urban setting, a historical and cultural icon.⁴⁴

Kaganovič was not alone in embracing classicism in the name of modernity in Russia, where classicism was widely viewed as a progressive alternative to the entrenched Byzantine style that had been indefatigably revived since the tenth century, when northeastern Slavs adopted Christianity and also adopted its architecture.⁴⁵ At the end of his life in 1933, Lunacharsky explained that classicism, far from being counter-revolutionary, could effectively symbolize the aspirations of the proletariat, owing to its direct link to ancient Greece and its democratic ideals.⁴⁶ This amusingly pitted ancient Greece against Byzantine Greece. The specious argument was readily endorsed even by Hannes Meyer, involved after 1932 in the gigantic urbanization of the Soviet Union. He too had come to consider classical architecture as the best expression of peoples' national aspirations.⁴⁷

Still, the Renaissance revivals were harshly criticized, even in the general press. As late as 1937 Palladianism was sardonically referred to as plagiarism. A Russian cartoon, reproduced in the *Architectural Record* in 1937, showed Palladio dragging a Soviet architect to police headquarters, claiming that the only original feature in that architect's design was his signature.⁴⁸ At the November 1934 Conference of Soviet Architects in Moscow, a month before Kirov was assassinated—while, despite the efforts of the party members in the union, the avant-garde still had the upper hand—Viktor Vesnin could declare that, after the first competition for the Palace of the Soviets, "all the architects were drawn into a great movement of enthusiasm, but many erred in choosing the path of lesser effort, that is, the path of eclecticism and kitsch, instead of dedicating themselves to creative work." According to Vesnin's paper, three essential tendencies had emerged: "First of all, an effort to restore classical architecture; then a current of eclectic architecture; and finally one that genuinely strives for new architectural forms."⁴⁹ He still adhered to the last.

The Fate of the Modernists

The institutionalization of Socialist Realism, a term coined at the First Congress of All-Soviet Writers in August 1934, entailed the almost impossible task of discrediting filmmakers, writers, artists, architects, pedagogues, and theoreticians of international repute and with long associations with the Revolution. The prestige of Soviet modernism's leaders was so compelling—at least in the case of architects—that they rarely lost their positions. (An exception was Konstantin Mel'nikov, who was identified with formalism and singled out as an exemplary case.) The modernists remained at least as the figureheads of most of the new Stalinist architectural institutions. Arrests were made, however, among the younger generation, leaving the masters suspended in a vacuum. Viktor Vesnin, one of the three brothers who were leaders of Constructivism, became Secretary General of the All-Union of Soviet Architects from the moment the new organization was officially instituted in 1932. In 1936, one of the two darkest years of Stalin's political repression, he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Throughout the 1930s Ginzburg, another leading Constructivist, was in charge of a team that built sanatoria and rest homes in the Crimea, while occupying a prominent position in the Union of architects.

It is important to note, however, that the persecutions and trials—the "great party purges" or *čistkas*—were at the beginning primarily, if not exclusively, directed against old Bolsheviks and committed party members such as Gustav

Klucis (1895–1938), one of the few avant-garde artists who had participated directly in the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. He was arrested in 1938, upon returning from Paris where his photomontage in the Soviet Pavilion featured a Stalin larger than life, towering above a congregation of citizens applauding Stalin's 1936 constitution—a model in granting democratic freedoms. According to some sources, he was shot immediately when arrested, along with a large group of other Latvian communists, on Stalin's orders.⁵⁰ A specific cause for someone's arrest was never needed, but a 1930 poster by Klucis that showed Stalin as a dark, looming figure in the background, half concealed behind Lenin's radiant face, may have marked him out. Klucis's authentic belief in the Revolution and the communist cause could have been another motive for his elimination. As an early Bolshevik revolutionary, he had his own strong political motivations that were not derived from any devotion to Stalin, which made him suspect a priori. Stalin's vengeance could take several years to materialize.

By contrast, none of the Vesnin brothers ever joined the party, nor did Ginzburg or Leonidov. They were therefore much less vulnerable, at least until mass arrests started as a way of obtaining unpaid labor to accelerate industrialization. They only belonged to the category of *nepartijci*, or non-party sympathizers, without a stake in the functioning of the party itself. Among the most noted avant-garde architects who were *nepartijci*, only Konstantin Mel'nikov (1890–1974), the staunchly independent Expressionist, was criticized by the regime. Subjected to growing public attacks for his alleged formalism, he ceased to practice architecture altogether after 1937. For most of his long life thereafter, he lived quietly in the idiosyncratic house of two interlocking cylinders he built for himself in the heart of Moscow at the end of the 1920s. After quitting architecture, he made a living as a painter, his first vocation. According to his son, the NKVD never questioned him.⁵¹

Ladovskij, the theoretically oriented architect, former VHUTEIN teacher and inventor of the Russian architectural Rationalism, built little besides a street-level metro station in Moscow in 1935, before dying a few years later. El Lissitzky translated the teachings of Suprematism from abstract to realist representation, and gave visual form to Stalinist foreign propaganda in the superbly innovative design for the journal *USSR Builds*. Derived from, but no longer partaking in, the Suprematist experience, his designs remained clearly modernist. His new direction was first seen in 1929 at the Berlin Press Exhibition and was also reflected in his design of the front page of *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy* that year.

The cautious attitude of the party apparatus toward the modernists was reinforced by the fact that a finished build-

ing could not be torn down as easily as a book could be censored, nor could a building under construction be abandoned. It was also important that the Politburo and Stalin be careful not to be perceived abroad as abandoning progressive positions. When their foreign image was at stake, a double standard applied, regardless of their personal tastes and disagreements. In its effort to gain total control over the architectural culture of the country, the party's supreme authority had to cater to at least two audiences—the conservative domestic population and the progressive international intelligentsia, which supported the October Revolution and the modern art it had come to expect from the USSR.

The Russian establishment listened to the beat of two drummers. Architecture journals of the period illustrate this clearly. Kaganovič himself was keen to project an interest in modernism. As his now declassified correspondence reveals, he was particularly interested in enticing the international modern architects of CIAM to hold a meeting in the Soviet capital, while at the same time imposing a clearly conservative approach on the reconstruction of Moscow. Behind closed doors, he exhorted the members of the architectural union's communist cell to bring the CIAM to Moscow as late as 1935.⁵² Despite fierce attacks on Le Corbusier made in Moscow from 1932 on, invitations kept coming to him throughout the 1930s. On the occasion of his visit to Le Corbusier in spring 1935, Boris Iofan urged him to come to the Soviet Union for a lecture series. The French architect responded positively on 28 July 1935.⁵³ These invitations could not have been extended without Kaganovič acting behind the scenes, insisting on hosting a CIAM congress in Moscow. In December 1935 Le Corbusier was also invited to join the new All-Union Academy of Architecture as a scientific correspondent, an invitation he also accepted, while expressing his distaste for academies as such.⁵⁴

However, despite their long campaign to woo CIAM to Moscow, it was Soviet officials who postponed the Moscow fourth congress of the organization, planned for 1933. This is despite the fact that, to this day, it is commonly believed that it was CIAM that cancelled the meeting, supposedly in response to the 1932 Palace of Soviets international competition, whose alarming results were interpreted as an official disavowal of modernism. This erroneous belief is based on letters that Cor van Eesteren, Victor Bourgeois, and Sigfried Giedion wrote to Stalin on 19 April 1932, lamenting the antimodernist choice of Žoltovskij, Iofan, and Hamilton. In their correspondence with Stalin, they did raise serious doubts about whether their congress could be held in Moscow under such circum-



Figure 11 Frank Lloyd Wright during a break at the First Congress of the SSA, 1937, speaking through a translator with Nikolaj Kolli, second from left, and Boris Iofan, third from left

stances. The congress, however, was postponed at Moscow's request, obviously due to the confusion associated with the recent creation of the official Union of Architects, which forced independent movements into a single organization, and to the party's difficulties in controlling the situation. CIRPAC (CIAM's executive body) continued making plans to hold its fifth and even sixth congress in Moscow, on Soviet insistence.⁵⁵

Kaganovič instructed the communist architectural apparatchiks, the former VOPRA members, to control the modernists in the Union of Architects from behind the scenes, and refrain from attacking the Constructivists too openly, since they were still involved in a large number of unfinished construction projects around the country. These included some Moscow metro stations, the Dniepostroj dam, prestigious sanatoria, rest homes, and cultural institutions. The most notorious project, the Palace of Culture in Moscow by the Vesnin brothers, which won the first prize in a 1930 competition, was inaugurated under Kaganovič as late as 1937, in the worst year of the Terror (see Figure 1). The of the building's boldly innovative interiors were never published except for three or four grainy photographs in *Arhitektura SSSR*. The symphony of softly waving interior balconies, mezzanines, stair landings, and the suspended walkways were all novelties in the brothers' architecture and comparable to Alvar Aalto's modernist innovations in the

same decade. The spiral stairways echoed the one in Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, published in *SA*.

The Palace of Culture was built for the automobile factory Zavodi Imenni Lihačeva (ZIL) on the site of the seventeenth-century Smirnov monastery, which was almost entirely demolished to clear the ground for the new building. One of the ironies of Russian history is that the palace was never fully completed, nor was the monastery completely destroyed. To this day, they stand side by side as witnesses of aborted histories.

The modernists, the Vesnin brothers, Ginzburg, Ladovskij, and even Ivan Leonidov played into these games of deception and double standards. Probably in accord with Kaganovič's expectations, the VOKS papers show they sent a letter to *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* in 1933, protesting the journal's coverage of the widespread concerns in Europe and the United States that modern architecture was under siege in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ They were likely pressured into writing the letter. But it was also true that most of them were still building and holding important professional positions, even if Ginzburg published a retrospective, critical analysis of the communal housing experiment (*Žilišče*) that he led from 1926 to 1930. Their journal *SA*, like their school, the VHUTEIN, had been closed in 1930 as well.

Belief in progressive modernism and belief in the party still overlapped. Boris Iofan—the ultimate architect of the

never-built Palace of the Soviets (whose multiple design strata were deposited by several competitions) and author of the equally eclectic 1937 Soviet Pavilion in Paris, was no doubt sincere when he assured Frank Lloyd Wright that modern architecture would be back in the Soviet Union in a matter of ten years, once the masses were ready for it (Figure 11).⁵⁷ Alabjan's claim to Wright that he had used up all the classical columns he had in his repertoire stemmed from the same conviction, expressed as a joke.

Also convinced of the ultimate victory of modernism, Aleksandr Vesnin rose in defense of Constructivism against its detractors at the First Congress of the All-Union of Soviet Architects in 1937. One of the critics was none other than Nikolaj Kolli, former Soviet member of CIAM and Le Corbusier's collaborator. His own architecture had become an example of the most banal eclecticism.⁵⁸ This could easily be explained by Kolli's concern, at the height of the purges, that he had traveled abroad, represented Soviet architects at the CIAM, hosted Charlotte Perriand in January 1934, and, most of all, been associated with Le Corbusier and the building of the Centrosojuz. Both were now publicly vilified; Le Corbusier was seen as a bourgeois architect, and his Moscow building as "an orgy of glass and concrete," in Hannes Mayer's words.⁵⁹

The Palace of the Soviets and the 1937 Paris Pavilion

Well into the 1930s, persistent echoes of modernity and modernism resonated in the least likely places. Upon close scrutiny, the later versions of the Palace of the Soviets, the unbuilt yet most visible symbol of Stalin's Cultural Revolution, reveal striking affinities with both American corporate modernity and even Soviet avant-garde art.

The long string of competitions for the Palace of the Soviets and the unceasing revisions of its design exemplify the inherent contradictions in the Soviet struggle to redefine its architecture in terms of Socialist Realism. The twenty-eight year old English-born architect Hector O. Hamilton of East Orange, registered in New Jersey, won the initial competition in February 1932, in a three-way tie with Iofan and Ivan Žoltovskij, a neo-Palladian expert (Figure 12). Despite his young age, and with only two years at the Cooper Union in New York, Hamilton was far from a novice, as represented in some news media. He had already designed several interesting buildings in the United States and Italy. He built the Municipal Center of Verona when he was eighteen years old, and another building in New Jersey; he also was the designer of three restaurants for the Fischer chain, municipal housing for the city of Naples, a number of large apartment houses, and several residences.⁶⁰

The prize given to Hamilton clearly reflected the general Soviet fascination with the United States,⁶¹ while the other two winners completed the panoply of acceptable design strategies—mainstream modern and academic classical. Both the 1933 version of the palace design, which resulted from Hamilton's association with classicists Ščuko and Gelfreich, and the revised 1937 version of the design referred in more than one way to Hamilton's first, competition-winning project (Figures 13, 14). They glorified the ultimate American icon, the skyscraper, and competed with Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, reinvented as a Lenin with an extended arm pointing toward the "ultimate liberation of humanity."⁶² As solid American references were gradually incorporated in the Moscow skyscraper—suited Stalin's ambition—Hamilton was removed from the winning team and conveniently replaced by Ščuko (the architect of the Lenin Library), in keeping with Kaganovič's own ambitions. Two other winners, Gelfreich with his classicist design, and Iofan with his mainstream modern entry, were joined into a working team. Iofan would ultimately assume the dominant role.

An attentive analysis of the 1937 white gypsum model of the palace (now kept in the storage at the Ščusev Museum, the "MuAr") reveals equally significant references to the recently constructed Rockefeller Center by Raymond Hood (1881–1934) (Figures 15, 16). This later version features sets of receding vertical slabs of Art Deco lineage, repeated as ornaments in retreating rings like diminutive Rockefeller Centers. These features had appeared in Hamilton's first project in the assemblies of vertical slabs in the balustrade of the Moskova River façade (see Figure 12).

Hood's New York skyscraper complex was an attraction repeatedly and lavishly featured in the Soviet professional press. Iofan had visited New York in the early 1930s and witnessed the building of it and the Empire State Building, the other most celebrated example of American modern corporate architecture of the time. His 1937 version of the palace clearly took its cues from both.

References to the iconic Rockefeller Center had already appeared in Iofan's entry in the 1934 competition for the Commissariat of Heavy Industry (Figure 17), a project that recalled both Hamilton's design strategy for the Palace of the Soviets and the just-completed government building by Langman. The "Gothic" character, which CIRPAC architects condemned in Hamilton's entry, was here emulated in accentuated vertical bands. The main difference was that Iofan's Commissariat of the People featured a monumental Rockefeller Center crowning the building's central axis. Iofan did not hide his fascination with modern America; he shared this enthusiasm with Stalin, and his

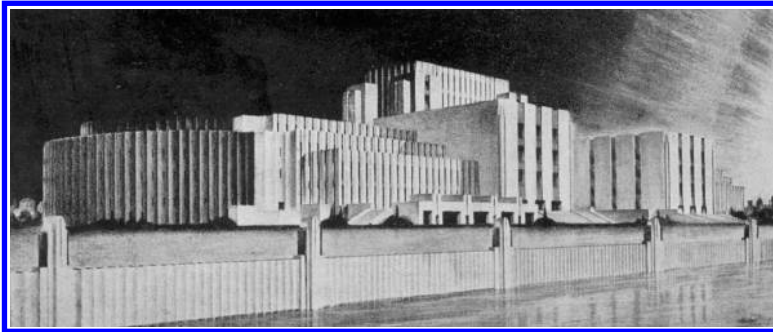


Figure 12 Hector O. Hamilton, winning design in Palace of the Soviets competition, 1931–32

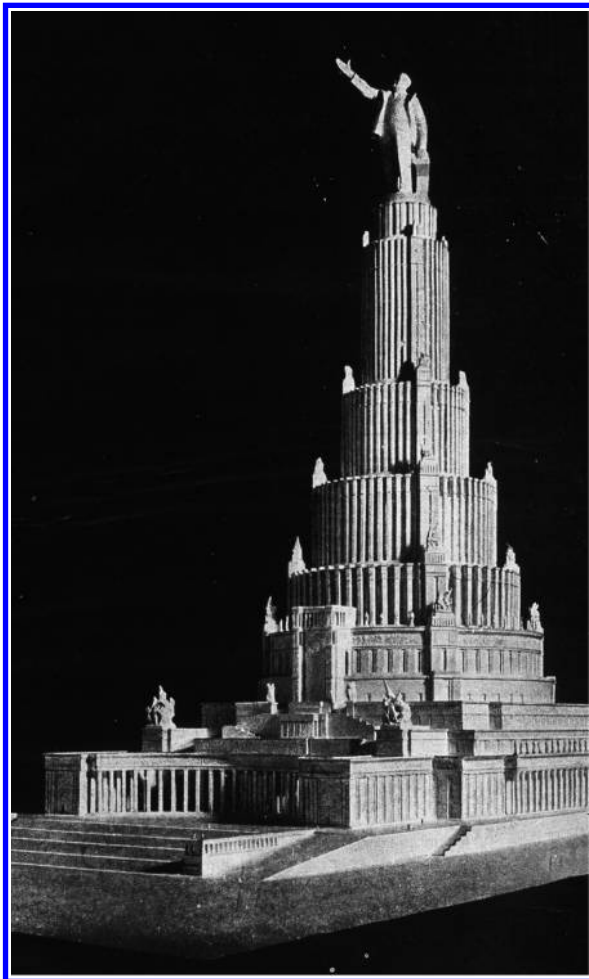


Figure 13 Boris Iofan, Ščuko, and Gelfreich, Palace of the Soviets, revised design with “Gothic” flutings, 1933

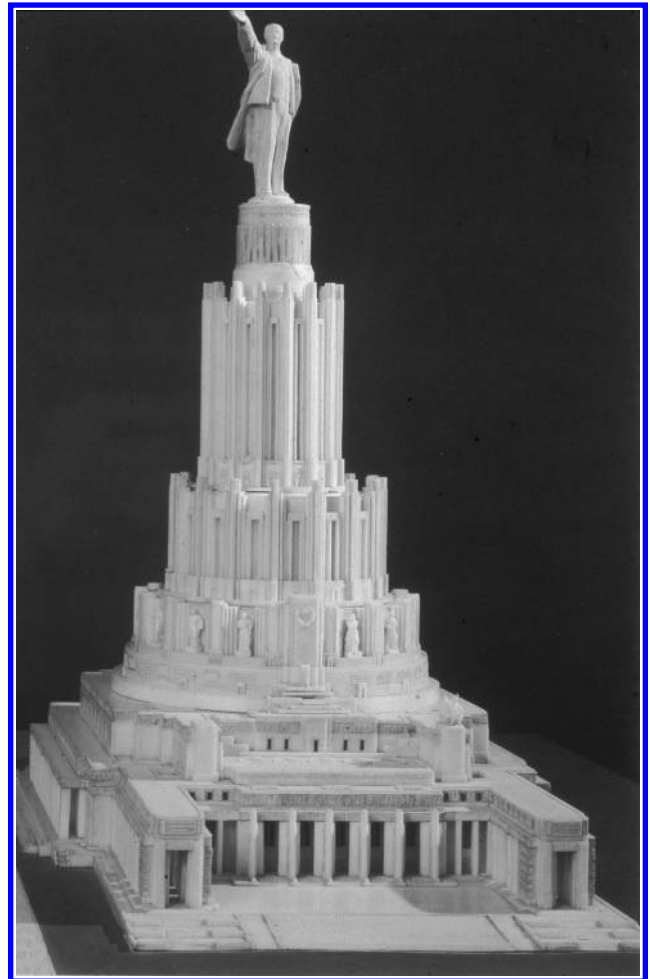


Figure 14 Iofan and Gelfreich, Palace of the Soviets, final design, 1937, gypsum model. Moscow Museum of Architecture

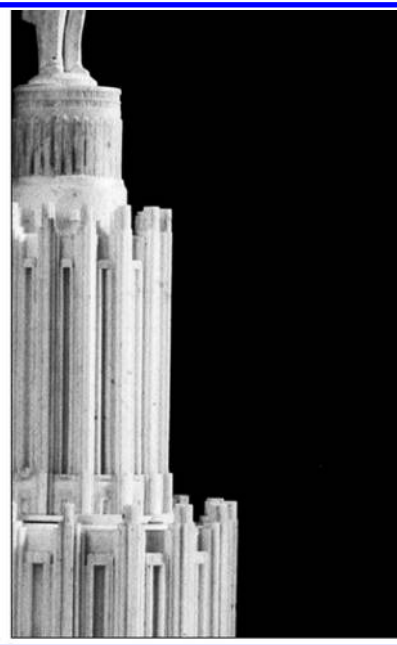


Figure 15 Raymond Hood, Rockefeller Center, New York, on the cover of *Arhitektura za Rubežom* (Feb. 1935). The uncharacteristically pristine condition of the journal and the square stamp indicate that it was kept under restricted access.

Figure 16 Iofan and Gelfreich, Palace of the Soviets, final design, 1937, detail of model showing vertical slabs that resemble miniature Rockefeller Centers

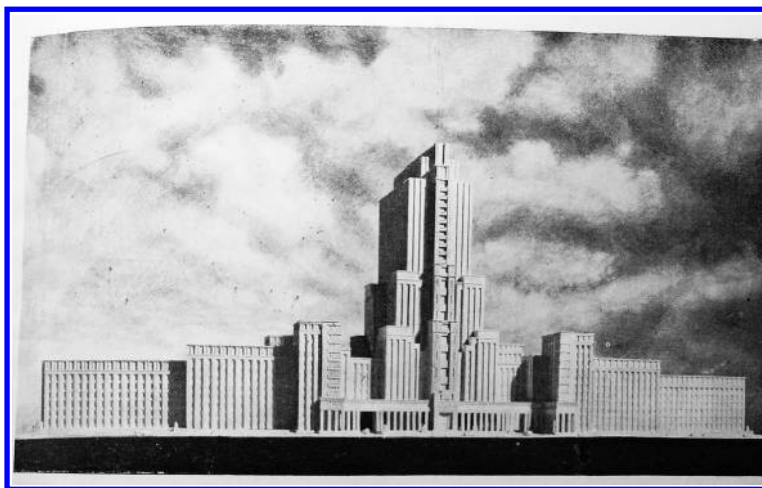
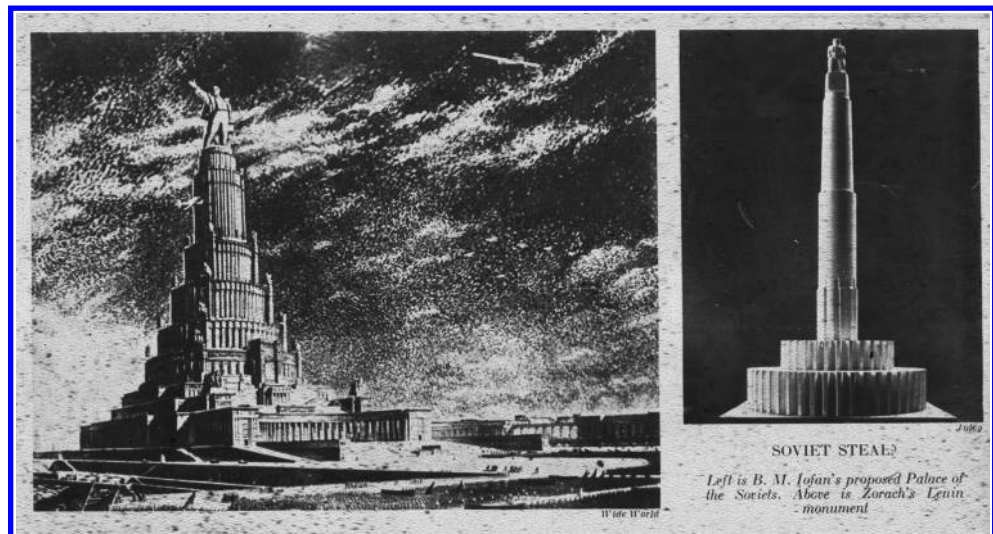


Figure 17 Iofan, competition entry for the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, 1934

Figure 18 William Zorach, competition entry for a Lenin monument, Leningrad, 1932 (*right*), compared to the Palace of the Soviets, 1933 version (*left*) in *Architectural Forum* (Dec. 1934)



office in the Kremlin was open to Stalin's impromptu visits. Inevitably, Iofan's projects represented Stalin's vision of Soviet progress as much as Iofan's own ideas. The goal was to outrun America, not reject it. In keeping with this, Iofan's skyscraper was to be taller than the tallest American building of the time.

The symbiosis between the two modernities—Soviet and American—was multilayered. The Lithuanian-born American sculptor William Zorach (1887–1966) complained in the *Architectural Forum* that his entry to a competition for a Lenin monument was plagiarized in Iofan's Palace of the Soviets (Figure 18).⁶³ Zorach was not so much frustrated by the plagiarism itself as by the transformation of his “progressive” sculptural concept into a “reactionary” caricature. In fact, the telescoped shafts not withstanding, Iofan's 1933 version of the palace with its vertical “Gothic” flutings resembled Zorach's monument in similar ways Hamilton's own palace evoked the sculptor's work. Whether plagiarism was involved or not, it is obvious that the three projects shared an aesthetic quest.

If Iofan's palace retooled American modern corporate design for the needs of the Soviet state, it also exemplified the long-lasting impact of the 1920s Soviet architectural revolution, although both the 1933 and 1937 renditions of the building seem at first sight to abjure everything the avant-garde stood for: abstraction, rigorous minimalism, and the rejection of axial symmetry. But closer scrutiny reveals the hidden spirit of modernism. Juxtaposed with an example of Kazimir Malevich's white *Arhitektoni*, Iofan's 1937 model reveals the imprint that Suprematism left on Soviet modern architecture (Figure 19, see Figure 14). Malevich had launched Suprematism in architecture with a collage of a Suprematist skyscraper pasted on a photograph of Manhattan, and his *Planici* and *Arhitektoni*—imaginary skyscrapers produced between 1920 and 1927—celebrated the ability to transcend everyday reality through art.

Malevich himself contributed to the convergence of Suprematism and Stalinism. At the 1932 Leningrad exhibition *Soviet Artists in the Last Fifteen Years*, he placed a Lenin statue on top of a number of his Suprematist skyscrapers (Figure 20), exactly as Iofan would do two years later on the second version of his Palace of the Soviets. To some degree Suprematism reverberated as well in the palace's interior, where abstract ornamental paneling lined the main congress hall. Even the massing of the pedestal of the colossal statue recalled the *Arhitektoni* of the previous decade. Equally ephemeral, both Malevich's and Iofan's skyscrapers were involved in an analogous dream of transcendence.

A similar case can be made for Iofan's Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris. The early sketches for it

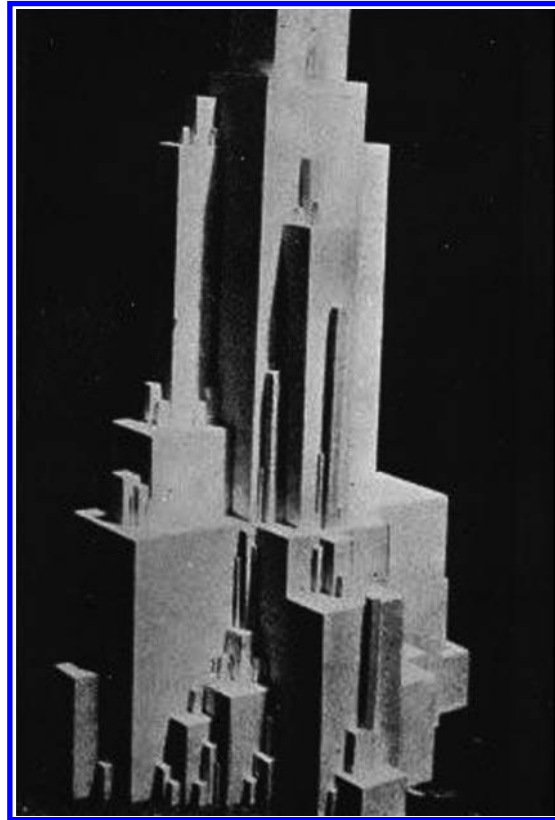


Figure 19 Kazimir Malevich, *Arhitektoni*, ca. 1923, detail. Russian Museum of Art, St. Petersburg

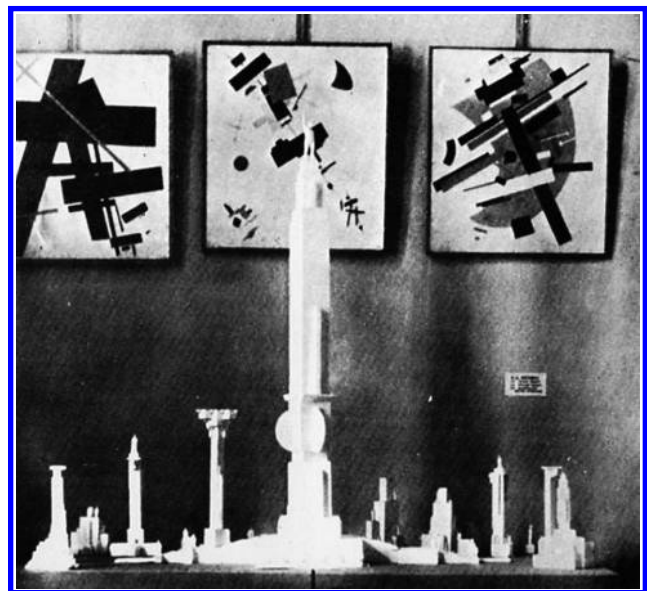
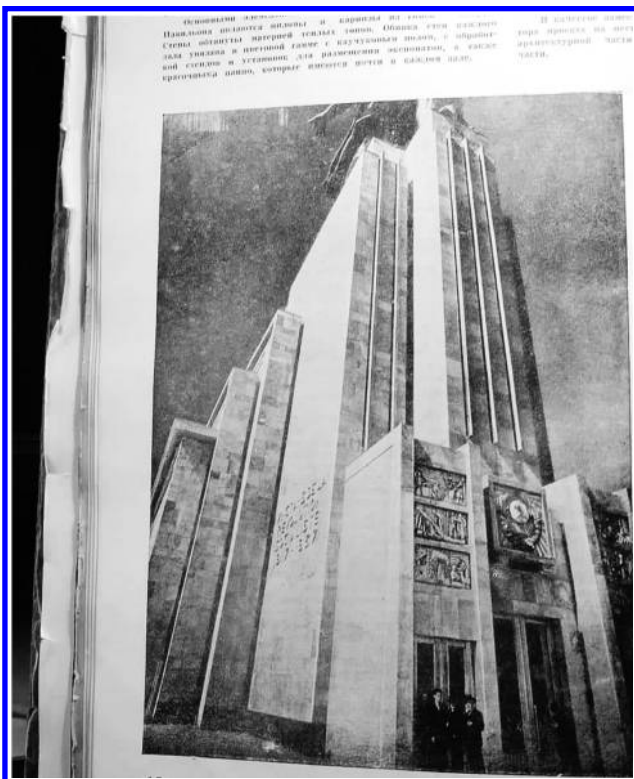
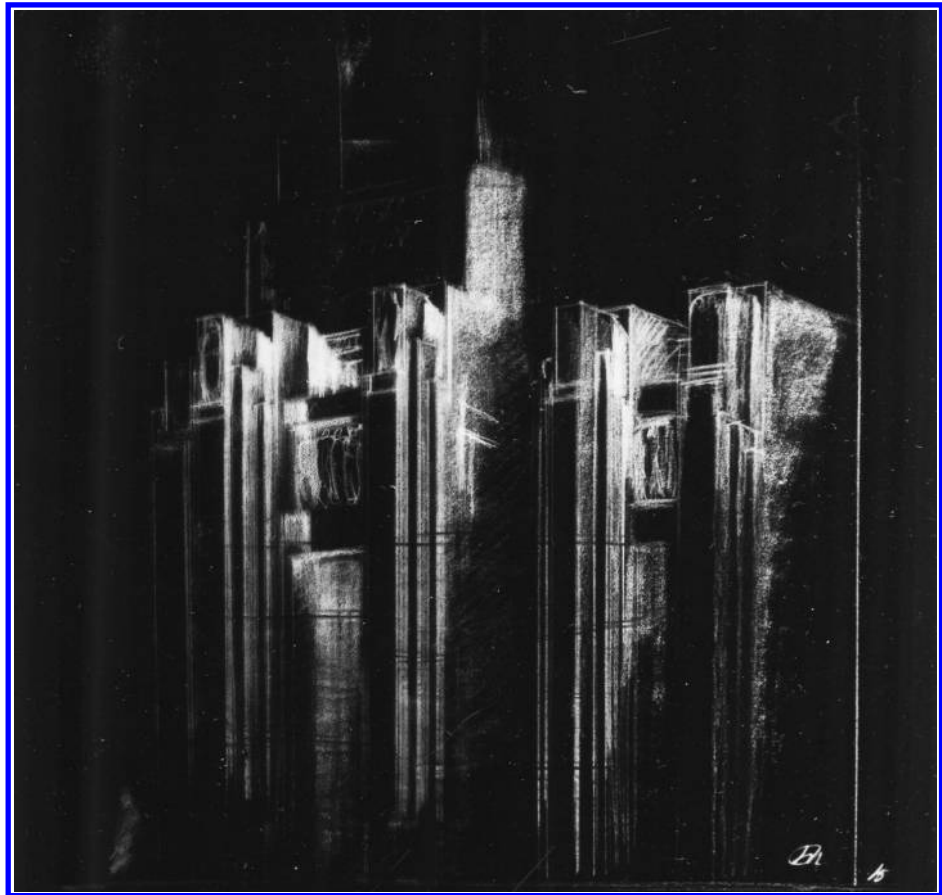


Figure 20 Malevich, Suprematist skyscrapers, several of which are topped with Lenin statues, art exhibition in Leningrad, 1931

Figure 21 Iofan, Soviet Pavilion, Paris World's Fair, early sketch, 1935

Figure 22 Iofan, Soviet Pavilion, Paris, 1937, as published in *Arhitektura SSSR* (June 1937), photographed without the statue, emphasizing its modern American character



showed formal concerns comparable with the two previous projects, the Palace of the Soviets and the Ministry of Heavy Industry (Figure 21). The “Rockefeller skyscrapers” assembled in the 1937 model of the palace (where vertical slabs replaced the earlier Gothic fluting), were replicas of the Soviet Pavilion in Paris, which had been in the works since the end of 1935, when the Soviet Union accepted an invitation to participate in the fair. Significantly, the photograph of the pavilion published in *Arhitektura SSSR* cropped out the monumental statue, emphasizing the structure’s affinities with its American model (Figure 22). With Rockefeller Center detectable in all three projects, Iofan created an American trinity celebrating Stalin’s power.

Boris Iofan was quite explicit about his Suprematist references. In the Paris pavilion he lined up a series of huge white Arhitekton-like skyscraper allegories on both sides of the pavilion’s monumental central stairs. These were designed by Suprematist artist Nikolaj Suetin, a follower of Malevich (Figures 23, 24).⁶⁴ As late as 1937, two years after Malevich’s death, these progeny of the Arhitektoni were still reverberating in multitudinous ways, pointing out to the

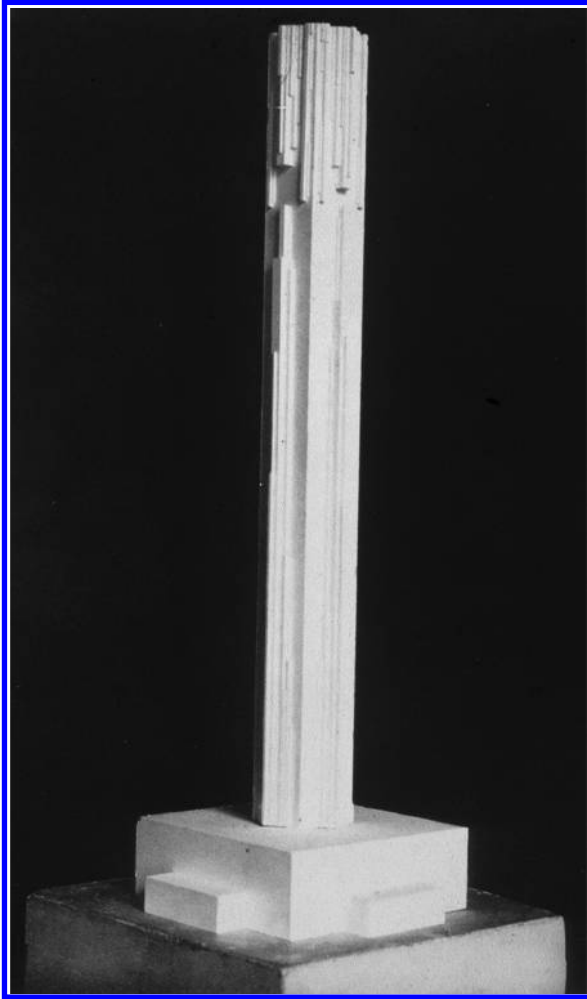


Figure 23 Malevich, Suprematist Arhitekton, ca. 1923. Russian Museum of Art, Saint Petersburg

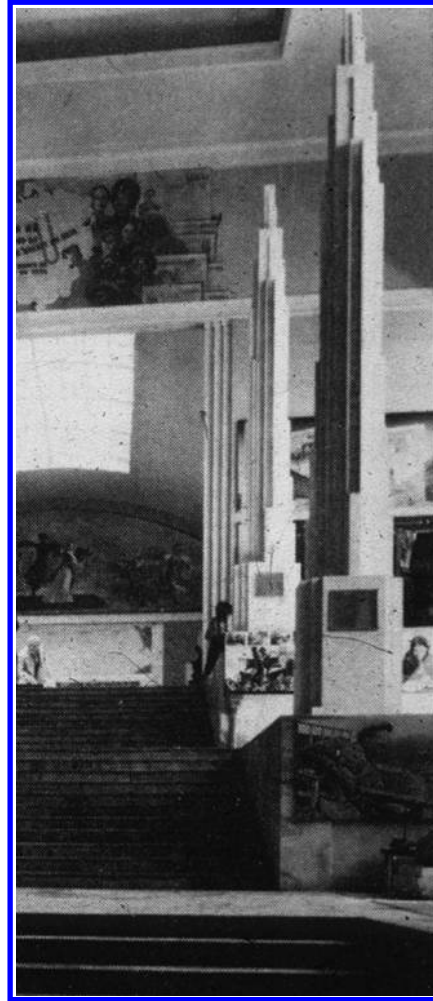


Figure 24 Nikolaj Suetin, Soviet Pavilion, Paris, 1937, decorative pylons

tenacity and depth of the modernist legacy. Far from dead, both modernity (the American skyscraper) and modernism (Russian Suprematism) remained alive for a long time in the imaginaries of Soviet architects.

Given the only slightly covert modern credentials of Iofan's Paris pavilion, it is no surprise that Frank Lloyd Wright was unabashedly enthusiastic about it (as much as he hated the Palace of the Soviets). He lauded it as the best building at the 1937 Fair—an indication that he detected the deeper truth about a project that later historians would dismiss as “Stalinist” (which was its political pedigree) or “classicizing” (although its classicism was severely abstracted).⁶⁵

This complex architectural fusion, in which political power controlled contradictory, if not outright incompatible architectural programs, was part of the strategy of the

Soviet leadership to consolidate its position on the international scene, and simultaneously to legitimize its image with the leftist movements that had sided or sympathized with the Bolshevik Revolution. As the Soviets considered it important to cultivate a progressive stance abroad, they generally instructed foreign communist parties not to adopt Socialist Realism. The explanation was that capitalist countries had not yet reached the revolutionary conditions that made Soviet realism possible—a bizarre inversion of the Soviet architects' claim that modernism would come back when the “masses” would be ready for it. The two stances were the opposite ends of the same myth.⁶⁶ It was also important for Stalin to convince the world that he had no designs for spreading the Bolshevik Revolution. Trotsky's “permanent revolution,” or Marx's view that socialism could be successful only if achieved worldwide, were abandoned in



Figure 25 Cover of *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy* (1 Dec. 1937), in the Library of Congress (left) and the Lenin Library (right)

favor of Stalin's determination to "build Socialism in a single country"—the stated goal of his Perestroika.⁶⁷

A telling example of the official effort to project a non-threatening face abroad—one that renounced revolutionary expansionism—is the January 1937 cover of an architectural journal. A comparison of the holdings of the Lenin Library and the Library of Congress in Washington reveals that *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy* published with two different covers for that issue, one for the USSR, and the other for the United States (Figure 25). Whereas the Moscow version of *Stroitel'stvo* found at the Lenin Library features a triumphant profile of Stalin superimposed on a red flag with a prominent hammer and sickle floating over a receding silhouette of the Palace of the Soviets, the cover of the same issue in the Library of Congress features only the skyscraper in monochrome pastel blue, with no ideological insignia except for the indistinct figure of Lenin topping the skyscraper and the silhouette of the Kremlin. Rather than a competition of ideologies, the journal's American cover conveyed simply a contest in skyscrapers. The Soviet Union was just catching up with the United States.

The 1937 Soviet Pavilion in Paris and the 1939 Soviet Pavilion in New York, both by Iofan, offer an analogous example. The Paris Expo coincided with the rule of the Popular Front government in France, dominated by the socialists, and the Soviets felt they could safely display a dramatic hammer and sickle carried by a male industrial worker and a Kolhoz woman (sculpted by Paris-educated Vera Muhina), using the pavilion as a pedestal. This was a response to the split within the French social democratic party between the right and the left wing at the 1921 congress in Tours; the latter had formed a communist party in

support of the young Soviet Republic while the former remained within the Third (socialist) International. Fifteen years later, France was undergoing the travails of a severe capitalist depression, whereas Russia could project the image of a country successfully building a new world that validated the communist option.

The message of the 1939 Soviet New York Pavilion was much more subdued. It exhibited only a diminutive five-pointed red star (communism on the five continents) brandished by a male worker as a torch, in obvious reference to the lamp carried by "Lady Liberty." Communism was presented as one of two paths that led to a single goal—human emancipation. In New York, Stalin sought international acceptance through competition, rather than confrontation—a stance toward the United States the USSR would maintain to its final dissolution.⁶⁸

In the midst of this tug of war between visions of socialism, modernism, and eclecticism, with Karo Alabjan now firmly rooted in his choice of historicism, a modernist sanatorium was inaugurated in the resort of Barviha. The architect of this exclusive medical center for Politburo and Central Committee members was Boris Iofan (Figure 26).⁶⁹

The versatile Iofan was simultaneously busy with the Palace of the Soviets and the 1934 entry to the Commissariat of Heavy Industry competition, and he would soon take up the Soviet Pavilion in Paris—all crucial projects for the regime. Under Stalin's gaze, he worked simultaneously in at least three different architectural languages: modernist (the Barviha sanatorium), Socialist Realist (the Palace of the Soviets) and in a cosmopolitan language of the American corporation (the Commissariat of Heavy Industry and the Paris pavilion). In the design of non-ceremonial, technical,



Figure 26 Iofan, Barviha sanatorium, 1934

Figure 27 Iofan, Barviha sanatorium, interior, with furniture designed by the architect



and science-oriented architectural types—such as the sanatorium, where function was paramount—he could embrace modernism with great serenity.

The hospital's dynamic, asymmetrical plan was in the best Bauhaus tradition, and the innovative, bubbly windows and obliquely oriented rooms and balconies increased exposure to the sun (essential in tuberculosis therapy) and gave the sanatorium its distinctive modernist look. The simplic-

ity of the whitewashed horizontal volumes of the building contrasted lyrically with the dark and crystalline openings, rhythmically distributed along the façade, and with the verticals of the surrounding white birch forest. A circular dining room and kitchen formed a hinge, joining the various dormitory wings, all planned along Bauhaus principles.

The sanatorium's interior was no less surprising (Figure 27). The furniture, expressly designed for it by Iofan,

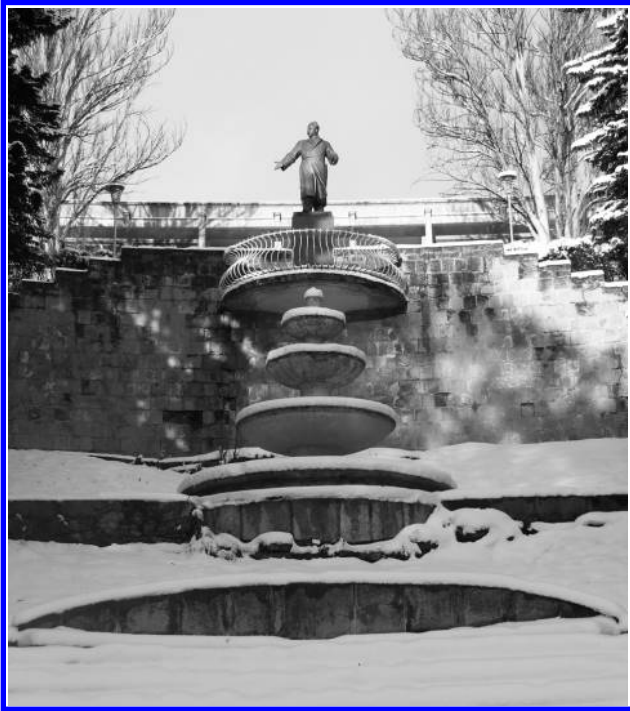


Figure 28 Statue of Politburo member Sergej Ordžonikidze, in Leonidov's park at the Ordžonikidze sanatorium, Kislovodsk, by Ginzburg, 1938 (photo 2003)

paid homage to the modernist work of the 1920s. The thin-legged, ascetic, tubular chairs, tables, and beds in the spacious and well-lit rooms owed their elegance as much to tough Productivist aesthetics as to Iofan's experience with Italian modern design, which he absorbed while a student in Rome. Safely sheltered from the gaze of the masses, who allegedly demanded Socialist Realist palaces for the people, the sanatorium's modernity went unchallenged. As Iofan was inaugurating this modernist sanatorium, Moisej Ginzburg received a commission for a sanatorium at Kislovodsk in the northern Caucasus, which still bears the name of Stalin's Politburo member Sergo Ordžonikidze, who sponsored the project and intervened in the design process as a virtual patron. His statue towered above the monumental stairs in the hospital's park—the only work that the young second-generation Constructivist Ivan Leonidov would ever be allowed to build (Figure 28, see Figure 2).⁷⁰

In his sustained search for a compromise that would avoid a slavish glorification of the banality of Socialist Realism, Ginzburg conceived a telling solution. At Kislovodsk, he opted for a reinterpretation of the Milanese Novecento, an early twentieth-century style that has been referred to as postmodernism *avant la lettre* (Figures 29, 30).⁷¹ Ginzburg was closely associated with the Italian architectural scene,

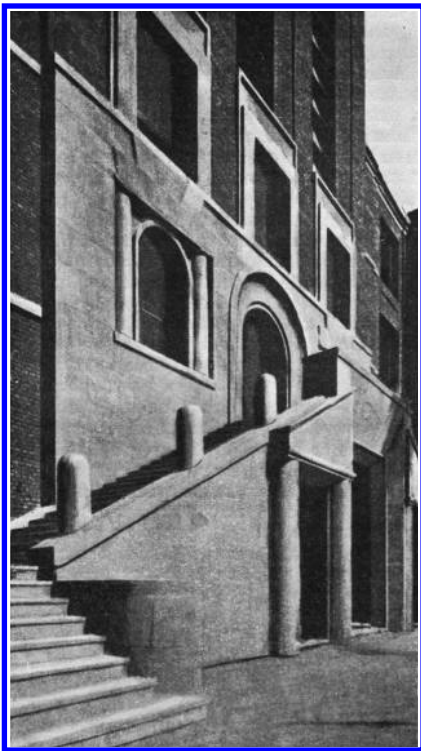


Figure 29 Antonio Carminati and Luigi M. Caneva, office building in Milan, reproduced in *Arhitektura posle voennoj Italii* (Postwar Italian architecture), 1935



Figure 30 Ginzburg, Ordžonikidze sanatorium, east wing



Figure 31 Ginzburg, Ordžonikidze sanatorium, rear façade of west building



Figure 32 Walter Gropius, Bauhaus, Dessau, 1926, dormitory

having studied in Milan and gone to Rome in 1934 as head of the Soviet delegation to a world congress of architects. While Iofan emulated the corporate modernity of New York, Ginzburg opted for its Milanese alternative.

Yet, this was not all. Beyond the front façades—which were most likely to find their way into official magazines and journals—one was suddenly faced with a secret display of modernist architecture. As if in dialogue with a bygone era, Ginzburg alternately evoked Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus dormitory (Figures 31, 32); Mies van der Rohe’s curtain walls, adding to it jokingly a “floating” balcony—perhaps as a reference to the “anti-gravitational” exercises of the Russian avant-garde (Figure 33); and Le Corbusier’s play with “geometric volumes under the light,” which Ginzburg had already included in his 1928–32 Narkomfin housing block in Moscow (Figures 34–36). Among numerous references to modernist icons, a glass cylinder enclosing a winter garden appeared as a magnificent transparent hinge that joined the composition of the three main hospital pavilions (Figure 37). In 1938, the Kislovodsk project was indeed the swansong of a modernist. It was not only Ginzburg’s last building, but also the last work of Russia’s avant-garde architecture.⁷²

When the Ordžonikidze sanatorium opened, Stalin was bringing to a close his second five-year plan, and concluding the most brutal purges of his career. Particularly important for his Perestroika, 1938 was also the year when the second Moscow subway line was started under Kaganovič. Moderns and conservatives competed to build the new sta-

tions—glittery underground palaces that made New York’s own look like a sewer, in Wright’s opinion.⁷³

The end of the second five-year plan and the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution in 1938 called for visible accomplishments, fictitious or not. A mix of terror and spectacular achievements, some of which harked back to the elusive faces of modernity, irreversibly cemented Stalin’s myth while clearing the way for the final defeat of the Russian architectural avant-garde.

Conclusion

The rationale for replacing the various architectural movements that flourished in the 1920s with a single union of architects was to secure the success of Stalin’s first five-year plan, launched in 1928. That plan needed, it was widely claimed, the concerted efforts of all architectural forces. The promises were grandiose, as architects and urbanists were challenged not only with the thorough modernization of Moscow—including building its state-of-the-art subway—but also with constructing an immense program of new industrial cities. Architects and engineers from all over the world, including from the United States, devastated by the Great Depression, were invited to join forces in building the USSR, “the sole country today boasting healthy finances,” as even the conservative French *Beaux-Arts* magazine wrote in 1935.⁷⁴ It seemed, now more than ever, that architects were fully entrusted with the task of “pulling the Republic out of the mud,” as Majakovskij wrote in a poem



Figure 33 Ginzburg, Ordžonikidze sanatorium, west façade of east wing with glass curtain wall and floating balcony



Figure 34 Ginzburg, Ordžonikidze sanatorium, side wall of east building



Figure 35 Le Corbusier, Maison La Roche/Jeanneret, Paris, 1923–24, interior

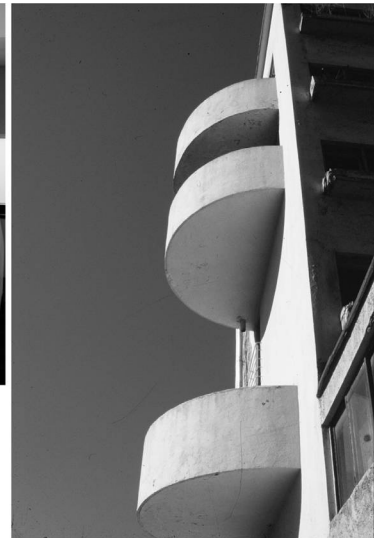


Figure 36 Ginzburg and Ivan Milinis, Narkomfin apartment building, Moscow, 1928–32



Figure 37 Ginzburg, Ordžonikidze sanatorium, winter garden as the “hinge” connecting the central, east, and west wings

at the end of the Civil War. Competitions of all sorts, national and international, were organized at a relentless pace in the USSR. The authorities knew that such contests maintained, like a mirage, the momentum of enthusiasm and hope. Competitions contributed to the illusion of progress, hiding the nature of most of Stalin's redemptive campaigns. To a large extent, the five-year plans and the products of the incessant competitions were alike doomed to remain on paper. The unrealized project for the Palace of the Soviets was the most explicit metaphor for both.

The most prominent Soviet architects remained convinced that Stalin's Perestroika was a genuine effort to revive and save the Revolution. The concessions the party now asked them to make, claiming a scientific understanding of history, were perceived by many as temporary. If briefly giving up radical experiments with cutting-edge architecture was the price to pay, the promised immense collective rewards of the first five-year plan certainly appeared to be worth it. The official invitation to Frank Lloyd Wright and to Le Corbusier to attend the first congress of the new union of architects, which coincided with the worst repression of 1936–37, no doubt contributed to the perception that sacrificing modern architecture was pragmatic and temporary.⁷⁵ The determinist myth that history is an ineluctable unfolding of human destiny, understood only by the proletarian avant-garde, was among Stalin's strongest tools in achieving total control. In the same way Mussolini refused to give a clear definition to his "chameleon-like" regime, to use Palmiro Togliatti's oft-quoted expression, which allowed architects to compete in giving fascism their own architectural definition, the vagueness of the term Socialist Realism, at least in architecture, allowed for plural answers throughout the decade. The Kislovodsk sanatorium exemplifies it best.

Revivalist historicism in architecture was a well-established practice in Russia long before Stalin and party representatives began intervening in art, architecture, and literature. It competed with modernism for prominent commissions. The foundations of Socialist Realism were thus already in existence in architectural practice, abetted by the country's general aesthetic conservatism and, indirectly, by the NEP. The models of what would become the trends of Socialist Realism from 1929 on were established in the USSR well before the party considered any intervention.

The historicist and folkloric tendencies referred to as "national architecture" emerged soon after Lenin's death. They were carried on by Stalinist dictates deep into the 1930s; after the war they reemerged as their own caricature, known in Russia as Stalin Rococo or Stalin *Empire*. Ironically, in 1928, when the modernists called for the party to

intervene in the polemic about progressive architecture on the occasion of the Lenin Library competition, they were convinced that a revolutionary party would necessarily reject historicism in the name of the modernity that had been born in the wake of the industrial revolution. With the growing Stalinization of Soviet culture, amidst an industrialization that was more fiction than reality, exactly the opposite occurred, albeit slowly and irregularly.

The slow process of building in the USSR (projects designed in the late 1920s often were not completed until the end of the next decade), mixed signals from power centers, the technical and scientific character of certain buildings (such as sanatoria), as well as the resilience of the revolutionary utopia in the imaginaries of the moderns all combined to preserve modernist and antihistoricist trends until nearly to the end of the 1930s. Only after World War II did the parvenu taste of the growing *nomenklatura*, eager to partake in the glittering luxury once available only to the deposed aristocracy, prevail fully.

Notes

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This article employs an increasingly accepted system of transliteration, which is closest to the Slavic languages that use both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabet. To avoid ambiguity, an exception is made for well-known names that have established English spellings, such as Malevich rather than Malevič, and Khrushchev rather than Hruščëv. All translations are the author's unless otherwise specified.

1. Initiated in 1927, three years after Lenin's death, the Revolution from Above—or Perestroika (Reconstruction), as Stalin called it—was used as a descriptive, slightly derogative, but factual term of what was also known as the Cultural Revolution.

2. The CIAM, founded in 1928 at la Sarraz, Switzerland, was the main institution of the so-called modern movement, which met regularly through the

1930s until its virtual dissolution in 1956 in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. For more on the CIAM, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

3. RGALI (*Rossijskij Gosudarstvenij Arhiv Literatury i Iskusstv*: Russian State Archive for the Literature and the Arts), Moscow. Also partially reported by a U.S. delegate to the Moscow Congress, Simon Breines, in “First Congress of Soviet Architects,” *Architectural Record*, Oct. 1937, 63–65. The Great Party Čistka was part of the general Perestroika of the social fabric, supposed to accelerate the advent of socialism. Stalin faced a serious resistance to his new policies at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930 and did not achieve full control over the system before the 1934 Seventeenth Party Congress—the Congress of the Victors. The first generation of leading protagonists of the Soviet avant-garde included, in architecture, Aleksej Gan (1893–1942) the inventor in 1922 of Constructivism, along with Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958); her husband Aleksandr Rodčenko (1891–1956), and Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), all members of the Inhuk (Institut Hudožestvennoj Kultury: Institute for the Artistic Culture). This early Soviet artistic movement evolved later into Productivism (the application of art to industrial production). Gan was the author of the movement’s manifesto, *Konstruktivizm* (Moscow, 1922); the Rationalists Vladimir Krinskij (1890–1971) and Nikolaj Ladovskij (1881–1941) were founders of the architectural group ASNOVA (*Asociacija Novyh Arhitektorov*: Association of New Architects); Moisej Ginzburg (1892–1946) founded in 1926 the group OSA (*Obščestvo Sovremenyh Arhitektorov*: Society of Contemporary Architects), a splinter group from ASNOVA; Nikolaj Kolli (1892–1946), the only Soviet member of the CIAM; Kazimir Malevič (1878–1935), the inventor of Suprematism; El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and Nikolaj Suetin (1897–1954); Konstantin Mel’nikov (1890–1974); and Il’ja Golosov (1883–1945).

4. RGALI, First Congress papers.

5. The author visited the sanatorium in January 2005.

6. The important campaign for the Moscow Metro and its significance for modern architecture is not discussed here, as this has already been done in other studies, and in particular in Christian Borngräber, “Constructivistes et académistes dans le Métro de Moscou au milieu des années trente,” in *URSS, 1917–1978: La ville, l’architecture*, J. L. Cohen, M. De Michelis, M. Tafuri, eds. (Paris: L’Equerre and Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1979), 300–16. See also Josette Bouvard, *Le Métro de Moscou, la construction d’un mythe soviétique* (Paris: Editions du Sextant, 2005).

7. Hugh D. Hudson Jr., *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917–1937* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

8. The archives of the Soviet government, the party committee of Moscow, the Central Committee, Politburo and Kaganovič papers, the Moscow Architectural Museum, the Lenin Library, and the Russian Archives for the Arts and Literature.

9. Lenin introduced the New Economic Policies (NEP) at the end of the Civil War in an effort to revive production and consumption through a limited market economy.

10. Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 145 ff.

11. *SA* 1 (1928), 40. The journal *SA* (*Sovremenaja Arhitektura*: Contemporary architecture), was founded in 1926 by Ginzburg. He brought to *SA*’s editorial board some of the most important figures of the architectural avant-garde, including the young Ivan Leonidov (1904–1957). Aleksej Gan, staunchly dedicated to the new society, revolutionized typesetting and book layout with his designs for *SA*. He was arrested in 1937 and never returned.

12. RGALI, Sojuz Sovetskijh Arhitektorov: Union of Soviet Architects, SSA papers, 1930–37.

13. The VHUTEMAS (*Vjšie Hudožestveno-Tebničeskije Masterskie*: Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops) was founded in 1919 by the People’s Commissariat for the Enlightenment (NARKOMPROS) under the Com-

missar Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933). By 1924 VHUTEMAS trained as many as 1,500 students. The school was renamed VHUTEIN (*Vjšsij Hudožestveno-Tebničeskij Institut*: Higher Artistic and Technical Institute) toward the end of the 1920s.

14. *SA* 2 (1928), 3.

15. “A Necessary Struggle: Protest Resolution on the VHUTEIN Dispute,” *SA* 3 (1928), 6.

16. *Ibid.*, 4.

17. *Ibid.*, 3.

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

19. *Ibid.*, 7.

20. See “Protiv neprincipielnogo eklektizma” (Against unprincipled eclecticism), *SA* 3 (1928), 92.

21. *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy* 6 (1928), 3.

22. ARU (*Asociacija Arhitektorov-Urbanistov*: Association of Architects-Urbanists) was founded by Ladovskij in 1928 after he left ASNOVA in response to the Five-Year Plan’s huge program of urbanization.

23. *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy*, July 1929, 6.

24. In the margins of documents he was preparing for the 1930 Sixteenth Party Congress, at the start of the great purges he orchestrated, Kaganovič casually jotted a hand-written note in red pencil saying that about 25 percent of the party membership would have to be expelled. His brutality earned him the nickname Iron Kaganovič. RGASPI archives, Kaganovič papers.

25. See Prepiska s CK. Sekretny del Sojuza Arhitektorov SSSR (The Secret Section of the Union of Soviet Architects correspondence with the Central Committee). Microfilm no. 5, Opis 1, Delo (ed. hran.) 22 1931–36, Fond 674, SSA papers. As documents I have consulted thus far show, Alabjan, the powerful leader of VOPRA, carried an intense secret correspondence with Central Committee members and Politburo strongmen such as Kaganovič and Sergo Ordžornikidze at least one year prior to the dissolution of VOPRA, and the mandated merging of all architectural groups into one single official Union of Soviet Architects. In this correspondence, as well as in secret meetings with VOPRA members, Kaganovič was explicit about how the role of architecture should be understood, and what would be the significance of style in the “intensified class struggle” launched by the Cultural Revolution in 1928. All the themes Kaganovič articulated in secret, VOPRA elaborated in its public utterances. After the creation of a unique union of architects in May 1932, Kaganovič acknowledged to the now dissolved VOPRA members, that maintaining multiple architectural groups had been a mistake.

Alabjan continued this correspondence in later years, occasionally reporting on the activity of the party group (previously VOPRA) directly to Stalin (May 1935), and to the other “secretaries of the Central Committee such as Andreev, Kaganovič, Ždanov (the main watchman for the implementation of Socialist Realism in the arts), Ežov (the NKVD chief), and the president of the government, Molotov. As Hudson also reports in his book, Kaganovič later admonished the party members of the Union not to attack the Constructivists too harshly in public because they were still building all over the country (Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 168). Conversely, they could conduct a merciless struggle against the “formalists,” a phantom term.

26. *SA* 4 (1928), 109–10. The official Soviet history about the demise of the modernists at the VHUTEIN, and of the School itself—uncritically accepted to this day by many Russian scholars—is that at the end of the 1920s the young generation of students allegedly rejected the modernists’ “lack of experience.” According to this official Soviet myth, the young were fed up with box-like architecture, and demanded what they considered a serious education, that is, a change in favor of classicism and the learning of the classical orders. What was erased from collective memory is that the

school did provide that curriculum to the students who chose it.

27. See “Tvorym Federaciju” (Let’s create a federation) *SA* 3 (1929), 89. The documents also belie the accepted notion that VOPRA had refused to join VANO as Anatole Kopp claims in his *L’Architecture de la période stalinienne* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1978). Quite to the contrary, it was the first to join it as the RGALI, SSA papers show.

28. *SA* 6 (1930), 10.

29. RGALI, SSA papers.

30. Bruno Taut, “Stroitel’stvo i arhitektura novoj Moskvy” (Building and architecture of the New Moscow), *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy*, Feb. 1929, 11–12.

31. Fondation Le Corbusier H2-9-305, letter from Moscow, 21 Oct. 1935.

32. See Jean-Louis Cohen, *L’Architecture d’André Lurçat (1894–1970): L’autocritique d’un moderne* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga, 1995).

33. See *SA* 4 (1928), 109–10.

34. André Gide, *Retour de l’Urss* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936).

35. Bruno Taut, “Stroitel’stvo i arhitektura novoj Moskvy” (Building and architecture of the New Moscow), *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy*, Feb. 1929, 11–12.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Fondation Le Corbusier H2-9-305.

38. See Eric Dluhosch and Rotislav Svácha, *Karel Teige 1900/1951: L’Enfant Terrible of Czech Modernist Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 106–40.

39. See Hannes Meyer, “Bauen, Bauarbeiter und Techniker in der Sowjeunion,” in *Das Neue Russland* 8–9 (1931), 49. For efforts of European architects to ingratiate themselves with the Soviets on Le Corbusier’s account, see also André Lurçat’s case in Danilo Udovički-Selb, “Charlotte Perriand and the Popular Front,” in *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living*, Mary McLeod, ed. (New York: Monacelli, 2003).

40. The conservative MAO charged the VHUTEIN with the same faults, disregarding, as the School’s Rector Pëtr Novickij pointed out, that the VHUTEIN students regularly provided furniture and other prototypes for the Soviet industry. See P. Novickij, “Restavatory / vosstanoviteli i Skola Arhitektury VTH” (The Restaurateurs / Restorers and the VHUTEIN School of architecture), in *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy*, Jul. 1929, 12–13.

41. Taut, “Building and Architecture of the New Moscow,” 11–12.

42. In Sergei Eisenstein’s *The General Line* the sets representing model farms, reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s “radiant farm,” were designed as Constructivist buildings by Andrej Burov, a second-generation Constructivist of Leonidov’s and Lidija Komarova’s class at the VHUTEMAS. He later embraced successfully a compromise that reflected both Kaganovič’s and Stalin’s differing “new lines” in the reconstruction of Moscow.

43. Frank Lloyd Wright, “Architecture and Life in the USSR,” *Architectural Record*, Oct. 1937, 60.

44. Against the anger of many Muscovites, the hotel Moskva was demolished in 2005 to fit financial needs of the Russian mafia, which today owns most of the hotel industry in Moscow.

45. See Dmitrij Svidkovskij, *Russian Architecture and the West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

46. Lunacharsky’s 1933 speech to the party members of the Moscow RGALI Union of Soviet Architects. He was preparing a book on the subject, but unfortunately died before completing the manuscript.

47. See J. L. Cohen, M. De Michelis, M. Tafuri, eds., *URSS, 1917–1978: La ville, l’architecture* (Paris: L’Equerre and Rome: Officina edizioni) 1979, 31.

48. Reproduced by Simon Breines, a New York architect, American delegate to the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects, in *Architectural Record*, Oct. 1937, 65.

49. Reprinted in the Belgian journal *La Cité*, Jan. 1934.

50. About the arrest and execution of Klucis, see Margarita Tupitsyn, *Gus-*

tav Klucis and Valentina Kulagina: Photography and Montage after Constructivism (New York: Steidl and ICP, 2004). I thank Jean-Louis Cohen for the information on the collective execution of Latvian communists.

51. My interview with the architect’s son Viktor Mel’nikov, himself a painter, May 2004. Mel’nikov was “rehabilitated” in the 1960s and participated in some architectural projects, despite his advanced age.

52. RGALI, All-Union of Soviet Architects files; correspondence between Kaganovič and Alabjan, the party secretary of the All-Union Association of Soviet Architects and FLC, H2-5-266, 270.

53. FLC H2-9-373, 3–4.

54. FLC I2-5-292.

55. Letter of 29 March 1933, FLC I2-5-293.

56. Letter of *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* main editor Pierre Vago to the VOKS (Vsesojuznoe Obščestvo Kulturnoj Svjazi s Zagranice: All-Union Society for the Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) secretary David Arkin, 3 Oct. 1933. RGALI, VOKS papers.

57. Frank Lloyd Wright, “Architecture and Life in the USSR,” *Architectural Record*, Oct. 1937, 59–63. On Wright’s trip to the USSR, see also Donald Johnson, “Frank Lloyd Wright in Moscow,” *JSAH*, March 1987, 65–79. Boris Iofan (1891–1976) was an Armenian of Jewish descent who joined the Italian Communist Party as a student in Rome, and built equally good modernist and Socialist Realist work. He had an office in the Kremlin where Stalin could supervise him at will. Iofan shared the authorship of the project with Vladimir Šuko and Vladimir Gelfreich.

58. RGALI, First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects files, SSA papers. See also Simon Breines, *Architectural Record* “First Congress of Soviet Architects” (see note 52, above). See also Breines’s unpublished manuscript on his trip to the USSR as delegate to the congress. I am grateful to Andrew Shanken for giving me the opportunity to consult the document. Vesnin’s response is also mentioned by Anatole Kopp, “Le Premier Congrès des architectes de l’URSS,” in Cohen et al. ed., *URSS, 1917–1978*, 316.

59. Le Corbusier complained repeatedly in his letters to Kolli between 1933 and 1934 for the latter’s complete silence while the building of the Centrosojuz was going up, and the absence of any acknowledgment of the numerous books he was sending Kolli. When Kolli finally arrived in Rome as a member of the Soviet delegation to the 1934 architecture congress, he wrote to Le Corbusier, explaining that he “finally could tell” him that the letters and the books he was not receiving were all given to him a day before leaving Moscow for Rome. He had been added to the delegation at the last minute, Paris, Fondation Le Corbusier (hereafter FLC), 12-5-293.

60. On the competition for the Palace of the Soviets and its prehistory see, among a substantial literature on the subject, Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, “K istorii vybora mesta dlja Dvor. Sovetov,” in *Arhitektura i Stroitel’stvo Moskvy*, Jan. 1988, 21–23. See also a Central Committee Bulletin *Dvorec Sovetov*, 1931–32; *Il Palazzo dei Soviet 1931–1933*, Alberto Samonà, ed. (Rome: Officina, 1976); N. S. Aratov, *El Palacio de los Soviet* (Montevideo, 1945), 2nd. ed.; Peter Lizon, *The Palace of the Soviets: The Paradigm of Architecture in the USSR* (Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1992). For the program, see “Programma proektirovanija Dvorca Sovetov SSSR v Moskve” in *Dvorec Sovetov* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1932), 123–29. See also *Stroitel’stvo Moskvy* 8, 1931, 8–10.

61. Two other American architects, Albert Kastner and Oscar Stonorov, shared the second prize. Of the 272 projects submitted, 14 were from the United States, including designs by Joseph Urban and Thomas Lamb, whose projects were retained along with Le Corbusier’s, Perret’s, Mendelsohn’s, Gropius’s, Pöelzig’s and Brazini’s. For a discussion of that “fascination,” see Jean-Louis Cohen, “America: A Soviet Ideal,” *AA Files* 5 (Jan. 1984). See also the praise for the American city by David Arkin’s preface to the Soviet translation of Lewis Mumford, “The City” *Civilization in the*

United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans, Harold S. Stearns, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 3–20. I found the reference to Arkin's praise at the Fondation Le Corbusier. In their second letter to Stalin, the CIRPAC members compared Hamilton's project to an American corporate building, a church on the Hohenzollernplatz in Berlin, and department stores with "pseudo-gothic appearance." FLC.

62. Wright, "Architecture and Life in the USSR," 60. In this article he also addressed the Secretary General of the Bolshevik party as "Comrade Stalin."

63. *Architectural Forum* 61, no. 6 (Dec. 1934): sup. 35.

64. Suetin later also worked on the 1939 Soviet Pavilion in New York.

65. See for example Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1960). The only allusions to classicism are the pavilion's cornices, but they are as much indebted to an "Art-Deco" or even Wrightian style than to classicism.

66. This point was articulated explicitly in the famous "Querelle du Réalisme" that the French communist literary journal *Commune*, edited by Louis Aragon, organized in 1934 in the wake of the Moscow congress of writers.

67. See Stalin's account on the conversation he had in 1929 with an American businessman known only as Mr. Campbell, a semi-official envoy of the U.S. government, "Zapis besedy s g-nom Kembellom, 28 Janvarja 1929g," in I. Stalin, *Sočinenia* (Collected work) (Moscow: GOSIZDAT), 1930, 13: 146–57).

68. In the 1960s buses in U.S. cities featured a sentence uttered by Nikita Khrushchev that "Communism will bury capitalism." Presented as Cold War scare tactics, the actual meaning of an incorrectly translated sentence in Russian was simply that communism, as a historical shortcut, would outlive capitalism.

69. The Barviha Hospital serves again today as an exclusive medical facility of the presidency of the Russian Federation, and is again off limits to visitors. Despite repeated attempts, I was unable to secure a permit to visit and photograph the building.

70. M. Ja. Ginzburg, *Arhitektura Sanatorija: NKTP v Kislovodske* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Arhitekturi SSSR, 1940), 8.

71. On this innovative Milanese movement (1919–39), lead by such figures as Giovanni Muzio (best known for his "Cà' Brütta" in Milanese dialect), Caneva, and Carminati, see Giorgio Ciucci, "Il Dibattito sull' architettura e la città fasciste" in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 7, II "Novecento" (Florence: Sansoni-RCS, 1982).

72. Ginzburg's monograph of the hospital, published in 1940, shows only the front (south) façades (see Figure 2).

73. Frank Lloyd Wright, "Architecture and Life in the USSR," *Architectural Record*, Oct. 1937, 60.

74. *Beaux-Arts*, Jan. 1935, 3.

75. Le Corbusier was officially invited to join the congress in a letter signed by Alabjan, Ščusev, and Viktor Vesnin on 10 May 1937. FLC P5-11. Invitations kept coming throughout the 1930s, while he and his *Centrosjuz* was vilified in the press. On the occasion of a trip to Paris in the spring of 1935, Iofan even visited Le Corbusier. The latter found him unexpectedly friendly and charming, not at all what he had expected the author of the abhorred Palace of the Soviets to be. Iofan even urged him to come to the Soviet Union for a lecture series. Fondation LC H2-9-373, 3–4. In Dec. 1935, while the Terror grew, Le Corbusier was invited to join the newly founded All-Union Academy of Architecture as "scientific correspondent," which he accepted. FLC I2-5-292.

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Figures 1, 3–4, 6–10, 12, 22, 25, 29–37. Danilo Udovički-Selb

Figures 2, 5, 21, 23, 26–28. Museum of Architecture, Moscow

Figure 11. RGALI, Moscow

Figure 15. *Arhitektura za Rubezom* and *Arhitektura SSSR*, photo by Danilo Udovički-Selb

Figure 17. *Arhitektura SSSR*, photo by Danilo Udovički-Selb

Figure 18. *Architectural Forum*

Figure 19. Museum of Architecture, Moscow and Danilo Udovički-Selb

Figure 20. From *Sovetskaja Arhitektura*, photo by Danilo Udovički-Selb