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The Socialist Design

Urban Dilemmas in Postwar Europe and the Soviet Union

ELIDOR MĚHILLI

We programmed a system and it programmed us.¹
—György Konrád, *The City Builder*

“We managed to rearrange the city down to the last grain of sand,” declares György Konrád’s frantic, impassionate, obsessive, idealistic city builder.² He has gone through all the trials of communist rule: a distinctly bourgeois background, enchantment, postwar professional success, ambitious building assignments, arrest, imprisonment, disenchantment, and, finally, release from prison into a world without Stalin but still with total planning. His unnamed socialist city, like Konrád’s text, is dense, polluted, sprawling, and layered. The scale of urban planning appears both awesome and terrifying, provoking in the builder disgust just as much as pride. One minute he is mighty, with his bird’s eye view and 600 convicts working under him; the next he is languishing in a Stalinist prison designed by his own father. His bold plans for remaking the fabric of society seem to radically depart from anything ever done before, yet they merely introduce “a modified system of inequalities in place of older systems.”³ Both the provincial East European city and its builder seem inextricably tied to the same fate. Indeed, at the

For inspiration, guidance, and criticisms, I am grateful to Stephen Kotkin. The article has greatly benefited from the thoughtful suggestions of Jan Plamper, who closely read numerous versions, and the editors of the journal. The research was made possible by generous support from the Department of History at Princeton University and a Mellon predoctoral fellowship at The George Washington University.

¹ George [György] Konrád, *The City Builder* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 82.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

root of his delirious wanderings is the awareness that he—like any of his drawings—is also a product of planning. This paradox of feeling power and powerlessness, ambition mixed with resignation, pride with pessimism, while being in control of everything yet seemingly ruled by the terms of others, pervades the mind of the city builder, just as it does the system around him.

Taking a cue from two rigorous and insightful books—Stephen Bittner’s account of the “many lives” of the Soviet Thaw and Greg Castillo’s study of the Cold War as a series of battles in design and the domestic sphere—as well as a recent explosion of interest among historians in the Khrushchev era, “spatial history,” material culture, and East–West exchanges, this article addresses the paradoxes of the Thaw as exemplified in urban form.⁴ It argues for the interconnected nature of domestic, international, and Eastern bloc-level dynamics by viewing processes of the Thaw simultaneously from the angles of neighborhood, city, and empire.⁵ These angles capture the evolving relationship with the Soviet past, the expansion of the Cold War into everyday city life, and the burgeoning exchange in knowledge, technology, and planning instruments among socialist countries. More suggestive than prescriptive, the choice of these three levels of analysis does not imply that the concomitant processes were discrete from one another.⁶ Indeed, a number of threads run throughout the essay: local battles over the meaning of socialist material culture, with their unexpected turns and twists; the participation of socialist planning in an international arena; but also, equally important, the earnest effort to devise a common planning model and architectural vocabulary across socialist space. The resulting “socialist design” was an amalgam produced by formal and informal exchange, an institutionalized logic of planning, invention, and imported technology, but also a self-induced competition with the capitalist West. Bittner’s work, reviewed in the first section of this article, elucidates the domestic dilemmas of the Soviet

⁴ See Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁵ On the broader interpretive implications of transnational approaches for Soviet history, see Michael David-Fox, “The Implications of Transnationalism,” *Kritika* 12, 4 (2011): 885–904. For a valuable example, see Austin Jersild, “The Soviet State as Imperial Scavenger: ‘Catch Up and Surpass’ in the Transnational Socialist Bloc, 1950–1960,” *American Historical Review* 116, 1 (2011): 109–32.

⁶ “The city–region–nation framework,” argues Gyan Prakash, “does violence to the history of modern cities,” and he accordingly advocates for increased attention to global engagements but also “‘thick’ local imaginaries.” See his “Introduction,” in *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, ed. Prakash and Kevin Kruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9.

Thaw. Castillo's analysis, taken up in the middle section, sheds light on the transnational entanglements of a Cold War battle over consumption and design supremacy. My third section examines an architectural episode in Moscow in 1958 to argue for both the relevance and the specificity of the "Eastern bloc arena" in these international postwar currents.

The context is Khrushchev's Thaw, the decade or so after Stalin's death, which has produced everything from detailed studies on Khrushchev's personality to analyses of the post-Stalin succession struggle, the release of Gulag prisoners, the tumultuous year 1956, and on to studies of de-Stalinization, state designs, and domesticity.⁷ From the onset, the Thaw became associated with the cultural realm. Yet in contrast to foreign policy, culture, in Nancy Condee's words, "could tolerate no peaceful coexistence."⁸ She concludes that the Thaw was "not about the lessening of conflict" but rather "about the rhetoric of conflict: its rules, tropes, and gestures."⁹ One might add that the Thaw was also about the realization—on the part of individuals like Konrad's city builder—of living in a system that had programmed its own planners.

Beyond these domestic developments, the Thaw was also about an intense systemic competition. The postwar years introduced a series of new challenges, including reconstruction, decolonization, and the "friendship of the peoples," all of which tested interwar definitions of internationalism. When coupled with the postwar boom of capitalist economies, the acquired Soviet sphere of influence in Europe could also turn into a liability, since socialist states explicitly presented themselves as superior to their Western counterparts.

⁷ Accounts of the Soviet Thaw include C. L. Sulzberger, *The Big Thaw* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956); Giuseppe Boffa, *Inside the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1959); Liudmila Alexeyeva, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993); Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 151–204; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); and Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006). On the succession struggle, see, among others, Mark Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, 1 (1999): 3–55. On Gulag returnees, see Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *Journal of Modern History* 78, 2 (2006): 333–76; and Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). On postwar material culture in the Soviet Union and in the Eastern bloc, see Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

⁸ Nancy Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw," in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 160–76, quotation on 164.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

Just as maturing awareness of the Soviet (or Stalinist) past under Khrushchev could seem to reinvigorate the system, therefore, so anxious attempts to catch and overtake the West could seem to depress it. This constitutes part of the story. But beyond Soviet–West exchanges, it is important not to ignore the Eastern bloc level of analysis. Stalin’s death was followed by efforts to revive the socialist integration project, resulting in more sustained exchange, planning coordination, and often more conflict among socialist countries themselves. As arenas where transnational actors, state authorities, planners, and users all converged, material culture and the built environment are particularly suitable for examining these overlapping dilemmas of the Thaw.

Neighborhood

Stephen Bittner analyzes the Thaw not at the level of society at large but through the daily lived experience in a single neighborhood, Moscow’s Arbat, and through the lens of various cultural actors: musicians and trainees; theater directors and guardians of repertoire; architects, planners, and preservation experts. This allows the author to weave characters and stories into a readable narrative. But the focus on agents of culture has more wide-ranging implications. The lives of these individuals permit Bittner to capture the contradictions contained in the metaphor of *ottepel’*, Thaw. Bittner asserts that in a world gushing with other strong metaphors, the Thaw was a flawed one. He calls attention not to a period of springtime after Stalinism, but to “impermanence, instability, and uncertainty” (3). Within the cultural realm, seemingly trivial clashes in interpretation quickly escalated into real-life drama. Bittner’s achievement is to capture these individual and professional lives riddled with ambition and contradiction but also with increasing awareness of their own past. Implicitly, the choice of focusing on agents of culture also recognizes that no matter how vast expectations of de-Stalinization may have been in other areas, the Thaw was chiefly a matter of the cultural sphere. For these intellectual types “Thaw” was real, even though it also remained permanently tied to fiction (via Ilya Ehrenburg).

Bittner’s Arbat, then, is almost exclusively inhabited by intellectuals and their ghosts. Having become synonymous with childhood in the works of authors like Bulat Okudzhava and Anatolii Rybakov, the Arbat seemed to preserve the aura of an old, pre-concrete Moscow. In fact, the neighborhood underwent routine demolitions and reconfigurations, as airy apartments once owned by aristocrats turned into densely populated communal apartments. The neighborhood became, as Bittner puts it, “a casualty of Soviet power” (36). For many who lived in the Arbat, Stalinism was disruptive, destructive,

invalidating. But as urban destruction and spatial reconfigurations created new spaces and realities, so the Stalin era produced new relations and modes of thinking (along with institutions and nodes of interest). De-Stalinization, which Bittner describes as “neither systemic in scope, nor coherent in implementation,” often dramatically revealed the creative (if sinister) dimensions of Stalinism. Indeed, had Stalinism not entailed a way of being in the world, seemingly minor challenges would hardly have escalated into loud public storms in the 1950s. Although he does not explicitly state this, Bittner’s work suggests that it makes more sense to study processes of the Thaw as signs of maturing Soviet awareness and identification with the past, punctuated by attendant anxieties vis-à-vis the Western lifestyle, rather than more examples of alleged resistance or challenges to “the state” or the “Soviet system.”

Take, for instance, Arbat’s Gnesin Music-Pedagogy Institute, where teachers observed an alarming rise of student interest in Western composers (George Gershwin, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith). While the teachers favored more “openness” in repertoire, they nevertheless enforced norms that limited exposure to Western composers. Why was this the case? In part, as Bittner shows, this was a result of the incoherence and contradictory nature of the Thaw, which denounced Stalin but did not actually replace Stalin’s cultural decrees. Some teachers associated threats to the curriculum with disciplinary problems among students. The most rebellious youths, in turn, interpreted stringent academic controls as Stalinist. But although the Thaw brought to surface these generational conflicts, it did not fundamentally alter the essential mechanisms of power. It merely laid some of them bare, which is to say that it exposed virtually everyone as actively involved in battling over the borders of socialist culture. Bittner captures precisely this tension between the awareness of a distinct Soviet cultural mission (embodied in the school curriculum) and a pervasive anxiety about Western culture. Teachers at the Gnesin, he notes, “did not have to be Stalinists to be saddened by some aspects of the thaw” (74). Like the neighborhood, which became a metaphor for the collective memory of many of its illustrious and often ill-fated inhabitants, the school curriculum was about something more than pedagogy. It was part of the civilizational mission of Stalinism, and one did not have to be a Stalinist, even after Khrushchev’s assault in February 1956, to be devoted to it.

The Thaw itself, Bittner argues in the second half of the book, later became an object of nostalgia. Suddenly, an era of openness by decree, marked by a man who was held in esteem neither by the populace nor by creative

types—“a meddler *par excellence*”—became remembered as having offered a missed opportunity (6). The idea of the Thaw as a “liberal period” emerged in contrast to a post-Thaw era of stagnation and renewed restrictions. Bittner rejects this linear trajectory along an axis of progress and regress. The break between the Stalin and Khrushchev years, he argues, was far from coherent or abrupt. Still, in light of Bittner’s analysis, a number of other questions emerge: Could it be, perhaps, that sudden fits of openness actually reinforced party rule? Could it be that destabilization in the cultural sphere proved productive insofar as it enabled power struggles among apparatchiks, officials, and other elites? These struggles benefited the communist establishment, which discovered that it was not necessary to enforce strict cultural continuity to ensure party continuity.

So what exactly changed during the Thaw? Factories were renamed, statues were dismantled, and the Lenin cult quietly replaced the Stalin cult.¹⁰ To assess the significance of the Thaw, Bittner fast-forwards to the 1960s, when the Arbat hosted the infamous trial of the writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel’ at the Institute of World Literature. This trial constituted, he argues, the very public beginning of a retraction of the autonomy “on loan” to the cultural elite in the 1960s (178). Bittner insists that in the course of a decade enough had changed among the intelligentsia to foster a more resilient challenge to arbitrary political controls. By the mid-1960s, however, the debate had essentially shrunk to the issue of leaving the autonomy of cultural institutions in place or taking it back altogether. As further evidence of the intelligentsia’s opposition to the establishment, Bittner points to numerous letters written in support of Siniavskii and Daniel’, some of which employed a new dichotomy between “Thaw” and “freeze.” But as Bittner admits, not everyone wrote in support of the authors on trial; some apparently admonished them. Bittner argues that the letters written in support of the two authors reflected the emergence of a new “civic duty.” It would have made sense, however, also to analyze the letters that were critical of Siniavskii and Daniel’, if only as a reflection, perhaps, of a different kind of duty. Still, one does not have to share Bittner’s assessment of the overall importance of these letter-writing campaigns or the distinction between a “civic duty” and alternative kinds of duties (ideological, professional, communist, Soviet) to appreciate the argument for a collective engagement with the narrative of the Thaw.

¹⁰ For a compelling overview of the urban effects of de-Stalinization on Moscow, see Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1995), 358–81.

That engagement took many forms. Like October, the Thaw was also eventually told, whether in writing or speech.¹¹ These narratives employed a distinct chronology (as evidenced by the urban reshaping of the Arbat) but they also inevitably referred to an official Soviet chronology. Bittner traces this engagement in two other examples drawn from the architectural and planning professions. First, he argues that emerging activists increasingly pushed state actors to preserve historic urban sites. Within the complicated framework of the Soviet Union, these kinds of pressures could give rise to multiple conflicts both at the level of a republic and at the level of the union. In Bittner's account, Moscow-based preservationists, architects, and planners (but also the construction industry itself) increasingly waged a battle in the mid-1960s over what elements of the built environment were worthy of preservation. As other scholars have pointed out, conflicts between preservationists and state bureaucrats were signs of maturing professional awareness but also intense competition for resources.¹² But these battles also crucially revealed the tension and mutually constitutive dimensions of Soviet and local identities, since experts often employed local examples to make the case for a *Soviet* heritage.

The other example is what Bittner calls "the rehabilitation of the avant-garde." Debates among experts and bureaucrats about industrial building methods and preservation took place in a climate of growing interest in the Constructivist architecture of the 1920s and its role in the history of the Soviet Union more broadly. Planners could now speak openly about this flourishing architectural period and the visionary names associated with it: Konstantin Mel'nikov, Ivan Leonidov, Moisei Ginzburg, and others. In the context of the Thaw, the avant-garde took on a new meaning, revealing not only awareness of the Soviet past but also its cultural standing vis-à-vis the capitalist West. Still, this was no full-fledged return to Constructivism. Brilliant as it is in conjuring up a particular political process under party-state rule, the term "rehabilitation" should not be taken literally. Fundamentally, the avant-garde was never officially reconfirmed as a viable model. Exhumed, yes, but not fully rehabilitated. Indeed, it is a legacy that remains threatened to this day. The association between Constructivism and later Soviet architecture remained tenuous, the return incomplete. Khrushchev, after all, as Condee

¹¹ See Frederick Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹² See John P. Farrell, "If These Stones Could Only Speak: Historical and Cultural Preservation in a Soviet Context, 1955–1966" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 2004).



Death of a Modernist Icon: Moisei Ginzburg (with I. Milinis),
Narkomfin Communal House, 1928–30, Moscow, southern view
Source: Author's photograph, 2009.



A Modernist Icon under Restoration: Konstantin Mel'nikov,
Rusakov Workers Club, 1927–28, Moscow, street view
Source: Author's photograph, 2009.

has remarked, was a “cultural critic” who harbored a noticeable “antipathy towards modernism.”¹³

Both examples are revealing precisely because of the tension between ideology and the long-standing ambitions of socialist planners, on the one hand, and collective identification with the Soviet past and an increasing push by Soviet authorities toward competition with the capitalist world, on the other. They also demonstrate that the Soviet built environment presents us with a somewhat special case in the social and cultural spheres, insofar as authorities allowed the (partial) resurrection of certain pre-Stalinist forms.¹⁴ Constructivism became a vehicle to identify a valuable Soviet legacy in architecture. It also seemed to satisfy two criteria of the Thaw: a rejection of Stalinism, as an evil personified in one figure, and an embrace of Soviet ambitions vis-à-vis the West (where specialists increasingly recognized the influence of Soviet Constructivism).¹⁵ It may be tempting to read preservation efforts as a form of challenge toward the Soviet state. Yet, as many valuable accounts of urban preservation in Western Europe and the United States have established, preservation actors are guided by specific interests, beliefs, and a distinct logic about history and the past.¹⁶ Rather than strictly a field of opposition or even resistance to the establishment, preservation could be effectively co-opted by the party-state.¹⁷ In addition to such topics as tourism and consumer culture in the Eastern bloc, this is a promising avenue of research that can potentially tell us a great deal not merely about the dilemmas of de-Stalinization and the life cycles of reform but also, crucially, about the production of a history of socialism itself, the developing awareness of a recent socialist past, and the ways in which that awareness was connected to material life.¹⁸

¹³ Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw,” 171.

¹⁴ On this point, see Michael David-Fox, “Cultural Memory in the Century of Upheaval: Big Pictures and Snapshots,” *Kritika* 2, 3 (2001): 601–13.

¹⁵ Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura contemporanea* (Milan: Electa, 1976). See also Patrizia Bonifazio et al., “Introduzione,” in *Tra guerra e pace: Società, cultura e architettura nel secondo dopoguerra*, ed. Bonifazio et al. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998), 9–33.

¹⁶ M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Boyer argues that Western urban design and preservation efforts in the 1970s and 1980s often borrowed from 19th-century fabrications to nostalgically “recreate” the past from fragmented urban remnants.

¹⁷ In socialist Albania, for example, Soviet-trained architect Gani Strazimiri helped launch a pioneering campaign to preserve “museum cities” in the early 1960s. Nevertheless, state authorities intentionally left religious architecture to deteriorate.

¹⁸ See Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *Tourism: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). For examples beyond the Eastern bloc, see D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren, eds., *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance, and Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

City

Tensions produced by the Thaw were made evident at Novyi Arbat, the ambitious Khrushchev-era urban planning project that transformed the old neighborhood into a modern showpiece. You go for a stroll along the busy thoroughfare, past *Moskovskii dom knigi*, amid the cacophony of stores blasting pop music, the sandwiched snack bars, and the cafés nestled within the winding gallery on the southern side, and you can't help but find the sheer scale of this urban ensemble daunting—even in a city like Moscow. To make room for the nine mammoth glass and concrete skyscrapers erected in the 1960s, entire buildings in the neighborhood had to be razed, alleyways blotted out, throngs of inhabitants relocated. Ultimately, four towers rose on a two-story gallery running the whole corridor while five other structures were set freestanding on the northern side. What started out as a relatively simple street project in the late 1950s ballooned into a sprawling enterprise within a matter of years. Novyi Arbat became something of a symbol of an era, a clear departure from the architectural and planning models of the Stalin period. But it also came to embody a modernizing ethos heightened by the postwar West European boom.¹⁹

In December 1954, Khrushchev, whom Bittner calls “a kind of architect manqué” (109), famously railed against Stalin-era architecture at the All-Union Convention of Construction Workers.²⁰ Though hardly secret, the speech had for architects and planners the kind of seismic impact that the February 1956 speech at the 20th Party Congress would have for communists across the world. Khrushchev criticized Moscow's ornate skyscrapers and took the construction industry to task for having long invoked the tenets of Socialist Realism to justify extravagant designs and financial folly. Alternating between sarcasm and reprimand, he warned against superfluties in construction (but also a reversion to Constructivism) while urging simplicity in design and a rapid expansion of industrial building methods.²¹ There was plenty of irony in the fact that the supposed turn from aesthetic authoritarianism came in the form,

¹⁹ Amir Weiner has argued that the renunciation of terror under Khrushchev came with a “renewed investment of power and trust in the population” but also a lingering “utopian drive” from the Stalin era. See his “Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (2008): 208–31.

²⁰ Khrushchev's speech was excerpted in an early pioneering volume on international postwar architecture. See “Remove Shortcomings in Design, Improve Work of Architects,” in *Architecture Culture, 1943–1968*, ed. Joan Ockman (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 184–89.

²¹ There was more than a hint of political calculation to Khrushchev's intervention, especially as the attack came during the final stages of the post-Stalin succession struggle. See Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 94–101.

essentially, of a scathingly delivered order. With the ornate gigantomania of the Stalin era angrily dismissed, a new concrete gigantomania started to take shape.²² But how did this come about exactly? How was it that Khrushchev's "economy of construction" and the motto "faster, better, cheaper" came to take precedence from Germany and the Balkans all the way to Siberia? While unquestionably important, Khrushchev's personality cannot explain how a single speech could have such a far-reaching impact on the built environment across the socialist world. Distinct mechanisms comprising the socialist world system enabled exchanges of ideas and techniques, but there was also a more broadly international dimension to this turn.

At the American National Exhibition in Moscow in the summer of 1959, Soviet visitors witnessed not the might of the American military machine but the intoxicating power of consumer goods, modern household appliances, and brightly appointed model homes.²³ When Nixon took Khrushchev on a tour around the exhibition, the two gravitated towards the *Splitnik*, an American prefabricated suburban model home, where the U.S. vice-president famously invited the Soviet premier to take a look around the kitchen. Pictures of the two leaders gesturing toward a yellow General Electric washer-dryer made the rounds across the world, but as Greg Castillo argues in *Cold War on the Home Front*, the famous Kitchen Debate was the culmination, rather than the starting point, of a long-standing competition in material culture. Castillo systematically traces the "psychological warfare" designed and executed by U.S.-based information agencies, cultural institutions, and ambitious impresarios. By focusing on household exhibitions mounted in West Germany, as well as Soviet responses and mirroring efforts to design a socialist material culture in the Eastern bloc, Castillo adds considerable evidence to the now more widely accepted claim that the Cold War was not fought merely in military terms but also, crucially, in the realm of design, consumerism, and domesticity. The American home, he asserts, with its dazzling electric appliances and consumer comforts, turned into a veritable Cold War weapon. American propaganda campaigns throughout the 1950s "encouraged the Soviet bloc to measure its progress through direct

²² On Soviet "gigantomania" as a product of "the fascination and commitment to a technology of display," as well as the propensity of socialist systems for "an exaggerated interest in mass production owing both to egalitarian ideological precepts and resource scarcities," see Paul Josephson, "'Projects of the Century' in Soviet History: Large-Scale Technologies from Lenin to Gorbachev," *Technology and Culture* 36, 3 (1995): 519–59.

²³ On the impact of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, see Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 855–904; and Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 453–57.

comparisons with Western per-capita private consumption, the Achilles heel of economies based on state-owned heavy industries” (xi).

Through the mechanisms of the Marshall Plan, U.S. authorities waged a propaganda war by promoting mass consumption and visions of abundance. While this effort initially lacked any aesthetic prescriptions, Castillo exposes the curious institutional links that ultimately led to the embrace of the International Style by U.S. campaigns in West Germany. (Chief among these institutions was the Museum of Modern Art in New York.) This curious convergence was exemplified by the 1952 exhibition “We’re Building a Better Life,” prepared by the Mutual Security Agency, a successor to the Marshall Plan. It included a model home that visitors could walk through as well as an “inhabited” life-size apartment unit complete with a narrator perched above, who described the wonders of modern household technology. The U.S. campaign, Castillo observes, hinged on the idea of cultivating “a transnational middle class” as well as on the promotion of Atlanticism, the “economic and military alignment that required West German rearmament” (69–70). Needless to say, though not directly targeting East Germans, the exhibition had a dizzying effect on workers living in a workers’ state but lacking similar material comforts. And even though not all West Germans were persuaded by the ideas of domesticity inherent to the American consumption formula, the images nevertheless proved highly seductive.

This battle was not limited to the realm of choreographed exhibitions and idealized homes. Castillo also investigates the tangled history of pedagogical institutes like Ulm’s Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG), a kind of postwar Bauhaus financed by the State Department that eventually came to embody “soft-power renegotiation” (42). Inaugurated in 1953 and championed, among others, by Bauhaus alumnus Max Bill, the HfG came to infuse prewar functionalism with postwar consumerism. There were similar efforts in East Germany: Mart Stam, another former Bauhaus instructor, attempted in the late 1940s to recast Bauhaus pedagogy and cultivate a proletarian intelligentsia by emphasizing industrial design.²⁴ But where West German experiments flourished, efforts to build a laboratory for creating an industrial socialist material culture in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) ended in failure. In the early 1950s, East German authorities launched an aggressive campaign against modernism (46–49). This new course was marked by the establishment of the Deutsche Bauakademie, modeled after the Soviet

²⁴ On the contradictory fortunes of the Bauhaus legacy in East Germany, see also Eli Rubin, “The Form of Socialism without Ornament: Consumption, Ideology, and the Fall and Rise of Modernist Design in the German Democratic Republic,” *Journal of Design History* 19, 2 (2006): 155–68.

Academy of Architecture and headed by Kurt Liebknecht (nephew of the martyred Spartacus founder Karl Liebknecht). Since the Bauakademie was interlinked with the SED Central Committee, design became enforced through the party machinery (50–51). The Stalinallee, East Germany's grand socialist urban showpiece and predecessor to the Novyi Arbat, "evoked a wider world spreading outward from the boulevard in a single direction—east" (90).

Conscious of the limits of focusing much of his book on utopian exhibitions and model homes displayed at trade fairs, Castillo is careful to point out that "both sides" presented selective visions of domesticity and technology. The average American home on display at Sokol'niki Park in 1959, he notes, was improbable (154). But precisely as exaggerations, these urban displays are highly suggestive. "At the first opportunity," one Soviet visitor to the U.S. exhibition observed, "I would buy such a house." Still, one could desire the displayed modern home *and* profess a belief in the superiority of socialism. As another visitor reportedly stated, "If the exhibition represents the American way of life, then it is the American way of life that we should overtake" (158). Others still, Castillo tells us, were dumbfounded by the presence of multiple rooms in a single apartment.²⁵ But why did the Soviets allow these unabashed displays of American consumerism in the first place? Castillo points to expectations and promises that the Soviets created themselves, especially the massive turn toward industrial building methods in the 1950s, galvanized by the party promise in 1957 that every Soviet family would receive its own apartment.

When it came to industrial building methods, Soviet planners had long looked toward the United States.²⁶ But Castillo shows how U.S. propagandists shipped prefab suburban homes to the Soviet Union to showcase both an American Way of Life and the breakdown of rigid class structures in the United States, where, as one advertisement put it, "everybody became a capitalist" (125). Another tactic was to "convert" Soviet functionaries by inviting them on tours of the construction industry in the United States. During one such visit by Soviet housing specialists in 1955, one of the American hosts observed that at the construction site "the Reds swarmed over the slab, dodging partitions and roofing sections as they came off the truck, reaching up to gauge the ceiling heights (which they considered low),

²⁵ For a discussion of the comment books of the 1959 U.S. exhibition, see Aleksei Fominykh, "Kartinki s vystavki': Knigi otzyvov Amerikanskoj vystavki v Moskve 1959 goda—vozvrashchenie istochnika," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2010): 151–70. Excerpts were published as "Amerikanskaia natsional'naia vystavka v Moskve, 1959 god: Kniga otzyvov," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2010): 187–216.

²⁶ Richard Anderson, "USA/USSR: Architecture and War," *Grey Room*, no. 34 (Winter 2009): 80–103.

examining heating, plumbing, and wire connections” (131). Reports indicate that the Soviets were eager to buy U.S. prefab homes “complete with heating and air conditioning equipment, GE electric kitchen, and all display model furnishings.” The Soviet minister of construction, similarly, was “ravished by an American suburban home” (134). Though he does not employ Russian sources, Castillo intelligently combs through U.S. correspondence to argue that Soviet planning authorities were intensely driven by the desire to replicate U.S. technology advances, which begins to explain why U.S. exhibitions were allowed in the Soviet Union in the first place.

The move toward the promised single-family apartment also signaled a new development: Soviet mass consumption. “Moving to a newly built separate apartment and creating a new domestic life,” Steven Harris has observed, “were the mass phenomena through which most Soviet citizens experienced the ‘thaw.’” In less than two decades, some 38 million Soviet families made that move.²⁷ But if centrally planned economies were adept at churning out basic mass-produced apartments, they lagged far behind in crafting an interior material culture and the technology of everyday life (what East Germans referred to as *Umweltgestaltung*.) Crucial to this effort, Castillo observes, was the attempt to define an “alternate model of consumer citizenship” (166). Yet these attempts merely “affirmed the instability of East bloc socialism as a historical formation” (174). Castillo concludes: “What was shared in Western and Eastern Europe was not lifestyle but lifestyle aspirations” (177). Soviet planning may have suffered from a plethora of structural problems, but envy was as crucial as any other. Some authors have pointed to the expansion of single-family apartments as a kind of retreat of the Soviet state from the private sphere.²⁸ If anything, however, it seems to have highlighted conflict and brought even more sharply into focus the all-consuming presence of the state, given pervasive consumer shortages. As in the prewar period, space continued to be counted, tabulated, and rationed, including vertical space. As experts and neighborhood activists waged a battle

²⁷ Soviet mass housing, writes Steven Harris, “was a quintessentially Soviet campaign: a systemic solution to a systemic problem” (“‘I Know All the Secrets of My Neighbors’: The Quest for Privacy in the Era of the Separate Apartment,” in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006], 171–90, quotations on 171 and 185).

²⁸ Mark B. Smith, “Khrushchev’s Promise to Eliminate the Urban Housing Shortage: Rights, Rationality, and the Communist Future,” in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilić and Jeremy Smith (New York: Routledge, 2009), 26–45; Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

for the Soviet past in Moscow, other battles with the capitalist West took place inside city exhibition halls, kitchens, and living rooms.²⁹

Castillo's greatest contribution is to direct us toward the making of aspirations, the ways in which those aspirations were shaped by a dynamic interaction, without which any understanding of technology during the Cold War would be inherently limited. The Eastern bloc, he notes, often served as a "cultural conveyor belt" to introduce Western innovations for testing in Moscow (189). This had important repercussions in the Soviet Union, but it also became evident in the East German campaign to "catch and overtake" the other Germany, an effort that raised both consumer expectations and the awareness of the centrally planned economy's shortcomings (191). The relational aspect of international consumption had unexpected and frustrating consequences for socialist states. "Torn between promises of plenty and rationalizations for scarcity," Castillo writes, "the project to cultivate an enlightened socialist consumer instead became a finishing school for citizen alienation" (204).

To be sure, the industrial building systems championed by socialist states have a long, varied, and truly transnational history. Inherent to this modern preoccupation was the obsession with the automobile and the prospect of factory-made houses in an era of Taylorized mass production of consumer goods.³⁰ When it came to housing, this obsession gave rise, in the words of Hans Scharoun, to "a genuine transformation of a kind that humanity rarely encounters."³¹ If there is a dimension of the history of the built environment that truly captures the social convulsions, revolutionary imaginations, and the transnational flow of ideas and techniques in the 20th century, this is the

²⁹ Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 212–52; Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," in *The Material Culture Reader*, ed. Victor Buchli (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 215–36; Mart Kalm and Ingrid Ruudi, eds., *Constructed Happiness: The Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2005); Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

³⁰ Barry Bergdoll pertinently distinguishes between early practices of prefabricating building parts offsite, which were common, with what he calls an "architectural culture of prefabrication," illustrated not merely by mass industrial building and onsite assembly but also by the marriage of architecture and industry and "marked as much by the creation of an image of modern living as by the exploration of new materials and techniques." See his "Home Delivery: Viscidities of a Modernist Dream from Taylorized Serial Production to Digital Customization," in *Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling*, ed. Bergdoll, Peter Christensen, and Ron Broadhurst (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 12–26, quotation on 12.

³¹ Hans Scharoun, quoted in Otto Haesler, *Mein Lebensweg als Architekt* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1957), xix.

story of industrial building systems. Attending these experiments, invariably, were pressing questions of variation and uniformity, the tension between architect and machine, market booms and busts, as well as issues related to site conditions, climates, and social context. The other crucial factor in the expansion of industrial methods was war.³² As Jean-Louis Cohen reminds us, World War II extended military concrete building techniques into postwar civil construction programs (in France as in the Eastern bloc).³³ A history of these systems would encompass, among other examples, the 19th-century treatises of the French inventor and industrialist François Coignet; experiments picked up in Britain by Joseph Tall and in the United States by Thomas Edison; the highly influential designs of European architects at the 1927 Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart (Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier) but also Martin Wagner and Ernst May; Henry-Russell Hitchcock's and Philip Johnson's 1932 *The International Style*; the entire history of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM); the French innovator Jean Prouvé and the architect and planner Marcel Lods; R. Buckminster Fuller and Richard Neutra in the United States (via Vienna); the prefabricated Lustron houses in the 1940s United States; the large-panel system of the French company Raymond Camus (exported to the Soviet bloc); and the Danish Larsen-Nielsen system, applied en masse in European public housing projects in the 1960s.³⁴

³² In Germany, for example, prefabrication expanded in the aftermath of World War I. See Kurt Junghanns, *Das Haus für alle: Zur Geschichte der Vorfertigung in Deutschland* (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1994).

³³ Jean-Louis Cohen, "Modern Architecture and the Saga of Concrete," in *Liquid Stone: New Architecture in Concrete*, ed. Cohen and G. Martin Moeller, Jr. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), 30.

³⁴ On Weissenhof, an initiative of the German Werkbund, see Richard Pommer and Christian F. Otto, *Weissenhof 1927 and the Modern Movement in Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). On the Modern Movement as a new aesthetic, see Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (with a new foreword by Philip Johnson) (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995). On CIAM, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and Jean-Louis Cohen, "International Rhetoric, Local Response," in *Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement*, ed. Hubert-Jan Henkel and Hilde Heynen (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002), 84–85. On the possibilities of reconciliation between prefabrication and "human needs," especially in the interwar period, see David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, eds., *Surface Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 143–49. For a brief history of Western prefabricated dwellings, see Colin Davies, *The Prefabricated Home* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). On prefabrication in postwar Britain and the association of reinforced concrete with poverty, see Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Brian Finnimore, *Houses from the Factory: System Building and the Welfare State, 1942–74* (London: Rivers Oran Press, 1989).

In Western Europe, architects intensely debated *Typisierung* at the beginning of the 20th century.³⁵ As prolific designers and innovators were dislocated by Hitler's rise to power—some attempted to execute their ideas in the United States; others traveled to the Soviet Union—divergent paths emerged across borders and economies. Because these paths often mirrored one another, and since they necessarily originated in common aspirations of modernity, they may appear to be the same thing. At every turn, however, they were shaped by markets (or lack thereof), government patrons, companies, business interests, and planning institutions.³⁶ Bittner carefully traces the intense discussions among Soviet planners over *tipovoe proektirovanie* (serial reproduction of building prototypes) and *tipizatsiia* (standardization of distinct elements). Although the move from one to the other was neither consistent nor linear, a shift nevertheless took place under socialism from large-bloc building systems to the large-panel system (using prefabricated slabs, as opposed to bulky blocks, for load-bearing walls and even sections like staircases or balconies).³⁷ Inevitably, socialist planners looked toward the West.³⁸ Castillo's account elucidates the international dimensions of this turn and the ways in which aspirations to “catch and overtake” the West led to the evolution of the ubiquitous housing prototypes in the GDR and what Blair Ruble has aptly called “hyper-standardization” across the socialist world.³⁹ But there were also important channels established within the Eastern bloc

³⁵ Experimenting with *Baukasten im großen* (large-scale building blocks) at the Bauhaus in the early 1920s, Gropius claimed that monotony “is not to be feared as long as the basic requirement is fulfilled to typify only building components whereas larger building structures remain variable” (Walter Gropius, “Wohnhaus-Industrie,” in *Ein Versuchshaus des Bauhaus in Weimar*, ed. Adolf Meyer [Munich: Albert Langen, 1924], 13).

³⁶ For an overview of the various postwar fortunes of architects in Eastern Europe, see Anders Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History* (New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

³⁷ It was occasionally possible to work outside the limits of *tipizatsiia* if one was lucky (or well connected) enough to get “special commissions” such as showcase cultural centers, palaces of congresses, or other landmark projects. Personal villas and summer dachas for Central Committee cronies could similarly be built in “the Scandinavian style,” but editors kept them out of architectural journals and catalogues. See Frédéric Chaubin, *CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* (Cologne: Taschen, 2011).

³⁸ East German planners visited France in 1956 to observe industrial building systems, Auguste Perret's Le Havre, and Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (which they proclaimed inadequate). See Werner Durth, Jörn Düwel, and Niels Gutschow, *Architektur und Städtebau der DDR* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1999), 1:481–82.

³⁹ Blair A. Ruble, “From *Khrushcheby* to *Korobki*,” in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History*, ed. William Craft Brumfield and Ruble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232–70.

whereby techniques and expertise circulated.⁴⁰ It becomes useful, then, to think not so much in terms of a simple line from Gropius and Stuttgart to postwar socialist *tipizatsiia* but rather about interconnected ideas and angles of innovation executed in various contexts and at different scales. These combinations produced outcomes of varying focus, detail, and impact.⁴¹

Consider, also, the obsession with the promise of new materials and the way this obsession has shaped modern cities. Much like modernist architects in the interwar period, socialist building industries celebrated the powers and promise of *zhelezobeton* (reinforced concrete).⁴² Across the Eastern bloc, construction industry experts exchanged technical details and formulas through coordinated efforts. Yet here, too, it would be too simplistic to draw a straight line between modernist euphoria and postwar Soviet-style mass planning. After all, the history of this enduring material is far from straightforward. Rather, it has been characterized by leaps and bounds, waves of entrepreneurial investment and capitulation, periods of almost utter disillusionment and sudden fits of enthusiasm and productivity.⁴³ It was not so much that the obsession with concrete's powers was narrowly ideological. Rather, over time, the material came to encompass the beliefs of a modern era. It was "ideally suited to modernism's aspiration to structural 'honesty'" insofar as it allowed designers to expose load-bearing functions that had been previously concealed.⁴⁴ But just as the material made it possible to expose the inner structure of buildings and to execute architectural visions of a greater

⁴⁰ For an original account of how Czechoslovakia pioneered industrial building typologies, as well as the complexities of architectural practice under early socialism, see Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–60* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

⁴¹ Widespread efforts to standardize architecture and building systems did not mean that standardization was total or even that standards were uniformly applied. Yugoslavia, for example, produced striking innovations (as did Cuba). On Yugoslavia, see Vladimir Kulić, "'East? West? Or Both?' Foreign Perceptions of Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia," *Journal of Architecture* 14, 1 (2009): 129–47.

⁴² For a valuable overview, see Antoine Picon, "Architecture and Technology: Two Centuries of a Creative Tension," in *Liquid Stone*, 8–19.

⁴³ The French engineer François Hennebique contributed to the rising popularity of concrete in turn-of-the-century Europe. Reinforced concrete, however, which involved the introduction of steel elements to carry the tensile stress in load-bearing structures, gained momentum only later. Standards for cement production and innovations in reinforced concrete were deeply tied to technological advances and competition between companies (as well as patent protections). See Kenneth Frampton, "Foreword," in Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), xv–xx; and Cyrille Simonnet, *Le Béton: Histoire d'un matériau* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2005).

⁴⁴ Cohen and Moeller, Jr., "Introduction," in *Liquid Stone*, 6.

scale, so it also permanently fixed in space contemporary technological deficiencies (like poor material quality and imperfect fixtures).

Beton. For millions, the word alone conjures up countless intimate details of drab everyday life in the Eastern bloc. Yet, for a long while, concrete also became associated with ideas of progress, social reform, and unprecedented possibilities. Its story conjures up visions of modernity, often in competition, and the ways in which “a seemingly innocuous and ingenious combination of inert substances” could be imbued with distinct meanings.⁴⁵ It also provides an excellent case study to locate the East–West conjuncture. Under socialism, it was possible to embrace distinct features of this inherently modern obsession and couple them with designs for a noncapitalist modernity. Modern mass prefabrication under centrally planned economies, in turn, gave rise to problems that had not existed before. In the absence of markets, innovation lagged and plagiarism of technological models spiked. State monopoly over property and planning (despite varying degrees of decentralization in the construction industry) shaped avenues for research and design. Prefabricated “houses for delivery” in the United States were fundamentally tied to a series of companies competing for a supposedly emerging market, which ultimately did not materialize. In West European cities, prefabrication often became associated with disastrous social planning and troubled satellite towns. These examples were intimately tied to the opportunities and pressures of markets, patent rules, and entrepreneurial initiatives. Not so in planned economies. Unencumbered by markets or social backlash, socialist states executed industrial building methods on an unprecedented scale. Scale, in turn, introduced problems that were not merely quantitative in nature: onsite assembly; organization of labor; workforce training; site inspections; mass social and leisure provisions; massive environmental consequences.⁴⁶

These endless rows of prefab blocks shaped (and still do) the urban experience of tens of millions.⁴⁷ By the early 1960s, the United Nations had recognized the Soviet Union as a world leader in building cheap mass housing, so it organized study tours in the Soviet republics for Latin

⁴⁵ Cohen, “Modern Architecture,” 20–33.

⁴⁶ On this point, see Paul Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷ “Nostalgia for socialism,” writes Thomas Lahusen, “has become a commodity, but not for those who still live in its ruins, because they are home.” See his “Decay or Endurance? The Ruins of Socialism,” *Slavic Review* 65, 4 (2006): 736–46, quotation on 736. A comparative effort to study the ubiquitous “grands ensembles” has produced a rich overview of the spread of large-scale building systems in postwar France and the Eastern bloc, but also in Algeria, South Korea, Iran, and South Africa: Frédéric Dufaux and Annie Fourcaut, eds., *Le monde des grands ensembles* (Paris: Créaphis, 2004).

American, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern planners.⁴⁸ In the GDR, *die Platte* became a reference to life under socialism itself.⁴⁹ Studying this vast material legacy of socialism raises a series of issues. First, the common art historical emphasis on identifiable networks of artistic patronage may become irrelevant, since many of these vast complexes were designed collectively or anonymously. Especially in the less developed socialist countries, planners often borrowed or copied foreign technical systems. These housing systems, moreover, came with a corresponding planning and distribution bureaucracy as well as a new vocabulary.⁵⁰ While the exact processes and models varied somewhat from country to country, on the whole certain elemental features of socialist material reality became sufficiently similar across the Eastern bloc to allow for essentially shared references to emerge. They are still visible today in the expanding industry of resurrecting socialist material culture in Germany and elsewhere.⁵¹ To a certain extent, these features of central planning mirrored the decline of the heroic architect in the West as well as the rise of objects of everyday life, which in the postwar period “involved more radical transformations of space than the most extreme architectural proposals.”⁵² But the socialist construction industry also provides a valuable case study of the way in which diffuse power operates: by making seemingly abstract terms (“housing need,” “cost reduction,” “simple design”) operational, by blurring authorial claims, and by shifting accountability for built outcomes.

Cold War divisions also produced unexpected entanglements. One example is Oscar Niemeyer, the distinguished author of Brasília’s urban plan, who maintained close ties to the GDR and was a popular fixture in

⁴⁸ “Report of the Study Tour of Building Technologists from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” (New York: United Nations, 1964).

⁴⁹ Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte: Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Schiler, 2005). One in five residents in the GDR lived in large-scale housing complexes (*Großsiedlung*). A large proportion of all industrially built housing units were of a single model: the ubiquitous *Wohnungsbauserie 70* (WBS-70).

⁵⁰ Planners invented technical descriptions to name features that had not existed before (WBS-70), whereas Eastern bloc residents coined new terms to express similar frustrations at scarce space and mock the authorities (*khrushcheby*) or ridiculed planning concepts like “complex urbanism.” There was incidental isomorphism even when Eastern bloc large-scale planning failed to achieve its stated goal of establishing a universal socialist standard.

⁵¹ See Paul Betts, “The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture,” *Journal of Modern History* 72, 3 (2000): 731–65.

⁵² Beatriz Colomina, “Cold War/Hothouses,” in *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy*, ed. Colomina, AnnMarie Brennan, and Jeannie Kim (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 10–21, quotation on 11.



Everyday Socialism on Display: Storefront replica of a socialist-era interior advertising Ostel, a GDR-themed hostel, Berlin, Germany
Source: Author's photograph, 2009.

the socialist architectural press.⁵³ Indeed, modern Brazilian architecture was exhibited and discussed widely in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.⁵⁴ Still, exchanges and international connections of this kind could have the effect of actually reinforcing East–West divisions. That socialist planning was not isolated from broader international developments does not mean that it was indistinguishable from them. Socialism was more than the sum of standardization in technology and ideological and aesthetic formulas. The coupling of widely available technology with specific planning visions and organizational systems (as well as inherent systemic shortages) created a kind of familiar amalgam on a grand scale. That is why it was possible to have an international socialist “market” for standard building systems without an actual market. Planning bureaucracies enabled an unprecedented exchange in technology and expertise across the Eastern bloc. Belief in building socialism was not relevant merely because it provided a clear blueprint for aesthetic or technical choices (most often it did not), but because it framed ambition

⁵³ On Niemeyer and the GDR, see Elmar Kossel, “Oscar Niemeyer und Deutschland: Die Rezeption in der DDR,” *Oscar Niemeyer: Eine Legende der Moderne/A Legend of Modernism*, ed. Paul Andreas and Ingeborg Flagge (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Architektur Museum; Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003), 59–68. In 1963, Niemeyer received the Lenin Prize. See O. Ianitskii and V. Khait, “Oscar Niemeyer,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 7 (1963): 9–13.

⁵⁴ “Arquitetura brasileira na Europa,” *Módulo*, no. 32 (March 1963): 60–61.

and established the parameters of the possible. Assessing the international dimensions of the socialist planning experiment, therefore, should not be an end in itself. Rather, an appreciation for the porosity of cultural and technical frontiers, the ambiguity inherent in dealings with one's past, international aspirations, and the back-and-forth of specific practices and ideas ought to bring more into the focus the specific ways that socialist states could be both "monolithic and brittle."⁵⁵ Rather than staying confined to familiar questions about the limits of Soviet power, this approach would raise new questions, for example, about the role of comparison in historical development, the process of mimicking, and everyday practices inherent to an imperfect socialist material life.

When reading Bittner and Castillo together, it becomes clear that anxieties over the Stalinist past and the postwar consumerist boom in the West converged in the minds of socialist apparatchiks. As Konrád's city builder would have it, the socialist system was both programmed in a specific way and programmed those who lived within it, including their desires. The Thaw seemed to heighten awareness of this programming by displaying parts of the inner architecture of the socialist planning machinery (just as reinforced concrete exposed both the ambitions and inherent limitations of the socialist urban program). *That* was the "socialist design"—not a specific aesthetic formula or a consistent definition but rather an institutionalized logic, a series of practices and models that were often invented, routinely borrowed from the West, executed on a massive scale, then submitted to the grueling test of standing up to Western achievements.

Empire

An imposing silhouette frames the entrance to the Novyi Arbat thoroughfare in Moscow: a concrete and steel high-rise building resembling an open book. As the headquarters of the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or CMEA), founded in 1949 to oversee economic relations among socialist countries, this iconic structure came to symbolize Soviet efforts to integrate the socialist world. One can trace that familiar silhouette on letterhead stored in archives from Hanoi to Havana, on medals and "friendship flags," on flashy posters and commemorative stamps, and on innumerable other objects that circulated across continents.⁵⁶ While shaped by the domestic policies of

⁵⁵ Stephen Kotkin (with a contribution by Jan T. Gross), *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), 18.

⁵⁶ A 2009 Moscow exhibition commemorated the material culture of the Comecon, including displays of archival documents, Eastern bloc consumer artifacts, and fashion catalogues:



Concrete Symbol: The Comecon building in Moscow's Arbat

Source: Arkhitektura SSSR, no. 4 (1966).

Stalinism and the Thaw, then, parts of Arbat's urban profile also stood as an unmistakable reference to a sprawling socialist world-system.⁵⁷

Postwar international crosscurrents and socialist exchange were not the same thing, though they were connected in important ways. Whether formally or informally, postwar architectural exchange remained a distinctly transnational affair. The novelty, as Stephen Kotkin has shown in an influential essay published in this journal, was the creation of a new socialist arena, stretching from the eastern regions of Europe to East Asia.⁵⁸ In certain locales of this vast territory prewar contacts survived and reemerged in the 1950s, while elsewhere war displaced countless people, erased preexisting institutions, and created new alignments. In East Germany, as Castillo demonstrates, prewar and postwar spheres overlapped and often clashed. But in countries

"SEV: Sovetskii proekt ekonomicheskoi integratsii," 29 April–28 June 2009, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), Moscow.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of Moscow's urban imperial manifestations, see Monica Rütters, "Moskau als imperiale Stadt: Sowjetische Hauptstadtarchitektur als Medium imperialer Selbstbeschreibung in vergleichender Perspektive," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, 4 (2008): 481–506.

⁵⁸ Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth? Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritika* 8, 3 (2007): 487–531.

that were never integrated in the modernism of the interwar period (such as, say, Albania), the socialist arena proved crucial for the construction of professional and urban identities. The international dimension was always present, therefore, but the fiercest professional struggles were often fought at the Eastern bloc level.

Taking seriously the global pretensions of socialist states, György Péteri has argued that “the communist project in Eastern Europe has been the largest deliberately designed experiment in globalization in modern history.”⁵⁹ Nurturing international ambitions, Soviet and Eastern bloc elites were conscious of the superiority of their social mission, or what Péteri aptly calls “systemic relativism,” meaning the essentially different and incommensurate nature of state socialism with Western capitalism. But they also became painfully aware of their poor economic and technological performance in relation to the West, not merely in terms of growth rates and tons of coal or steel produced, but essentially in terms of “the failure of state socialism to appropriate and adopt the main tendencies of international technological development and their failure to pioneer such changes.”⁶⁰ Superiority and inferiority, then, combined “to form the mentality of the communist elite and their seemingly capricious oscillations between the extremes of offensive or defensive, integrationist or isolationist policies.”⁶¹

Exchange was at the heart of this large-scale experiment in socialist globalization. As both Bittner and Castillo suggest, technical inventions that were not originally Soviet could be effectively appropriated and circulated by a variety of Soviet and Eastern bloc agents and institutions. The Soviets were directly in control of many facets of this exchange, but much of it was also overseen by Eastern bloc authorities themselves.⁶² Momentous as it was, however, socialist exchange did not necessarily bring more Eastern bloc cohesion, strengthen political loyalty, or even, in certain cases, increase

⁵⁹ György Péteri, “Nylon Curtain—Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe,” *Slavonica* 10, 2 (2004): 113–23, quotation on 117.

⁶⁰ “Out of fifty major technological advances that were made during the post-war era and still shape our lives today,” Péteri observes, “only three appeared first in a socialist country” (*ibid.*, 118).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Ideas, technological formulas, and blueprints circulated across the Eastern bloc through the formal mechanisms of “technical–scientific exchange,” administered by bureaucrats and sanctioned in the central plan. See, for example, “Technisch-wissenschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, das ist Freundschaft,” November 1950, Bundesarchiv (Archive of the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin, BArch) DE1/10676.

openness.⁶³ In rediscovering this flow of ideas, peoples, and technology across Cold War borders, it becomes necessary to spell out the conditions and institutions that contributed to certain outcomes and not others. Nuanced analyses of socialist exchange would also help us explain how the Eastern bloc could seem both resilient and unstable.

One example that clearly manifested the contradictory nature of socialist exchange was the fifth congress of the Union internationale des architectes (the International Union of Architects, UIA), held in Moscow in 1958. Founded in 1948 in Lausanne, Switzerland, the UIA attempted to unite all international architectural organizations into one body—a kind of United Nations of architects.⁶⁴ Like CIAM, the UIA was rooted in preexisting professional networks and international contacts: the British planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie; the Swiss Jean Tschumi; the Hungarian-born expatriate Ernő Goldfinger; the American Ralph Walker; the Russian Nicolas Baranov; and the illustrious, if formal, presence of Auguste Perret.⁶⁵ The organization found its energetic spokesman in Pierre Vago, an enterprising architect born in Budapest to József Vágó (associated with the League of Nations building in Geneva) and who became a founding editor of the influential journal *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*.⁶⁶ After CIAM rejected an invitation to join ranks, the UIA developed as a bureaucratic structure encompassing national professional associations with sections devoted to Western and Eastern Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. As Vago would later put it, the goal was to form an organization that was neither “elitist” nor “dogmatic like CIAM.”⁶⁷

Even though Vago and his associates were committed to taking politics out of international architectural gatherings, Cold War tensions nevertheless seeped in.⁶⁸ Preparations for the 1958 Moscow congress, for example, were

⁶³ Architects' memoirs still provide the best insights on the contradictory nature of socialist exchange. See Maks Velo, *Paralel me arkitekturën* (Tiranë: njeriu, 1998); Petraq Kolevica, *Arkitektura dhe diktatura*, 2nd ed. (Tiranë: Logoreci, 2004); and Ion Mircea Enescu, *Arhitect sub communism* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2007).

⁶⁴ Aymone Nicolas, *Lapogée des concours internationaux d'architecture: L'action de l'UIA, 1948–1975* (Paris: Picard, 2007), 39–43.

⁶⁵ Among the major contributions of CIAM, which was founded in La Sarraz, Switzerland, in 1928, was the influential Athens Charter, a modernist manifesto on urban design adopted in 1933. The charter outlined the principal organizational features of the “functional city”: dwelling, work, leisure, and circulation. See Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*.

⁶⁶ Pierre Vago, “De l'origine à la foundation: Les structures et leur évolution,” in *L'UIA, 1948–1998* (Paris: Éditions de l'Épure, 1998), 17–27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁸ One prominent example, involving the Field brothers, Stalinist show trials, and the UIA, is captured in Hermann Field and Kate Field, *Trapped in the Cold War: The Ordeal of an American Family* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

jeopardized by the Soviet and Eastern bloc invasion of Budapest in November 1956. The Egyptian section also filed a complaint letter with the UIA in December, denouncing the British and French attacks against Port Said.⁶⁹ Vago immediately flew to Moscow to get assurances from Soviet authorities that the congress would be free of politics.⁷⁰ The Soviets were willing to oblige, deeming the congress a valuable opportunity to showcase postwar Soviet planning achievements. Accordingly, Soviet authorities mobilized planning bureaucrats and issued invitations around the world.⁷¹ By special permission from the CPSU, the congress was held within the Kremlin from 21 to 27 July, and guests were treated to waltzes played by a Red Army orchestra, tours of the Lenin mausoleum, and a visit to a prefab panel factory.⁷² All in all, some 1,400 delegates came to Moscow, representing more than 40 countries.⁷³ In addition to large Soviet, Eastern bloc, and French contingents, Latin America was also heavily represented, with Colombia and Mexico sending 81 and 148 delegates, respectively.⁷⁴

The chosen theme of the congress (“Construction and Reconstruction of Towns, 1945–57”) resonated both with postwar socialist planners as well as delegations from the “developing world.”⁷⁵ Even though discussants reiterated familiar arguments about the aesthetic and functional aspects of urban planning, one particular concern emerged across Cold War lines: monotony. Architects around the globe, the meeting’s resolution proclaimed, were enthusiastically embracing industrial building methods and more rational planning techniques. Yet these same techniques could easily result in uniform urban profiles. The resolution did not explicitly argue against monumentality in urban planning, an issue that had preoccupied CIAM for decades, but merely pointed out that “the goal in designing housing and public centers should be the creation of possibilities for decent human

⁶⁹ Nicolas, *Lapogée*, 111–12.

⁷⁰ Pierre Vago, *Une vie intense* (Brussels: Archive d’Architecture Moderne), 444–46. Similar tensions erupted when the UIA decided to hold its seventh congress in Havana in 1963. Reportedly, Field Castro and Che Guevara joined an animated discussion on architecture and revolution (John Michael Austin-Smith, “Havana, 1963,” in *L’UIA, 1948–1998*, 113–18).

⁷¹ VOKS letter to Albanian–Soviet Friendship Society, 12 February 1958, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 9576, op. 4, d. 1, l. 42; invitation to the UIA Congress, Arkivi i Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tirana, Albania, AMPJ), viti 1958, dosja 64, fleta 10.

⁷² Luben Tonev, “Moscou, 1958,” in *L’UIA, 1948–1998*, 101.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁴ “Compte rendu du congrès par A. G. Heaume,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* 29, 79 (September 1958): 7.

⁷⁵ International Union of Architects, *Construction et reconstruction des villes, 1945–1957/ Stroitel’s tvo i rekonstruktsiia gorodov, 1945–1957*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Édition d’État de Documentation sur la Construction et l’Architecture, 1958).

living.”⁷⁶ It concluded with a general call to “cooperation” among countries and a reference to peace. But what exactly was “decent human living”? And how could monotony be avoided? The resolution similarly avoided questions of property and economic planning, and it did not explicitly outline the characteristics of the “new aesthetics” of industrially built cities. Underlying a seemingly universal agreement on industrial building methods, then, were unresolved questions and fundamental divergences. In their final report, for example, the East German delegates wrote that there could be no industrial solution to urban problems in the West as long as there was private property and a market economy.⁷⁷

A number of other ideological clashes betrayed the unofficial symbol of the gathering—the ubiquitous white dove. At one point, some delegates brought forward a motion to adopt the Stockholm petition on nuclear disarmament (based on the 1950 Stockholm Peace Appeal originally formulated by Ilya Ehrenburg). The congress initially adopted it, but before Soviet officials had any chance to run with the headline, UIA executives canceled the motion.⁷⁸ On another occasion, Poland’s Helena Syrkus urged fellow architects to “break the silence” and reintroduce the human scale in architecture.⁷⁹ More conspicuously, Jean Tschumi of Switzerland and Jean Fayeton of France took issue with Soviet architecture in their speeches.⁸⁰ Curiously, Soviet officials seemed willing to admit to past planning errors. On the question of monumentality in Moscow, for example, the architect Karo Alabian, author of the Central Theater of the Red Army and secretary of the Soviet Union of Architects, readily acknowledged the architectural excesses of the period between 1935 and 1956. Although some UIA officials’ accounts tend to smooth over these confrontations, notes kept by the East Germans indicate that delegates divided themselves along Cold War lines.⁸¹ Indeed,

⁷⁶ “Entschliessung des V. Kongresses der U.I.A.,” 4 August 1958, BArch DH1/8077. See also “Resolutions du Ve Congrès de l’Union Internationale des Architectes,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* 29, 79 (September 1958): 13.

⁷⁷ Kurt Liebknecht and Walter Pisternik, “Bericht über die Teilnahme am UIA-Kongress in Moskau,” 4 August 1958, BArch DH1/8077.

⁷⁸ Vago, *Une vie intense*, 446.

⁷⁹ Helena Syrkus (1900–82), along with her husband Szymon (1893–1967), were prominent Polish members of CIAM. Helena delivered an impassioned speech in defense of Socialist Realism at the organization’s congress in Bergamo, Italy, in 1949, in which she criticized CIAM for having made “a fetish of the skeleton,” called for bringing art closer to the people, and declared that there should be “a greater respect for the spirit of the past.” See Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 79–90, quotation on 87.

⁸⁰ Liebknecht and Pisternik, “Bericht,” BArch DH1/8077.

⁸¹ Tonev, “Moscou”; Vago, *Une vie intense*.

Soviet and Bulgarian representatives took the floor “on behalf” of the socialist countries while the Dutch, French, British, and West Germans spoke for “the West.”⁸² Speaking time was also allocated to China, as well as Chile (for Latin America) and the U.S. delegation (for North America).

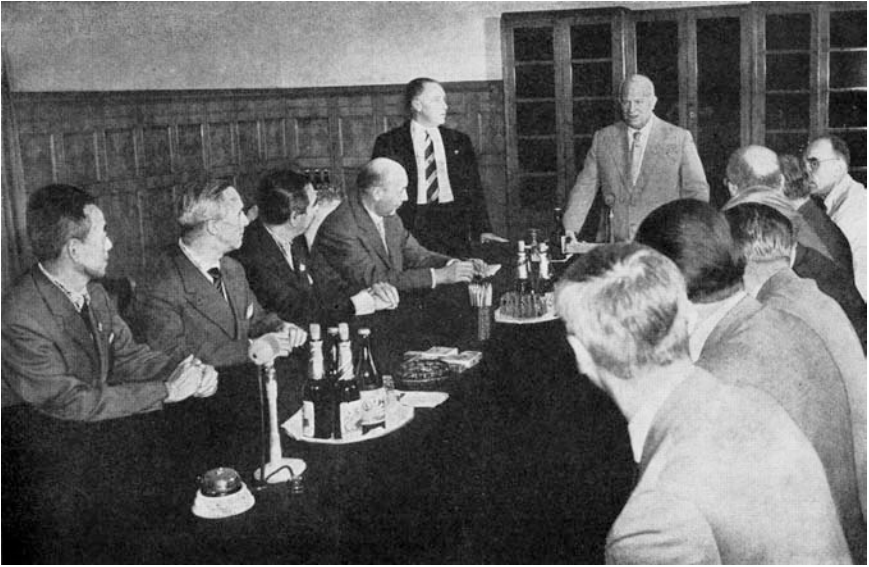
Records of private meetings between Soviet and East German planners also bring to light the tensions that permeated Eastern bloc professional elites in the aftermath of the Soviet Thaw.⁸³ On 26 July, the East German delegation—which consisted of Walter Pisternik, Kurt Liebknecht, Edmund Collein, and Gerhard Kosel—met with Alabian and Ivan Aleksandrovich Grishmanov, head of the CPSU Central Committee’s Department of Construction.⁸⁴ As outlined in reports filed by Liebknecht and Kosel, the East Germans were eager to raise a number of questions and concerns about the future of socialist architecture. They claimed, for example, that the Soviet response to the French delegates’ criticism had been lukewarm. Soviet design projects exhibited at the congress had struck Liebknecht as inspired by “fashionable Western architecture.” Yet another point of concern was a speech by the chief of the Institute of History and Theory at the Soviet Academy of Construction and Architecture, in which he had spoken about “an architecture for the 20th century” without even mentioning social classes. In laying out these concerns, the East Germans seemed to take on the role of spokesmen for the Eastern bloc. They appeared anxious, for example, about Western cultural influences in Hungary after 1956 and warned that there could be no coexistence between Western and socialist architecture.

While admitting that he had not properly responded to the French accusations, Alabian nevertheless pointed out that the Soviets themselves had acknowledged the architectural excesses of the Stalin era. Still, nobody could actually deny the obvious differences between socialist and capitalist urban planning, he noted. A simple comparison between Moscow and

⁸² Miles Glendinning notes that the event also enabled the welfare-state architect Robert Matthew to act as a diplomatic “broker.” See his “Cold-War Conciliation: International Architectural Congresses in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s,” *Journal of Architecture* 14, 2 (2009): 197–217.

⁸³ The issue of separate representation for East and West German architects had long frustrated UIA executives. See a report by Kurt Liebknecht, “Selbständige Mitgliedschaft des Bundes Deutscher Architekten der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der UIA,” 2 August 1958, BArch DH1/8077.

⁸⁴ Walter Pisternik (1904–90) was a functionary of the Building Affairs Section of the SED Central Committee. Gerhard Kosel (1909–2003), the most vocal proponent of industrialized building in the GDR, served as state secretary and deputy minister of construction. As noted earlier, Kurt Liebknecht (1905–94) was the first president of the Deutsche Bauakademie and a member of the SED Central Committee. Edmund Collein (1906–92), a Bauhaus alumnus, served as vice-president of the Bauakademie.



Khrushchev and the Architects: The Soviet leader speaks to participants at the congress of the International Union of Architects, Moscow, July 1958

Source: Arkhitektura SSSR, no. 8 (1958).

London would suffice. The socialist city, Alabian went on, would have to be built around a “social core,” not merely parks and trees encircling private businesses. As for the elements of the “architecture for the 20th century,” as well as how this related to “national forms,” he merely admitted that the issue was complicated. Certainly, the point was not to paste some “national” pastiche on façades. (As an example, Alabian brought up Armenian architects who had reportedly carved religious elements on the panels of modern housing blocks.) Simplicity, he insisted, could also serve as “a national form.” Although Alabian concurred that a tough stance on Western architecture was necessary, he also deemed the UIA of “colossal political importance,” especially given the tendency in South American architectural circles to challenge American planning models. In conclusion, participants agreed to call a meeting among socialist countries to clarify further the issues related to socialist architecture.⁸⁵

The day before Alabian and Grishmanov met with the East Germans, Khrushchev attended a meeting of the UIA executive board, where he criticized the strong influence of classical Greek and Roman architecture in the Soviet Union. Roman architects, he asserted, were geniuses who built palaces for the

⁸⁵ Kurt Liebknecht, “Bericht über zwei Besprechungen beim Leiter der Abteilung Bauwesen des ZK der UDSSR—Gen. Grishmanow,” 30 July 1958, BArch DH1/8077.

wealthy. But social relations under socialism were of a wholly different nature, and economic calculations were at the heart of central planning. Stalin-era Soviet architects, Khrushchev complained, had adorned even cowsheds with columns. Nevertheless, the Soviet leader drew a line between socialist planning and Western modernism. “We do not want to build cities filled with boxes, as the French architect Le Corbusier recommends,” he said, “which is to say that we do not want to simplify things.”⁸⁶ The Soviet Union did not need 30-story buildings or long silhouettes because people could not take shelter in silhouettes. There were a few things Soviet planners could learn from the West, he acknowledged, but when it came to housing, the West had produced little innovation since World War II. In conclusion, while admitting that there was no such thing as a rigid socialist form, Khrushchev argued that socialist architecture was created by the convergence of a certain calculus of cost and the overriding principle of serving the people.⁸⁷

These seemingly minor incidents and exchanges in Moscow in 1958 encapsulated many of the overlapping dilemmas of the Soviet Thaw. Above all, they exposed generational and personal conflicts within the planning profession (similar to the generational battles that Bittner identifies at the Gnesin Institute or among Moscow planners). Whereas Liebknecht was personally invested in the previous denunciation of “formalism,” Gerhard Kosel was firmly committed to the prospects of industrialized construction and prefabrication technology.⁸⁸ If Liebknecht stood for socialist realism, Kosel emerged as the chief architect of Eastern bloc-wide exchange in industrial building methods.⁸⁹ Later that year, he was handpicked to lead the Comecon’s Berlin-based permanent commission on construction, whose task was to oversee the exchange of construction technology and architectural standards among member states.⁹⁰ Personal ambition, in short, was deeply interwoven with evolving debates at the national, Eastern bloc, and international levels.⁹¹

In addition to highlighting the international horizon in which postwar architectural discussions were carried out, these exchanges reveal the self-

⁸⁶ Ibid. See also Gerhard Kosel, “Akttenotiz über eine Besprechung in der Abt. Bauwesen des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU am 26.7.58,” 28 July 1958, BArch DH1/8077.

⁸⁷ Liebknecht, “Bericht,” BArch DH1/8077.

⁸⁸ Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 75–83.

⁸⁹ Gerhard Kosel, “Tendenzen der Industrialisierung des Wohnungsbaues in der Sowjetunion,” 28 July 1958, BArch DH1/8077.

⁹⁰ “Bericht über die konstituierende Tagung der Ständigen Kommission Bauwesen des Rates für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe,” 17 October 1958, BArch DH1/8084.

⁹¹ Kosel even established contacts with the Palo Alto-based American architect Ernest J. Kump, who promised to forward materials on U.S. modular housing systems (Gerhard Kosel, “Betr. Amerikanisches Modulsystem,” 28 July 1958, BArch DH1/8077).

induced anxiety pervading the socialist world system. That anxiety was rooted not merely in the abandonment of one style for another but in the understanding that socialist planning was part of a much larger dynamic of power and control, as argued convincingly by both Bittner and Castillo. The 1958 Moscow episodes also point to the fact that the appropriation of Soviet practices in the cultural realm was often more subtle than direct orders, and that avenues of influence were equally shaped by Eastern bloc actors, local interests, and daily power struggles. Finally, the exchanges between the Soviets and the East Germans in Moscow openly acknowledged the daunting competition in architecture, urban planning, and material culture with the capitalist West. Even if such a thing as “socialist design” could not be readily defined, as Khrushchev acknowledged in front of his guests at the Kremlin, it had to be invented merely for the purpose of distinguishing it from Western architectural and urban forms. East German architects heavily criticized international “star architects” yet they could barely conceal their obsession with Western architecture.⁹² Geographical proximity to the West certainly shaped this outlook, but the East German anxieties were also shared across the Eastern bloc. Architects and planners embodied the paradox of “socialist design”: their blueprints “cut through the face of doubt,” as Konrád’s unnamed city builder boasted, yet self-induced doubt came back to haunt them, just as it kept haunting him, again and again.⁹³

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⁹² The East German delegation, for example, passionately denounced the Interbau, a development project for the Hansaviertel in West Berlin, featuring the designs of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. On Interbau’s impact on East German planners, see Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 182–88.

⁹³ Konrád, *The City Builder*, 90.