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Contemporary European History (2022), **31**, *469–477*
doi:10.1017/S0960777321000734

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

REVIEW ARTICLE

Framing the Socialist City as Practice

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Christina Crawford, *Spatial Revolution: Architecture and Planning in the Early Soviet State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 424 pp. (hb), £27.00, ISBN 9781501759208.

Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918–1988* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 440 pp. (hb), £35.00, ISBN 9780875807430.

Mateusz Laszczkowski, *'City of the Future': Built Space, Modernity and Urban Change in Astana* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 220 pp. (hb), £50.00, ISBN 9781785332562.

Cynthia A. Ruder, *Building Stalinism: The Moscow Canal and the Creation of Soviet Space* (London: IB Tauris, 2018), 304 pp. (hb), £81.00, ISBN 9781784539474.

Andy Willimott, *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes and Soviet Socialism, 1917–1932* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 256 pp. (hb), £78.00, ISBN 9780198725824.

Katherine Zubovich, *Moscow Monumental: Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin's Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 280 pp. (hb), £21.00, ISBN 9780691178905.

The publication of Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain* in the mid-1990s transformed the field of Soviet studies. He presented Soviet socialism as a civilisation born of the Enlightenment, inspired by science's ability to sculpt society, and driven by the pursuit of an alternative to capitalism. His phrase 'speaking Bolshevik' spawned productive debate, as did his use of the Foucauldian paradigm. In something akin to a clarion call for urbanists, he proposed the socialist city as a metonym for this new Soviet world: Soviet socialism, he noted, was inherently industrial. Authorities regarded the city as a hallmark of socialist modernity, an endpoint and changing ideal toward which to strive, all of which makes the city a fruitful centre of investigation.[1]

Though not broadly noted at the time, Kotkin's work was marked by a complex and varied spatiality. His prose dropped readers in vividly described time-space moments, so that they felt the symbolic drama of erecting a steel town in a remote region on the steppe, the popular ingenuity through which families inhabited housing designed for single individuals, the insider/outsider tension inherent to the Special Labour Settlement's placement adjacent to the new socialist city, and planners' frustration at how actual construction proceeded ahead of and in contradiction to their ever-changing models. In Kotkin's poststructuralist framing, space – not unlike discourse – defined the terms of popular engagement with the Soviet state, the latter enjoying the upper hand in the relationship.

As Kotkin's writing reshaped discussion in the field, a plethora of urban case studies were written by young scholars, like myself, who were eager to exploit the openness afforded by Soviet collapse.[2]

[1] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Stephen Kotkin, 'Discovering the Socialist City', *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 23, 1–4 (1996), 231–61.

[2] Alan Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Heather D. DeHaan, *Stalinist City Planning: Professionals, Performance, and Power* (Toronto: University of

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Most of us dove into the archives, just as Kotkin had, but with his insights in mind. Up to this point, the field of Soviet urban studies could roughly be divided between architects, geographers and historians, who examined architecture, urban geography and the socio-cultural history of the Soviet city, respectively.[3] The translation of Henry Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* into English in 1991 helped put these fields in dialogue with one another by fostering the spatial turn. Historians began to push into – and beyond – the late Stalin era, examining the Cold War, Soviet mass housing programs, and the question of Eastern European influences.[4] A Second World Urbanity group was formed by Daria Bocharnikova and Steven E. Harris as a way to advance scholarly discussion of urban life in the post-war socialist world.

This research did not generate a definitive understanding of *the* socialist city. Soviet socialism alone produced a wide range of architectural forms, from Stalin-style Gothic skyscrapers to the stripped-down modernism of late Soviet apartment blocks. Each form had non-socialist parallels and sources of inspiration, and neither Soviet nor Western commentators universally agreed that any specific design was entirely or exclusively 'socialist' – though, as Kotkin rightly suggested, the Soviet system overall regarded itself and its cities as socialist and should therefore be accepted as such. Even so, a growing body of research indicates the need to develop a more pluralistic concept of socialist urbanity. Official concepts of time-space were political, designed to advance a particular set of social relations.[5] They infused politics and, with it, all of our records, since ordinary citizens learned to 'speak Bolshevik' (to use Kotkin's parlance).[6] Yet, socialist cities embodied a wide range of physical spaces and practices, many of contested relationship to Soviet socialism as idea.[7] The following studies, in their attentiveness to materiality and diversity, contribute to this more open-ended, less state-centric view of the Soviet urban experiment.

Our first monograph – Andy Willimott's *Living the Revolution* – highlights early grassroots support for what would become the state's linear understanding of socialism. As Willimott shows us, throughout the 1920s and the Cultural Revolution, youth enthusiasts in Soviet cities subjected their home and work lives to the search for a *novyi byt*' (a new, socialist 'everyday life'), a pursuit typically involving the formation of an urban commune (*dom kommuny*). Communes formed spontaneously in rented spaces, apartments, dormitories, barracks and hostels – wherever a few young workers, veterans or students might come together to fashion a revolutionary new form of collectivity. Their members lived

Toronto Press, 2013); Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Karl D. Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction: Urban Identity in Soviet Sevastopol after World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Julia Obertreis, *Tränen des Sozialismus. Wohnen in Leningrad zwischen Alltag und Utopie 1917–1937* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag Köln, 2004); Martin Blackwell, *Kyiv as Regime City: The Return of Soviet Power after Nazi Occupation* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016); Jeffrey W. Jones, *Everyday Life and the 'Reconstruction' of Soviet Russia During and After the Great Patriotic War, 1943–1948* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2008); Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

[3] James H. Bater, *The Soviet City: Ideal and Reality* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980); R. Antony French, *Plans, Pragmatism, and People: The Legacy of Soviet Planning for Today's Cities* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995); R. Anthony French and F. E. Ian Hamilton, eds., *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy* (New York: Wiley, 1979); Michael F. Hamm, *The City in Russian History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); N. B. Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' Sovetskogo goroda 1920/1930 gody* (St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 1999).

[4] Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Susan Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste', *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211–52; Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[5] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–6.

[6] Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life During the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Stephen Emmett Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street* (Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

[7] David Crowley and Susan Emily Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (New York: Berg, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from a 'common pot' (*obshchii kotel*) and imposed collective discipline to foster hygiene, time management and budgeting skills, labour productivity, cultural self-improvement and ostensibly more equal gender relations, all seen as critical elements of a socialist everyday. Life in such communes could be tension-ridden, because many youths conceptualised their pursuit in doctrinaire, exclusivist terms. They seem to have assumed that there was only one true socialist path.[8]

Such communes were largely a response to a distinctly impoverished, run-down, old-world environment. Some formed through – and participated in – the revolutionary housing repartition of 1917–21, which transferred 'excess' living space from the rich to the poor, offering the first opportunity to experiment with new socialist forms of daily life. At the time, extreme housing shortages and Soviet housing re-allocations, coupled with little new building, made collective living a necessity.[9] By turning such mandatory collectivity into an ideal, these commune-builders produced their own form of socialist architecture – that of activism.[10]

In Willimott's telling, these commune-builders were nothing like the revolutionary 'dreamers' described in Richard Stites' research: in Stites' telling, commune-builders were part of a broad sweep of revolutionary and utopian experimentation cut short by the rise of Stalin. But Willimott argues that commune members – at least those who left traces in the written record – never meant for their experimentation to be open-ended and that, in fact, they rallied behind the Stalinist state as the driving force of revolution after 1932. In this, they resembled avant-garde architects as described by Boris Groys: they welcomed the power of a centralised state to achieve their revolutionary aims.[11] Willimott also emphasises the exclusionary and highly masculinist nature of their vision. Women who joined communes were asked to cut family ties and found their firmness and commitment (understood as masculine qualities) to be in constant question.

Christina Crawford's *Spatial Revolution* offers a slightly different perspective on this era of revolutionary innovation. Setting aside the question of the avant-garde, a topic well covered in classic studies by Catherine Cooke and Selim Khan-Magomedov, as well as in Anna Bokov's new study of how Soviet constructivism influenced the Bauhaus tradition, Crawford focuses on *actual* socialist construction – not ideas of it.[12] But unlike Willimott's commune-builders, or the avant-garde as described by Groys, Crawford's city-builders displayed an openness of inquiry that *never* seemed to disappear.

Examining spatial planning in three economically important but geographically peripheral locals – oil-processing Baku, steel-making Magnitogorsk, and machine-building Kharkiv – Crawford shows how economic scarcity, industrial ambition, scientific planning and socialist governance framed and produced a distinctly socialist *praxis*. By praxis, Crawford refers to the interplay of theory with real life. Praxis put socialist ideology and international planning models into dialogue with the specific economic, social, political and other challenges of Soviet affairs. It was inherently experimental and flexible, as well as productive. It resulted in what are now recognisably 'socialist' urban forms – the small, highly functionalist domestic unit, or the structural arrangement of social institutions and services (i.e. schools, laundries, childcare facilities, cultural buildings) within a large-scale urban superblock. As the manuscript makes clear, such *socialist* praxis brought together thinking and experience at three scales – local, national and transnational, the latter being very much tied to the capitalist world.

[8] For other models of communal living see Igor B. Orlov, *Kommunal'naia strana: stanovlenie sovetskogo zhilishchno-kommunal'nogo khoziaistva (1917–1941)* (Moscow: HSE Publishing House, 2015).

[9] Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 8.

[10] Andy Willimott, *Living the Revolution: Urban Communes and Soviet Socialism, 1917–1932* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 74.

[11] Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[12] Anna Bokov, *Avant-Garde as Method: Vkhutemas and the Pedagogy of Space, 1920–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

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Crawford shows socialist praxis at work and developing in early Soviet Baku, where planner Aleksandr Ivanitskii and his Baku client team conceptualised the very first Soviet superblock. This superblock modelled the large-scale design possibilities inherent to the socialist abolition of private property. Population density, green space, housing and service provision were planned in an integrated manner to maximise public health and provide for the equitable consumption of social and cultural services. Built at the behest of the Baku City Council (Baksoviet), this superblock emerged around the same time as four 'garden settlements' (*poselki-sady*) for workers in Baku's adjacent oil districts, managed by the Azerbaijan Oil Company (Azneft). These settlements featured standardised minimalist homes (with design innovation by the Vesnin brothers), rationalised transportation and lavish (for this region) green space. The 1927 Baku General Plan conceptualised Baku and these settlements as a single entity, an innovation noteworthy for its expanded concept of time and space – a broadened future Baku, planned for in the present.

The Cultural Revolution of the late 1920s forced Soviet planners such as Ivanitskii to directly confront the problem of socialist *byt'*, the question at the heart of Willimott's commune members' pursuits. Across the Soviet Union, planners, architects and figures in all walks of public life found themselves embroiled in this discussion – much of which focused, in 1929, on the All-Union Open Design Competition for a plan for the socialist city (*sotsgorod*) of Magnitogorsk. The competition brief sought designs for a housing combine (*zhilkombinat*), a residential complex architecturally structured to eliminate the nuclear family as a socio-economic (and thus also as a spatio-architectural) unit. This was radical – a call to fundamentally remake society. Yet, for all the intellectual energy expended, neither the competition nor Ernst May's later arrival in Magnitogorsk resulted in tangible or do-able plans – in part, because of a series of radical changes in understanding socialist *byt'*. Crawford restores value to these efforts, however, by presenting them as an 'instaurational text' for socialist urbanity. As an 'instaurational' moment, the competition set loose guidelines for future planning. These in turn directly impacted the planning of Kharkiv's socialist city.[13]

Crawford's emphasis on socialist *praxis* also integrates Soviet-American cooperation. As she notes, Ivanitskii's team remained closely tied to American and European planning experts. Independent of Ivanitskii, an Azneft representative travelled to the United States, and it was rumoured that Azneft purchased American model homes for Baku. Baksoviet members also made an American pilgrimage. Magnitogorsk attracted the time and attention of German planner Ernst May, mentioned above. Soviet authorities purchased American equipment and contracted American expertise – for example, hiring Albert Kahn Inc. to produce plans for their Stalingrad Tractor Plant in 1929. In Kharkiv, Soviet engineers then borrowed Kahn's Stalingrad plan freely, creating an unauthorised (by Kahn) replica of the Stalingrad plant. This adaptation of a standard plan to the particularities of a new site, a process known in Russian as *priviazka,* became routine practice not only in the Soviet Union but globally – even in America, after Kahn brought news of this Soviet innovation home. As scholars, we have long known of these partnerships, but Crawford make such Soviet-American exchange integral to socialist praxis, socialist urbanity and also the transnational production of the industrial city.

Throughout, Crawford brilliantly showcases the *materiality* of the planning process. Her skills as licensed architect are on full display as she walks readers through planners' maps, travel notes, cartograms and similar documents, using these to produce a lived and *practised* genealogy of socialist design. Here, Crawford has articulated the experimental, transnational roots of later East Central European and post-Stalin urbanity.[14]

Yet Crawford never articulates the relationship of her findings to Stalinist urbanism. The socialist models discussed in her book were not applied to Soviet housing on a large scale until the Khrushchev era – and then, notes Stephen Bittner, often without the constructivist, experimental aesthetic of the

[13] The concept of an 'instaurational text' comes from Françoise Choay, *The Rule and the Model: On the Theory of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 6.

[14] On features of Eastern European socialist design, see Kimberly Elman Zarecor, 'What Was So Socialist About the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe', *Journal of Urban History* 44, 1 (2018), 95, 99–100.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1920s.[15] In the interim, Stalin's extravagant monumentalism interfered with rational efficiency and minimalist design.[16] This enabled American propagandists in the early Cold War to appropriate modernism – the very style that defined so much of the Soviet 1920s – as a symbol of *Western* internationalism.[17] Under Stalin, low-rise housing – built by individuals, not the state – proliferated, placing a heavy strain on the Soviet Union's limited transportation and public health infrastructure.[18] Planners confronted serious economic and administrative obstacles to realising their authority, including hostility to themselves as 'bourgeois' experts.[19] The politics and thus the practice of Stalin-era design differed from that of the 1920s. But presumably, it was also socialist? Crawford does not answer this question.

Yet Crawford's emphasis on *praxis*, which is inherently open-ended and experimental, provides a partial solution in that it leaves space for adaptation and variation. Many architects and planners continued to advocate standardisation and stripped-down, modernist design throughout the Stalin years.[20] Even interest in American innovation lingered.[21] In fact, as Katherine Zubovich proves in her *Moscow Monumental*, Soviet-American partnership remained essential to realising Stalin-era monumental design. Such transnational connectivity may seem antithetical to the Stalin period, which we associate with xenophobia and the Cold War, but Zubovich advises readers to view Stalin's monumentalism from the standpoint of its own era, before the Cold War and Khrushchev's critique defined it.

Zubovich's is a monumental story, pun intended, for Zubovich's research encompasses the House of Soviets and Moscow's postwar 'tall buildings' (*vysotki*), including both the 'seven sisters' (e.g. Moscow State University, Hotel Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs building) and the unbuilt 'sister' at Zariad'e. Throughout, Zubovich highlights not only the transnational roots of this Stalin-era design but also these buildings' *material* consequences. This is *not* a study of the aesthetics of propaganda, as tied to the structure of Moscow and its relationship to Stalin – a topic brilliantly covered by Katerina Clark.[22] Instead, Zubovich exploits archives, diaries and photos to offer – not unlike Crawford – a hands-on study of planning as practice and materiality.

Readers will find this highly refreshing, starting with Zubovich's entirely new interpretation of the oft-mocked Palace of Soviets. The design of the Palace of Soviets anticipated a large-volume, round-based structure with several halls, including an amphitheatre for 20,000 people. A one-hundred-storey skyscraper crowned by an eighty-meter statue of Lenin would have rested on top. Had this edifice been erected, it would have been the tallest building in the world at the time. Though long dismissed as Stalinist excess, Zubovich reminds us that the proposal's daring won admiration from American observers, whom Soviet architects and engineers hoped to involve in technical consultation. Further, work toward the project had real and lasting impacts. The design competition helped articulate socialist realism as aesthetic, serving as what Crawford might have dubbed its 'instaurational text'.[23] Though the

[15] Stephen Bittner, *Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 143–6.

[16] Owen Hatherly, *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings* (New York: The New Press, 2015), 12, 20.

[17] Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[18] See Smith, *Property of Communists*, 108–12; Donald A. Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943–1953* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[19] Timothy J. Colton called this 'disjointed monism' in Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1995), 6.

[20] Daria Bocharnikova, 'Inventing Socialist Modern: A History of the Architectural Profession in the USSR, 1954–1971', PhD dissertation, European University Institute Florence, 2014, 57; DeHaan, *Stalinist City Planning*, 136.

[21] American inspiration for Soviet design into the Stalin period is discussed in Jean-Louis Cohen, *Building a New New World: Amerikanizm in Russian Architecture* (New Haven: Canadian Centre for Architecture/Yale University Press, 2021).

[22] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Katerina Clark, 'Socialist Realism and Sacralizing of Space', in E. A. Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, eds., *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 3–18.

[23] On the evolution of its design, see Sona Stephan Hoisington, '"Ever Higher": The Evolution of the Project for the Palace of Soviets', *Slavic Review* 62, 1 (2003), 41–68. On the evolution of Soviet design to this point, see Harald Bodenschatz and Christiane Post, eds., *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins: Die internationale Suche nach der sozialistischen Stadt in der*

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palace was never built, the institution created to oversee its construction, the Administration for the Construction of the Palace of Soviets (USDS), had a lasting impact on wartime defence, architectural standardisation and ties to American architects. After the war, the USDS supervised the construction of Moscow State University, which was initially regarded as a dress rehearsal for the palace. In fact, notes Zubovich, it was Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's architectural taste, not some fatal and impossible-to-modify design flaw, that led to the project's demise.

In 1947, the Palace of Soviets was recast as merely one building in a larger postwar ensemble of Moscow skyscrapers. Born of the era of *Zhdanovshchina*, a period marked by Cold War tension and Soviet suspicion of foreign influence, the skyscrapers in this ensemble were dubbed 'tall buildings' (*vysotki*), a way of garnering terminological distance from the American equivalent. Work on them reflected the era – one of postwar recovery, not just Cold War boundary-drawing. Construction workers were dubbed *letchiki-vysotniki* (a handle synthesising the terms for aviator and 'tall building') and praised for 'reaching new heights'. The buildings' historicist design embodied the Soviet state's embrace of Russian imperial heritage in the 1930s, a trend reinforced by the war. As a result, when work on the Zariad'e building's foundation uncovered the remains of a settlement over 800 years old, construction stopped and archaeological excavation began.

Towering heights and rhetoric fully fit our image of the Stalin era, but Zubovich highlights the destabilising, even horizontalising, impact of these projects. As the towers pushed upward, Moscow spilled outward. Construction workers were usually housed in low-rise, hastily constructed buildings in the Moscow suburb of Cheremushki, where roads, transportation and social services were entirely inadequate. Because the tall buildings did not provide apartments for the masses (even the elite found it difficult to win living space within them), long-term residents of Moscow suffered either deteriorating housing conditions in the centre or exile to subpar housing on the city's periphery. Such regions were nothing like the Novye Cheremushki microdistrict of Khrushchev-era fame, with its five-storey, prefabricated apartment buildings designed to accommodate family and yet foster collectivity. In the 1930s, Moscow's periphery was in chaos. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (NKVD), which exercised broad supervision over the construction of Stalin's *vysotki*, had other priorities, such as completing Moscow State University's physics and chemistry labs, which were essential to the atomic bomb project.

After Stalin died, these buildings' very persistence served as an ironic backdrop for Khrushchev-era diplomacy. By the time Khrushchev denounced their aesthetic, Stalin-style tall buildings had already been gifted to Warsaw, Prague and Bucharest, capitals of Eastern Bloc socialist states.[24] International visitors to Khrushchev's Soviet Union typically found themselves housed in Stalin's buildings, because they were – at the time – the best that the Soviet Union could offer. One might argue that the buildings, as spatial objects, refused to submit to the forward march of time, as Soviet rhetoric would seem to demand.[25] Certainly, they were disruptive to Khrushchev's de-Stalinising rhetoric, just as Cheremushki undermined the Stalin-era claim to 'reaching new heights'.

The rhetorical conquest of time and space was central to Stalinist discourse, and it is therefore a focal point of Cynthia Ruder's *Building Stalinism,* which concerns the building of the Moscow-Volga Canal. From the start, the canal claimed a geographic reach that outpaced reality. When completed in 1937, the canal linked Moscow to the Volga and, through this, to merely *three* seas – the Baltic, Caspian and White. Yet, Moscow was immediately hailed as the 'Port of *Five* Seas', telescoping time in anticipation of the 1952 completion of the Volga-Don canal connecting Moscow to the Azov and Black Seas. Like the House of Soviets, such rhetoric fit the global monumental moment, and Ruder could have chosen to frame her study in transnational terms. However, Ruder

Sowjetunion 1929–1934 (Berlin: Braun, 2003); Mark Meerovich, Evgeniia Konysheva and Dmitrii Khmel'niktskii, eds., *Kladbishche sotsgorodov: Grado-stroitel'naia politika v SSSR 1928–1932 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011).

[24] For further work on Russian architecture in a global context, see Richard Anderson, *Russia: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015).

[25] For theorisation of this, see Karl Schlögel, *In Space We Read Time: On the History of Civilization and Geopolitics* (2003), translated by Gerrit Jackson (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2016), 17–29.

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makes a different, vital contribution by highlighting the centrality and yet relative invisibility of carceral space in the canal's construction.

Ruder's implicit and often explicit point of comparison is the White Sea-Baltic Canal, whose completion was feted in the *History of the Construction of the Stalin White-Sea-Baltic Canal (Belomorsko-baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina: Istoriia stroitel'stva, 1931–1934 gg*). Compiled by Maxim Gorky, this 'history' consisted of a montage of works by inmates and literary luminaries and celebrated the canal as a technical wonder that wrought the transformation of nature, including those forced to build it. This publication fell out of circulation during the Great Purges, when many involved in the canal's construction found themselves condemned as enemies of the people. As shown in Ruder's research, the Moscow-Volga Canal likewise generated two commemorative works – one finished in 1937 and the other in production in 1938. Because both celebrated the achievements of individuals who became purge victims (many of whom worked on both the Belomor and Moscow-Volga sites), neither went to press. A later volume, entitled *Moscow-Volga Canal 1932–1937*, was published in 1940. Relying on Katerina Clark's concept of the 'imperial sublime', Ruder analyses how these publications minimised the banal, forged and naturalised power relations and produced a Soviet 'reality' of 'hypostasised, awe-inspiring dimensions', as equivalent to the Great Terror.[26]

Ruder's work offers an important, in-depth and almost encyclopaedic exploration of Moscow's Dmitrov Corrective Labour Camp (Dmitlag, 1932–8), which sustained the canal's construction. Sixty-nine sub-camps (*lagpunkty*) ran along the canal route, and the village of Dmitrov was given over to camp headquarters. The prisoner population ranged from 10,400 inmates in January 1933 to 195,648 inmates in April 1935, and at least 22,842 died while labouring on the project.[27] These unfree workers produced copious quantities of literature, music, poetry and reportage for internal camp consumption – some of it (e.g. love stories) seeming to suggest that prisoners found some scope for personal creative or emotional outlet, even in such coercive conditions. Apart from the above-mentioned volumes, their cultural output appeared in the *Biblioteka Perekovki* (Library of Re-forging), a series of booklets written by and for inmates.

In socialist time-space, canal workers were to be 'reforged', their former selves overcome; yet their work defined the Soviet present and future. Ruder uncovered figures of Gulag labourers in sculpture at the lower gates of Lock 1, and their NKVD personnel guards were represented in sculpture atop the towers at Lock 2. Even as inmates' cultural production filled largely hidden archives, their technical and physical contribution to socialist urbanity remained on open display. They are thus an unstated part of the stamps, pins, matchbook covers, cubs and other small trinkets and ephemera that commemorate the canal. Not unlike Stalin, whose bust lies hidden in the waters at the base of the canal, they are present, but unseen, and represent the ideological and social tension inherent to the project.

As shown in Catriona Kelly's *Socialist Churches*, socialist time-space was often overtly contested, something reflected in the Soviet Union's many-decade debate over the heritage status of cultic buildings. Particularly in the early Soviet period, and then again under Khrushchev, religious edifices stirred official ambivalence: they were too closely associated with the *byt*' that the regime (and Willimott's activists) sought to eradicate. They were therefore excluded from the socialist city as concept. Yet here, Kelly draws attention to churches' stubborn materiality, as well as to the resilience of parishioners who fought to retain these as active sites of worship. As Kelly's title asserts, these cultic buildings were, at least at some level, *socialist*.

For her study, Kelly takes us to Petersburg (also known as Petrograd [1914–24] and Leningrad [1924–91]). Kelly knows this city extremely well, for she recently published a masterful study of the memory of the more mundane aspects of life in Soviet Leningrad.[28] In *Socialist Churches*, however,

[26] Clark, *Moscow: The Fourth Rome,* 280–1, as cited in Ruder, *Building Stalinism*, 160.

[27] Cynthia A. Ruder, *Building Stalinism: The Moscow Canal and the Creation of Soviet Space* (London: IB Tauris, 2018), 71–2.

[28] Catriona Kelly, *St. Petersburg: Shadows of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kelly discusses spaces that were never truly mundane, though some were rather intimate – for instance, 'house churches', which were small chapels in the *interior* of official buildings, important symbols of the church-state partnership of the tsarist era. Something of the house church's invisibility ironically applies to regular churches, which – though occupying public space – generally failed to find serious representation in nineteenth-century literary representations of the Petersburg urban landscape. Their place as *local* as opposed to national heritage is thus unclear.

Kelly does a masterful job of unpacking how groups with competing concepts of faith, heritage and cultural value determined the vagaries of preservation as it pertained to cultic buildings. In Orthodoxy, materiality was and is not merely a representation of the sacred but a medium of it. However, preservationists – architects, planners, historians, artists and other heritage-related experts – valued cultic objects merely in cultural and artistic terms. Though many supported church parishes seeking to escape closure, they did so for pragmatic reasons: a church in use retained its integral nature – its vessels, icons and historic function – even if parish institutions too often fell short of professional standards with regard to heritage protection (failure in which was often an excuse for church closure by authorities). Preservationists also sought state support for their work – for preservation, museum creation and for protecting churches from rapacious looting by Soviet industry. In turn, these authorities tended to be hostile to parishioners and their buildings.

Not unlike Ruder, Kelly offers thorough, almost encyclopaedic detail, narrating dramatic shifts in preservation politics. She identifies a Petersburg tradition of preservation marked by careful attention to architectural 'ensembles' (*ansambli*). Their creation often involved *nadstroika*, or floor-adding, to harmonise rooflines, and the 'restoration' of architecture to a stated 'ideal date'. She discusses the 1935 concept of Petersburg as a 'museum city', providing important framing for the battle to preserve Petersburg's monuments in the Great Patriotic War.[29] Kelly outlines how the war prompted decrees protecting old Russian architecture, including kremlins, fortresses, monasteries, palaces, country estates, parks and gardens, and buildings (typically churches) with frescoes and wall paintings by recognised masters. Khrushchev prompted a wave of church closures, usually by appealing to health and safety or preservation regulations that parishes could not uphold. Brezhnev increased funding for preservation, though typically without allocating much money to care for religious edifices.

In all of this, churches were somehow always part of the socialist city, but of awkward and uncertain place. Some churches – or at least their contents – were readily embraced as heritage. Others found new importance only after the Second World War, and still others came to be valued only at the very end of the Soviet period, with the millennium celebration of the Christianisation of Rus'. Still, whether denigrated or cherished, churches remained – if not as active religious sites, then as museums, warehouses, libraries or some other repurposed space. They were part of the materiality of the socialist city – and also of religious practices and time-spaces meant to be outside of it, though stubbornly nestled within.

Taken together, the books discussed above highlight the tremendous variety of urban spaces under socialism: urban communes, the housing combine, low-rise homes, underdeveloped suburbs, microdistricts, the labour camp and the church or museum. Each provided a distinct context for socialist experience. This is what makes Mateusz Laszczkowski's *City of the Future*, an anthropological study, a complement to the history books above, for Laszczkowski examines how regional practices and identities are formed through engagement with urban materiality. Embracing Aihwa Ong's concept of 'worlding', he emphasises that people – and regimes – borrow models and ideas from a variety of places and times, without being a category of that borrowed.[30] In his view, place-making is inherently heterogeneous, with citizens' subjectivities representing an assemblage of reworked past, present and regional practices and identities, as formed through engagement with the urban landscape.

[29] Steven Maddox, *Saving Stalin's Imperial City: Historic Preservation in Leningrad, 1930–1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

[30] Aihwa Ong, 'Introduction: Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global', in Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, eds., *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell: 2011), 1–26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Laszczkowski's study focuses on the post-Soviet Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan, formerly also known as Akmolinsk, Tselinograd, Akmola and – at the time his book was published – Astana. He opens his study with a common joke about traveling to Nur-Sultan, now the showpiece of a modernising independent Kazakhstan: the bored traveller sees steppe, steppe, and then, with excitement, Nur-Sultan, and then – alas – more steppe. When told out of context, the joke does not necessarily evoke laughter; but the joke speaks to Nur-Sultan's urbanity – one that, like so many former Soviet cities, is marked by sudden arrival at a small urban oasis in an undeveloped hinterland, without suburbs. This steppe/urban contrast defines the city's built environment, being the context through which subjectivities are framed. Rural migrants to the capital wish to inhabit its modernity, identified since 1991 with 'New Astana', the part of the city hosting the Monument of the Kazakh Land and the Tree of Life. When these newcomers find themselves residing in the Soviet-era part of town, with its old buildings and rural quality, they perceive personal failure.

The Soviet-era part of town is still called Tselinograd. Nestled beside 'new Astana', it is filled with Soviet-style box-shaped concrete apartment blocks, which are interspersed with individual dwellings typical of rural areas. In this run-down contrast to new Astana's spectacular urbanity, one finds *tselinogradtsy,* the long-term inhabitants of this Soviet-era landscape, whose nostalgia, says Laszczkowski, has produced an 'alternative time-space of their collective belonging'.[31] Old Tselinograd evokes a rurality and 'spatial intimacy', which Laszczkowski defines as shared community, built around the recognition of how a 'rural outlook' and materiality is somehow proper to inhabitants of this portion of the city. Though somewhat self-denigrating, this self-understanding does not translate into the embrace of actual rural Kazakh newcomers, seen as uncouth outsiders.

At first glance, the work might seem an inversion of Jeff Sahadeo's study of late Soviet migration from the Soviet periphery to Moscow and Leningrad: in that study, Soviet migration, fostered by the rhetoric of friendship of peoples, offered a sense of late Soviet dynamism and belonging.[32] Tselinograd was formed through Soviet-era migration in the opposite direction, to the periphery to cultivate virgin lands (*tselina*). Today, Nur-Sultan as place appropriates this Soviet modernisation project for the Kazakh people. But Laszczkowski's Tselinograd identity is nostalgic, refusing to engage this Kazakh modernity. In the study, the most dynamic place-making occurs through 'Encounter', a situational game that builds on the distinctly Soviet humour of *stiob*, or production of the ironic and bizarre. The game invites participants to stage unexpected events in public spaces, thereby upsetting conventional expectations of place and behaviour. As with the study as a whole, it emphasises how modernising narratives can be disrupted by differing spatial contexts, memories and experiences.

Together, these six books link socialist urbanity to local, national/regional and global experiences. Crawford shows us a spatial project bound to global and local experimentation, not just socialist theory and governance. Willimott's activists pursued a socialist *byt'* that, for a time, seemed to require the abolition of family life, a concept that Stalin rendered obsolete. Yet urban communes reappeared in the Khrushchev period, when Stalin's tall buildings and canals, a part of the 1930s moment of global monumentality, were themselves condemned. These tall buildings had exiled Muscovites to the margins. Along with parishioners, Cheremushki residents and Gulag inmates inhabited times and spaces that were officially outside of socialism yet essential to its production. Together, these six studies remind us that Soviet socialist urbanity was an interlocutor of capitalism, not its antithesis, and a loose model or praxis rather than a bounded 'thing'. Socialist linearity was pure myth, urban models that were dismissed never disappeared, and lived socialism – the world of material and temporal spaces and practices – remained complex and diverse.

[31] Mateusz Laszczkowski, *'City of the Future': Built Space, Modernity and Urban Change in Astana* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 230.

[32] Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

Cite this article: DeHaan HD (2022). Framing the Socialist City as Practice. *Contemporary European History* **31**, 469–477. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000734 Published online by Cambridge University Press