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Essay

‘Molodoi Chelovek, my origins lie in the past, but I am from the future’

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My enduring interest in the relationship between socialist politics and architecture began in 1977. The airwaves throbbed with industrial beats, deep recession loomed and neo-liberal ideology was gathering strength. Bonfires that warned of invasion were lit on the hills and sirens wailed of impending social disintegration. Unease pervaded the land and a distrust of grand historical narratives had spawned the dread vocabulary of post modernism. It was in the midst of all this that I stumbled across the spectacular world of the Russian *avant-garde* in a book simply entitled, *Building in the USSR 1917–32*.[1] Published in the early 1970s before the *avant-garde* began to bask in the limelight of western adoration and only a few years after the Kruschev thaw, it revealed to me what was then a lost world. For the first time I read the exotic names that over the years would become so familiar—Melnikov, Golosov, Ladovsky, Leonidov, Ginzburg, Gan. The photographs and drawings were poorly reproduced but clear enough. Their world was hard lined, crisply engineered, uncompromising and visionary. I encountered Mayakovsky who spoke of how the streets were our brushes, and the squares our palettes, read El Lissitsky’s *An Architecture for World Revolution*, and was mesmerised by the proletarian conductor standing on a rooftop directing an orchestra of factory hooters.[2] The touch paper had been lit.

A couple of years later, in 1984, I made my inaugural trip to Russia. Even if the USSR was best described as State Capitalist or at best a Degenerated Workers State, I had to see for myself.[3] I was convinced that if I searched hard enough, I would find traces of a revolutionary culture that had survived in a city that after all boasted a metro system emblazoned with the names Barricade, Kropotkin and Prospect Marx. For the first time I gazed in astonishment at the Club Russakova that I imagined landing like a spaceship as if it had stepped out of the pages of Bogdanov’s utopian novel *Red Star* and stood awestruck, cap in hand, in front of the disintegrating Dom Narkomfina. [4]

I tramped Moscow on and off for over twenty years. I looked under flagstones, in the lift shafts of thirty-storey tower blocks, and in the mosaiced scenes of hero workers adorning the ceilings of the metro. I documented the remnants of the *avant-garde*, watched SS20 missiles trundle past the monumental buildings of Stalin’s city and meticulously scanned the five-year plans wondering what a trillion cubic metres of concrete would look like. I hunted for clues in the satirical pages of Bulgakov, in Yuri Gagarin’s eyes that stared down from the dome of the space pavilion and between the highly charged covers of *SA* and *Stroitel,* the architects’ and construction workers’ revolutionary magazines.[5] I forensically examined the poetic camera angles of Vertov and Dovzhenko, and bathed in the philosophical beauty of Paradjanov and Tarkovsky. Such was my obsession that for a

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while I wore a red and black chevron tunic, smoked Belomorkanal and sang Polyushka-Polye in a Komsomol outfit. By the mid 1990s I probably knew the city better than any other. And so I drank the *avant-garde* until it came out of my nose and inflicted my mania on students. I even ran my design studio in Glasgow according to the Constructivist working method: 'Remember Comrade students, that when you begin to draw, form in a progressive socialist society is an unknown X that always emerges anew from the particular social and technological pre-conditions of the brief.'[6] Forward march …

I no longer fetishise the *avant-garde* as I once did, which is not to say that it has lost its importance. It remains one of the most important and vital chapters in the history of attempts to forge an alternative to the capitalist city. More generally, it seems to me now as it did thirty years ago that all the crucial questions about the relationship between architecture, social freedom and individual liberty, politics and culture, were played out in 1920s and 1930s Russia with an intensity that was unique. This is reason enough to continue to think about the Soviet experiment. All other urban revolutions up to that point had never progressed beyond the process of defence and negation, such as tearing down symbols of oppression, constructing barricades, torching palaces and appropriating strategically important institutions.

The first decade after the revolution however was different. The socialisation of land and building production, and the introduction of workers' control in all large construction and design organisations, were unprecedented in political history. Delegates at the founding OSA Congress in 1928 pledged that it was the architects' duty 'to work together with the proletariat to build a new existence, and to find architectural forms that would most closely correspond to the social tasks set by the revolution.'[7] For the first time in history architects had the real opportunity to develop a comprehensive socialist programme for architecture and urban development. Imagine then, if you can, an architect's office where the air is thick with conversations about the emancipation of women in the home, the development of new building typologies suited to a post-capitalist society and the design of infrastructural networks to redistribute resources on an equal basis to all areas of the planet.

From *The Memoirs Of The Dom Narkomfin*

The snowy stillness was interrupted by the tramp of a strange visitor whose behaviour and body language resembled that of a devotional pilgrim who having crawled over hostile swamp, desert and mountain range finally arrives at the sacred. He had a transcendent smile and despite the cold sweats clicked away at the speed of an automatic weapon. Close ups of crumbling render, cracked brickwork and rusting steel; panoramic shots that captured the entirety of my dilapidation. It was eleven o'clock in the morning and the war veteran arrived at his bench in the small park wearing a dull green jacket, his left breast weighed down with medals. Normally he gazed through me into the distance but on this particular day he watched the curious figure who in pursuit of the perfect camera angle had begun to twist and turn like a Siberian shaman.

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Molodoi Chelovek, why are you taking photographs of this bomb damage?

Gospodin, this isn't bomb damage, gracious no, not at all, nothing could be further from the truth, an example of unfortunate neglect most certainly, yes, but this, well, this is one of the most important ideas of the twentieth century. It is a commune of a transitional kind.

The veteran wanted to laugh, but there was clearly something very odd and unfortunate about the stranger.

If you will permit me to explain sir. This building in front of you was intended as an incubator of a new way of life that over time would liberate the Soviet citizen from antiquated gender relations and bourgeois domesticity.

The veteran began to feel a little disturbed. The strange expressions were definitely in Russian but utterly incomprehensible. Undeterred by the old man's visible alarm, Molodoi Chelovek continued.

Imagine sir, washing clothes, rearing children, cooking, eating, reading and playing, all of it, collectivised in a startling modern building that hums with the electricity that is produced naturally by an emancipated proletarian.

The bewildered veteran didn't cross himself because he was from a generation that whole-heartedly denounced god, and this wasn't the first youth he'd met under the influence of capitalist drugs. With his profound atheism under spectral attack he scurried towards the metro, shaking his head in furious incomprehension, warning a group of old women selling gherkins and wooly socks that there was a madman on the loose and a foreign one at that. His confusion was understandable and not so much because he lived in an overcrowded communal flat that constantly smelt of boiling potatoes and damp clothes, or because the apparition undermined the rules of historical and dialectical materialism, but because the claims of Molodoi Chelovek seemed so utterly absurd they bordered on the surreal.

The truth of the matter, however, is that such occurrences are not unheard of in a city that excels in the bizarre and mythological. After all this is a city in which mongrel dogs swear at aristocrats, black cats strut the alleys in the company of the devil and whole streets in defiance of the laws of geo-technics are rolled back to accommodate runways. It is a city that was burnt to the ground by its inhabitants, destroys its monuments and pretends they were never there, and boasts tales like that retold by many late-night revellers of when a brigade of ghost building labourers appeared out of the tunnel at Metro Mayakovsky mournfully singing the great poet's suicide note.

In other words, whilst undoubtedly odd, the mad excitement of Molodoi Chelovek was not so unusual. Strange though it might seem, he saw in me evidence that another world exists. I was a window, or perhaps an umbilical cord that connected him to the five-thousand-year history of communes. In this sense he was like a forensic scientist or some kind of detective, sifting through the ruins of history for concrete proof that utopia is not a fiction.

*

In recent years I have had a constant stream of visitors, almost all of them from the western lands.

I would have liked to help Molodoi Chelovek and his ilk, but I never quite understood what they hoped to find in me. A blueprint? Instructions on how to build a new world? It was more than a little peculiar. Most Russians thought them certifiable. Back in the 1980s there was little desire for communes. Neither was there much talk about the common ownership of land, workers' committees in factories or green Sotsgorods.[8] Now that vengeful priests have returned brandishing hot irons and the former professor of historical materialism sells flowers outside the metro for a slice of black bread, such talk makes even less sense. In truth my irrelevance steadily grew, year after year, and in inverse proportion to the speed at which the city was transformed. I was banished under Stalin's monumental reconstruction, ignored in the drive to industrialise everything and am fading to the point of complete insignificance under the cloud-bursting kitsch of international business centres and penthouse flats. This said, I am aware of my historical importance. When all is said and done, I was, and perhaps still am, a memory of the future whose DNA stretches back thousands of years.

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In Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What is To Be Done?* a character called Vera gazes at an idyllic panorama in the midst of which sits an assemblage of iron, crystal, aluminium and electric light.[9] She has never seen anything like it before. It is not a cathedral, nor an aristocratic mansion. It is a palace for the people, a commune in which machines do most of the work and the inhabitants live in harmony with each other and nature. Vera is, of course, looking at just one of the many ancestors who inhabit my genealogical tree, the roots of which, like the fabled Banyan, stretch back to the origins of time and space. In the depths of his trance-like state Molodoi Chelovek time travels. He detects the traces of the communes of prehistory, of Thomas More's *Aircastle,* Fourier's militarised love paradise and Robert Owen's experiment in social welfare.[10] As he peers through the cracked yellowed glass he uncovers the outlines of the first experiments in public housing, and as he crumbles the rubble that has fallen from the roof he is convinced that he can feel the pulse of the Paris Commune, when workers draped the aisles in red crimson and transformed the house of god into a workers' club.

But Molodoi Chelovek is not as deranged as the muttering onlookers think, for I, The Commune of a Transitional Kind, along with my siblings, the Palace of Proletarian Culture and The House of Communism, were shaped by these incendiary histories. Our authors didn't think of us as mere buildings, we were far more than that. We were space ships, bio-chemical laboratories and psychological testing grounds. We weren't just there to provide shelter from Moscow's bitter winters and sweltering summers, we were living proof that a building could embody some higher and universal purpose. Even if it could not change human nature, then it could at least transform social behaviour and attitudes as part of the transition to the *Novie Byt*.[11] In cosmic tones the Commissars of the Soviet Enlightenment proclaimed that social progress and the democratic restructuring of everyday life could

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be planned objectively and scientifically. Not only that, but now that science and technology had been wrenched from capital and placed in the service of the people, there was no limit to what the revolution could achieve. Reversing the flow of rivers, carving canals through inhospitable tundra and planning the colonisation of Mars were all in the realms of possibility. Science could diagnose the mysteries of the body, explain the progress of history, tame wild nature, organise economic development and liberate architecture from the evils of subjectivism and formalism. Based on a materialist analysis of the task in hand, Soviet Architecture would eradicate the memory of watery soup, priestly damnation and choleric basements, and build in its place a city inhabited by strong, noble proletarians clutching electric dynamos, welding irons and set squares.

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Intoxicated by their unbridled optimism for what the future had to bring, architects took the revolution at face value and assumed that the class struggle had been successfully completed. Novelists on the other hand were far more sceptical about the course of events and suspicious of the blind faith placed in the innocent march of science and technology.[12] The future lay not in the dreams of maverick philosophers, abstract painters and experimental theatre directors. It resided in the calloused hands of architect mathematicians and engineers who daily laboured in the corridors of the state building committee Stroikom drawing up plans to rebuild the city on sound scientific and objective principles. In a great hangar of inconceivable dimensions, the engineer D503 constructed the Integral, a crystal ship of spinning globes and cantilevers that resembled a mechanical fusion of the towers of Babel and Tatlin. It was a miracle of the scientific imagination that according to D503 would solve the riddle of the universe and liberate humanity from need. The irony of this story and the next was not lost on me. In a nearby park, another engineer, Ivan, unveiled the magnificent Ophelia. It was a peculiar choice of name, for his creation bore no resemblance to a dead woman floating in a stream. Far from it. To the astonishment of his friends he had worked tirelessly to construct a machine to end all machines, a machine that would possess such immense mechanical power that if unleashed on the world would make all other technologies redundant and free humanity from the burden of heavy labour. Unfortunately, Ophelia had other plans and as she was switched on for the first time unleashed a large gleaming needle with which she skewered her maker to the wall.

Equally disturbing was the tale I heard a little while later, a tale that shook me to my foundations and predicted the coming of a time when the struggle for truth would be replaced by the systematic organisation of mass deception and the solidity of concrete by atomic dust. Determined to succeed where others had failed, a third engineer, comrade Prushevsky, sketched out a plan for the greatest social condenser in history, an indestructible 'All Proletarian Home'.[13] This was no ordinary work of architecture, it was Mother Russia's caress, a Van de Graf Generator, a Theremin and a Garden of

Eden, all rolled into a single edifice that would guarantee the peace and stability of the future, and provide sanctuary for the planet's entire working-class population. It also was to end in tragedy. In his mind Prushevsky had imagined some peaceful white building that shone with more light than there was air around it, an architecture of faith and freedom, of peace, colour and beauty. But Prushevsky knew in his heart that he must have imagined life on some remote star since despite all his efforts and calculations, as they began to dig the foundation pit, it suddenly expanded beyond measurement and was transformed into a dark bottomless abyss. To his horror he realised that he hadn't laid the foundation of the future but the opposite, its graveyard.

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By the early 1930s my great revolutionary adventure was all but over. The ideological warriors of proletarian classicism and revolutionary romanticism sharpened their pencils and I was put on trial. On building sites the popular 'production way of life communes' were declared an ideological error, egalitarianism was dismissed as a petty bourgeois deviation and as the leaden tones of '*ideanost*, *partinost* and *narodnost*' thudded from the podium, the presiding judge donned a black cap and announced my death sentence.[14] There was to be no more talk of dis-urbanism, social condensers and the collective reorganisation of domestic life.[15] In an absolutist state devoted to the reproduction of myth, critical experiments of any kind, be it on celluloid, text or image, had become highly dangerous activities. Even a former revolutionary hero like my friend the filmmaker Dovzhenko was labelled an enemy of the people and his masterpiece, *Earth,* 'A counter-revolutionary obscenity.'[16] *Avant-garde* writers begged forgiveness or fled into exile with their experimental prose. Some, like the master of modernist literature, Andrei Bely, had already been banished and described as a corpse for the unforgiveable misdemeanour of failing to write stories about proletarians seizing the post office and Putilov Iron works.[17]

The same fate awaited the explosive space-time geometries of the painters whose abstract realism bled away into a triptych of golden swaying corn and glistening tractors. As for myself, I knew that I would soon be crushed. Out of the distant fog I saw an army of singing Stakhanovite masons and architects, amongst them former comrades who through fear or ambivalence had dispensed with black squares and red triangles and taken up the barbed cudgels of monumental neo-classicism. From thereon, Soviet architecture would no longer be defined by progressive social programmes and formal experimentation, but by patriotic slogans, hero cults and the assimilation of the past. It was left to Kaganovich to carry out the arrests and announce to the assembled masses at the grand opening of the Metro, that the future lay in marble columns, that overnight by some miraculous trick had become Soviet and Socialist.

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Before they had fully woken up to the tragedy unfolding around them, the *avant-garde* had been

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packed on trains to provincial polytechnics as model makers, filing clerks and lumberjacks. From the platform the officer from the Ministry of the Interior waved good riddance but not before he had thanked them for demonstrating how the merging of art and politics could be such a powerful weapon in the battle to capture hearts and minds.[18] I feared for my life, and then one spring morning in 1935 I awoke to a tumultuous sound that signalled the end of one history and the dawn of another. The golden cupola of the cathedral of Christ the Saviour had been rent by sticks of dynamite and a deathly crack had split the church from top to bottom. The assembled audience of the Party faithful applauded and cheered in unison. The centre of Moscow shook, my fragile metal windows rattled, plumes of smoke rose into the heavens as the thunder rolled over the ground and 'vanished in a silence like the end of the world'.[19]

In its place they planned to construct Boris Iofan's monstrous Palace of the Soviets. Overnight my dream of a kinetic tower of transparent platonic volumes that vibrated with the voices of liberty and freedom was destroyed. For when stripped of its decorative tiers and kitsch caryatids, the true nature of the Palace was revealed. It was a tombstone, a violent betrayal of the democratic aspirations of the revolution and the naked embodiment of a political State unbounded by moral convention.[20] As it happened unrobed and beardless priests cursed the site and it was never built. Instead they dug a heated circular open-air swimming pool where Molodoi Chelovek would swim in the midst of dense winter steam with an insulated cap and a floating tray of vodka trying to imagine that the pool hid a spinning motor that would lift it like Krutikov's flying city into orbit. What Molodoi Chelovek could never have imagined back then, was how, twenty years later, in a masterpiece of tragedy and farce, Moscow Council rebuilt the Cathedral and scrubbed the city clean of hammers and sickles as if seventy years of Soviet history had been no more than an hallucination.

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It was shortly after the explosion that I dreamt of escaping. The next day's headline story in *Pravda* read:

> Extraordinary event at number 25 Ulitsa Chaikovskovo. Comrades might have already visited the startling and now discredited modern housing commune; if you haven't then it is too late. Sometime during the night the building wrenched itself off its foundations and according to witnesses walked unsteadily down the Sadovoi Koltso boulevard before breaking into a run. Accelerating to a quite unseemly velocity it sprinted past the Soviet border with Poland and appears to be heading in the direction of Berlin. Readers might recall a similar thing happened a few years back as reported by Comrade Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky who on a consciousness-raising mission to Paris witnessed the Eiffel tower, the monument to the 1789 revolution pull up its legs and head out of the French capital. By all accounts it was so enamored with stories it had heard of our glorious revolution that it decided to find a new home in Moscow. Hounded by French secret agents across Europe, it got lost in the Alps and was sub-

sequently found in pieces in Lake Constance. It is to be hoped that a similar fate does not await the Dom Narkomfina and it will see sense and return to its rightful position as an important example of how not to build.

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In the aftermath of the war, Moscow was transformed into an architectural victory parade; Chicago skyscrapers merged with French Chateaus, the proportional systems of ancient Rome and the fairy castles of central Europe. In less than a decade the skyline of the city was transformed by seven towers, one of which, a twenty-two storey housing block, placed me permanently in shadow. But against all the odds I survived, or rather, what is more to the point, was simply ignored. The truth of the matter is that the history of Moscow is not to be found in my ruins, or in the boulevards of the triumphant victorious city, but in the humble concrete panel. In 1955, a year after the ceremonial completion of my neighbouring architectural nemesis, the era of the hero building was brought to an end. With fanfares blaring and banners waving, the pages of *Arkhitektura CCCP* relayed the Central Committee's decision to fully industrialise building production with immediate effect. Once again, the tectonic plates of the nation's architecture shifted.

It was in the aftermath of this epoch-defining moment that I was quite unexpectedly reborn in the plans for Novie Cheremushki and the House of an Experimental Kind. Lured into a false sense of optimism, architects armed with concrete blocks and cranes tried to massage the corpse of the *avant-garde* back to life with drawings that reverberated with the spirit of the commune. But they were exceptions to the overwhelming logic of industrialisation. In cavernous offices two thousand architects churned out details for a million new flats and in the adjoining factory two million cadre prefabricated concrete panels in such vast numbers that joined end to end they stretched out beyond the edge of the solar system. The only thing that really mattered was the fulfillment of the plan target. And as for the social condenser, it was no more than a fiction from a parallel universe. This was the way things stood in 1988. A few years later Gorky Street was renamed Tverskaya and Moscow descended into a perverse carnival of gangster capitalism.

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Today the trees of the small park in front of me are skeletal. The war veteran no longer comes. He died of a stroke after the coup in 1991 when they replaced the hammer and sickle on top of the White House with a Tsarist eagle. Recently and quite unexpectedly, Molodoi Chelovek paid a visit. He was older and had lost his hair as I have lost most of my render. He looked sad, maybe disillusioned. I think he was saying farewell. The American Embassy official, oblivious of my presence, hangs out the window for a smoke and stares over the roof terrace. It's a different story with the property man. He has returned with a potential investor and furiously points in my direction. He has plans. I am an ugly mess of brick and concrete and should be demolished to make way for a casino. But there are also rumours that I might become a world heri-

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tage site. I rather despair at the idea. I think I should be left to disintegrate and be interred in the broken ground with all the other revolutionary ideas from an epoch now considered deranged and best forgotten. After all the Museum of the Revolution is now housed in a rusting shed with a broken entrance sign that reads: 'Here lies the Museum of Recent History.'

Notes and references

1. Oleg Shvidovsky, *Building in The USSR* (London, 1971). It was not until the early 1980s, with the publication of the work of Catherine Cooke, Anatole Kopp and Khan Magomedov, that a true picture of the depth and breadth of the early Soviet experiment began to emerge in English. See, for example: Catherine Cooke, ed., *Russian Avant Garde Art and Architecture* (London, Academy Editions and Architectural Design, 1983); Anatole Kopp, *Constructivist Architecture* (London, Academy, 1985); Selim Khan Magomedov, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1987). In addition, the English version of Mosei Ginsburg's *Style and Epoch* was published in 1982. Since then the Soviet *Avant Garde* has become big business and nowadays there is a virtual library of texts that trawl its history with monographs on most of the key artists and architects and even facsimile reprints of the Constructivist magazine, *SA*: *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*.
2. El Lissitsky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution* (London, Lund Humphries, 1970). It was originally published in 1930 not long before the attacks on the *avant-garde* began to gather pace.
3. I used to play a game with students where I asked them to name the most important event of the twentieth century. The moon landing, the invention of the television, the holocaust, the Internet, nuclear fusion and so on. They were just some of the more obvious responses. Mine was perhaps just as predictable. 'It was the Russian Revolution.' What is certainly true is that for most of the twentieth century you could understand an individual's politics by how they characterised the USSR. For those on the right of the political spectrum it was simple enough. It was evil because it was Communist, and vice versa, it was Communist and therefore evil. For those on the left it was the subject of intense debate and many of the internecine battles that continued throughout the twentieth century can be traced back to the disagreements that took place in the 1920s between anarchists, libertarians, the Workers' Opposition, the followers of Trotsky and the supporters of what had become by the end of the 1920s the Stalinist General line. As late as the 1970s and 80s the battles continued unabated. Did the Law of Value operate in the Soviet Union? Was the bureaucracy essentially a new ruling class? To what extent was the labour process in a Soviet car factory different from that in Detroit? And what about 1956 and 1968? On one side were the Moscow-aligned Communist Parties who went along with whatever Moscow said and therefore maintained that it was either a proto-communist state, a developed socialist one or whatever else the Politburo decided, as leaders came and went. In contrast the line of the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International was unequivocal. The Soviet Union was State Capitalist. See, for instance, Tony Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (London, Bookmarks, 1988) and Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR*, Volumes I and II (London, Harvester Press, 1976). Ironically this was also the conclusion reached by the anarchists who as early as 1921 had described the USSR as the USCR, the Union of State Capitalist Republics. See, for example, Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (New York, Free Life Editions, 1974). One interesting

set of observations from inside the Soviet Union on the emergence of a 'stateocracy' was provided as late as 1989: see Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Thinking Reed* (London, Verso, 1989).

4. Alexander Bogdanov, *Red Star—The first Bolshevik Utopia* (Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1984). This is just one of a plethora of science fiction scripts that emerged in the first years of the Soviet Union. The historian Richard Stites estimates that in the first decade after the revolution there were anything up to two hundred works of science fiction in a whole number of forms: novels, short stories, poems, plays and fims: Richard Stites, *Revolutionary dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989)
5. The space pavilion was located in the highly decorative 'Park of Economic Achievements' in the North of Moscow. In a weird way I always liked to think of the Park as the Soviet equivalent of Disneyland, with its array of buildings devoted to various branches of industry, and the economic and technological progress of the fifteen Republics. Both the journals mentioned were relatively short-lived. *Stroitel* ['Builder'] was set up almost immediately after the revolution and published articles on such things as the role of Trade Unions, the problematic introduction of scientific management (a Soviet version of Taylorism orchestrated by Gastev), strike breakers and the alarm amongst building workers at how old contractors were being given jobs in the new State Building Department. By the mid 1920s it had been replaced by *Stroitelenaya Promishlenost*, a journal that contained no critical articles and only dealt with questions of a technical nature pertaining to building construction. The famous *SA* was also relatively short-lived and ran from 1926 to 1930. It was the showcase for modern architecture and in particular for the work of the Constructivists. It too was replaced by the journal *Arkhitektura CCCP* that continued to be published almost uninterrupted till 1989.
6. *Constructivism as a method of laboratory and teaching work* was originally published in *SA* in 1927. It was translated and reprinted by Catherine Cooke in her volume *Russian Avant-Garde, Theories of Art, Architecture and the City* (London, St Martins Press, 1995)
7. This is a resumé (my translation) from the conclusion of Mosei Ginzburg's report on the First Conference of Modern Architecture in which he laid out in detail the principles of Constructivism and how it differed from western functionalism: *SA*, *5* (1928), pp. 143–145.
8. The 'Sotsgorod' was one of many urban ideas that sprang up in the aftermath of the revolution as the quest began to find an urban form that would reconcile town and country and transcend the contradictions of the capitalist city. In many ways a giant social condenser, one of the better-known schemes was the Vesnin brothers' neighbourhood block design. Other variations included Ilya Golosov's linear block and Milnius and Ginzburg's plan for a decentralised linear settlement for Magnitogorsk that incorporated ideas from the dis-urbanist theories of Sabsovich and Okhitovich. The latter was murdered along with Aleksei Gan in the late 1930s. The full array of ideas for the future of the Soviet city is illustrated in Selim Khan Magomedov's *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture*, *op cit*.
9. Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What is to be Done*? (New York, Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 370. Many writers in the middle of the nineteenth century were intrigued, bemused and in some cases unimpressed by the Crystal Palace on Sydenham Hill to which Chernyshevsky is referring. For a famous critique see Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (London, Bristol Classical Press,1993), p. 25.
10. Over many years I have traced the origins of utopias and dystopias in both literary writings and architectural

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projects. An attempt to build a bridge between the two in semi-fictional form can be found in my essay *Scares and Squares II: A literary journey into the architectural imaginary*: see J. Charley, *Memories of Cities: Trips and Manifestoes* (London, Ashgate, 2012).

11. From the very beginning of the revolutionary project there was a conviction that daily life should be fundamentally and qualitatively different from that in the capitalist west. Workers' power and the emancipation of women were fundamental to that vision, and probably the most famous concept that captured such sentiments was what became known as the *Novy Byt*, literally 'new way of life'. It was an idea that finds a parallel in Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (London, Verso, 1991) first published in 1947, in which he famously declared that people 'do not fight and die for tons, or for tanks and atomic bombs. They aspire to be happy, not to produce.' (pp. 48–49).
12. At the top of my list of texts that satirise the idea of technological and social progress would be: Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (London, Penguin, 1993) and his essay collection *Soviet Heretic* (London, Quartet Books, 1991); Yuri Olesha's, *Envy* (New York Review of Books, 2004 [1927]); the Czech writer Karl Capek's *The Absolute at Large* (Nebraska, Bison Books, 2005). There are later Soviet works that also touch on similar themes, such as the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside Picnic*, and a number of short stories, in a collection edited by Mirra Ginsburg, *The Ultimate Threshold: A collection of the finest in Soviet Science Fiction* (London, Penguin, 1978). Of course no list would be complete without Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (London, Penguin Classics, 1997) and *Heart of the Dog* (London, Penguin Books, Vintage Classics, 2009), that remain to this day unsurpassed.
13. Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit* (London, Penguin Books, Vintage Classics, 2009). For a longer analysis of this work and that of Zamyatin and Bely, see J. Charley, *The (Dis) Integrating City: The Russian Architectural and Literary Avant-Garde*, in *Memories of Cities*, *op cit*.
14. After the formal amalgamation of all cultural organisations in 1933 that marked the launch of 'socialist realism', the terms '*ideanost*, *partinost* and *narodnost*' were the organising categories by which works of art, architecture and more generally cultural production would be judged. As such, all artistic work was required to be imbued with 'ideological content, Party spirit, and national character.'
15. As mentioned above, one interpretation of what communism might mean in terms of the reconstruction of everyday life found its expression in the *Novy Byt*. However, in the years immediately after the revolution there was an outbreak of 'spontaneous communism'. At one end of the spectrum were young anarchists and libertarians who 'squatted' in the homes of former aristocrats and collectivised the organisation of daily life. At the other end were the 'production way of life communes' that were popular amongst building and other workers in which wages would be shared equally and decisions made collectively.
16. One of the most extraordinary stories of cultural revolution and counter revolution can be found in the memoirs of Herbert Marshall, an Englishman who studied film in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s, and was a personal friend of Pudovkin, Vertov, Eisenstein and Dovshenko. The quotation is from his book: *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (London, Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1983).
17. Trotsky was highly critical of the *avant-garde* and of formalism, but saved his venom in particular for Bely: see Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 55.
18. Although it was Walter Benjamin who famously coined the phrase 'the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life', it is one of the great

contradictions of the *avant-garde* that it showed with such clarity just how powerful the aestheticisation of politics could be, albeit in a qualitatively different historical situation: see Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, Schocken Books, 1968), p. 241.

19. This is a quotation from Victor Serge's wonderful *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* (New York Review of Books, 2004).
20. One of the early essays I wrote about Soviet Architecture was on the Stalinist reconstruction of the Moscow, in which I redefined 'socialist realism' as the 'realism of social deception': see J. Charley, *The dialectic of the built environment: the making of an imperial city*, *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (London, E &F N Spon/Chapman and Hall, 1996).