The Landscape of Stalinism

THE ART AND IDEOLOGY OF SOVIET SPACE

Edited by **EVGENY DOBRENKO** and **ERIC NAIMAN**

Studies in Modernity and National Identity

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Within the text we have used the transliteration system of the Library of Congress, but have altered it slightly to render names familiar to or at least less unpronounceable for readers unfamiliar with Russian. In the notes we adhere strictly to the Library of Congress system when citing Russian sources.

Introduction

ERIC NAIMAN

While supervising an inexperienced pilot on a military training flight, a taciturn, self-sacrificing hero suddenly loses his eyesight in E. Pentslin's 1939 film *The Destroyers* (Istrebiteli). Without indicating that anything is amiss, he instructs his young charge in the procedures necessary for a successful landing. When the fledgling pilot jumps down from the front seat and protests that he was inadequately prepared, the hero gazes blankly in front of him and says quietly: "Give me your hand, Yasha, it seems that I've gone blind."[1]

This moment from an undistinguished film (thus rather typical for its time and place) might be "read" in several ways, but I have selected it to open this collection of essays because it seems to me emblematic of the plight of Soviet citizens who sought to make their way through the social and discursive space of Stalinist culture. Survival and success depended on one's skills in ideological navigation, on being able to make one's way through a world that existed on the plane of representation and imagination, a plane that exerted a kind of asymptotic and symptomatic pressure on the surface of everyday life. The provincial hero of Andrei Platonov's 1936 story "Among Animals and Plants" is initially perplexed, even stunned, by the lack of fit between ideological discourse and the emotionally barren landscape that surrounds him.[2] He is traumatized by the inaccessibility of the ideological world, irritated "that he didn't know science, that he didn't travel in trains with electricity, that he hadn't seen Lenin's mausoleum and that he had only once sniffed perfume, from a bottle that belonged to the wife of the director of section number ten." This sense of ontological impotence ends when he finally gains access to the world of record players and female parachutists by staging his own heroic event—the prevention of a railway accident. The result is not a lapse into psychotic fantasy but an invitation to Moscow and a dramatic shift of his own "reality" into closer proximity with the utopia that he has been strug-

gling to see and hear all around him. Physically crippled as a result of his exploit, he has learned to function in another landscape, one that can be accessed by a kind of productive, imaginative vision born of a frequently intoxicating and often terrifying blindness.

The numerous maimings of Stalinist heroes in literature and art have led Igor Smirnov and Lilya Kaganovsky each to speak of the importance of masochism and symbolic filial castration in narratives that prioritize the potency of Stalin, the "Father of Peoples."[3] But one might claim that this loss is compensated for by a new, symbolic empowerment, an empowerment informed by a sense of historical development, a sense of steering through the virtual landscape of the future by projecting it onto the topography of the present. Marxism had long insisted on the priority of historically informed vision; Feuerbach's problem, Marx alleged, was that when he looked at the landscape in Manchester or Rome, he saw only what was in front of him, not the historical process of which that landscape was a part.[4] Soon after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Soviet theoreticians began cautioning Party members and sympathizers against looking at the world "with an unarmed eye."[5] The arming of the eye involved learning to see "dialectically" or, to put it another way, to see in accordance with the discursive curves of the Party's General Line. Essentially, this learning was a kind of epistemological training flight, one ending in ideological competence, disciplined blindness, and heightened vision.

Stalinist culture and Soviet ideology are often—and quite rightly—regarded as verbal phenomena. Stalin himself highlighted the primacy of speech in his own speeches; to a significant extent, his most important "works" were all metadiscursive: "Everyone is *talking* about the successes of Soviet power in the area of the kolkhoz movement. . . . What does this all *say?*"[6] For Stalin, events were primarily discursive and metadiscursive, often to a dizzying degree: "Remember the latest events in our Party. Remember the latest *slogans,* which the Party has put forward lately in connection with the new class shifts in our country. I am *speaking* about *slogans,* such as the *slogan* of self-*criticism,* the *slogan* of heightened struggle with bureaucracy and the purge of the Soviet apparatus, the *slogan* of organization, etc."[7] In Stalin's indictment of him, Bukharin's chief fault in 1928 was his failure to grasp the Party's slogans. As recently published diaries from the period reveal, the struggle for success in Stalin's Russia was in many respects akin to an effort to master a new language. Lately, historians have begun to embrace a methodological "linguistic turn" in an effort better to

understand the truth (or is it "truth"?) of the Stalinist epoch.[8] The contributors to this collection do not disparage the importance of language to an understanding of Stalinist culture. They embrace the concept of discourse but focus upon that concept's spatial dimension.

What was the importance of space to the discourse of Stalinist ideology? How did one have to focus *vision* on ideological figures in order to move vigorously through Stalinist society? In approaching the importance of this category to the shaping of the Stalinist subject, we must understand space as discourse in three dimensions, discourse through which the subject *moves.* One might define ideological space as language (broadly conceived) that seeks to transform life on a poster into life on the skin. But instead of bringing a poster to life, discourse can transform life into a poster, producing subjects all too aware of the ideological inadequacy of sham three-dimensionality.

We can profitably study Soviet culture of the 1930s from any of three directions. The first approach strives for dispassionate, archaeological distance, looking at the material remnants of the 1930s or, where space is concerned, the physical transformation of the earth. From this point of view, by "straining away the mountains of verbiage," we might discover that the landscape of Stalinism was not radically different from the landscapes of other rapidly industrializing empires.[9] A second approach explores the experience of Soviet citizens as they climbed that mountain of verbiage, as they coped with material deprivation and a sense of ideological inadequacy (the inadequacy of ideology or the inadequacy of their sense of self).[10] A third approach, employed by the contributors to this book, focuses less on the consumption of ideology than on its production. The essays in this collection are studies of ideological poetics that deal with various components of a particular ideological "trick"—the shading of discourse, the projection of rhetoric, the drawing of lines simulating motion. They deal with ideology's attempt to climb into another dimension and transcend the distinction between landscape and space. The volume concerns itself with quotation marks that offer themselves as eyeglasses. Perhaps this is not a particularly eloquent image, but it captures the extent to which the essential experiential figure provided to Stalinist subjects was the mixed metaphor.

In the late 1930s, Mikhail Bakhtin formulated the theory of the "chronotope," a notion that insisted on the appropriateness of a certain conception of space to each historical era. The emergence of this critical tool, this concept of spatio-temporal specificity, in a specific

country and at a specific time is often neglected, but we should recall that this was a country in which—as the following essays show—the notion of space (and of space in its ideological unfolding) was imbued with remarkable ideological prominence. Bakhtin himself, a scholar with a rich philological background, continued to seek the condensation of time and space in verbal images. The contributors to this volume logically expand the purview of his investigation as they explore in verbal, visual, and spatial constructions the chronotopes of the time and the space that produced the very idea of the chronotope.[11]

The book is divided into three parts. The first explores ways in which producers of various forms of art utilized space in the period between the first Five-Year Plan and Stalin's death, that is, from 1929 to 1953. We begin with aesthetic uses of space because, following the lead of Vladimir Nabokov and Boris Groys, we believe that Stalinism can best be understood as a lethal aestheticization of life.[12] The essays in part one consider the spatial dynamics of ideology in architecture, painting, cinema, song, and aesthetic criticism. Part two deals with aspects of the naturalization of ideological space. Taking as their focus objects as diverse as postage stamps, tourism, advertising, map making, and the Soviet musical, the authors examine how Soviet citizens were symbolically mobilized. The contributors to part three study the utopian impulse of what Emma Widdis calls "the imaginary geography of the 1930s." They show how Soviet ideology centered on spaces that seemed to be outside human history (the north, the underground), spaces on which Soviet society could inscribe itself, as if on a blank page. Even where the focus was on areas of human habitation, the impulse moved from exploration *(razvedka, uchen'e)* to mastery *(osvoenie)* and the remaking of nature in one's own image.

The contributors to this volume represent diverse backgrounds: philosophy, history, art history, and literary studies.[13] Methodologically, stylistically, and thematically they are quite heterogeneous, and in several cases the essays reach diametrically opposed conclusions. Yet while they differ in their conclusions, the contributions share several themes. The authors return repeatedly to the semanticization of space, the "saturation" (Oksana Bulgakowa) of space with meaning. Totalitarianism is distinguished by a kind of epistemological imperialism, the battle for the "symbolic occupation" (Boris Groys) of space and time. An aspect of this battle is the impulse toward the sacralizing of space (Katerina Clark); often in unexpected ways space is coded as sacred or profane. (Mikhail Ryklin argues that this dichotomy had profound

temporal complications, with formerly sacred spaces both debased *and* redeemed by their contact with the historically profane.) Nearly all the contributors emphasize the paradoxical centrality of the periphery in the Stalinist landscape. The provinces and edges of the nation were continually labeled periphery, yet this insistence on distance was often paired with an affirmation that distance could be magically annihilated.

Several of the authors consider what might be called the ideology's "personal periphery." In their examination of depictions of leisure, Randi Cox, Evgeny Dobrenko, Richard Taylor, and Emma Widdis show how the home and activities of relaxation became important arenas for the assertion of ideological control. Their essays also explore important representational differences distinguishing the Stalin era from the preceding decade. Two essays, those by Hans Günther and Mikhail Epstein, take issue with the proclaimed "novelty" of Soviet space and assert continuities with the prerevolutionary past.

Many of the essays attest to the presence of an infantile narcissism at the heart of Stalinist ideology. Several authors highlight the ideological desire to transform space into a representation of oneself. Jan Plamper discusses the inescapably metaphoric relation of nature to mankind in Stalinist painting. Emma Widdis and John McCannon each describe the desire to use nature as a mirror for the Soviet project. The dynamic of *osvoenie* discussed by Widdis may be seen as the clearest expression of the desire to make nature like oneself. Epstein writes of the Russian urge to turn spaces of habitation into replications of the lonely human body. Günther treats this question in Jungian terms, seeing in mass songs of the period a continual replication of the maternal body. The collapsing of distance, a frequent theme in these essays, serves as a corollary to the utopian desire for temporal leaps and is another sign of the ideological demand for immediate fulfillment of desire.

We have placed Epstein's essay last not only because it raises to a "metaphysical" plane some of the issues in the other contributions but also because it implicitly poses far-reaching questions with which we wish to leave our readers. Epstein describes the Russian attitude toward space as one of mythological dread, the horror of a vacuum linked to "the burden of freedom." The "mythologeme" at work is thus not desire for the "blank page" but the fear of it. Or rather, Epstein's essay, read in the light of those preceding it, suggests that in the Soviet period the fear of space was conjured away by talking about space, by turning space into language, by pretending that

geography could be figured in two dimensions—by a page of any sort. As Dobrenko argues, even the time-honored form of two-dimensional spatial representation—the map—was too directly linked to the three-dimensionality that it traditionally signified. Maps gave way to description, to language, in a virtually metasymbolic act of appropriation. In this volume, we explore how one-sixth of the globe was gobbled up by words. We offer readers a variety of voyages through the landscape of the Soviet ideological imagination during a time when that imagination was both tragically blind and intensely creative.

NOTES

1. *Istrebiteli,* E. Pentslin, director, Kievskaia kinostudiia, 1939.

2. Andrei Platonov, *The Portable Platonov,* trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler, *Glas* 20: 179–216. Complete Russian text published in *Rossiia,* 1991, no. 1.

3. I. P. Smirnov, "Scriptum sub Specie Sovietica," *Russian Language Journal* 41 (1987): 115–138; Lilya Kaganovsky, "Bodily Remains: The 'Positive Hero' in Stalinist Fiction," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000.

4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Germany Ideology," in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 5: 40.

5. G. Zinovyev, *Filosofiia epokhi* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1925), 5.

6. I. V. Stalin, "Golovokruzhenie ot uspekhov," in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gos. izd., 1949), 12: 191. Emphasis added.

7. I. V. Stalin, "O pravom uklone v VKP(b)," in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gos. izd., 1949), 12: 11. Emphasis added.

8. The most prominent work in this vein is probably Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

9. For an interesting example of this approach, see Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001): 17–48.

10. For pioneering work in this direction, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, *Intimacy and Terror,* trans. Carol A. Flath (New York: New Press, 1995). Other important contributions include Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931–1938," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 344–73; Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pittsburgh University Press, 2000); and Golfo Alexopoulos, "Portrait of a Con Artist as a Soviet Man," *Slavic Review* 57 (Winter 1998): 774–90.

11. On the impact of Stalinism on the evolution of the concept of the chronotope, see Anne Nesbet and Eric Naiman, "Formy vremeni v 'Formakh vremeni': Khronosomy khronotopa," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 2 (1993): 90–109.

12. Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (New York: Vintage, 1947); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond,* trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton University Press, 1992).

13. In its subject and methodological diversity, our volume has a predecessor, *Beyond the Limits: The Concept of Space in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Smith (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1999). The essays in that volume range from economic geography to social anthropology. Although some of the essays deal with the Stalinist period, most have a wider or later temporal focus.

Part One

Space and Art

1

Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space

KATERINA CLARK

For decades Soviet and Western cultural critics bandied about the term "socialist realism" as a virtually self-evident category that applied in all creative fields. Of course some common stipulations for socialist realism were widely applicable—for example, mandatory optimism, aesthetic conservatism, moral puritanism, and *partiinost,* the last somewhat barbarously translated as "party-mindedness" and generally meaning enthusiasm for things Bolshevik. Few critics, however, addressed the question, Is there such a thing as *a* socialist realism, or did "socialist realism," in practice, have different conventions for each field, despite common factors such as those just named?

Traditionally, Soviet literature—or, more specifically, the novel—has been regarded as the cornerstone of socialist realism, and within that literature, the "positive hero" is the key element that defines the tradition. The positive hero encapsulates the cardinal public virtues, and his or her career over the course of the novel symbolically recapitulates the nation's progress toward communism, thereby legitimating the status quo and affirming that Soviet society is on the correct, Marxist-Leninist track. The hero fulfills these functions within an elaborate system of verbal signs such as motifs, plot functions, and epithets organized as a de facto code that enables the heroic biography to perform its task. Clearly, several of the arts, especially those with little or no narrative component, such as painting and architecture, but also many of the performing arts such as opera, ballet, and music, were limited in the extent to which they could find analogs for the highly elaborated verbal code of the Soviet novel.

Another common denominator is to be found in most, though not all, examples of Soviet culture that are labeled socialist realist. (This common denominator does not particularly apply to music, especially when a given composition has no thematic dimension.) At the heart of many canonical works of socialist realism lie spatial myths in which

"heroes" or "leaders" function as human embodiments of, or emissaries from, a higher-order space. Even unadorned socialist realist buildings (that is, those with no clear thematic potential) could be interpreted as expressing such spatial myths. Arguably, in the novel, at the level of deep structure, the hero's mission is not ultimately his public task to build that power station, raise those economic yields, or drive out that enemy, not even *just* to grow as a communist, but to mediate between two different orders of space that might somewhat tritely be classified as the sacred and the profane. Consequently, architecture, as spatial architectonics, could be seen as the quintessential genre of socialist realism. Significantly, perhaps, in the first half of the 1930s, the very decade when the conventions of socialist realism were being established, architecture was the branch of the arts that received the greatest attention from the leadership.

Architecture's central role in Stalinist culture has its own logic in that building and spatial organization lie at the heart of Marx's account of society: the base-and-superstructure model. This potential was picked up in Bolshevik Party rhetoric about "building communism." Building also assumed tremendous importance in Stalinist culture because of the utopian aspects in the notion of living "in communism," the perfected society. By the thirties, the Russian Revolution was at least fifteen years old, and the realization of the new society still proved elusive. Yet (or perhaps consequently) in that decade building was given a privileged status in both the leadership's pronouncements and its practical programs.

At the beginning of 1931, a time of general reevaluation of the country's goals and ideals as the first Five-Year Plan wound down and leaders took stock and planned the second, Party leaders in their speeches began to use architectural models to explicate the current historical moment and its place in the overall Marxist-Leninist model of history. It was said recurrently that with the plan and its concomitant cultural revolution, the "foundation" *(fundament)* of socialist society has been laid; now it was time to construct its "edifice" *(zdanie)*.[1] Then, at the Party plenum in June 1931, a plan for rebuilding many of the major Soviet cities was announced. Thereafter, throughout the decade (as had been less true earlier), plans for particular towns and buildings were supervised closely by Party leaders, especially by the Moscow Party head Lazar Kaganovich, who in 1933 was appointed head of the supervisory body, Arkhplan. Whether as cause or as effect, in Party rhetoric the rebuilding of the Soviet city came to stand for the moral

and political transformation of the entire society into a communist one. Architectural schemes and tropes became dominant sources for political rhetoric throughout this most formative decade in the history of socialist realism.

My topic in this essay is not just the centrality of architecture in socialist realism but specifically the sacralizing of space. In this aspect of the socialist realist tradition, not only Party rhetoric and official programs but also widespread intelligentsia prejudices were contributing factors. During the period leading up to the revolution and beyond, the various factions among the intelligentsia, deeply divided as they were, generally shared one prejudice: they reviled the perceived effects of a rentier-mercantilist society on culture and looked to purify it by driving out the market, a secular version of the biblical story of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple. A particular bête noire for both Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia generally (not, after all, entirely separate categories) was the "petty shopkeepers" and their stalls *(lavochki)*—a bête noire also, incidentally, for members of the Frankfurt School.[2]

The purification or repurification of space was to prove an obsessive concern in Stalinist culture. Its centrality in the purges, for example, is not far to seek. After the revolution itself, it informed many of the rituals of iconoclasm and spatial transgression to be found in the culture of the twenties; some involved tearing down the statues of the ancien régime in order to repurify space, whereas in others, such as the mass spectacles, the central act was some spatial transgression whereby "the proletariat" or oppressed classes burst into the polluted space of the rentier-mercantilist-cum-tsarist regime, claiming that space for themselves and repurifying it by driving out the "scum."

By the thirties, however, the Soviet Union had largely passed through its iconoclastic phase and was into one of nation building. The institutionalization of socialist realism has to be seen as a key moment in this process. The Bolshevik leadership needed a culture adequate to the great new nation it had founded. It is no accident that at the same time the Soviet state was "creating" its new culture, it was also rebuilding its capital, Moscow, as the symbolic center of the renewed nation. In May 1931 Maxim Gorky returned to the Soviet Union permanently from quasi-emigration; in less than a year a single Union of Writers had been formed, with him as head, and the "new" literary method of socialist realism was proclaimed. At the Party's plenum of June 1931—only a month after Gorky's arrival—when the plan for the reconstruction of

Soviet cities was announced, it was already clear that Moscow was to get the lion's share of the funding and attention. The rebuilt Moscow, it was declared, was to function as the model *(obrazets)* for the rest of the country and for the progressive forces of the world besides.[3]

In this policy one already sees the tendency that was to be defining for Stalinist culture—the naming of a canonical model to function as a beacon toward which all lesser examples of the phenomenon in question (in this case, towns) should incline. Moscow, however, was not merely a model; it was also the seat of power. Consequently, it came to function as an extraordinarily privileged space. All other cities were limited merely to approaching it.

It will be recalled that in Russia the building of cities already, from prerevolutionary times, played a central role in accounts of national identity. Moscow and St. Petersburg were not merely rival claimants to the title of capital, but the distinctive features of the layouts of the two cities had come to stand for rival accounts of the national identity. Among those who admired St. Petersburg, its canals and embankments, "clad in granite" and presided over by grand statuary, and the city's broad streets and gridlike street plan came to stand for culture, modernization, and Westernization. St. Petersburg's detractors saw the same features as standing for soullessness and a fatal distortion of Russia's historical path. The latter group generally preferred Moscow's onion domes and narrow, higgledy-piggledy lanes, which they proclaimed not just the opposite of St. Petersburg's "rigid grid" but veritable embodiments of a more spontaneous, spiritual, and organic Russia. Moscow's detractors saw the narrow lanes and onion domes as icons of chaos, backwardness, and obscurantism.

During the reigns of the last two tsars, moreover, there had been a sort of "battle of the styles" between those who wanted architecture to be in the style of seventeenth-century Muscovy (the century when the present-day Kremlin walls were erected) and those who supported the empire style of neoclassical St. Petersburg. Both of the tsars, Alexander III and Nicholas II, preferred the Muscovite style, which they believed stood for a closer (if somewhat paternalistic) relationship between the tsar and his people. A lobby of architects—many of whom later reemerged to prominence as the principal designers of the monumental public structures commissioned in the Stalinist thirties—allied with the liberal, modernizing faction within the emerging middle class, favored the neoclassical style.[4]

Both parties in this debate were reacting against recent vogues for

eclecticism and *style moderne.* Spatial purification, the redirection of architecture from the variegated toward a more consistently maintained style that predated the modern mercantilist world (associated with recent vogues), was a common aim of both schools. Those proselytizing for a return to the empire style advocated not only construction of new buildings in that style but also freeing existing examples from the clutter of the stalls and minor structures around them. Moreover, those who sought a neoclassical revival, no less than advocates of the Muscovite style, promoted specific styles not just for their surface features but for a particular nexus of attributes that essentially represented an entire weltanschauung.

When proselytizers wrote about buildings in the empire style, they praised them for the way they achieved a "harmonious" integration of the buildings' component parts, for their "wholeness" *(tsel'nost'),* and for their monumental facades. They also repeatedly invoked attributes from a common inventory: "simple" *(prostoi),* "severe" *(strogii),* "austere" *(surovyi),* "restrained" *(vyderzhannyi),* and "lucid" *(svetlyi).* Moreover, they tended in their writings toward an isomorphy between descriptions of the architects and of their buildings: both were characteristically "simple," "stern," "restrained," and "severe."[5] Significantly, these clichés resurfaced later as the core of a standard inventory of epithets in socialist realist literature for identifying the hero as an emblem of political consciousness.

This is not to suggest that neoclassical architects and their champions influenced socialist realist literature.[6] But what appear in both instances to be descriptions of external features are in fact simultaneously affirmations of an ideological position. Thus, for example, "simple," indicating in the case of architecture that superfluous features have been eliminated in the interest of preserving the tradition's "strict" lines, is at the same time a claim that the tradition used has divined a supernal formula. In the case of socialist realism, one mandatory function of which was ritual affirmation of the status quo, art in its very formal features affirmed the ideological purity of the regime and the *extra*ordinary extent to which the leaders were diviners of the true (after all, the capsule version of Lenin called him "simple like the truth" *[prost kak pravda]*). For this reason, when the infamous "signal" article in *Pravda* in 1936, attacking Dmitry Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk Region,* decried the way the music's unharmonious "confusion" *(sumbur)* rendered the mandatory "simplicity" impossible, the criticism was not merely aesthetic in its implications.[7]

The entire country was organized in a hierarchy of spheres of relative sacredness, a cartography of power. It was the task of socialist realism, whether in art, in film, or in literature, to present the public with its landmarks and its route maps.

The more obvious examples of the sacralizing of space and its links to building are to be found in visual forms of socialist realism. In literature, it is largely present at the level of deep structure, as we shall see, but is sometimes quite transparent. One example of this is a passage in Vasily Grossman's classic of socialist realism, the novel *Stepan Kol'chugin* (1937–39). This novel, set in a prerevolutionary Donbas mining town, chronicles the (for socialist realism typical) progress of its hero, Stepan Kol'chugin, from callow and oppressed working-class lad to conscious Bolshevik revolutionary. Stepan, however, conceives the progress to communism in terms of building a city, as is particularly apparent in a scene in which he returns one evening from his first major encounter with a mentor figure at the factory and pauses as he contemplates the benighted workers' housing:

> The tiny houses were barely raised above the ground. Straight ahead the black industrial hill rose up before him, and on its summit a lantern shone. . . . The cottages were clustered under its slope as if driven there in a disordered *[besporiadochnuiu]* bunch. . . .
>
> And Stepan wanted to drive these little huts from the earth [against which they huddled], to make them larger and higher so that they might stand beneath that distant light on the top of the hill, that a mighty people who have dominion over fire and iron might not stoop, might not creep, coughing, into these dark and narrow burrows. Vague and dim notions *[predstavleniia]* rose up in his mind, notions that were alarming, daring, and audacious.[8]

These "vague notions," or embryonic consciousness, are thus identified with building a new, modernized city. Progress toward Bolshevik political awareness is conflated with a version of the myth of the building of St. Petersburg as a bulwark against Russian primitivism and obscurantism. The light on the top of the hill stands for the "pinnacle," or political end, to be striven toward, but it also stands for a guiding light.

The passage is also informed by that valorized spatial binary, high-low, which was to become central in the metaphorical system of Stalinist culture. This spatial hierarchy informs the choices of many of

the symbolic heroes who were foregrounded in the rhetoric and ritual of the thirties, such as aviation heroes, who were said to go "ever higher," mountain climbers, and even virtuoso violinists, whose notes were said to go "higher" than those of lesser performers. It was also a central value in architectural practice. The most famous moment of Soviet architectural history is the competition of 1931–33 to design a Palace of Soviets building. The winning design, by Boris Iofan, was intended to be the highest building in the world—taller than the recently constructed Empire State Building—and crowned with a gigantic statue of Lenin.

In the passage from *Stepan Kol'chugin* one also finds a fundamental of the socialist realist system: an emphasis on the greatness of space as a guarantee of the greatness of time—in other words, of the historical record. Similarly, in socialist realist architecture, buildings are not just functional—they do not just meet practical needs—but are also monuments bearing witness to an extraordinary time. In actuality, several styles were used for Moscow's new buildings, primarily some version of the classical, but also Renaissance, Russian national, and Gothic, the latter frequently refracted via the recent architectural vogues of New York and Chicago. But whichever style was used, the crucial criteria for a building's design were that it be monumental and that it proclaim in its very style a grand pedigree.

Thus the division into two orders of space that lies at the heart of socialist realist practice implies a parallel division into two orders of time—or, more accurately, there is a division into two orders of space-time. The temporal dimension, however, is largely implicit; Stalinist culture put extraordinary emphasis on space. It is no accident that the popular hit from Grigory Aleksandrov's 1936 film *Circus* (Tsirk), "Song of the Motherland" (Pesnia o rodine), which had the singular distinction of also functioning as an auxiliary national anthem, opens with the line, "Broad is my motherland." The opening epithet "broad" *(shiroka),* which is given greater emphasis by its placement as the first word in the song, encapsulates the greatness in the country as symbolized in its vast, almost endless horizontal sweep. In effect, "broad" functions as a metaphor for imperial might.

Although the country might have had an extraordinary spatial sweep, in rhetoric it was generally represented not as an undifferentiated horizontal but as one with hierarchical divisions. In a sense, the opposition high-low that we find in *Stepan Kol'chugin* is but a translation to the vertical axis of another, horizontally articulated one, most

characteristically patterned as center-periphery. Generally, this opposition determines the deep structure of socialist realist literature; the hero progresses in the novel from "periphery" to some sort of center.

These two space-times (center and periphery) are so radically different that they must be represented as maximally cut off from each other. Consequently, when, for example, toward the end of the typical novel, the hero travels from his provincial town or collective farm for a visit to Moscow, the intervening terrain is rarely depicted. Often, he goes by airplane, so that as he bridges the gap between the two places he sees nothing but the clouds, suitable props for a liminal space. Alternatively, the intervening journey is not reported—there seemingly is no contiguity between the two places, and the one can be reached from the other only by a spatio-temporal leap. Similarly, when the journey from periphery to center occurs within a single space—for example, when a city is modernized—it is important to represent the "new" Soviet city as a total and immediate transformation of the old. Hence a cliché of literature from the early thirties is the hyperbolic claim that "all of Moscow is under scaffolding" *(vsia Moskva v lesakh)*—Moscow, as it were, is in a chrysalis from which a diaphanous butterfly will emerge, bearing no resemblance to its former, grublike state. Later, in some of the classics of socialist realism, a schematic opposition between the "new" Moscow and other sections of the country had an explicit temporal correlate—the new Moscow as the future versus some provincial location as the present or past.[9]

Despite claims that "all of Moscow" was being transformed, in actuality only some sections of the capital were rebuilt, principally those in the center. The majority of the other grandiose designs for new public buildings in Moscow went unrealized, including even the Palace of Soviets, which was intended to recenter the capital. Arguably, this was not merely because ambitions and the desire to outdo Hitler's new Berlin outran the pocketbook. So many novels and films of this time include a fleeting segment involving a vision or even the construction of a fantastic city that emerges, phantomlike, ex nihilo (or from the rubble created in an orgy of dynamiting) and is often gleaming white.[10] Such scenes had their visionary, miragelike quality because, like the grandiose plans for public buildings in Moscow, they were not so much representations of reality as proleptic rhetorical devices; they were both a promise of a great and glorious future as-yet-not-totally-realized and a template, a guiding model. As proleptic devices, they were anticipated in A. A. Zhdanov's capsule formula for socialist realism made

in his keynote address to the First Writers' Congress in 1934: "A combination of the most matter-of-fact, everyday reality and the most heroic prospects" *(sochetanie samoi surovoi, samoi trezvoi prakticheskoi rabotoi s velichaishei geroikoi i grandioznymi perspektivami)*—note that "prospects" are both spatial and temporal.[11]

Architecture is in some ways the most concrete and material of all art forms, but at the same time—as the architectonics of space—it is one of the most abstract. This dual ontological status played a critical role in socialist realist practice. Sinyavsky, in his famous essay "On Socialist Realism," brought out this twofold nature, the way in which socialist realism tries both to present actuality and to monumentalize. Hallowed space is essentially outside of time; distinctions between past buildings and "the new" need not necessarily obtain. Indeed, a select few buildings from prerevolutionary times, such as the Kremlin and the Bolshoi, enjoyed this special status more than any new structure. But these mythicized structures, whether of the new Moscow or the old, had simultaneously a very real, concrete, and even banal existence.

Architecture functioned in the socialist realist tradition rather the way the icon does in Russian Orthodox culture, in that it had a simultaneous existence in two orders of reality, sacred and profane. Like Alice's looking glass, it reflected an image and yet was also a portal. But the pattern largely represented an inversion of the usual inside-outside distinctions that obtain for a sacred space. The inside of a given building might be defined largely by its mundane function (for example, as the location of a Soviet institution) while outside it functioned as a sacred monument to inspire awe and contemplation. The Kremlin, however, the most sacred space, was sacred both inside and outside.

Moscow had become the center of the nation (more so in the thirties than in the twenties), but the capital, in turn, had its own center. Because the Palace of Soviets was never built, the Kremlin remained the center of centers. The spatial hierarchy was articulated in a series of concentric circles, somewhat like a national *matrioshka* doll: the outer rim was the country at large (the periphery), the first inner circle was Moscow, and then came the Kremlin. There was also an innermost inner, Stalin's study in the Kremlin, but it was generally considered too sacred to be actually represented; it could be seen only as "the light in the window." In its stead, commonly either St. George's Hall, the place of public ceremonial and investiture, or a tower of the Kremlin functioned as that solid, innermost doll of the *matrioshka*.[12]

In visual and literary representations, the Kremlin is not normally

caught in its totality. Not only are the administrative buildings and churches played down in favor of the fortress walls and towers, but often the expanse of them is not shown. Instead, a single tower, possibly with a short stretch of adjacent wall, is portrayed. This is particularly apparent in Aleksandr Gerasimov's *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin* (1938), a painting that is a candidate for *the* exemplum of socialist realist art, in that it won one of the first Stalin Prizes (in 1941), and thereafter "few civilian institutions" would fail to have a copy.[13] In this painting, a monumental Stalin and Voroshilov, in greatcoats, stand at a balustrade on a Kremlin height (see fig. 2.3). Their perpendicular form is picked up in a parallel figure, a tower of the Kremlin not far away. This arrangement is clearly not just for the purposes of composition. The isomorphism between Stalin and Voroshilov, on one hand, and the Kremlin tower, on the other, implies identification.[14]

In this painting, as was characteristic, Stalin is like a monument or a monumental building. Indeed, when Stalin appears in films, if he moves at all, it is in slow, lumbering, deliberate movements, as if he were a stone statue à la the commendatore in Mozart's opera *Don Juan.* Representations of Lenin were sometimes monumental, like those of Stalin, but more frequently he was depicted, whether in film, painting, or sculpture, leaning forward, as if straining toward the revolutionary tomorrow, or at least with lively, darting eyes to suggest a mind forever in motion. Frequently in art and film, his body is placed on a diagonal rather than a vertical, as for Stalin. In another canonical representation of him by Gerasimov, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (1930), an accompanying banner flapping in the wind beside him (and arranged on a diagonal) is used to represent motion despite stasis.[15] This technique for representing Lenin did not, of course, originate with Gerasimov but can be seen in, for instance, romantic, patriotic art of the nineteenth century and in Eisenstein's 1927 film *October.*

In this respect, the most common representation of Lenin is closer to that of ordinary people, who generally appear either as a mass or (especially if a smaller group) in some sort of motion or activity, often straining muscular, seminude bodies in the performance of some task.[16] What is to be noted here is a binary, a valorized spatial division with an implicit corresponding temporal hierarchy. Whereas generally in art and film, Stalin (and, by analogy, other major leaders) is monumental, motionless, and vertical—the solo tower, so to speak—both Lenin and the people are in motion, either inclining forward or in a bustling, directionless conglomeration.[17] Lenin and the people are in

a state of *becoming* (although Lenin is ahead of the people and leading them forward); Stalin is in a state of *being*.

In paintings and photomontages of the 1930s, Stalin and the other leaders are generally represented as monumental, towering figures out of proportion to the rest of the citizenry depicted.[18] They are often placed on some higher point on the frame or landscape in order to accentuate this monumentality. In films of the period, towering architecture also plays a major role in the depiction of leaders. This is particularly striking in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (part one, 1944).[19] In both, the hero-leader, played by the tall, willowy Nikolai Cherkasov, seems to tower over his environment. But the buildings with which he is associated are also disproportionately large. In *Nevsky,* the "folk" live in underground dugouts while Alexander lives in a vast wooden structure. Indeed, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the hero-leader and these buildings: most of his major decisions or critical moments occur as he touches one of the monumental buildings or imitates its shape with some bodily pose.

The reification of Stalin—the leader as a statue or monumental building—was often accompanied by the anthropomorphizing of a symbolic building. Thus in Aleksandrov's musical film *Circus,* after the two heroes together compose that famous song "Broad Is My Native Land" at a grand piano in a stateroom of the Hotel Moscow, the Kremlin tower looms up, unrealistically close, at the heroine's window. Orwell got it wrong. It was not Big Brother who was watching us but a great tower of the Kremlin, which so often functioned in socialist realist art and film as a sentinel, a guardian, or a guarantor of ideological purity.

In *Circus,* the Kremlin tower also stands as the guarantor of the good life. The hotel suite in which the heroine is staying and through the window of which the tower can be seen represents the height of luxury in the new society. In a later scene, it is the Bolshoi that rears up in the background, this time as other characters eat cream cakes in the hotel's roof garden. Thus the privileged space in the symbolic system of socialist realism can have either a worldly import—luxury—or a more sacred one. Or both can be there simultaneously. It might be said that while the Soviet Union aspired, consciously or unconsciously, to achieve in its culture an imperial sublime—at the heart of which was a binary opposition between two orders of reality akin to those found in a traditional belief system—in fact it was operating in the modern, secular world. In consequence, the exalted in its culture was always in danger of devolving into something of more mundane, material

value. All systems leak, and even in "totalitarian" cultures they are never implemented to perfection. Binary systems are, in the last analysis, only constructs anyway, although in a culture dominated by such a doggedly dualistic theoretical system as Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the binaries tend to be more consistently maintained than is generally the case.

Stalinist culture was very schematic. The identification discussed here between a leader-mentor figure and a tower or other architectural feature is possible because both are essentially abstractions. Arguably, in literature the positive hero is, though a character in his or her own right, at a fundamental level also an abstraction. His or her principal function is to mediate between the provinces (the periphery) and Moscow.

Socialist realist novels are generally set in the periphery. This is not just because it provides a pared-down microcosm for representing processes that take place in the greater arena of society at large, but also because the periphery is the space of the masses. The center is a sacralized space, the space of the great leader(s). The role of the masses is to be forever in motion, striving to attain "Moscow," to enter that extraordinary space to which an extraordinary degree of activity (speed) will transport them. But they can attain "Moscow" only figuratively, fleetingly, or tokenly. The positive hero and his mentors are virtually the only ones who can go to Moscow. They must *ritually* mediate the temporal gulf in a journey, in space, though no member of the general populace can traverse the temporal gulf in actuality. Thus when Stalin is to deal with the populace at large, he has to leave the sacred space, temporarily—to come outside the Kremlin and stand on the mausoleum to greet the people for the revolutionary holiday parades.

Of course Stalin also sees a select few in the Kremlin, generally as he gives them awards in St. George's Hall, sometimes as he extends them advice. In representations of such scenes, however, emphasis is laid on how extraordinary the spatial surroundings appear to ordinary mortals, how remote from their world. Extensive use is made of light and the color white. For example, Aleksandrov's musical *The Radiant Path* (Svetlyi put', 1940), a veritable parody of the socialist realist conventions discussed here, culminates in a series of events taking place in some extraordinary space-time. The audience is first treated to the heroine's dazed view at a reception in the Kremlin, and then, as she is taken up into the skies in an open car, it is given an aerial view of the Moscow of the future. Finally, after the heroine descends, the audience

sees a series of shots of the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (some featuring Vera Mukhina's statue *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*). In all these scenes, as is typical of the finale of an Aleksandrov film, white and shimmering light is used to a hyperbolic degree.

White, like light—as, for example, in the candelabra of the Kremlin hall or a metro station—can have a phantomlike or miragelike quality suggesting a different order of space, something sacred or eternal. But it can also palpably suggest this-worldly positives—consumerism and luxury (smart casual clothes à la the jazz age, white curtains in the stateroom, candelabra such as only the rich might have). In this aspect, white affirms the radical extent to which the quality of life has improved for the worker. It is also symptomatic of the extent to which the heroic age of Marxist revolutionism in the twenties has come to an end: realistically, a worker could not wear white because his clothing would get dirty at work; it was traditionally the engineer who wore white gloves, and he was despised for that very reason. But white (and light) are crucial as devices for representing the "suddenly" of that mind-boggling leap from provincial backwardness (often underlined with scenes of muddy roads) to the glittering, modern city.

An evanescent glitter or a blinding flash of light that may temporarily overcome the positive hero is an important convention of socialist realist practice for representing moments of encounter with the Great Leader or moments when a protagonist is in some sacred space. Those moments must be epiphanic—that is, intense—but extremely brief and not extending to later life, except as inspirational memories or moments marking an absolute transformation. They are outside time. In this particular aspect, the hero's ecstasy sometimes has suggestions of an orgasm.

Symptomatic of the extent to which "the leader" and even the most positive of heroes participate in two entirely different orders of time can be seen in the presentation of their private lives. Most Stalinist novels, and many films as well, are structured as rituals of initiation whereby a less mature figure is guided through his maturation by an older mentor and can eventually be initiated in some ritual way and enter (political) adulthood.[20] This ritual of maturation, however, only tokenly entails the hero's attaining the ontological status of a Stalin. The distance between them must be absolute, and a guarantee of this is the way they live in different temporalities. One can see this, for example, in Mikhail Kalatozov's film *Valery Chkalov* (1941), in which the extremely impetuous eponymous hero is ushered through his ritual