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TWO LESSONS IN MODERNISM: WHAT THE *ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW* AND AMERICA'S MASS MEDIA TAUGHT SOVIET ARCHITECTS ABOUT THE WEST

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TWO LESSONS IN MODERNISM: WHAT THE *ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW* AND AMERICA'S MASS MEDIA TAUGHT SOVIET ARCHITECTS ABOUT THE WEST[*]

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In the decade following World War II, countries across the Iron Curtain launched urban renewal and mass housing programs that became enmeshed in the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the West used urban planning and housing to stake their claims about which system – capitalism or socialism – could best provide postwar prosperity and the superior way of life.[1] The architects and house builders charged with carrying out these programs worked at the dynamic intersection of modernist architectural design, domestic building programs, and Cold War politics. Many were able to interact with their counterparts across the Iron Curtain through publications, exhibitions, international professional groups, and tours.[2] In this essay, I focus upon two exchanges between Soviet and Western architects and housing experts, one in 1947 and one in 1955, which have received little attention from scholars, but merit closer examination for what

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[1]For an examination of the ways mass housing and gender roles intersected with the Cold War, see Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211-52.

[2]For an overview of such interactions, see Catherine Cooke (with Susan Reid), "Modernity and Realism: Architectural Relations in the Cold War," in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, ed. Rosalind Blakesley and Susan Reid (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 172-94.

they can tell us about how these individuals shaped the interpenetration of domestic issues and international relations alongside the more familiar diplomatic and military spheres of the Cold War conflict. I argue that taken together, the exchanges revealed two "lessons" directed at the Soviet Union in an evolving Western discourse on modernist design that projected relations of power entirely at odds with the Soviet leadership's view of its place in the world. Both exchanges subsequently deteriorated into Cold War spectacles that both sides believed exposed the true motivations and machinations of the other. Having tried to avoid such an outcome, the Soviet architects and housing experts in these exchanges learned an unintended lesson about the unpredictable workings of the Western media that could twist their words and actions in the name of ideology in ways all too familiar to citizens of Stalin's Soviet Union.

In the first exchange in May 1947, three Soviet architects published articles on postwar housing in England's premier journal of architecture and town planning, the *Architectural Review*. In introducing the articles, the editors delivered a stern lecture on the principles of highbrow modernism and Soviet architecture's failure to meet them. This first lesson claimed that the standards of modernist design were universal, but could only be discovered in the West. According to the *Architectural Review*, Soviet architecture had beaten a retreat from its earlier contributions to the modern movement and was now mired in a hopelessly backward-looking eclecticism meant to appease the lowbrow tastes of an underdeveloped society. The lesson projected onto Soviet architecture the editors' anxieties that contemporary political and economic forces in the West would soon erode the very autonomy of the architect that they believed gave modernism its vitality. The three Soviet architects were dumbfounded by what they perceived to be their Western counterparts' unprofessional conduct and refusal to accept Soviet architecture as a viable alternative to the West's domination of the modern movement.

Stalin's ideological watchdogs were similarly displeased at the lesson their architects received, but blamed the architects themselves for it. By year's end, they were subjected in Moscow to an honor court of their peers, which found them guilty of self-promotion, subservience to the West, and denigrating Soviet architectural achievements.[3] In the wake of this incident, the *Zhdanovshchina*,[4] and rising Cold War tensions, the prospects of developing meaningful contacts with Western architects seemed hopelessly dim.

Yet only eight years later in 1955, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) in the United States invited ten Soviet housing experts on a month-long tour of America's new suburbs.[5] The housing experts played the role of cultural diplomats in a new atmosphere that

[3]This study is the first to examine archival records related to the honor court. The architects' articles and the editors' introduction in the *Architectural Review*, as well as the second part of their exchange in the pages of the journal in 1948, have received little scholarly attention. In a passing reference, Catherine Cooke notes that the *Architectural Review*'s criticism of the three architects' articles re-emerged in the 1949 anti-cosmopolitan attacks. See Cooke, "Modernity and Realism," 176, 192. In his broader study of the journal's history, Erdem Erten briefly analyzes the role the architects' articles played in shaping the journal's agenda for postwar architecture and urban planning. See Erdem Erten, "Shaping 'The Second Half Century': *The Architectural Review*, 1947-1971" (Ph.D. diss., The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004), 217-19.

[4]Literally, the "time of Zhdanov." This refers to the early postwar period during which party ideologues, led by Stalin and Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, carried out repressive campaigns against the intelligentsia for its alleged lack of patriotism, ideological weakness, and subservience to the West. For a discussion of Zhdanov's actions that gave the term its meaning, see Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31-8.

[5]Similar to the *Architectural Review* affair, the 1955 tour has received little analysis. Scholars have briefly mentioned it as an example of cultural exchanges before a major 1958 agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States reorganized such exchanges. See J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1983), 156; Amanda Aucoin, "Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange and American Information Activity during the Khrushchev Years" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 2002), 58-59. Aucoin's observations on the 1955 tour are based on a report for the Central Committee preserved in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). The archival research in the present study, as will be described in further detail below, is based on reports in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI). More recently, Greg Castillo provides additional analysis of the 1955 tour, based primarily on research in major American newspapers. Castillo convincingly shows how this largely forgotten event preceded and shaped the underlining issues of the better known American Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, where Khrushchev and Nixon had their famous "Kitchen Debate". Emphasizing in particular the Soviet delegates' purchase of an American home during their visit, Castillo situates the 1955 tour in the Soviets' attempts to learn more about American technology and also in the broader efforts of American Cold War warriors to wage the conflict over questions of consumption and housing. See Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 130-36, 161. The present study expands upon both Aucoin's and Castillo's analyses through original research in the Russian archive RGALI (where I researched two of the Soviet delegates' accounts of the tour), the archive of the National

uneasily mixed the easing of tensions with the enduring ideological struggle between socialism and capitalism. The Soviet delegates arrived with an open mind to learn whatever they could and muted their criticisms of the American path to mass housing and modernity until they returned home. When compared to the 1947 honor court, the 1955 tour was a testimony to the passing of Stalinism and the beginning of Nikita Khrushchev's thaw at home and in international relations. It was among the first of several exchanges that signaled the renewal of international professional contacts since the onset of Cold War tensions in the late Stalin years made such interactions nearly impossible.[6] The tour reflected and shaped a shift in the Soviet Union's approach to the Cold War under Khrushchev by which the Stalinist insistence that all things Soviet were superior and exceptional was modified by limited recognition that the country still lagged behind the West and could learn from it in order to eventually overtake it. As György Péteri argues, such shifts back and forth between declarations of superiority and admissions of inferiority were evident throughout the history of state socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as their leaderships struggled to define themselves and their relationship to the West. While their leaderships' insistence on superiority often translated into policies isolating

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Association of Home Builders, local and national American newspapers, Russian émigré newspapers, and French and Soviet newspapers. The present study also analyzes several unexamined aspects of the tour such as the delegates' interactions with the Western media, an international incident that soured the tour at its end, one delegate's visit to a famous American architect's estate, and other contacts the delegates had with American everyday life that were not directly related to housing.

[6]As Richard Anderson shows, the productive and cooperative exchanges that Soviet architects enjoyed with their American counterparts during the war were all but eliminated by the late 1940s on account of the *Zhdanovshchina* and the Cold War. See Richard Anderson, "USA/USSR: Architecture and War," *Grey Room* 34 (Winter 2009): 80-103. Scholars have chronicled the re-emergence of exchanges similar to the 1955 tour in the years shortly after Stalin's death. On a delegation of Soviet journalists who also toured the United States in 1955, see Rósa Magnúsdóttir, "Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes toward the United States of America, 1945-1959" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 149-95. Other exchanges involved tours of architects traveling exclusively in the capitalist West. On a group of West German architects who toured the United States in 1950, see Greg Castillo, "Design Pedagogy Enters the Cold War: The Reeducation of Eleven West German Architects," *Journal of Architectural Education* 57, no. 4 (2004): 10-18. On the impact tours to the West and the Soviet Union had on Polish architects' ideas, see David Crowley, "Paris or Moscow? Warsaw Architects and the Image of the Modern City in the 1950s," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 769-98.

them from the West, muted admissions of temporary inferiority could open the door toward greater contact in the hopes of eventually overtaking the West.[7] The two exchanges presented here allow us to examine how such tendencies in state socialist regimes' sense of self were directly shaped and accentuated by interactions their architects and housing experts had with their Western counterparts.

The Khrushchev regime was substantially more willing than its Stalinist predecessor to admit its inferiority to the West and engage with it. Nonetheless, the 1955 tour demonstrated the limits of this approach if the lesson the Soviets were willing to take from the West went too far. As in 1947, problems revolved around the Western media's representations of what the Soviet professionals said and did. The Soviet visitors in 1955 were subjected to constant surveillance and propaganda – that of the Western mass media – which proved just as adept as the honor court in 1947 at twisting their words and actions in the service of Cold War ideology. In the tour's final days, the media's misinterpretation of a Soviet government decree created a scandal involving one of the delegates that transformed the tour, politicized from the start as a harbinger of better relations between the two superpowers, into an acrimonious Cold War spectacle revealing the true intentions and tactics of each side. In both incidents, the Western media – highbrow in 1947 and middlebrow mass media in 1955 – played the catalytic role in turning overtures for better relations through professional exchange into raw displays of Cold War tensions. Unrestrained by a single government authority and prone to launch bizarre insults at foreigners, the Western media appeared to these Soviet professionals as a loose cannon with the unusual power to force their country's leadership to act in its prescribed Cold War role. While

[7]György Péteri, "Nylon Curtain – Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe," *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113-23.

the Soviet architects and housing experts in 1947 and 1955 were taught lessons in modernism, they also learned unintended lessons about the Western "free press".

More frequently than the usual images of the Cold War would lead us to expect, the individuals involved in both the 1947 and 1955 exchanges shared ideas on reconstruction and housing across geographic and ideological boundaries that resembled less an impenetrable Iron Curtain and more what Péteri has called the "Nylon Curtain". This alternative metaphor helps us interpret the interactions and permeable boundaries scholars have increasingly examined in the cultural history of the Cold War. Its allusion to David Riesman's prescient and satirical essay from 1951, "The Nylon War," in which the United States bombards the Soviet Union with consumer goods to wage the Cold War (the Berlin airlift of 1948-1949 likely serving as Riesman's inspiration), serves well to emphasize the role that consumer goods, their technologically advanced production, and the race over standards of living played in the Cold War. Indeed, the NAHB and the American press corps spoke in the language of "The Nylon War" in assuming that exposure to the American way of life would change the Soviet housing experts and, by extension, all of Soviet society. But the Nylon Curtain permitted more than only consumer goods or their tantalizing images to pass across the border, and the direction of exchange was not, as Riesman's essay suggested, only from the West to the East.[8] From classical music and film to children's rights, the Nylon Curtain allowed for the exchange of ideas and experiences from West to East and East to West on a wider array of topics than previously recognized.[9] While cultural exchanges across the Nylon Curtain were billed as harbingers of

[8]Péteri, "Nylon Curtain," 113-23.

[9]For recent scholarship that has explored such interactions, see the articles in "Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union," a special issue of *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 9*, no. 4 (2008). See also, *Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe*, ed. György Péteri (Trondheim: Program on East European Cultures and Societies, 2006).

"peaceful coexistence," they also perpetuated the Cold War by providing a non-military arena for competition between the chief adversaries. Cultural exchanges altered what each side's relative strengths and weaknesses were, and expanded the range of issues and persons involved in fighting the Cold War.[10]

As recent scholarship demonstrates, the point is not merely that the boundaries between the capitalist and socialist systems allowed for more interactions than the reigning metaphor of the Iron Curtain would allow. The Nylon Curtain, Péteri argues, permitted exchanges of information that "were not only fueling consumer desires and expectations of living standards but … also promoted in both directions the spreading of visions of 'good society', of 'humanism', as well as of civil, political, and social citizenship."[11] In the case of the architects and housing experts examined here, their exchanges in both 1947 and 1955 gave new meanings to domestic questions in both the Soviet Union and the West ranging from postwar reconstruction and architectural aesthetics to an architect's autonomy, the profession's code of conduct, and anxieties about the deleterious effects of women's consumer desires on design. Each side came away with different and largely unintended lessons about the other. The Soviet architects and housing experts gained insights into the workings of the Western media. The *Architectural Review* came away with some valuable reflections on its own approach to the modern movement. American newspapers not only learned that Soviet housing technocrats were not so different from American businessmen, but that the new Soviet government did indeed appear to act differently than its Stalinist predecessor when individual citizens ran afoul of the party line.

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[10]Frances Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 193-214.

[11]Péteri, "Nylon Curtain," 113-23. Quotation from page 115.

By framing the exchanges in 1947 and 1955 as "lessons in modernism," my aim is twofold. First, viewing the exchanges as "lessons" describes well the didactic voice in which the *Architectural Review* and American newspapers addressed the Soviet architects and housing experts.[12] This manner of "addressing" Russia, as Larry Wolff calls it, dates back at least to the 18th century Enlightenment when philosophes wrote to Russians about Russia.[13] Viewed in this light, the exchanges examined here and the Cold War of which they were a part belong to a much longer history between Russia and the West whereby the latter already seemed to have the upper hand in establishing the implied power dynamics of its interactions with the former. The two exchanges presupposed and legitimized relations of power characteristic of teaching and learning a lesson. They featured a fully formed authority, Western architectural critics and the mass media, which sought to educate a developing subject, Soviet architects and housing experts, according to a lesson plan that revealed their inferiority and defined their proper path to modernity. In both cases, the Soviet leadership's refusal to accept the relations of power implied in these lessons triggered their transformation into Cold War spectacles.

Second, viewed as lessons, the exchanges tell us much about an evolving, at times contradictory, Western discourse on modernist aesthetics and how it bolstered the Western view of the Soviet other in the Cold War context. In the first case, the *Architectural Review* put forward a conventional defense of the modern movement in architecture as a highbrow,

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[12]Similar to scholars' use of the term "pedagogy" to describe modern architectural programs, I employ "lessons" to highlight the didactic elements of these exchanges. Two such examples are particularly relevant to the present essay. Greg Castillo's study of an "urban planning pedagogy" taught to West German architects in the United States demonstrates how such didacticism intersected with the Cold War. See Castillo, "Design Pedagogy Enters the Cold War." Erten's description of the "Townscape" architectural program, developed in part by the *Architectural Review*, as an "urban design pedagogy" illustrates the importance the editors of the journal placed on their didactic mission. See Erdem Erten, "Thomas Sharp's Collaboration with H. de C. Hastings: The Formulation of Townscape as Urban Design Pedagogy," *Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 1 (January 2009): 29-49.

[13]Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 195-234.

progressive endeavor struggling to develop universal architectural forms in the face of the corrosive eclecticism and kitsch that totalitarian regimes and mass markets alike were constantly threatening to impose. The second exchange in 1955 taught the Soviets a quite different lesson. In a seeming contradiction of the lesson in 1947, the NAHB and American newspapers embraced the power of the mass market and mass production to bring the wonders of modernist design and industrial efficiency into a modern home that could go anywhere, even communist Russia. Instead of debasing modernist aesthetics, this colossal undertaking would raise the standard of living of millions of American families and if it reached the Soviet Union, it might even bring the Cold War to an end. Taken together and viewed from the perspective of Soviet architects, these two contradictory lessons in modernism were enough to leave anyone confused as to what the modern movement and the West were up to.

Lesson one: Soviet architecture is not modern

The *Architectural Review* presented readers of its May 1947 edition with three articles on Soviet postwar reconstruction by the architects David Arkin, Andrei Bunin, and Nikolai Bylinkin.[14] This exchange of ideas developed in an international context in a deep state of flux. When the journal's editors solicited the articles in December 1945, a spirit of wartime cooperation and shared experience continued to shape the Soviet Union's relations with its Western allies.[15] Such a spirit had already affected the architectural profession during the war when Soviet and American architects exchanged ideas over prefabrication technology and the construction of

[14]David Arkin, "Some Thoughts on Reconstruction," A. Bunin, "The Reconstruction of Urban Centres," and N. Bylinkin, "Reconstruction and Housing," *Architectural Review* 101, no. 605 (May 1947): 178-84.

[15]The honor court materials indicate when the journal asked for the articles. See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (hereafter, RGAE), f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 152-53.

freestanding, individual houses.[16] The *Architectural Review* echoed these sentiments of cooperation when they explained at the beginning of their introduction to the articles that the Soviet Union's approach to reconstruction merited particular attention since the country required the most extensive postwar recovery program of all combatant states and possessed the greatest planning infrastructure to undertake it. Facing similar challenges, the editors suggested, British architects and town planners might have something to learn from their Soviet counterparts.[17]

By the time the Soviet architects sent their articles to the journal in December 1946, the earliest salvos of the Cold War had already begun to overshadow the goodwill forged in the war.[18] In a February 1946 speech, Stalin reframed the war and its origins along ideological lines pitting socialism against capitalism. In his Fulton, Missouri speech a month later, Winston Churchill blamed the Soviet Union for imposing an "Iron Curtain" across postwar Europe. In March 1947, President Harry Truman announced the basic principles of the Truman Doctrine by which the United States would assist those nations seeking to resist and overturn communist encroachment.[19] These international tensions, as we shall see below in greater detail, intersected in the Soviet Union with the *Zhdanovshchina*, whereby the Party attacked the intelligentsia for its alleged subservience to the West and lack of patriotism beginning in mid-1946. When the Soviet architects' articles were published in May 1947, therefore, the domestic and international rhetoric surrounding Soviet-Western relations had already shifted from the cooperative to the confrontational. As Richard Anderson shows in the case of Soviet architects' relations with their

[16]Anderson, "USA/USSR: Architecture and War."

[17]"Reconstruction in the U.S.S.R.," *Architectural Review* 101, no. 605 (May 1947): 177.

[18]The honor court materials indicate when the Soviet architects sent their articles to the journal. See RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 152-53.

[19]On how these statements shaped the beginning of the Cold War, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 49-62.

American counterparts, the *Zhdanovshchina* and Cold War tensions as forces existing outside their professional exchanges had a chilling effect on their past wartime cooperation.[20] Readers of the *Architectural Review* saw the same shift in the editors' introduction that moved from the positive note indicated above to a scathing critique of Soviet architecture's astounding failures to be sufficiently modern. But in contrast to how good relations between Soviet and American architects during the war subsequently succumbed to forces outside the profession, the Soviet architects' interactions with the *Architectural Review* became themselves the source of Cold War tensions and fueled the *Zhdanovshchina*.

The journal's editors – Hubert De Cronin Hastings (owner and chief editor), Nikolaus Pevsner, James Richards, and Osbert Lancaster – were established architectural critics and historians who conceived of their journal as the authoritative voice on modern architecture at home and abroad.[21] In January 1947, they reasserted the *Architectural Review*'s claim to being the leading arbiter of architectural trends in their manifesto, "The Second Half Century," which marked the journal's 50th anniversary. Going far beyond the journal's basic function as a forum for architecture past and present, the editors positioned themselves as avant-garde critics who proudly proclaimed that "the REVIEW flouts good taste." Mirroring the omniscient, all-encompassing ethos of modernist architecture, they congratulated themselves for having already pushed the boundaries of "high criticism" beyond aesthetics and into the realms of construction, engineering, and technology. "To the concrete, steel, glass, brick, electricity, plastics, timber and other trades the REVIEW has given special issues devoted mainly to the discussion of their souls. And for the modern movement in architecture it has performed the same service." Looking

[20]Anderson, "USA/USSR: Architecture and War."

[21]For a history of the journal in the postwar era, see Erten, "Shaping 'The Second Half Century.'"

toward the future, the editors pledged themselves to orchestrating a "visual re-education" in order to place architects above all professions and even politicians in reshaping the built environment. They proclaimed "the architect's role to become the master co-ordinator, through whom the technicians of the statistical sciences and the mechanical facts, as well as the painters and poets, must look to translate their raw material into the stuff of which visible civilization is made."[22] When it came time to write the introduction to the three Soviet architects' essays, the editors were convinced they had much to teach the Soviet Union about modern architecture and leaped at the chance to put their didactic mission into practice.

Dispensing with their introduction's first suggestion that the Soviet Union offered a viable alternative in postwar reconstruction, the editors cautioned that Soviet architecture was an extreme example of what could happen in the West if state control over architecture and urban planning continued unchecked. Whatever successes Soviet planning might produce in reconstruction, the impact of "State patronage" on aesthetics would be devastating. Echoing Trotsky's classic interpretation of Stalinism in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), the journal condemned the aesthetics of Soviet architecture and urban planning as a disastrous retreat conditioned by the lowbrow tastes of its social base, the bureaucracy. "Seeing that, according to sophisticated European standards, Russian buildings appear bourgeois and retrogressive, [other nations] wonder whether this is the inevitable result of extensive State patronage—whether the rule of the official does not by its nature result in leveling down to an uninspired mediocrity."[23] By framing the articles in this aesthetic hierarchy, the editors gave their readers a superior perch from which they could safely observe Soviet architecture with no need (or risk) of borrowing

[22]"The Second Half Century," *Architectural Review* 101, no. 601 (January 1947): 21-26. The capitalization of "REVIEW" in the quotations here appears in the original.

[23]"Reconstruction in the U.S.S.R.," 177.

from this inferior other. In turn, they gave the Soviet architects a stern lesson in how badly their country had failed to uphold the universal principles of modernism that only existed in the West.

In contrast, the three Soviet architects were more interested in explaining to their English counterparts how the Soviet Union was rebuilding after the war rather than claiming the superiority of the Soviet planning system. They sought common ground with their English interlocutors by citing Western architects and cities they found useful. They assumed that a professional, even critical dialogue about modern architectural trends in the pages of an esteemed publication should be conducted free of Cold War polemics that blamed a country's architectural shortcomings on its social and political system. Their desire for such a discussion was most evident in their critical assessment of modernist trends in Western architecture. Focusing upon some of the most cherished principles of the modern movement, they argued that Soviet architects were overcoming its false oppositions between past and present, the built environment and nature in order to meet the demands of postwar reconstruction. They claimed that debates about the international style, in which Soviet architects had themselves participated, were outdated and offered few solutions to contemporary problems. Far from wanting to learn a lesson about modernism, the Soviet architects wanted to critique it as part of a wider professional dialogue aimed at moving things forward, not as a way of putting their English counterparts in their place and heaping scorn on their social and political system.

Arkin's article pointed to a generation of debates in Western architecture between critics of the city, who predicted its certain demise, and its modernist champions, who saw it as "an aesthetic ideal, the crown of human civilization." Citing the Soviet version of this conflict, the battles between "disurbanists" and "urbanists" in the 1920s and early 1930s, Arkin explained that the Soviet Union had already had this debate and moved beyond it. On the one hand, Soviet

architects had rejected the disurbanists' call for "the gradual and systematic 'dispersal' of cities." Instead, they accepted the city as "the most economic form of human consociation," which would meet society's needs. Their goal was "to heal the modern city of its defects." On the other hand, Soviet architects had surpassed those champions of the city obsessed with using it to achieve universal and perfectly rational forms, a definitive break from the past, and a purely man-made environment devoid of nature.[24]

To illustrate his point, Arkin gently mocked the high priests of modernism: "Poets of Urbs believed that asphalt was more convenient and more modern than green meadows; that 'modern man' feels more at home under the lights of electric suns than under the real sun; that conditioned air can successfully replace the ozone of pinewoods."[25] In the eyes of the *Architectural Review*'s editors, modernist architecture was not something to laugh about, but to take very seriously as a sign of a country's place in the hierarchy of their imaginary "visible civilization". Arkin was more aware than the editors, however, of the real-life consequences that politicized debates over modernist architecture could have on their shared profession. He had been a witness to the vicious politicization of Soviet architecture, launched in particular against disurbanists and urbanists, which transpired during the cultural revolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s.[26] In broaching this sensitive topic, Arkin steered clear of mentioning architects

[24]Arkin, "Some Thoughts on Reconstruction," 178-79. On the urbanists and disurbanists' debate, see S. Frederick Starr, "Visionary Town Planning during the Cultural Revolution," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 207-40.

[25]Arkin, "Some Thoughts on Reconstruction," 178.

[26]A native of Moscow, Arkin (1899-1957) graduated from Moscow State University in 1922 and began teaching at the Moscow Institute of Architecture in 1934. See *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, no. 2 (Moscow: nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia," 2005), 226.

whose lives were lost or careers ruined and the debilitating effect that Stalinization had on architecture.[27] Instead, he engaged this past debate as a means to criticize Western architects' present work.

In contrast to the false oppositions he saw in the disurbanists and urbanists' debate, as well as contemporary Western architecture, Arkin advocated urban planning in the postwar era that would embrace "natural features, the contours of the ground, the presence of rivers." He claimed that "architecture will be called not to 'screen' nature but, on the contrary, to emphasize its beauty." Instead of rejecting the past, architecture should "blend the novelty of modern times, of new architectural forms, with the most vital traditions of the past," particularly national traditions. In contrast to modernist architecture's "bookish, rationalistically-artificial attitude towards the problems of new forms," the urban planning Arkin championed was "not only an art of linking up buildings in space but also of binding them closely and continuously in time." Instead of applying universal forms, architecture and urban planning would reflect local conditions and local history. "The creative task of the modern architect," he concluded, "is to give architectural expression to the people's, the locality's, the city's individuality, and not to hide this individuality behind a simplified screen of reinforced concrete, glass and metal."[28]

As reflected in all three architects' articles, it was the war's devastation that underlined the importance of moving beyond any rigid aesthetic ideology to embrace an architecture that met practical needs and took its location's natural environment and history into account. Their approach to architecture and urban planning, especially Arkin's emphasis on incorporating a locality's architectural heritage, included a critique of modernism's universalizing tendencies.

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[27]On the cultural politics of Soviet architecture, see Starr, "Visionary Town Planning" and Hugh Hudson, Jr., *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917-1937* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[28]Arkin, "Some Thoughts on Reconstruction," 179.

Their views on the problems with the modern movement suggest an affinity with what Kenneth Frampton later described as the "critical regionalism" of architects around the world who embraced the technological advancements and building techniques of modern architecture as a way of expressing rather than obliterating regional traditions and local history, and resisting any totalizing aesthetic of architecture.[29] As we shall see, the editors of the *Architectural Review* themselves adhered to a much more nuanced approach to the modern movement than either Arkin's depiction or their 1947 introduction would indicate. But it was precisely Arkin's critical assessment of the modern movement as being replete with failings specific to the West, I would argue, that provoked the *Architectural Review*'s editors to write their introduction in such defensive tones that did more to obfuscate than faithfully represent their own critical stance toward modern architecture.

While Arkin argued that "there can be no universal schemes suitable for any and every country, for any geographical belt, for any local conditions,"[30] the editors of the *Architectural Review* responded in their introduction by upholding "absolute standards" for appraising architecture and then promptly declared the Soviet case unable to qualify for an evaluation based on such standards. "Russia is not only a foreign country," the editors opined, "but it is more foreign than most countries, and her problems are in few respects comparable with ours." The editors insisted that Soviet work would have to be evaluated "according to its own conditions." Yet their intention was not to assess the Soviet case by Soviet standards, but rather pinpoint what was wrong with Soviet practice according to a hierarchy of aesthetic difference that equated modernist architecture in the West with universal standards. "If we seek *absolute* standards, it

[29]Kenneth Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 20 (1983): 147-62.

[30]Arkin, "Some Thoughts on Reconstruction," 179.

may well be that the best of our own and of Western European architecture rests on values of a more absolute kind; but even so it is not enough to condemn the Russian as 'bad.'" (emphasis in the original) Instead of just dismissing Soviet architecture, the editors wanted to know why it was so bad and "pretentious, naive and exceedingly bourgeois in taste."[31]

The journal's unoriginal answer to this question repeated the canonical defense of modernism in the face of totalitarianism and commercial mass culture that the American art critic Clement Greenberg had made in his seminal 1939 essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Like Greenberg and Trotsky before him, the editors theorized that Soviet aesthetics were not merely the product of the leadership's own tastes imposed upon an unwilling populace, but rather corresponded to the aesthetic sensibilities of the Soviet people at their present stage of development. The Soviet leadership had settled on a "uniformly eclectic style" that satisfied the "need not to outpace the slow growth of popular understanding." Where Arkin saw "vital traditions of the past," the editors of the *Architectural Review* recognized "a familiar symbolism," which the country was most likely stuck with "for a generation" until "pure architectural form is able to evolve a response from a sophisticated public, as it is beginning to do in Western Europe and America now." Where Arkin saw a series of false and outdated choices in the architectural debates of the 1920s and early 1930s, the editors saw a period when Soviet architects had developed "an architecture of pure form" well ahead of their time and beyond "the nature of most people's response to architectural art."[32] The hierarchy of aesthetic difference in the editors' notion of a "visible civilization" thus had a temporal dimension. Refusing to address what the three Soviet

[31]"Reconstruction in the U.S.S.R.," 177.

[32]Ibid., 177-78.

architects had actually written, the *Architectural Review* offered instead a curt Trotskyite polemic against all contemporary Soviet architecture.

The irony behind such criticism was that the editors were hardly devotees of such a heavy-handed version of modernism as represented in their introduction, but rather critics in search of alternative approaches that could widen the principles of modernist architecture as embodied in the work of Le Corbusier and his followers. Beginning before the war and lasting through the 1970s, Hastings and other critics pioneered the concept of "Townscape" urban planning and used the *Architectural Review* as its platform. They promoted their theory as an alternative to the modernist planning visions of CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture), as well as the Garden City theories that shaped the New Town projects in postwar England. Rather than subjugate nature and break from past traditions as modernism demanded, "Townscape" proponents sought planning schemes that included cultural heritage and the natural environment within the traditional division of town and country. Eschewing the universalism of modernist town planning, they billed "Townscape" as a specifically English way of sculpting the natural and built environment, and turned to Romanticism and the 18th century gentry's paternalistic approach to planning for inspiration.[33] In pursuing "Townscape" and other architectural and planning alternatives such as the Swedish inspired "New Empiricism," Hastings and his colleagues were attempting to expand the field of modern architecture beyond the rigid functionalism and revolutionary ethos of modernism. They embraced the same building methods and technologies available to Le Corbusier, but insisted that there was more than one way to

[33]Erten, "Thomas Sharp's Collaboration with H. de C. Hastings."

employ them effectively in the postwar cityscape.[34] In short, Hastings and his circle were also in search of their own "critical regionalism."

The editors' architectural agenda complicates our understanding of their exchange with the Soviet architects in a fruitful way. When responding to the Soviet architects' essays and addressing their readers about what Soviet architecture represented, the editors spoke initially in a defensive and simplified modernist discourse that obscured the complexity of their own approach to the modern movement. Self-censorship, it appeared, was not only a circumstance of Soviet intellectual life. In comparison to the editors, the Soviet architects began this exchange not by regurgitating a well-established discourse, but by speaking more critically and broadly about a range of issues that town planners and architects faced in both the Soviet Union and the West. In the first chapter of this exchange in May 1947, the English editors and the Soviet architects found themselves at opposite ends of where they were supposed to be from a Westerner's perspective. The editors were regurgitating a party line they did not really believe, while the Soviet architects were thinking critically and broadly about architecture. To be sure, it was the Soviet architects' refusal to speak like the *Architectural Review*'s editors in a Manichean and didactic discourse of their own that got them into so much trouble back home with Stalin and Zhdanov.

Peer review at Stalin's court of honor

Soon after the *Architectural Review* published its May 1947 issue, the architects found themselves under criticism at home and several months later in front of an honor court of seven

[34]Erten, "Shaping 'The Second Half Century,'" 216-21.

peers.[35] Most of the court's members occupied high posts in the Soviet architectural community such as the chairman, Viacheslav Shkvarikov, who was the deputy head of the USSR Soviet of Ministers' Architectural Affairs Committee. Another member was Aleksei Shchusev, a pre-revolutionary practitioner of Russian Revivalism who reinvented himself in the 1920s as a Soviet architect most famous for his design of Lenin's Mausoleum.[36] Eight individuals listed as witnesses in the investigation included other high profile architects such as Arkadii Mordvinov, vice-president of the Academy of Architecture, and Nikolai Kolli, a member of the academy's presidium and vice-president of the architectural section in the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS). A group of experts chosen to review the articles included such key figures as Dmitrii Chechulin, at the time Moscow's chief architect, and Boris Iofan, identified in the court's records as the designer of the Palace of Soviets, the famous project in Moscow that was never built.[37] In short, by late 1947, the three architects' case had become a well-known affair within the elite stratum of the Soviet architectural profession.

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[35]The honor court's archival records include four files in the collection of the Soviet of Ministers' Architectural Affairs Committee. They contain the court's stenographic records, petitions from the accused, the court's decision, copies of the architects' articles, and various reports from the Architectural Affairs Committee's party organization. The Soviet mass media does not appear to have widely covered the case. The newspaper, *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, did publish in March 1949 a scathing critique, "Bourgeois cosmopolitans in architectural theory and criticism," that lambasted Arkin's article and his role in having all three articles published, but did not mention the English journal's title or the honor court. See "Burzhuaznye kosmopolity v arkhitekturnoi teorii i kritike," *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, March 22, 1949, 4.

[36]The remaining five court members were I. V. Ryl'skii, a member of the Academy of Architecture; E. G. Chernov, deputy director of the academy's Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture; Z. N. Bykov, head of the industrial arts administration of the Soviet of Ministers' Architectural Affairs Committee; A. V. Romanov, chairman of a "union of housing and municipal construction"; and N. S. Kucherova, a representative of the academy's party organization. RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, l. 136. On Shchusev's career, see Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), 73. Timothy Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 225-27.

[37]The other witnesses included V. N. Semenov, a member of the Academy of Architecture and head of its Institute of Urban Planning; N. Kh. Poliakov, head of the faculty on urban planning at Moscow's Institute of Architecture; A. I. Mikhailov, head of the section on Soviet architecture in the academy's Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture; V. V. Baburov, head of the urban planning administration of the Soviet of Ministers' Architectural Affairs Committee; and N. N. Smirnov, head of the administration on housing of the Architectural Affairs

In its final decision, the honor court made clear that Arkin was primarily to blame for the articles and had missed an opportunity to show the world how well the Soviet Union was reconstructing after the war. As the scientific head of the architectural section of VOKS, he had been in charge of responding to the *Architectural Review*'s request for the articles. The honor court faulted him for allowing the articles to be sent in December 1946 without proper review by the architectural section of VOKS. This was an especially egregious error on Arkin's part, the honor court pointed out, since the Union of Soviet Architects had already discussed one of the touchstone ideological texts meant to keep the intelligentsia in line: Zhdanov's August 1946 speech regarding the thick journals, *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*.[38] The honor court's accusations illustrated the difference that one year could make in the political contexts, both international and domestic, in which the Soviet architects worked on their articles since the *Architectural Review* had initially contacted them in December 1945. Their failure or resistance to keep up with these changes had drawn the attention of party ideologues on a matter that, the evidence suggests, Arkin and his colleagues at VOKS had handled without interference from above.

Between December 1946, when the architects sent their essays, and their publication in May 1947, Stalin and Zhdanov intensified their attacks on the intelligentsia for its perceived ideological weaknesses and servility to the West. Stalin ordered Zhdanov to create a new mechanism for this effort, the honor courts, which were established in March 1947, but

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Committee. The group of experts who reviewed the articles also included S. E. Chernyshev, a member of the Academy of Architecture. RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 136-7.

[38]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 135-36, 152-53. A key moment in the Party's campaign against the intelligentsia, Zhdanov's speech was preceded by a major Central Committee resolution attacking the two journals in part for having published material that displayed "servility before the modern bourgeois culture of the West." As quoted in Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, 32-34.

discontinued in late 1949.[39] Eighty-two ministries and other bodies set up their honor courts, which were loosely based on a similar institution in the Tsarist military.[40] The most famous case, about which historians know the most, was directed against the scientists Nina Kliueva and Grigorii Roskin for having allegedly revealed their work to Westerners on their potential cure for cancer.[41] Stalin played a key role in drawing attention to their case and devising an honor court to address their alleged transgressions. Following Kliueva and Roskin's trial in May 1947, the Central Committee circulated in mid-July a letter on their case that drove home the Party's central demand that the intelligentsia stamp out all "kowtowing and servility before the bourgeois culture of the West."[42]

This was the greatest error that Arkin and his fellow architects had committed. Soon after the Central Committee circulated its letter, the party organization of the Academy of Architecture began to criticize Arkin, Bunin, and Bylinkin for their articles.[43] In early November, the party organization of the Architectural Affairs Committee (under the Soviet of Ministers USSR) recommended that an honor court deal with the three men.[44] Following more than a month of investigation, the court met from December 17 to 23, and submitted its verdict on December

[39]"O sudakh chesti v ministerstvakh SSSR i tsentral'nykh vedomstvakh" in *Stalin i kosmopolitizm: Dokumenty agitpropa TsK KPSS, 1945-1953*, ed. D. Nadzhafov and Z. Belousova (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 108-9.

[40]Kees Boterbloem, "The Eternal Ensign: Andrei Zhdanov and the Survival of Tsarist Military Culture in the Soviet Union," *War and Society* 22, no. 1 (May 2004): 11-12.

[41]Nikolai Krementsov, *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Vladimir Esakov and Elena Levina, *Stalinskie "sudy chesti": Delo "KR"* (Moscow: Nauka, 2005).

[42]As quoted in Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, 36-38.

[43]This information is drawn from two petitions Bylinkin wrote in August and November. RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 46, ll. 89, 94.

[44]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 46, ll. 8-11.

24.[45] It found that the architects committed three main errors: displaying servility toward the West; inadequately delineating the differences between the Soviet Union and the capitalist West; and shameless self-promotion. The court also blamed the architects for the introduction in the *Architectural Review*, in which the editors had "slandered Soviet architecture and the Soviet system with unconcealed hostility." Their articles, the court decided, had given the journal an easy opening to do this.[46] The editors' introduction had indeed derided Soviet architecture as a bizarre specimen falling far short of "European standards." They had described Soviet architecture as "bourgeois and retrogressive" and "pretentious, naive and exceedingly bourgeois in taste."[47] Their polemic resembled Soviet political discourse and its own diatribes against all things "bourgeois". This politically charged exchange was precisely what the three architects had hoped to avoid and considered unprofessional. Yet they were now in the middle of it.

The language of the honor court's reports dutifully employed the language of the *Zhdanovshchina* and its noxious blend of self-righteous indignation in pursuit of the allegedly unpatriotic. The three architects had "committed an undignified anti-patriotic act."[48] Bylinkin had "acted not like a scientific Bolshevik, armed with Marxist-Leninist doctrine and resisting bourgeois ideology, but like an apolitical non-party philistine, irresponsibly discussing Soviet architecture abroad."[49] He had done so "forgetting his obligation to the Motherland." His decision to publish illustrations of his own projects constituted "the pursuit of popularity that is undignified for a Soviet architect." More broadly, Bylinkin had not properly situated housing in

[45]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 135-60.

[46]Ibid., 153.

[47]"Reconstruction in the U.S.S.R.," 177.

[48]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 46, l. 8.

[49]Ibid., 11.

the "comparison of two worlds – the socialist and the capitalist," and failed to show "what was different and better about our Soviet system in comparison to capitalism."[50] The honor court's investigation showed as little interest as the *Architectural Review* in seeing the common ground Soviet architects and urban planners shared with their Western counterparts.

Arkin's transgressions in this regard had been even worse. By suggesting that Soviet and English architects were both embarking on "a new era in architecture after the destruction of cities," Arkin's article "put on an equal footing the architecture of our socialist country and the architecture of capitalist countries."[51] He had gone down "the path of servility before the reign of the foreign." He had collapsed Soviet architecture together with capitalist architecture into the category of "modern architecture," making it impossible to see the clear differences between the capitalist approach, "in which architecture serves the interests of the ruling classes," and the Soviet approach, in which "architecture serves all the people and from start to finish is imbued with the deep care for the Soviet person."[52] Such criticism was a vivid illustration of the regime's overall reaction to the affair, as well as the Soviet leadership's longstanding anxieties about its relationship to the West. It captured what György Péteri calls the "fundamental tension of the state-socialist project: the tension between the drive for modernity and the profound need to steer modernizing developments so as to produce and reproduce systemic exceptionalism rather than to blur the distinction between capitalism and socialism."[53] In regards to the urbanist and

[50]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 157-58.

[51]Ibid., 140-41.

[52]Ibid., 154-55.

[53]Péteri, "The Occident Within – or the Drive for Exceptionalism and Modernity," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 933.

disurbanist debate, the honor court faulted Arkin for pointlessly rehashing a dead argument that only served to put Soviet and Western architecture on the same level.[54]

Bunin was also guilty of "servility before the reign of the foreign." His article had "legitimized and translated the contradiction, specific to the capitalist city, between the center and the outskirts into the language of artistic regularity." Worse still, he failed to understand the Soviet city, displayed "a formalistic approach to Soviet architecture" and "deprives the heroic city of Stalingrad of all its artistic treasures." Bunin's explanation aggravated the honor court. He tried to pass off his article as merely being "'business-like' and therefore not concerning questions of an ideological nature." He claimed it be "'ordinary,' in other words, not timed for the jubilee date" [the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution]. He argued that his article was no different from anything he had written and that it was merely "'informative,' that is, not attempting to address any social problems or general points." Consequently, he was guilty of "separating science from politics, art and architecture from ideology."[55] Not to be outdone by the *Architectural Review*, the honor court provided its own lesson to the three architects and the broader architectural community about how a Soviet architect should speak to a foreign audience lest he sully his honor, as well as that of his profession and country.

Through petitions to the honor court and party organizations, and their own participation at the trial, the architects responded in various ways ranging from admission of guilt and heaping blame on others to resisting the charges and demanding changes to the court's final statement. Bylinkin initially wrote at least three petitions in which he sought to explain in the vein of self-criticism how horrified he was at the charges, how poorly he had written his article, and how he

[54]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 142-43.

[55]Ibid., 146-47, 155-56.

should have written it. "The weight and unexpected nature of the accusation were so great that I couldn't even think in those first days," he informed the honor court's chairman, Viacheslav Shkvarikov, "however on that same day, July 28, I sent a petition to the party bureau of the Academy [of Architecture] and asked them to get to the bottom of this question." He told Shkvarikov outright that "my article is a bad article … It's bad to the core. It does not reflect in a dignified manner the Soviet principles of building residential districts" (his emphasis).[56]

In another petition, Bylinkin admitted that publishing the images with his name led to the impression of seeking "popularity," but insisted this had not been his intention. To fix his mistakes, he promised to write the *Architectural Review* a letter to blast it for the introduction. The journal might not print his letter, in which he case he would proceed "with unmasking the 'freedom of the bourgeois press' and this nonsense and lies in the introduction of the *Architectural Review*" by stating his case in the Soviet and English communist press. He claimed to have set up "a review of works in the publication process at the Academy" and committed himself to "the unmasking of harmful urban planning theories, which the West and America use to take the working masses' attention away from the real causes of the crisis of modern capitalist cities and away from the horrible living conditions of the toiling masses in capitalist society."[57] Bylinkin was the quickest to admit his guilt, but not without first convincing the honor court that it had misrepresented his article to say the English and Americans had invented micro-districts, whereas he had really said Soviet architects had done so first.[58] Upon clearing up this matter, he gave in to the charges. "I agree with the honor court's stated formulation and believe that it is

[56]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 46, ll. 89, 91.

[57]Ibid., 92-93, 97-98.

[58]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 48, l. 315.

objective and correctly assesses what I have done."[59] Arkin and Bunin also admitted their guilt, insisted that they had acted in good faith, and conceded that their articles left much to be desired. But they both explained that they would address parts of the accusation with which, as Arkin put it flatly, "I don't agree."[60]

Arkin had already articulated the substance of his objections at the honor court's meeting of December 20, the chief purpose of which appears to have been to make sure each architect would admit his guilt at the final December 23 hearing. Arkin insisted that the correspondence between the *Architectural Review* and VOKS had gone through the latter's English section and not the architectural section for which he was responsible. Shkvarikov asked Arkin to put this off until the final hearing, but Arkin insisted it be raised now and resisted Shkvarikov's demand that he admit his guilt so they could move on. Interpreting a VOKS official's testimony that Arkin had asked him to read, Shvarikov concluded that how this matter was represented "is not important." Arkin shot back, "But for me it is important." Furthermore, he demanded that he not be blamed for the two other architects' articles. He would answer for his own work, but the other two men would have to answer for theirs.[61]

The three architects were not the only ones who contested the charges. Some members of the court defended them and sought to lessen the charges. One was Aleksei Shchusev, the architect of the Lenin Mausoleum. His defense of the accused appeared to be motivated by professional solidarity in the face of political persecution, as well as shared ideas on architecture and urban planning. Shchusev had had his own brush with Stalinist politics when the head of the Union of Architects, Karo Alabian, unsuccessfully attempted to purge him from that body in 1937. His

[59]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 1, 14.

[60]Ibid., 15.

[61]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 48, ll. 316-19.

sins had included praise of Western construction technology at the first congress of Soviet architects in June of that year.[62] While he survived this ordeal, the experience must have left him keenly aware of the dangers inherent in Stalinist cultural politics and most likely poorly disposed toward Alabian. His own theories on urban planning may have also made him sympathetic to the accused. As illustrated in his work on the New Moscow city plan in the 1920s, Shchusev had championed the inclusion of new elements within a city's existing structure rather than erasing its past heritage.[63] Arkin's position that urban planning and architecture had to incorporate local history likely resonated with Shchusev's own philosophy.

It was Bunin's article, however, that probably made the biggest impression on Shchusev. Bunin championed urban planning that respected "the nature of the city's inheritance in works of architectural art" and praised Shchusev at length for his plan to reconstruct Novgorod, which "provides for the restoration of all the ancient monumental buildings." In contrast to Novgorod, Bunin dismissed the reconstruction plan for Stalingrad for being "devoid of any valuable artistic legacy." Discussing the city that bore Stalin's name in such terms was probably not a good idea and explains why the charges against Bunin mentioned his disregard for the city. Bunin indeed took aim at what Stalinism represented, starting with the architect in charge of its reconstruction, Karo Alabian. He charged that Alabian "was in a position to plan new buildings in complete disregard of everything except the approved town-planning scheme and the character of the prevailing landscape." Like his politics, Bunin seemed to imply, Alabian executed plans without much thought to what architects before him had built in the city. In contrast, Shchusev "enjoyed no such freedom" in reconstructing Novgorod. Instead of leaving matters there, Bunin took

[62]Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 191-202.

[63]Colton, *Moscow*, 225-30.

things further by suggesting that Shchusev was a more honorable man than his nemesis. He continued, "it is extremely difficult to decide which of the two opposite problems [rebuilding Novgorod and Stalingrad] has been the more laborious, and honourable to solve, because only a really great artist could play a secondary architectural role in a worthy manner amidst a host of architectural chef-d'oeuvres." Shchusev "has proved not to be lacking in the requisite qualities," but evidently Alabian was.[64]

The editors of the *Architectural Review* had no idea what Bunin was talking about, which was too bad since he was making their Trotskyite point that a mediocre bureaucrat had risen above more capable individuals to shape Soviet architecture. Calling Alabian's honor into question and praising Shchusev's revealed the three architects' desire to define a professional space where they alone determined the value of their work. In celebrating Novgorod's architectural heritage, Bunin drove the point further by highlighting "the Vetche Square, where in olden days, the populace assembled to discuss affairs of State." The democratic legacy of Novgorod's medieval past was embedded in its very architecture and worth emulating, whereas Stalingrad (and by implication Stalin) offered architects only "complete disregard of everything except the approved town-planning scheme."[65] Was this not Bunin's subtle way of teaching his English audience a lesson about modernism, informed as it was by a similar desire to replace what existed with something entirely new and what the editors of the *Architectural Review* called "absolute standards"? If Novgorod symbolized an alternative to Stalingrad and Stalinism, honor provided architects with a way to judge their colleagues independently of the Party. But Stalin and Zhdanov soon tried to turn even this concept against the intelligentsia by subjecting them to

[64]Bunin, "The Reconstruction of Urban Centres," 180.

[65]Ibid.

honor courts. At the very least Shchusev sought to blunt the attack as best he could, perhaps seeking to protect Bunin who had defended the elder architect's honor and architectural values in an international forum.

Whatever his motivation, Shchusev took issue with the official accusations and its language. "What he [one of the architects] wrote isn't important, it doesn't mean that he's a criminal, yet here it's plainly written that he did so on purpose. Why did he 'lose a sense of responsibility'[?]" Seeking to soften the language of the charges, he urged his colleagues, "We don't need to write 'irresponsibly, undignified,' but simply say 'insufficiently scientific and proofread'." Shchusev complained about the phrase "groveling and servility before the West's bourgeois culture" and the charge that the architects had been unpatriotic. He suggested they write instead, "that they forgot their duty before the Motherland." But another architect on the court suggested this might sound worse and offered instead "an anti-patriotic act." Yet another objected to that idea, noting, "I don't see anything anti-patriotic in these articles…. There's nothing in them that would disparage our dignity." "And there's nothing that would raise our dignity," objected the prosecutor. Yet he, too, seemed interested in finding language that would lessen the charges. Referring back to Shchusev's suggestion, he noted that saying "they forgot their duty before the Motherland – that's worse."[66]

The honor court's final verdict reflected the tone of this discussion. Bunin and Bylinkin both received a "public censure" (*obshchestvennoe poritsanie*), the most lenient of three possible sanctions. The next highest punishment was a "public reprimand" (*obshchestvennyi vygovor*), which Arkin received. No one received the worst possible punishment by which the honor court

[66]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 48, ll. 308-12.

could turn a case over to a criminal court.[67] As in the case of Kliueva and Roskin[68], the three architects continued their professional careers.[69] Whether this was a typical outcome for all honor courts remains to be researched. Insofar as the architects' case was concerned, Stalin and Zhdanov used the court as a mechanism to bring the profession in line through the fear of repression rather than repression itself. They wished to quash architects' postwar expectations for greater contacts with Western counterparts and freer debate over sensitive topics without quashing their careers or personal lives. In short, they wanted to teach architects a lesson. By framing the issue around honor, Stalin and Zhdanov appropriated a concept that, as Bunin's article suggested, architects used to define professional excellence on their own terms. The resistance that architects on the honor court displayed to persecuting their colleagues demonstrates that Stalin and Zhdanov were less successful than they had hoped in rubbing the intelligentsia's face in their own notion of honor. At the same time, the honor court accomplished precisely what Stalin and Zhdanov had sought: to place the entire profession on notice and sever professional ties with their Western counterparts.

[67]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 159. On the three possible verdicts, see *Stalin i kosmopolitizm*, 109.

[68]On Kliueva and Roskin's continued research on a cure for cancer after the honor court and into the post-Stalin era, see Krementsov, *The Cure*, 158-213.

[69]Whether the court case adversely affected their careers is more difficult to determine. At the very least, as the following evidence suggests, the three architects continued working. Arkin became a professor at the Moscow Higher School for Industrial Art in 1953. See *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, no. 2 (Moscow: nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia," 2005), 226. Bunin, who had begun teaching at the Moscow Institute of Architecture in 1942, completed his doctorate in art history and became a party member in 1958. See *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 4, 3rd edition (Moscow: izdatel'stvo "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1971), 114. Bylinkin later served as an editor for a volume on Soviet architecture. See Nikolai Bylinkin and Aleksandr Riabushin, eds., *Istoriia sovetskoi arkhitektory, 1917-1954 gg.*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Stroiizdat, 1985).

A Letter from the USSR

To declare the end of such contacts, the three architects sent a letter to the *Architectural Review*, which it published in March 1948. As suggested above, Bylinkin was eager to respond to the editors' introduction and the three architects may have sent their letter even before their trial was over.[70] The beginning of their letter reflected once more their original assumption that entering into this dialogue was to have been conducted in a professional space free of polemics. They explained to the editors that "the exchange of information on all cultural and way-of-life questions" that British elites held in such high regard was all very good, but applied "only if the elementary rules of literary ethics and social honesty are observed, rules which seem to be ignored by the editorial staff of THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW." (emphasis in the original) Rather than adhere to this professional prerequisite for dialogue, the editors' 1947 introduction had launched "slanderous and groundless attacks on the whole of Soviet architecture and the Soviet people without touching on any of the actual points made in the articles." The architects were dumbfounded that the editors simply rejected the very possibility that "Soviet architecture as a great organically developing socialist art" could even exist as an alternative to what the West presently had.[71] In other words, the editors had a lesson to learn about their unprofessionalism and lack of imagination. For all of its claims to "absolute standards," the modernist critique they had chosen to employ made it impossible for them to see alternatives and consider that modernism was itself perhaps more regional than universal.

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[70]In their introduction to the architects' response, the editors indicated that it was delivered "in December 1947." Since the honor court's verdict was issued on December 24, it is probable that the architects sent their response before the trial was even complete. See "A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," *Architectural Review* 103, no. 615 (March 1948): 75. RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, ll. 152-60.

[71]"A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," 75.

Midway through their response, the Soviet architects switched to their own polemical attack that echoed the language of the honor court charges against them. Describing the editors' critique of Soviet architecture as a crude attempt "to belittle the great Soviet people and its new socialist culture," the architects articulated a stock defense of socialist realism far removed from their previous, more nuanced critique of the modern movement in the West. They reminded the editors "that architecture in the U.S.S.R., socialist in content, is developing in national forms which display the vivid originality of the peoples of the U.S.S.R." It was "free from the corrupting influence of the capitalist market" and consequently able "to reconstruct old towns and to put up new ones, using for the first time its newly framed principles of socialist town-planning." Forgetting their earlier claims that Soviet and Western architects shared common problems and approaches, the architects dutifully divided the world into the two camps worldview dictated by Stalin and Zhdanov. Their response also drew upon the changing meanings of the war, which served to underline differences. "Your preface cannot belittle the Soviet people who have given the world great men in every field of human creative endeavor, who have built a great socialist state and whose blood has freed the peoples of Europe from Fascist slavery." In other words, the English editors owed their freedom to speak largely to the Soviet citizens whose lowbrow tastes in architecture they so callously dismissed. Finally, the architects severed their ties with the journal by declaring "publicly that we refuse to contribute any further articles to this magazine," thereby fulfilling what Stalin and Zhdanov had hoped the honor court would achieve.[72]

In response to the architects' letter, the editors of the *Architectural Review* published an extended essay in both Russian and English to clarify their criticism of Soviet architecture and

[72]Ibid., 75-76.

reflect on the impasse of the exchange. It is important to note that the editors likely had no knowledge of the honor court before publishing their essay in March 1948. In fact, no evidence suggests they ever found out what had happened to the Soviet architects. As with their introduction in 1947, the editors continued in their 1948 essay to view the three architects as merely spokespersons of a larger system without ideas of their own and assumed that whatever they had written was an official Soviet view. In response to the architects' letter, the editors lamented "how wide is the gulf that now separates us from the Russians." This was an unintended outcome that might yet be fixed by "discover[ing] some meeting ground where, if it has to be, we can at least agree to differ with the Russian architect." Whereas the Soviet architects' ordeal before the honor court severely curtailed what they could now say and reduced their participation to bland polemics, the editors' worldview seemed to be expanding at this point of the exchange as they probed ways of making sense of the Soviet Union outside the straightjacket of their May 1947 introduction. "A Letter from the U.S.S.R." (the title they gave to the Soviet architects' response in March 1948) provoked a lesson on the limitations of the modernist architectural discourse the editors had employed against their Soviet colleagues. Drawing from the new lexicon of the Cold War, they admitted that "both sides of the curtain, so far as architecture is concerned, is apparently one of bewilderment," but pledged themselves "to survey the viewpoints of both sides" in order to allow each to understand the other.[73] To make good on their renewed effort to engage with Soviet architecture, the editors featured several photographs, with their own commentaries, from an exhibit on contemporary Soviet architecture that was being held at the Royal Institute of British Architecture. (Figures 1-3 include four of the ten photographs published in the *Architectural Review*).

[73]Ibid., 76.

A SURVEY OF RECENT BUILDINGS IN THE U.S.S.R.

An attempt has been made in the article on the preceding pages to define the difference between the Russian and the Western approach to the question of contemporary architectural style, and thus make it possible to look at the fruit of either in relation to its own background. Recent Russian buildings can also, however, be looked at simply as architectural designs. Some of the work shown at this month's exhibition at the R.I.B.A. is illustrated here with comments on the way it strikes the eye of the Western architect, who inevitably compares it with the recent architectural developments with which he is already familiar.

1

1, the Frunze Military Academy, Moscow, by Lev Rudnev and Vladimir Munz, 1937. A remarkable combination of elements—the main block of a type first developed in America about 1890, and then by men such as Behrens in Germany : a utilitarian structure crowned by a few very restrained classical elements. The ground floor screen on the other hand is bare, forbidding and wholly of a twentieth century monumental style, including its inset ornamental panels which succeed in making of hammer and sickle a pattern reminiscent of Paris and Western Avenue. The tank is a monument to the purpose of the building as well as to socialist realism in sculpture.

Figure 1. Photograph from an exhibit on contemporary Soviet architecture held at the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA) in 1948 and published in the *Architectural Review* in March 1948 along with the editors' response to the three Soviet architects' letter. The caption illustrates the editors' recurring critique of Soviet architecture's eclecticism. See "A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," *Architectural Review* 103, no. 615 (March 1948): 81. Figures 2 and 3 include photographs from the same RIBA exhibit. All four photographs are reproduced here with permission of the Royal Institute of British Architecture.

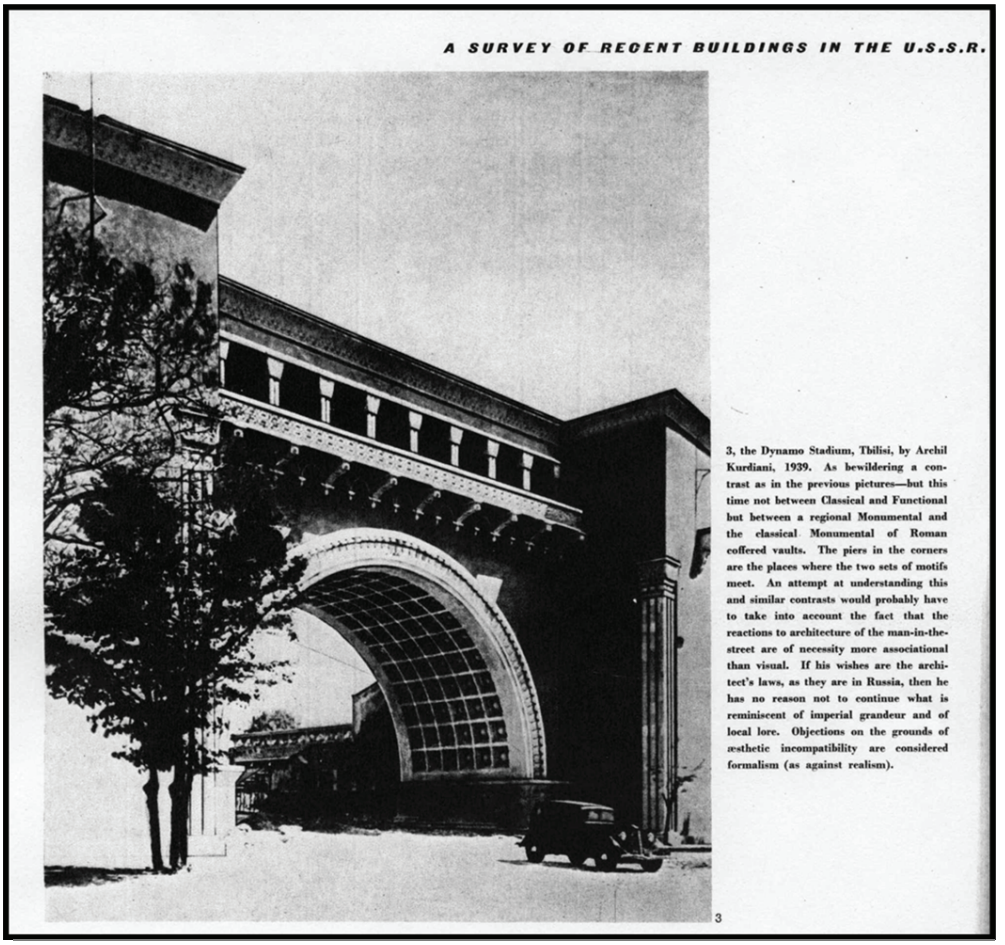
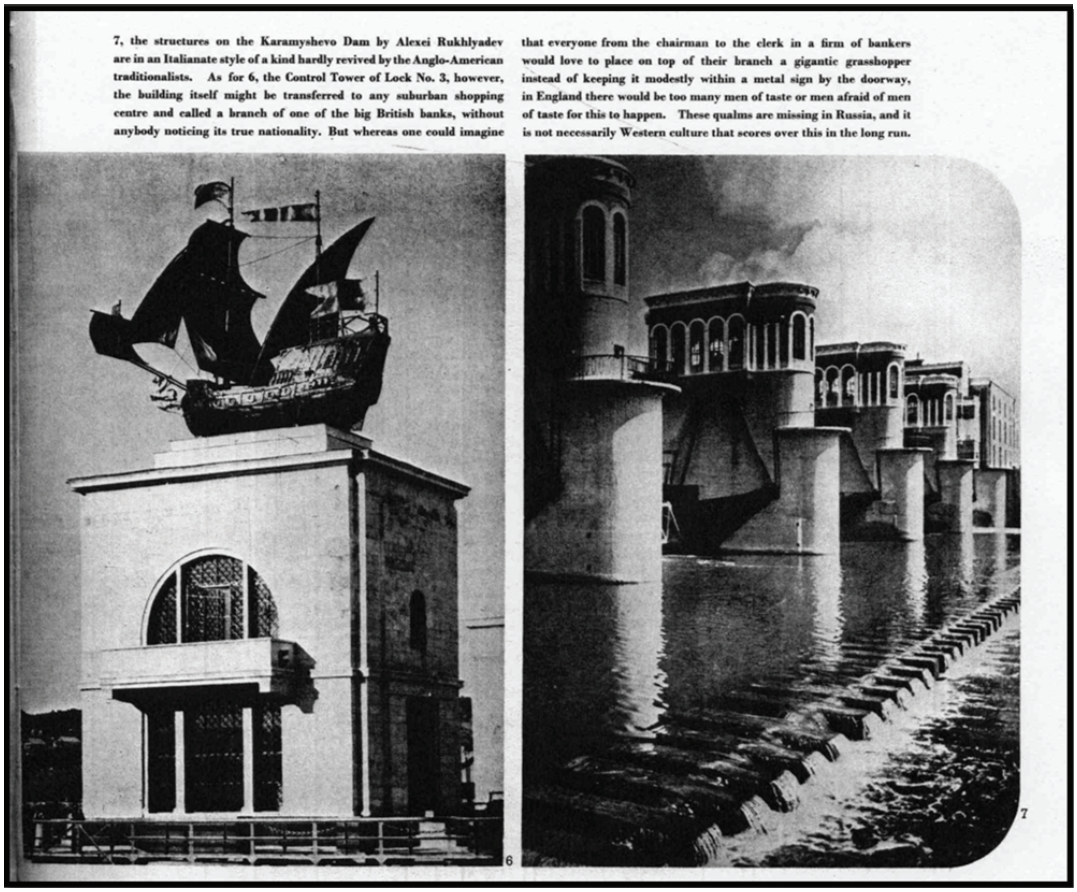


Figure 2. Photograph from the RIBA exhibit published in the *Architectural Review*. In the caption, the editors linked the eclectic combination of imperial and local motifs in the Dynamo Stadium to the ordinary person's desire to recognize established, traditional forms. See "A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," 82.


7, the structures on the Karamyshevo Dam by Alexei Rukhlyadev are in an Italianate style of a kind hardly revived by the Anglo-American traditionalists. As for 6, the Control Tower of Lock No. 3, however, the building itself might be transferred to any suburban shopping centre and called a branch of one of the big British banks, without anybody noticing its true nationality. But whereas one could imagine that everyone from the chairman to the clerk in a firm of bankers would love to place on top of their branch a gigantic grasshopper instead of keeping it modestly within a metal sign by the doorway, in England there would be too many men of taste or men afraid of men of taste for this to happen. These qualms are missing in Russia, and it is not necessarily Western culture that scores over this in the long run.

6

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Figure 3. The editors' critique of the Karamyshevo dam makes Greenberg's argument that both totalitarian regimes and capitalist countries produced lowbrow kitsch, while insisting that England retained enough good architectural taste to prevent such aesthetic catastrophes. See "A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," 83.

Straying far from the omniscience of modernist criticism, the editors admitted that without sufficient access to information, they knew little about what Soviet architects were actually designing. But what they did know greatly perplexed and worried them. They wondered why Soviet architects all seemed to march in "complete unanimity" behind "their present eclectic

style." Despite noting the diversity in such a style that spanned "many forms from the most scholarly reproductions of past styles to naive picture-book fantasies," the editors failed to see that eclecticism was by definition hardly unanimous, even in the Soviet case and especially when compared to the uncompromising principles of modernism. What really confused the editors was that the Soviets had "consciously chosen for the architectural expression of new and revolutionary social, political and economic ideals, the architectural styles of past ages – ages of which the philosophies are in most respects antipathetic to them." According to the editors' Marxist worldview, this simply made no sense. "The Western architect, therefore, asks himself: how can the Russia of to-day be content with motifs for the most part evolved by the ruling classes of pre-revolutionary days?" Why had Soviet architects abandoned the "aesthetic experimentation" that lay at the heart of the modern movement to which they had previously contributed?[74] Why, in other words, were Soviet architects not behaving like the avant-garde architects of the 1920s that Western critics wished they had continued being?

In answering this question, the editors elaborated upon their original, Trotskyite explanation of bureaucratically imposed conformity and the path that Soviet architects had taken to get there. Soviet architects had not resisted the state and only then conformed against their will "through the conscious suppression of attempts to rebel against authority." Instead, conformity came naturally to the Soviet architect and operated within him at a deeper, historically determined and subconscious level. "So strong in Russia is the tradition of conformity, so religious in character – it seems – the faith with which the validity of the line of policy laid down as dialectically correct is accepted, so powerful is the logic of theory, that whoever fails to act consistently with it becomes a useless and irrelevant part of the whole complex mechanism." The Soviet architect's

[74]Ibid., 76-77.

willingness to conform, rather than coercion alone, was what ultimately set him apart from his Western counterpart. "The Western architect," the editors argued, "believes his own independence of action to be the essential basis of creative endeavour; in Russia, so strong is the prestige of philosophical theory that conformity is not a defeat for the individual but the opportunity of access to the central fount of inspiration." At stake was nothing less than the autonomy of the architect and a space for experimentation that together would keep things moving forward. Echoing Greenberg, the editors explained that the greatest obstacle to forward progress was "popular architecture" in both the West and the Soviet Union. In the former, the architect faced "the combined efforts of the impressionable (and usually philistine) public, the state official and the commercial publicity man." In the latter, popular architecture supplanted the fruitful experimentations of the 1920s and arose from one-party rule, the lack of an industrial base without which modern architecture was unsustainable, and the lowbrow, traditional tastes of ordinary people yearning for "the architectural splendours that had previously been the perquisites of the rich and powerful."[75] For Greenberg, the only way out of this impasse, otherwise known as kitsch, was an unapologetic modernist idiom that demanded difficult art that represented and conceded nothing outside or especially behind itself in order to keep moving forward. In repeating the party line against popular architecture, perhaps the editors felt the same pressure they ascribed to others in England who dared dabble in the evils of popular taste (see their commentary in figure 3). Nonetheless, as explained above, the editors wondered if there was an alternative to Greenberg's rigid modernist edicts and whether the Soviets themselves might also be searching for it. Everything they knew about Soviet architecture told them otherwise.

[75]Ibid., 77-78.

The editors' search for architectural alternatives was especially evident in the valuable lesson they were learning about themselves as they tried to make sense of Soviet architects and what motivated them. Such self-reflection reveals in fascinating detail the extent to which such exchanges impacted both sides across the Nylon Curtain. Confronted with the circumstances under which Soviet architects worked, the editors revealed themselves to be greater proponents of liberalism than their Marxist criticism of architecture would suggest. They praised the Western ideal of "unbounded freedom for small scale experiment and individual thought" in contrast to Soviet architects' adherence to "certain approved styles." Speaking the language of John Stuart Mill, the editors declared the salvation of Western democracy in modern times to rest upon "maintaining one fundamental principle, the principle of the integrity of the individual, from which follows another principle, that of the respect for minority opinion." This was where the Western creator of art found himself. "He may from time to time be ignored, he may be left to starve or be killed by kindness, but his work, it is felt, does represent one of man's most worth-while activities, and must be allowed to express itself without purposeful outside interference." The editors concluded, "In terms of architecture this frankly implies a certain degree of *laissez-faire* so far as style is concerned."[76] (emphasis in the original) Having confronted what they perceived to be the foundations of Soviet architecture and the Soviet architect's subjugation, the editors decided that the West's model was still preferable even with its own unfortunate tendencies in popular architecture.

Despite their misgivings about the Soviet architect's lack of autonomy, the editors concluded their essay by wondering whether they could still find common cause with their Soviet counterparts in creating an authentic "popular participation in the adventure of modern

[76]Ibid., 78.

architecture" that did not descend into kitsch yet went beyond a sterile and inaccessible modernism. They praised "the current [read: their own] demand for the humanization of the modern architectural idiom, for something more organic to set against the over-abstract, for recognition of the emotions as of equal importance with the intellect." Such statements echoed what the three Soviet architects had argued in 1947 and the editors now readily admitted the similarities. Perhaps the editors really were "pursuing the same ends as the Russians, albeit by an almost opposite technique, in our efforts to recapture the evocative qualities in architecture without which no vernacular idiom can flourish." If so, they were left wondering why their dialogue with their Soviet counterparts had ended in such acrimony. "If we are … but choosing a different way of approaching the same objectives, there seems little reason why this should not be stated openly, and why we should not agree to differ on it."[77] Here was the central question of how this exchange had descended from a spirit of cooperation in undertaking similar problems in reconstruction after the war to misunderstandings and recriminations. In questioning whether the basis of this conflict even made sense and seeking a way out, the editors were thinking along the same lines as Soviet and American political leaders periodically did throughout the Cold War when they, too, questioned the conflict's rationale and sought alternatives.[78]

The answer to the editors' own question lay partly in the modernist discourse they had initially used to address the Soviet architects' essays and the reaction it had provoked among party ideologues in Moscow. Using this discourse not only sparked the conflict by offending the Soviet side, but made it impossible for the editors to communicate what they themselves thought about architecture and urban planning. Why then had they employed a discourse that represented

[77]Ibid., 78-79.

[78]For a study that examines why Soviet and American leaders were incapable of resolving the Cold War conflict despite opportunities and their desire to do so, see Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*.

architectural principles they did not subscribe to? As stated above, one reason was that the editors were defending the precepts of modernism in reaction to how the Soviet architects, Arkin in particular, had critiqued it. In addition, modernism's claims to "absolute standards" made it an ideal weapon to brandish against a perceived inferior whose methods of professional organization seemed to threaten the very basis of what it meant to be an architect in the West. A fear of intellectual contamination and guilt by association also motivated the editors to adopt a discourse that could clearly delineate between "us" and "them". They worried that any similarities to what the Soviets were doing would discredit their own architectural ideas. Indeed, one critic later accused the journal of adhering to an "Anglo-Zhdanov line" in architecture, suggesting that their efforts to revise the modern movement risked reproducing the shoddy aesthetics of socialist realism.[79] In the 1947 introduction, the editors tried to draw a sharp distinction in the minds of their readership between what they insisted were the journal's positive contributions and revisions to the modern movement and what they saw as the Soviets' confused and inarticulate knock-off dictated by bureaucrats. In stating these differences, they used Soviet architecture as a means to discuss and purge everything that was or could possibly go wrong in their own efforts at formulating a new direction in modern architecture. If their aim in 1947 was to distance themselves from Soviet architecture, their response in 1948 recognized that they had done so in such a way that compromised their own ideas.

Despite such insights into their own way of thinking, the editors found it difficult, when responding to the three architects' letter and commenting on the RIBA exhibit, not to continue speaking in a modernist discourse that presupposed rigid aesthetic hierarchies. The editors even found one more reason that their Soviet counterparts had regressed. They argued that

[79]On how the editors sought to avoid such associations with what they perceived to be Soviet socialist realism, see Erten, "Shaping 'The Second Half Century'," 216-21.

industrialization and the war effort had stalled the Soviet Union's economic growth at the stage of heavy industry, thereby stunting the development of design work. In contrast, the West's economies had begun to sustain a revolution in mass consumption that now drove design in novel and vibrant directions. Naturally, "the search for a new vernacular" (code for the *Architectural Review*'s own aesthetic agenda and what we should really call their search for a "critical regionalism") was in keeping with the times and therefore could not be associated with Soviet practice. The modernist aesthetic, previously focused on representing the industrial age, had entered "the world of everyday things, and designers have taken their inspiration from these things either consciously or because the qualities these things possess – their freshness, their spare economy of means, their capacity for progressive refinement – have made them symbolic of contemporary aspirations." The West had already begun to outstrip the Soviet Union in the next fields to be transformed by modernist design: mass consumption and the home. "While our light industry was in full production," the editors told their readers, "and new styles of household goods, for example, were accustoming the Western eye to changing visual values, the Russians were concentrating on heavy industry and capital equipment." The Soviets' inability to transition from an industrial to a consumerist economy not only meant they were behind, but helped explain why they had chosen their retrogressive path in architecture and design. "When the circumstances in Russia demanded the search for more sensual qualities in design, it was understandable therefore that the architect should look for them either in the eclectic products of the age before mechanization, or in regional characteristics where some sort of organic qualities happen to have survived, however irrelevant they may seem to-day."[80] In contrast, Westerners moved forever forward beyond the war and industrialization; they found the "sensual qualities"

[80]"A Letter from the U.S.S.R.," 78.

they were looking for by shopping for goods infused with the novelty and simplicity of modernist design.

If the Soviets had failed to learn the first lesson in modernism, they were already behind in the second one that taught how the proper synthesis of modernist design and mass consumption would remake the everyday material world and push design work forward. With this argument, the *Architectural Review* foreshadowed the shift in the modernist lesson plan that the Soviet housing experts witnessed on their tour of American suburbs in 1955. By the mid-1950s, reconstruction was no longer as pressing an issue for Western architects and urban planners as it had been in 1947. They now turned to the ways that mass consumption and urban population growth shaped their design work and paid their salaries. Mass consumption and suburbanization in America had also become a measure of the West's postwar prosperity and were deployed as non-military weapons of the Cold War, as David Riesman's "Nylon War" had foretold in 1951. Yet much like reconstruction had held the possibility of building common ground with the Soviets by providing a shared experience, housing and mass consumption held the potential for recognizing common desires beyond Cold War conflicts. But from the West's perspective, such a dialogue still had to be conducted as the lesson of a teacher to a budding, if deeply troubled student who might abandon all of his bizarre ideas if the lesson went well. Instead of having such a highbrow publication as the *Architectural Review* guide this lesson, it was now up to the middlebrow writers of the American mass media to take up the second lesson in modernism. For their part, the Soviets under Khrushchev were now much more eager to learn that lesson, not in order to accept their inferior status, but to overcome it with the knowledge their experts could gain about the latest home building technology and domestic consumer goods the West had to offer.

Soviet housing experts in Eisenhower's America

In October 1955, 10 housing experts from the Soviet Union embarked on a goodwill tour of the United States to learn how Americans built their homes and lived in them. Invited by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the Soviet delegation included primarily high-level officials from urban planning and housing construction, as well as one architect. The group traveled around the United States over the next several weeks, investigating housing and the American way of life in New York, Washington, DC, Boston, Fort Wayne, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tucson, Houston, Austin, New Orleans, and Cleveland.[81] The tour took place when such exchanges were just beginning to be renewed and three years before the Soviet Union and the United States signed an agreement on cultural exchanges in 1958. Along with other preliminary exchanges including agriculturalists and journalists from the Soviet Union, the housing specialists' tour was a bellwether for conducting Cold War diplomacy through cultural and professional exchanges.[82] Such tours, as well as their uncertain status, drew close scrutiny not only from both superpowers, but especially from the Western mass media eager to report on anything unscripted in the Cold War struggle. These exchanges were at the center of the Iron Curtain's transformation into the more porous boundary of the Nylon Curtain and the unpredictable scenes it might allow. The tours ultimately shaped how both adversaries, as well as the mass media, approached more well known exchanges of the period, such as the American

[81]Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (hereafter, RGALI), f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, ll. 2, 4.

[82]Soviet journalists toured the US at the same time as the housing delegation. See "Russian Journalists Say, 'All Wives' Alike," *Tuscon Daily Citizen*, October 20, 1955. For an analysis of the journalists' tour and its impact on Soviet approaches to the Cold War, see Magnúsdóttir, "Keeping Up Appearances," 149-95. An exchange of agriculturalists was cited during the housing experts' 1955 tour as the event that began such exchanges. See "Russian Visitors," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1955. On the 1958 agreement, see Richmond, *Cultural Exchange*, 14-15.

and Soviet Exhibitions of 1959 in Moscow and New York, respectively, and Khrushchev's own tour of the United States, also in 1959.

In contrast to how the *Architectural Review* affair of 1947 had ended, both the Soviet Union and, in this case, the United States seemed genuinely interested in easing tensions by highlighting how both societies shared many of the same domestic goals. Unlike the late 1940s when the Soviet Union refused to take lessons from the West (after all, Stalin and the Party were the only true teachers of Soviet citizens), Khrushchev's regime was prepared to accept lessons it could apply at home to improve the socialist economy, and ultimately win the Cold War. The 1955 tour showed how both sides used mass housing and consumer culture to wage the Cold War more intensely through non-military means and decide once and for all whether capitalism or socialism was best. Changes in the Soviet approach to the Cold War were not the only factor that initially made the 1955 tour an ideal setting for professional interaction and a second lesson in postwar modernist design. Under Dwight Eisenhower, the United States government actively sought out such exchanges as part of its overall commitment to easing tensions with the Soviet Union. The Americans who hosted and reported on the Soviet housing experts, however, played a far more direct role than their government in shaping the course and meaning of the exchange.

The NAHB and American journalists who reported on the tour developed a lesson plan for their Cold War counterparts that fundamentally differed in tone and content from the *Architectural Review*'s. Instead of lecturing the Soviets on their hopeless quest for respectability among the high priests of modernism, the NAHB and American mass media taught their Soviet guests the wonders that modernist design could bring to the masses through efficiently designed kitchens and prefabricated single-family homes. Liberated from the *Architectural Review*'s fears that the mass market, not just Soviet totalitarianism, might drown the modern movement and the

architect's autonomy in a morass of demoralizing kitsch, the American hosts happily announced that modernist design was up for sale at the nearest suburb and that all their Soviet guests had to do to become free and modern was buy an American home. But despite its conciliatory tone, the American lesson in modernist design was nonetheless implicitly predicated on power dynamics that cast the Soviet Union as an inferior other, which became more explicit as the tour reached its conclusion.

The 1955 tour thus not only tells us something about changes in the Soviet approach to the Cold War, but reflects how American voices transformed the Western discourse on the conflict with a new set of assumptions and a dynamism that could appear as foreign to those defending modernism from the taint of mass consumerism as it was intriguing to open-minded Soviet housing experts. Written within a stale orientalist paradigm at the heart of the modern world's once greatest, now fading empire, the *Architectural Review*'s highbrow lesson had presented an aesthetic hierarchy that established, but also needed the Soviet Union's inferior position to prove once again that modernism was both universal and uniquely Western. In contrast, the NAHB and the American press eagerly sought Soviet citizens' inclusion – but not the Soviet state and definitely not its socialist ideology – into an emerging world that fused modernist design with suburban life as a way of ultimately resolving the Cold War. They cast their conciliatory lesson on the universal virtues of domestic life in what Christina Klein calls the "global imaginary of integration" that America's middlebrow writers, cultural figures, and policymakers used to legitimize the United States' growing geopolitical power and simultaneously downplay its imperial connotations. Dispensing with the stolid orientalist discourses of European empires that focused on exclusion and difference, America's middlebrow intellectuals emphasized the commonalities that bound ordinary Americans to the peoples of the de-colonized world in order

to recast the country's actual hegemonic power as a non-imperial, benevolent venture designed to save them from the clutches of communist encroachment.[83]

Klein focuses on how America's middlebrow intellectuals constructed discourses of integration, alongside the more familiar discourses of containment, to draw the de-colonized peoples in Asia away from the Soviet Union. The 1955 tour suggests, however, that the NAHB and American newspapers told their readers that Soviet citizens – not unlike de-colonized peoples who had escaped European empires and their foreign ideologies – could likewise be separated from the oppressive Soviet state and its socialist ideology and integrated into the world of domestic bliss that modernist design and the postwar housing boom made possible. The touring housing experts were thus familiarly represented to American newspaper readers as regular businessmen on a company junket. They could be taught modern construction techniques and the virtues of private home ownership. They could even commiserate with their American counterparts about the consumerist excesses women threatened to unleash in new homes designed by male architects. The Soviet delegates might even purchase the American model of the postwar home if given the chance. Who knows what fortuitous changes might happen if they took it home? For their part, the Soviet professionals in 1955 arrived in the United States enthusiastic to learn the lessons in building techniques and domestic modernist design that Americans were equally eager to teach. Along with Khrushchev's leadership, they temporarily accepted their inferior position as students in this American lesson and diplomatically tolerated its ideological undertones.

[83]Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

After their return to the USSR, two of the delegates, P. Spyshnov and Alexander Vlasov, shared their experiences at meetings with their colleagues in Moscow in early 1956.[84] Their two reports, examined here for the first time, shed the most light on how the delegates themselves experienced the tour, what they actually learned, and how they assessed the American way of life. Vlasov, who was the only architect on the trip, played a central, if unintended role as the delegate Western journalists found most interesting and controversial. His career tells us much about the transition in high cultural politics from Stalinism to the Khrushchev era and how those politics became entangled in the Cold War. Vlasov ultimately ended up at the center of the media maelstrom that soured the tour and turned it into an international incident. Before turning to the tour itself, therefore, we will briefly examine the life and times of this Soviet architect who had risen through the ranks of the profession under Stalin and now found himself in the unfamiliar world of Khrushchev's regime and his obsession with mass housing.

Alexander Vlasov – architect of a Stalinist career

Born in 1900, Vlasov finished his architectural studies in 1928 at Moscow's Institute of Civil Engineers and leaped immediately into the cultural revolution that engulfed the profession. In 1929, he joined Karo Alabian (Aleksei Shchusev's nemesis mentioned earlier) and others to found VOPRA (The All-Union Association of Proletarian Architects) that attacked constructivists in the cultural revolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s.[85] As in other fields of

[84]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, "Stenogramma soobshcheniia Deistvitel'nogo chlena Akademii Arkhitektury SSSR o praktike zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva v Amerike. 19-go ianvaria 1956 goda." RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, "Stenogramma dolkada Spyshnova P. A. o poezdke v SShA, 3 fevralia 1956 goda."

[85]On Vlasov, see *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 3rd edition, volume 5 (Moscow: izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1971), 150. On VOPRA, which was originally called the All-Russian Society of Proletarian Architects, and Vlasov's inclusion as a founding member, see *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, no. 6 (Moscow: nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia," 2006), 63.

cultural and professional life, young VOPRA members like Vlasov benefited from the social mobility that came with the Stalinization of their profession, the marginalization of established architects, and the creation of the Union of Architects in 1932.[86] In terms of his own architectural philosophy, Vlasov did not abandon the modern movement because he was coerced or desired to conform as Western observers such as the *Architectural Review*'s editors expected. Instead he appeared to have genuinely disliked constructivism from the start and favored the more traditional aesthetics that Stalinization sanctioned. According to his entry in a volume of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* published in 1951, Vlasov's "creative work reflects the search for new, realistic forms and the creative use of the classical heritage." His projects in 1930s Moscow included buildings in Gor'kii Park and the interior of the House of Pioneers. He became a party member in 1949 and spearheaded Kiev's postwar reconstruction as its chief architect (1944-1950) under his patron Khrushchev, who headed the Ukrainian Republic. Once Khrushchev moved to his new post as party chief for the city of Moscow, he made Vlasov the capital's chief architect in 1950. But soon after Stalin's death, the political tide began to work against Vlasov. He lost his coveted post as Moscow chief architect in 1955, after Khrushchev accused him and others of neglecting the common person's housing needs and designing instead ornate architecture wasteful of state resources. Far from being drummed out of the profession or repressed, Vlasov was named president of the Academy of Architecture in 1955, the post he held while on tour in America.[87] Yet Vlasov found himself to be the director of an institution whose

[86]On VOPRA, see Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 118-46. On social mobility during the cultural revolution, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[87]This summary of Vlasov's career is drawn from *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2nd edition, volume 8 (Moscow: gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1951), 247-48; *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 3rd edition, volume 5 (Moscow: izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1971), 150. Colton, *Moscow*, 354, 370-71; *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, volume 5 (Moscow: nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia," 2006), 453; Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 117. Media reports identified

days as the bastion of Soviet architectural thought since 1934 were numbered. In August 1955, the government decided to replace it with a new Academy of Construction and Architecture starting in 1956.[88] What Vlasov's role would be in this new organization, the title of which echoed Khrushchev's emphasis on construction and engineering over architecture, remained unclear in the fall of 1955.

Although Vlasov did not have to go through the humiliating experience of an honor court, the benign consequences of his fall from favor under Khrushchev echoed the fate of the architects in 1947, who suffered only stern rebukes. In the small world of elite Soviet architects, Vlasov's career had evolved in ways that implicated him in the intrigues of late Stalinist cultural politics, but demonstrated to him that falling from grace, even under Stalin, was not necessarily career-ending or worse. Reproducing VOPRA's polemics from the cultural revolution, Vlasov did hatchet work for the Party after the war in its crusade against allegedly unpatriotic members of the intelligentsia accused of kowtowing to the West. In a 1948 article for *Pravda*, Vlasov zeroed in on three individuals involved in the 1947 honor court – Andrei Bunin, who was on trial, Viacheslav Shkvarikov, who chaired the honor court, and N. Poliakov, who was a witness.[89] Vlasov blasted them for inadequately exposing the shortcomings of capitalist cities, especially those in the United States, in their 1945 book, *Urban Planning* (*Gradostroitel'stvo*).[90] Their alleged failure to examine foreign practices in a sufficiently ideological light resonated with the charges of the honor court in 1947. Vlasov even pointed out that "bourgeois specialists," like

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Vlasov as chief of the Academy of Architecture. "Russians Visit First U.S. Project," *New York Times*, October 5, 1955. "Enroute with the Russians," *Practical Builder* (December 1955): 19-21.

[88]On the creation of the new academy, see its entry in *Malaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, volume 1, 3rd edition (Moscow: gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo "Bolshaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1958), 211.

[89]RGAE, f. 9432, op. 3, d. 49, l. 136.

[90]Viacheslav Shkvarikov, et al., *Gradostroitel'stvo* (Moscow: izdatel'stvo Akademii arkhitektury SSSR, 1945).

Frank Lloyd Wright, had done a better job of critiquing the West's approach to urban planning.[91] As we shall see below, his admiration for Wright was actually quite sincere.

Vlasov's role on the 1955 tour reveals changes and continuities that transpired after Stalin's death in Soviet cultural politics. His case supports Stephen Bittner's argument that the changes the intelligentsia experienced under Khrushchev are better understood as a function of new ideological directions instead of increased liberalization.[92] Under Stalin, Vlasov had been a politically loyal follower willing to turn on his colleagues, such as Bunin, in the name of the party line. Other architects proved less willing to do Stalin and Zhdanov's dirty work as evidenced by the professional solidarity they showed at the honor court in attempting to mitigate the charges against Arkin, Bunin, and Bylinkin in 1947. After Stalin's death, however, Khrushchev neither sought to punish Vlasov for his political support of Stalinism nor rewarded the three architects for their past actions with greater liberalization. Instead, Khrushchev took an ideological stance against the social and aesthetic principles of Stalinist architecture in the name of pursuing his mass housing campaign that delimited in a new way what architects could do.

Khrushchev's ideological vision for housing was a populist one later enshrined in the Third Party Program of 1961, which claimed that when the country reached communism in twenty years, "every family, including the families of young married couples, will have a fully outfitted apartment, corresponding to hygienic and cultural needs."[93] Single-family apartments would no longer be available only to elites as had been the case under Stalin, while most urban dwellers lived in cramped communal apartments and barracks. Now every Soviet family – the one social

[91]A. Vlasov, "Nazrevshie voprosy sovetskogo zodchestva," *Pravda*, September 25, 1948.

[92]Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, 215-16.

[93]*Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, vol. 8 (Moscow: izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1972), 245, 267-8.

group that cut across all social groups – would enjoy this staple of modern life and measure of a society's higher standard of living. In signaling the shift toward less expensive, pre-fabricated mass housing necessary to accomplish these goals at a December 1954 meeting with architects and constructors, Khrushchev humiliated architects like Vlasov for their "excesses" in architectural design. He even singled out Bunin for the same, suggesting that the new line in housing would be as uncompromising with an architect who had dared criticize Stalingrad in a foreign publication as it was with Stalinist architects. Khrushchev suggested that the constructivist tradition had positive attributes that need not be automatically dismissed and essentially told architects like Vlasov that their aesthetic sensibilities were no longer favored.[94]

In many ways, as Bittner argues, this meant that architects worked under greater, not less government control.[95] This was the position that Vlasov and others like him found themselves in by the mid-1950s. But as scholars of Khrushchev's mass housing program have shown, some architects, furniture designers, and publicists reacted positively to Khrushchev's new direction and further articulated its ideological vision. These members of the intelligentsia transformed the separate apartment through their designs and words into a site of scientific planning and social and cultural transformation, where "petty-bourgeois" values were to be eradicated in the name of creating new people fit for the communist future.[96] As this scholarship demonstrates, many of these designers drew from the aesthetic traditions of the 1920s avant-garde intelligentsia that had

[94]Nikita Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel'stva* (Moscow: gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1955), 24-25.

[95]This was especially true in the ways Khrushchev's regime restricted architects to work on cheap, mass housing designs. See Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, 105-40.

[96]Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," *Journal of Design History* 10, 2 (1997): 161-76. Susan Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289-316. Reid, "Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home," *Cahiers du monde russe*, 47, no. 1-2 (January-June 2006): 227-268. Christine Varga-Harris, "Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era," *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (2008): 561-89.

sought to forge the New Soviet Man and Woman precisely in such spheres as the home. Having never liked their modernist aesthetics to begin with at the start of his career, Vlasov was not about to embrace it now under Khrushchev. As a consequence, he found himself on the wrong side of a dramatic shift in the state's housing priorities that had already begun to acquire an ideological and aesthetic vision for housing that was deeply alien to him.

Lesson two: modernism for the masses

Unaware of these finer points in Vlasov's career, the Western media usually identified him as the one architect on the 1955 tour and president of the Academy of Architecture. Reporters' coverage of Vlasov and the other delegates was generally positive and quite extensive. This included national coverage in papers like the *New York Times*, as well as local papers like the *Austin American* that covered the tour as it came through town. Trade publications, like the *NAHB Correlator* and the *Practical Builder*, reported on the tour and three of the housing specialists were even interviewed on the public interest television program, the *American Forum*, where they recounted what they had learned about American house building. French newspapers, such as *Le Figaro*, reported on the tour as the delegates made their way back to the Soviet Union through Paris, while Russian émigré newspapers in both the United States (e.g, *Novoe russkoe slovo*) and Paris (e.g., *Russkie novosti*) also tracked the tour. Along with NAHB officials and ordinary American homeowners whose homes the delegates visited, the media played a critical role in teaching the Soviet delegation the lesson on fusing modernist design with mass consumption and everyday life in America's suburban utopia.

Over the course of the tour, the Soviet delegates learned an unintended lesson in the workings of the Western media assigned to cover them. Similar to the architects' experience with

the highbrow *Architectural Review* in 1947, contact with the mass media left the housing specialists dumbfounded about how the Western "free press," to paraphrase Bylinkin, functioned in practice. In contrast to 1947, the Soviet housing experts enjoyed a greater learning curve that even the media began to notice as it made sense of these communists visiting America. Bob Welch of the *Practical Builder* noted in Los Angeles, "by now the Reds know how to act their publicity relations parts. They don't bat an eyelash at popping flashbulbs or lapel-grabbing reporters. No sooner had they alighted from the San Francisco plane than they obligingly climbed back up the steps for TV and press photographers to shoot typical arrival pictures."[97] In 1959, Khrushchev himself would exhibit even greater skill, but also frustration in handling American reporters eager to land a front page spread on the world's most powerful communist.[98] The 1955 tour was thus an early test run for the American media in covering Soviet officials roaming about the United States. In their interactions with Americans, the architects provided for reporters what Welch called "the entire human interest side" of the story.[99] The tour showed reporters that these communists visiting the suburbs were not so bad or dissimilar from ordinary Americans. In photographs and cartoons, they even looked like regular American businessmen going about their affairs (figures 4-6). The cartoon, "Come in, I've Got Lots to Show You," (figure 4) illustrated the extent to which the American media sought to draw the Soviet delegates

[97]See Welch's untitled article in the news report from the *Practical Builder*, "Enroute with the Russians: This Report: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Taliesin," in the file, "Russian Housing Delegation Visit (1955-1956)/News Clippings" in the National Association of Home Builders and National Housing Endowment Archives, Box 08-038; F-16. I thank Mehret Samuel of the NAHB for locating these archival files on the 1955 tour.

[98]As Peter Carlson shows, Khrushchev's relationship with the American media was itself a major aspect of his visit to the United States in 1959. Both sides benefited, as well as American businesses eager to use Khrushchev for free publicity. Reporters were eager for a story to write and Khrushchev relished the media coverage of his tour as confirmation of his international stature. It was also a volatile relationship that could erupt in Cold War recriminations when Khrushchev felt slighted and American reporters asked uncomfortable questions. Peter Carlson, *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude Starring Nikita Khrushchev, America's Most Unlikely Tourist* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009).

[99]Welch's article in "Enroute with the Russians."

into what Klein calls the "global imaginary of integration." The cartoonist went so far as to depict the American in the image as the "other" in order to highlight how integrated into American business life the Soviet delegates could become. This reversal of the traditional orientalist paradigm nonetheless suggested that underlining differences still mattered. The Soviet delegates could be depicted as American businessmen, but not in the same image with American businessmen.

Figure 4. Cartoon published in the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), October 25, 1955. The cartoon is reproduced here with permission of the *Times-Picayune*. The New Orleans architect invites the Soviet housing experts into his studio to learn about his city's housing, but the blueprint "private enterprise" suggests an ideological lesson as well. The handshake here denotes a friendly greeting made over the common ground of housing and hints at the closing of the business deal to come once the Soviets accept the architect's plans and free market ideology. The delegates' coats and ties make them appear like reasonable American businessmen on a company trip and therefore amenable to the architect's sound advice. Photographs published in newspapers (see figures 5 and 6) similarly made them look like businessmen. In contrast, the New Orleans representative's period attire suggests that differences still mattered.

As represented in American newspapers, the tour started on a high note and indicated the possibility for such exchanges to ease Cold War tensions by providing a shared lesson of mutual understanding. Tying such tours to diplomatic relations, the *Washington Post and Times Herald* explained that the "NAHB invited the Russians in the spirit of Geneva after a group of Soviet farm experts toured the midwest last summer."[100] The *Boston Daily Globe* explained that greater attention to housing could help avoid war. "The visitors exhibited more interest in earth-moving machinery … than the Pentagon Building." The paper claimed that "a pre-painted wood shingle touched off more excitement among [them] than a string of aircraft carriers they saw in Boston harbor."[101] The mayor of Tucson assured his guests that the American housing boom illustrated his country's commitment to peaceful relations. Ivan Koziulia, the head of the delegation and Minister of Urban and Rural Construction, informed his hosts that much new housing could have already been built in the Soviet Union had the war not exacted such vast destruction. The head of Tucson's home builders' group told the Soviets, "As you have come here with open minds, we receive you with open minds…. We in Tucson hope that this kind of exchange of information and ideas becomes a habit between the United States and the Soviet Union, for we believe that when our people learn to know each other, they need never fear each other."[102] Newspaper reports interpreted the friendly relations between the Soviet delegates and their hosts as a sign that improved international relations were perhaps not as difficult to achieve as Cold War ideology insisted. "Peaceful coexistence can be realized with little effort," the *Seattle Daily Times* observed. "Scatter a group of Soviet officials in a couple of chartered buses. Season with

[100]Richard Lyons, "10 Russian Officials Start Housing Tour," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, October 5, 1955.

[101]Paul Plakias, "Is Kitchen Also Bedroom? Asks Russian Visitor," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 5, 1955. Paul Plakias, "Pre-Fab Ideas Stir Russians on Tour of Boston Home Sites," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1955.

[102]Dave Feldman, "Russ Home Experts Tour Tucson Building," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 20, 1955.

affable Americans. Let human nature take its course. In no time – with the aid of interpreters – everyone is palsky-walsky."[103]

The search for common ground across the ideological boundaries of the Nylon Curtain was further revealed in reconnecting with past acquaintances and even former Russian and Soviet citizens. Alluding to how the Cold War had ruined wartime cooperation, one story noted that an American soldier who had sold soap and cigarettes to Russian soldiers during the war was now reconnecting with Soviet citizens as the delegation's bus driver in Boston.[104] Another story featured two émigrés who had departed the Soviet Union for America at the beginning of the 1920s and would serve as local interpreters for the tour when it came through Tucson. The headline, "Russians Can Learn from Tucson Trip," suggested the lesson plan the Soviets were enrolled in throughout the tour. Yet one of the interpreters, William Wilde, suggested that learning could also be a mutual experience creating common ground. "'We can learn overall planning from them,' added Wilde, who feels that not enough city planning is done in America – and especially Tucson – today. 'Our peoples need a thorough understanding of each other and a chance like this to get better acquainted.'"[105] In New Orleans, Leonid Volkov, a former Soviet air force pilot who had immigrated to the United States during the war, sat down with a few delegates over drinks and recorded the conversation for New York's Russian newspaper, *Novoe russkoe slovo*, as well as *Newsweek* magazine, where he served as contributing editor.[106] In his report to Moscow architects after the tour, Spyshnov reflected on the "many former Russians" in

[103]Robert Heilman, "Russian Delegation Sees Much of Sound Area," *Seattle Daily Times*, 15 October 1955.

[104]Paul Craigue, "Ex-G.I. Is Bus Driver: Russians Taken for Ride – This Time at No Expense," *Boston Evening Globe* (*Boston Daily Globe*), October 6, 1955.

[105]Dave Feldman, "Russians Can Learn from Tucson Trip," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 14, 1955.

[106]"A Convivial Drink or Two … The Way the Touring Russians Talk in Private," *Newsweek*, November 14, 1955, 34-35. The interview was published in Russian as "Razgovor s sovetskimi 'stroiteliami'," *Novoe russkoe slovo* [New York], November 13, 1955.

the United States. He believed that many held positive views of "Soviet Russia" and claimed that the newspaper *Golos Rossii* reported on the Soviet Union "objectively and loyally." Yet he also warned that others bore hostile feelings toward the Soviet Union and that the delegation had had problems with these. As had already been reported in American newspapers during the tour, Spyshnov complained of protesters, among them Latvians, who had met the delegation at Boston's Logan Airport and later at their hotel.[107]

The Soviet housing experts did not allow these minor incidents to interfere with the purpose of their journey and their open-minded approach to lessons in American housing and modernist domestic design. Their open-mindedness reflected the thaw in culture since Stalin's death as the intelligentsia began to explore previously forbidden topics and aesthetic traditions. Insofar as architecture was concerned, this especially pertained to discussions of the constructivist tradition.[108] In his report on the tour, Spyshnov described the airports the delegation passed through in Helsinki, Stockholm, and Copenhagen, as "constructivist" in design and "an example worthy of imitation." His positive description of the airports as low-cost, simple spaces promoting customer convenience not only hinted at wider discussions of the constructivist past, but echoed recent policy shifts in housing that attacked the "excesses" of Stalinist architecture and favored cheap and rational designs.[109] In December 1954, Khrushchev had announced these changes in his meeting with architects and constructors in which he sternly criticized them for ornate and costly architecture.[110] During the tour itself, the leadership underlined its ideological

[107]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, ll. 22-23. "Pickets Flank Russians at Airport, Hotel," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 5, 1955. Roevekamp, "Puzzlement over Private Enterprise."

[108]Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*.

[109]On positive reappraisals of constructivism under Khrushchev, see Stephen Bittner, "Remembering the Avant-Garde: Moscow Architects and the 'Rehabilitation' of Constructivism, 1961-1964," *Kritika* 2, no. 3 (2001): 553-76.

[110]Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii*.

shift away from Stalinist architecture and toward less expensive mass housing in a major decree, "On the elimination of excesses in design and construction," on November 4, 1955.[111] The central purpose of the housing experts' tour was to learn what they could about American building methods that could be applied to meeting the state's new housing goals. They tirelessly absorbed American know-how in visiting a total of 38 one-storey home developments; 12 multi-storey houses and administrative buildings; five schools, two hospitals, and two universities; 18 factories producing construction materials; and four water and sewer facilities.[112] Unlike the architects in 1947, they had not been tasked with explaining Soviet housing and urban planning to a foreign audience. This would have to wait for an American housing delegation that visited the Soviet Union the following summer.[113]

"Sometimes the wife wants something the man can't afford"

As American newspapers enjoyed pointing out, the Soviet delegation not only accumulated ideas, but also things. According to the *New York Times*' Harrison Salisbury, the delegation burned through approximately $50,000. Their purchases included "a nail-driving machine" and various items of "small machinery, tools and electrical equipment."[114] The delegation acquired "boxes" of literature on American homes from the NAHB and obtained the contact information "of companies that manufactured the heavy machinery in the Black Brollier [concrete] plant [in

[111]"Ob ustranenii izlishestv v proektirovanii i stroitel'stve," *Izvestiia*, November 10, 1955.

[112]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, l. 4.

[113]Hugh Morris, "Builders Not Impressed By Soviet Housing Plans," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 28, 1956.

[114]Harrison Salisbury, "Touring Soviet Aide Pictures U.S. as Christmas Dream Come True," *New York Times*, October 29, 1955.

Houston].”[115] In Boston, Koziulia “spotted a bargain he couldn’t pass up. He shelled out $46 for a pre-assembled double window and door.”[116] A delegate informed viewers of the *American Forum* that they had purchased General Electric’s latest kitchen model.[117] Another delegate “purchased a prefabricated door, window and accordion type door to take back to the Soviet as as [sic] model of cheap construction.” The delegation also obtained “complete blueprints for the housing developments they visited” and “samples of … pre-painted shingles, asphalt roof shingles, insulation and metal laths.”[118]

The delegation’s most remarkable purchase was a $12,500 prefabricated home they bought from developer Andrew Oddstadt, head of the Rollingwood Construction Company near San Francisco.[119] This house epitomized the lesson the Soviet housing delegates were supposed to learn about infusing modernist design into the postwar home. In answer to Koziulia’s query about their low cost, Oddstadt responded that they were cheap because of their prefabrication, which was based on “an efficient, working organization … to glean the full benefits of factory production.” His houses came in “three basic plans – two single-level homes and a one-level house with garage.” An Oddstadt home was a total work of art that employed “architects, gardeners, horticulturists, and cost experts to come up with a ‘packaged’ plan for creating homes that blend into the landscape as though they had always been there.” Through mass production, this article seemed to suggest, every American family could now enjoy the organic architecture

[115]“Russian Builders Given One Wrong Impression,” *American-Statesman* (*Austin American*), October 23, 1955.

[116]Plakias, “Pre-Fab Ideas Stir Russians.”

[117]*The American Forum: The Soviet View of Housing*, NBC, October 30, 1955. I thank Rosemary Hanes of the Library of Congress for making a copy of this program available.

[118]“Frills? Nyet … Russians Want to Know About Low Cost Staples,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1955.

[119]This price was reported by the *Christian Science Monitor*. See “Soviet Delegation Buys $12,500 Prefab in Visit to California Community,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 1955. Another newspaper reported that the home cost $13,750. See “Visiting Red Places Order on US Home,” *Austin American*, October 18, 1955.

of Frank Lloyd Wright's modernism and its healthy relationship to nature. "I'll take that one," Koziulia said.[120] So might every Soviet family, American reporters hoped, as the home was shipped to the Soviet Union "to give Soviet home builders an idea of United States housing construction."[121]

Toward the end of the tour, the Oddstadt house resurfaced during the delegates' appearance on the TV program, *American Forum*. In response to the moderator's suggestion that the purchase would change how the Soviet Union built housing, Koziulia diplomatically cast doubt on this idea by claiming that climatic differences would make such models unworkable.[122] The house's prefabrication technology and consumer appliances were likely of more interest to the Soviets than what the moderator hoped was a broader acceptance of the American freestanding house as a way of life.[123] During the war, Soviet architects had looked favorably upon such American homes and their prefabricated construction as a model and continued to do so even when relations with the United States deteriorated in the early years of the Cold War.[124] In contrast, Khrushchev's mass housing campaign ultimately focused on constructing prefabricated five-storey apartment buildings, not single-family homes.[125] The American media's excited

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[120]"Soviet Delegation Buys $12,500 Prefab in Visit to California Community," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 1955.

[121]Harrison Salisbury, "Touring Soviet Aide Pictures U.S. as Christmas Dream Come True," *New York Times*, October 29, 1955. The article appeared in a Russian émigré newspaper as "Sovetskie stroiteli v SShA," *Novoe russkoe slovo* (New York City), October 30, 1955. Other newspapers reported on the purchase of this home as well. "Visiting Red Places Order on US Home," *Austin American*, October 18, 1955.

[122]*The American Forum: The Soviet View of Housing*.

[123]Greg Castillo similarly notes the Soviets' keen interest in the home's technological aspects, construction, and consumer items. See Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 134-36.

[124]Anderson, "USA/USSR: Architecture and War."

[125]Vlasov mentioned the purchase of the home in an interview with *Pravda*, but did not indicate how Soviet constructors and architects were using it. See "Beseda s arkhitektorom A. V. Vlasovym," *Pravda*, December 5, 1955. As Greg Castillo points out, the home's subsequent fate once it was shipped to the Soviet Union is still unknown. It was only in July 1956 that it was finally sent, according to the *New York Times*. See Castillo, *Cold War*

reaction to the Soviet delegation's purchase of the freestanding American house was thus rather overdrawn and betrayed reporters' unwillingness to see the Soviet housing experts as little else than empty vessels waiting to be filled with American lessons in modernist design. In fact, the delegates had a sharper sense of what they wanted to learn from the American home and what they could do without than the American media gave them credit for. The home's construction, interior design, and consumer items seemed worth spending $12,500 to examine more closely back home. In contrast, the model of freestanding homes and functionless lawns in the suburbs, as we shall see later, was something the delegates ultimately criticized.

Koziulia's lukewarm reception to the American dream home on the TV program was indicative of another frustration the Soviet delegates experienced with their American hosts. According to Vlasov's account back in Moscow, the Americans handling the tour resisted the delegates' requests to see multi-story public housing, but ultimately allowed them to visit such housing in Chicago.[126] Their interest in such housing, largely absent in most Western media accounts of the tour, made sense since it more closely approximated in design the kind of multi-story apartment buildings of Soviet mass housing. The delegates also had the chance to see public housing earlier in Boston, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*, but only after overcoming their hosts' reluctance, which revealed the ideological undertones of the exchange. The newspaper wrote, "The official American hosts, members of the Rental Housing Association of Greater Boston and the Boston Homebuilders Association, made no secret that what they wanted their guests most to see was privately financed housing, rather than government-

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on the Home Front, 135. Whether the home had any impact on Soviet building practices (if it did finally arrive in the Soviet Union) is also a question requiring additional research.

[126]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, l. 9.

sponsored public housing."[127] Public housing was a poor candidate for the type of housing that America's housing leaders and newspapers wished to feature in their contribution to fighting the Cold War in which middle-class, white families happily abandoned downtown for the security and bliss of the suburbs. In contrast, public housing's low-income African-American tenants were of the wrong race and class, while its form of property and financing were far removed from the free-market relations upon which the American way of life was supposedly based.[128]

At the center of that way of life, American newspapers were happy to report, were the items of mass consumption that the Soviet experts accumulated, including souvenirs ranging from a Davy Crockett costume for one delegate's son[129] to shirts and bathing shorts.[130] Delegates were photographed as discerning consumers trying on cowboy hats and boots, and inspecting sunglasses and bathing suits (figures 5 and 6). Through consumer goods, American hosts could show off their hospitality and down home traditions to the Soviet delegates. A reporter in Tucson informed his readers, "Although their welcome won't be a royal western one (no lynching allowed), they'll be presented cowboy hats and boots – and squaw dresses for the wives – after luncheon at the Arizona Inn."[131] The consumerist temptations of modern American life provided common ground, but also sharpened differences. Echoing Riesman's "Nylon War", newspapers hinted at the shortages Soviet citizens suffered and the power of American consumerism to draw

[127]Frederick W. Roevekamp, "Soviet Visitors Inspect Braintree Model Ranch," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 5, 1955, 2.

[128]On the history of public housing in Chicago, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[129]Salisbury, "Touring Soviet Aide."

[130]"Soviet Visitors Inquire, 'Where's Cowboys, Indians?'" *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 21, 1955.

[131]Dave Feldman, "Homes Tour Set: Russians Arrive Here Tomorrow," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 19, 1955. The reporter's mention of lynching was a reference to traditional notions of extra-legal frontier justice in the American West, not the lynching of African-Americans in the South. I thank Krystyn Moon for this clarification.

their attention. The delegates "eyed the bulging shelves at the market," said one report.[132] One delegate was said to have looked out from an airplane window at night and confided anonymously to his neighbor that America was "a child's dream of a Christmas tree, come true."[133] Soviet citizens displayed proprietary instincts and a taste for luxury that made them more familiar to American reporters, but in need of encouragement given their state's socialist ideology. A *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans) editorial cheered an elite Soviet youth whom *Literaturnaia gazeta* had taken to task "for living on a big inheritance that permits him to duplicate Hollywood's version of life in Petrograd under the czars." The newspaper was pleasantly surprised to learn that inheritances existed in the Soviet Union and approvingly noted the significant compensations that government and cultural elites, as well as "technocrats of all kinds," commanded. "They not only have high salaries, they receive national prizes, charge large fees for their services and accumulate royalties."[134] Together with the aforementioned cartoon (figure 4) that appeared on the same page, the editorial indicated that the Soviet housing officials who had come to town were not communists determined to foment social revolution. They were recognizable technocrats who had respectable salaries with a stake in the social order and its economic differences ostensibly based on merit, just like the American businessmen they looked like. As the cartoon showed, they were in the United States to learn about the American path to postwar housing and perhaps even purchase its blueprints and underlining ideology of "private enterprise."

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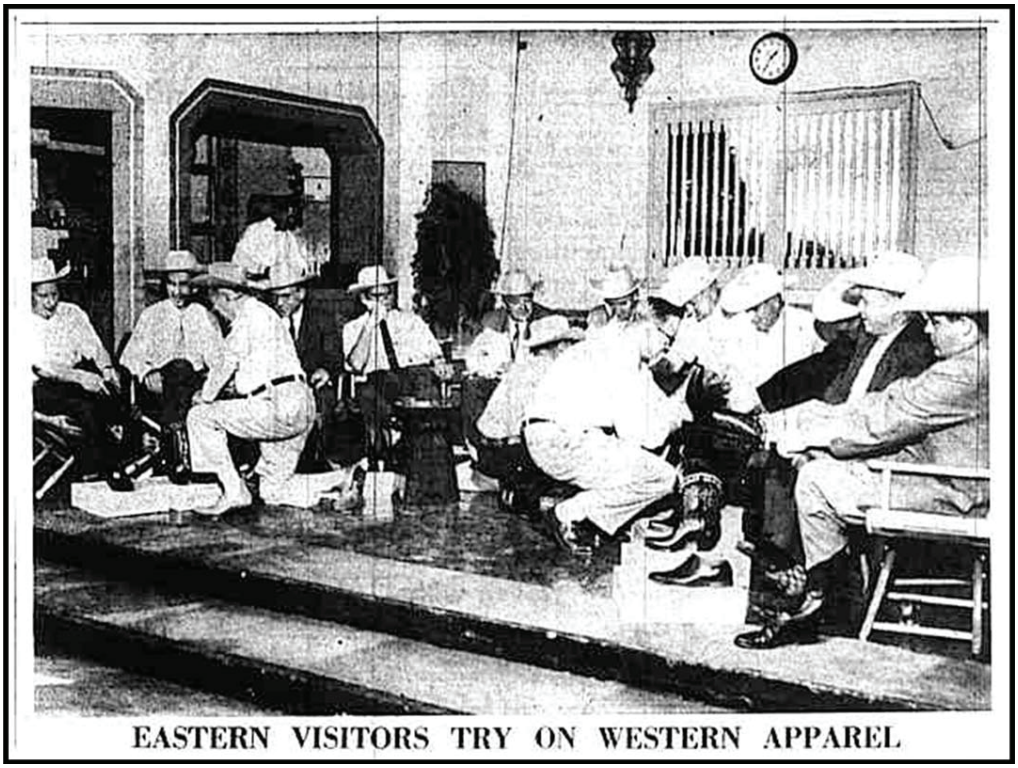
[132]Ibid.

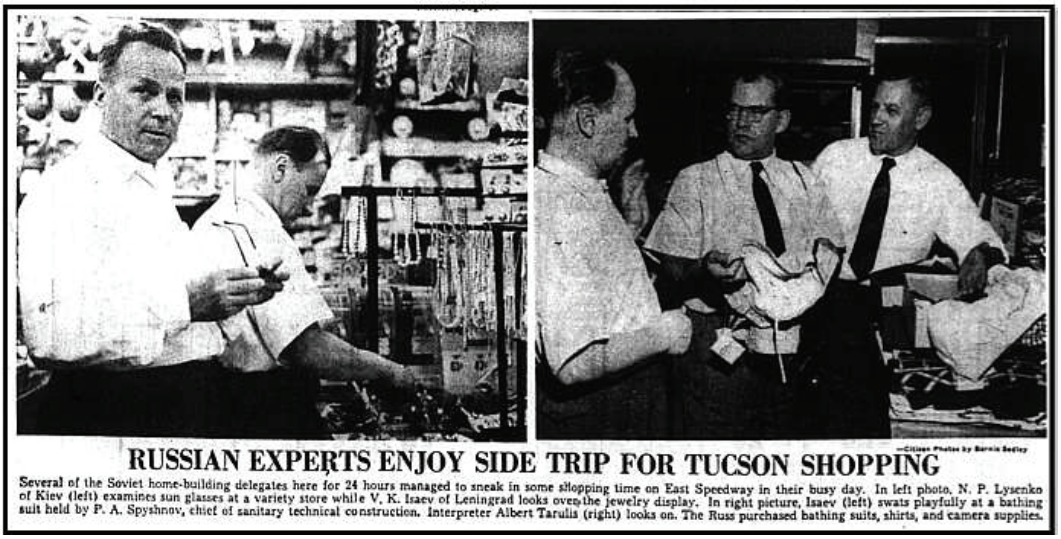
[133]Salisbury, "Touring Soviet Aide."

[134]"Russian Idle Rich," *Times-Picayune*, October 25, 1955,

Figure 5. This photograph of the Soviet housing experts shopping for cowboy hats and boots in Tucson appeared above an article about the tour on the front page of the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 20, 1955. The photograph and those in figures 6 and 7 are reproduced here with permission of TucsonCitizen.com. Along with its title, the photograph communicates an appropriately male form of consumption that helped the reader see the Soviet men as regular guys not unlike local men sporting similar accessories to their business attire. The clothes are "Western" in both the regional sense of the American West and the global sense of the Cold War context in which consumer items emerged as a way of emphasizing fundamental differences between capitalist plenty and socialist privations. The Soviet delegates are 'trying on' clothes, but more importantly they are trying on two Western ways of life. In this image, the search for establishing common ground and mutual respect by sharing regional clothing traditions with guests operates in tension with the West's Cold War strategy of using consumerist temptations to lure Soviet citizens away from socialism.



EASTERN VISITORS TRY ON WESTERN APPAREL



RUSSIAN EXPERTS ENJOY SIDE TRIP FOR TUCSON SHOPPING

Several of the Soviet home-building delegates here for 24 hours managed to sneak in some shopping time on East Speedway in their busy day. In left photo, N. P. Lysenko of Kiev (left) examines sun glasses at a variety store while V. K. Isaev of Leningrad looks over the jewelry display. In right picture, Isaev (left) swats playfully at a bathing suit held by P. A. Spyshnov, chief of sanitary technical construction. Interpreter Albert Tarulis (right) looks on. The Russ purchased bathing suits, shirts, and camera supplies.

Figure 6. These photographs of the housing experts shopping in Tucson appeared on the front page of the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 21, 1955. Just like the American businessman, the Soviet professionals purchase souvenirs and jewelry for their wives back home while facing a busy schedule. They are as capable as their American counterparts to shop responsibly and critically, a reassuring sign of appropriate male restraint in matters of consumption. They only need to be given the chance to do so, which the American capitalist economy makes possible.

While pushing the Soviet housing delegates to be more like their American counterparts, newspapers emphasized the anxieties that consumer items posed for the (male) designers of the modern home in a way that suggested common ground about gender relations. "Russians and Americans have at least one thing in common," the *Boston Daily Globe* opined, "'The housewife rules supreme in the home.'" The phrase was attributed to Koziulia, suggesting a shared view on women's power to de-stabilize the inner arrangement of a space designed by men. Commenting on women's universal desire for "comfort," Koziulia "expressed the opinion somewhat ruefully, 'Sometimes the wife wants something the man can't afford.'" His statement represented in

gendered terminology the Soviet state's anxiety over meeting people's rising expectations for more housing and consumer goods. In alluding to shortages, the newspaper suggested a fundamental difference and shortcoming of socialism, but also agreement with Koziulia that a "wife" was the source of insatiable consumer desires universally.[135] Herein lay a central tension in the second lesson on modernism. The mass consumer items and postwar home with which modernist design was supposed to be fused risked taking over the modernist design project in unpredictable ways. Projecting such anxieties over consumerism onto the housewife was one part of the lesson that the Soviet delegates were prepared to accept. Back in the Soviet Union, such anxieties would soon become a feature of the Soviet discourse on mass housing and the need to rein in women's consumer desires with a rational and scientific approach to domestic living.[136] After the trip, Vlasov told his Moscow colleagues that Americans were obsessed with how best to arrange their kitchens to accommodate a woman's needs. "For example, they assign much importance to where a television should go in the kitchen so that the housewife can watch what's on the screen while she's sitting in the kitchen and feeding her child."[137] Such an observation may very well have appealed to those Soviet designers looking for ways to optimize and rationalize a woman's domestic work schedule. To Vlasov, ironically enough, it seemed to represent little more than American consumer excess.

Housing spaces and one's role in either constructing them or consuming them were similarly gendered. Newspapers approvingly explained how the male delegates focused on construction and the outside of the home, while showing little interest in the interior, especially the kitchen and its appliances, which constituted the woman's sphere. Suggesting that only a woman could

[135]Plakias, "Is Kitchen Also Bedroom?"

[136]Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen."

[137]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, l. 12.

truly be excited by a kitchen, the *Boston Daily Globe* wrote, "The Russians were like housewives, examining the modern kitchens with built-in electric ranges, and asking about the thermostats and the forced hot-water heating system." But the men were ultimately "less interested in gadgets than in structural details."[138] The very language newspapers used was gendered to reflect the delegates' proper, male concerns. A story explained how they "gazed at gleaming model house kitchens, showing friendly but mild interest. But once they had an opportunity to look at construction in the raw, their genuine interest burst forth in endless questions and lively comments, both critical and approving." One delegate "at first a quiet, retired observer" (because of the kitchen?) then had "a man-to-man talk with tall, easy-going John Apsit, construction superintendent" about workplace timetables and subcontractors.[139]

The American housewife was only one character in an overly feminized popular culture that seemed alternately threatening and tantalizing to the Soviet delegates, which permitted them and the American media to continue exploring their differences and similarities. Vlasov reported to his Moscow colleagues how he became repulsed at watching female wrestling on American television, which he described as "absolutely frightful." He explained how a woman kicked her opponent "like a soccer ball, she started twisting like a worm from pain, after that she leaped on her stomach and jumped, then grabbed her by the hair and dragged her from one corner to the next, and all this accompanied by awful screaming." This spectacle and women's role in it appalled Vlasov.[140] But another American female archetype, the beauty queen, provided a safer representation of women that Vlasov and American men could both enjoy. In printing Vlasov's

[138]Paul Craigue, "Soviet Cameras Click in Boston," *Boston Evening Globe*, October 5, 1955.

[139]Frederick Roevekamp, "Puzzlement over Private Enterprise Fails to Abash Soviet Visitors," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 7, 1955.

[140]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, ll. 39-41.

impressions of a local beauty queen and juxtaposing their photographs (figure 7), the *Tucson Daily Citizen* communicated a shared assessment of her body, objectified and examined as a piece of "architecture" falling under his gaze as would a building. The newspaper thus echoed the *Boston Daily Globe*'s earlier assertion that Soviets and Americans could at least agree on how they viewed women (this time, literally).


TUCSON DAILY CITIZEN

—Citizen Photos

RUSS ADMIRES HER 'ARCHITECTURE'

After seeing Miss Pima County (Barbara Hilgenberg, right), Russian building expert A. V. Vlasov remarked to the press that "there are certainly no objections to her from an architectural viewpoint." Vlasov should know — he's president of the Russian Academy of Architecture. He also termed her "gay, optimistic, excellently built, with nice strong legs, and a beautiful face." He smiled and added that his verdict was made from afar, unfortunately.

Figure 7. These images and commentary appeared in the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 21, 1955. The caption and the direction of Vlasov's gaze suggest that he shares the normal but appropriately restrained sexual desires of an American businessman away from home appreciating the local women. Alongside the housewife and female wrestlers Vlasov encountered on the tour, the beauty queen represents a third archetype of the American woman and perhaps the least threatening. He finds "no objections" in a woman he can evaluate purely on her physical attributes. In contrast, the consumer desires and violence of the other two women, respectively, had given cause for concern.

Critiquing the lesson

In his report to colleagues in Moscow, Vlasov expressed largely negative views of American life and television, stressing differences with a Cold War rival that excelled in lowbrow culture. Cowboy programs on TV confused Vlasov since "the heroes ride around on horses, kill someone for some reason, love someone for some reason – all kinds of incomprehensible things." As for detective shows, he complained that someone always got killed and the victim "lets out a frightful scream, it's done with such naturalism." American boxing, like female wrestling mentioned earlier, was too violent for Vlasov's tastes. Commercial interruptions every 15 minutes urging him to "Drink Coca-Cola!" prevented him from enjoying a film. In his survey of American culture, Vlasov concluded to his colleagues that it was fairly lowbrow. He claimed there was little theater or opera, and that Americans read primarily "boulevard literature." American health care also left a bad impression. Vlasov came down with "a viral infection of American origins" and pointed out that the medicine he received cost ten dollars, whereas a pair of shoes went for only seven. America lacked cultural refinement and remained unpredictably expensive. Their doctors, Vlasov claimed, "can ask for however much they want."[141]

Direct contact with American life must have indeed struck Vlasov as particularly lacking in what the Soviet intelligentsia considered good taste and socially edifying culture. Vlasov had reached the elite ranks of the intelligentsia under Stalin along a path of social mobility that sanctioned social differences based not upon one's financial wealth, but rather upon the amount of "culturedness" (*kul'turnost'*) one attained. The intelligentsia benefited from this social system that afforded its members privileged access to goods and services, as well as opportunities to

[141]Ibid., 8, 39-41.

shape the very content of "culturedness" by which social differences were justified.[142] Vlasov had already enjoyed such perquisites as travel abroad to the West well before his trip to the United States in 1955. He traveled in the fall of 1936 to Greece, Italy, and France, where he found the classic architecture he preferred.[143] In 1948, he went to Lausanne as a Soviet delegate to the convention that created the International Union of Architects.[144] In expressing his antipathy toward American mass culture, Vlasov was throwing barbs at a Cold War rival in an officially sanctioned discourse of cultural criticism that he and fellow members of the intelligentsia had helped shape. He was speaking the party line on America, but he, too, was a member of the party and it was his line as much as it was any Politburo member's and Khrushchev's. His subsequent criticism of America's love affair with suburbanization showed that, despite having been marginalized professionally as a Stalinist architect, Vlasov's cultural elitism could be recycled to combat the Cold War enemy. In critiquing the mass product of modernist design, the American suburban home, Vlasov could play an important role in accentuating the differences between Soviet and American life. In doing so, he reflected what György Péteri calls the "drive for exceptionalism and modernity" that characterized Soviet leaders' insistence that socialism was distinct from capitalism despite any outward similarities.[145]

Vlasov spoke to his colleagues about the unfortunate choices Americans had made in creating what he called "one-storey America." He offered a critique of the lesson plan in modernist design that he had diplomatically endured while in the United States under the careful

[142]On the role of "culturedness" in Stalinist society, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste," in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 216-37.

[143]M. I. Astaf'eva-Dlugach, "A. Vlasov (1900-1962)," in *Zodchie Moskvy*, volume 2, ed. M. I. Astaf'eva-Dlugach, Iu. P. Volchok, and A. M. Zhuravlev (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1988), 269.

[144]Cooke, "Modernity and Realism," 176-7.

[145]Péteri, "The Occident Within – or the Drive for Exceptionalism and Modernity."

eye of the American media. He explained that the one-storey suburban home had displaced America's other housing alternatives, such as multi-storey apartment buildings, and was situated in "groups or satellites" twenty to fifty kilometers outside of town. Vlasov cited several reasons for America's move to the suburbs including cheaper land, accessibility afforded by automobiles and roads, and the fact that "Americans are proprietors at heart … they want to own their own home." He also claimed that Americans left for the suburbs because they feared nuclear attacks on large cities. Once they got there, they lacked a sufficient number of schools and hospitals, but had plenty of supermarkets with parking. In a critique of American consumerism that praised the Soviet way of life, Vlasov lamented that Americans did not grow their own produce on their own plots of land since they bought their food from the store. Consequently, Americans had nothing else better to do with their suburban yards than grow grass, sadly missing out on the satisfaction Soviet citizens enjoyed growing food in their garden plots.[146]

In his overall assessment of what the delegation had seen on the tour, Vlasov drew upon stock phrases about the fundamental differences between the planned, state-led nature of Soviet architecture and the unplanned, chaotic development of American cities. He even engaged in some overdue self-criticism by pointing out that Soviet architects had not worked to their full potential and "overlooked that mass construction, housing in particular, is a political objective of great significance." In language that recalled a purge trial under Stalin, Vlasov confessed, "We didn't ascertain and see in time the involvement of the party and the government, which pointed out for us serious shortcomings and helped us find the way to correcting mistakes and fix them." In contrast to his colleagues in 1947, however, Vlasov could admit that America excelled in certain aspects of housing construction and that "there is something to be learned from

[146]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, ll. 4-8.

Americans." His other observations suggested there was more Vlasov wanted to praise about American practices, but could not do so under the ideological changes Khrushchev had forced upon his architects. In particular, Vlasov saw in his American counterparts the professional autonomy that Khrushchev had taken away from him. He dutifully criticized the American government for not providing standardized housing models and letting private firms develop their own, but seemed to suggest this was a good thing. American architectural design had "a strikingly expressive individual character and this is entirely natural in a country that lacks state construction." Instead of a central oversight authority, American cities had an office that regulated new building construction locally, but only as it pertained to its impact on urban planning. This sent Vlasov into an apparent daydream about the greater autonomy he had enjoyed under Stalin. "Insofar as architecture is concerned, as far as I could tell, this office isn't allowed to interfere in this question, and if the home is mine, then I do what I like."[147] Despite his best efforts to criticize American practices and offer his own self-criticism, Vlasov seemed incapable of hiding his disapproval for what was happening to the architect's role in the Soviet Union.

The conflicted feelings Vlasov had about being an architect under Khrushchev became even more evident when he told his colleagues about the pleasant visit he paid Frank Lloyd Wright at the American architect's Taliesin estate outside Madison, Wisconsin. Like a tourist back home from a tour of Wright's houses in America, Vlasov showed his colleagues his slides of the architect's home and described its architectural elements. Yet Vlasov was no ordinary tourist. He had encountered Wright once before on the occasion of the first congress of Soviet architects in

[147]Ibid., 18, 33-36.

1937.[148] In journeying to Taliesin, Vlasov was seeking to reconnect with a foreign colleague after almost two decades. His trip to see Wright echoed what architects in 1947 had been attempting to do in seeking to re-establish professional ties with foreign colleagues outside the dual minefields of Stalinist and Cold War polemics. But his trip underlined the ironies about who ultimately was able to re-establish such contacts. Vlasov had been complicit in Stalin's attacks on the intelligentsia after the war for its alleged lack of patriotism and subservience to the West. He had even attacked Bunin who had been one of the architects seeking greater contact with Western interlocutors in 1947. Vlasov's praise for Wright in his polemical attack on fellow architects in 1948 had evidently been real, but it took Khrushchev's thaw to allow him another chance to see the man in person.

Vlasov had asked since the start of the 1955 tour about the possibility of seeing Wright. At least one reporter, Claudia Boynton of the *Practical Builder*, understood the symbolic significance of Vlasov's inquiry and framed it within "the controversy between the two architectural schools of thought represented by Mies van der Rohe, whose influence is strongly felt in Chicago, and Frank Lloyd Wright." The NAHB arranged the visit especially for Vlasov, who left his comrades to tour Chicago without him. As Boynton suggested, skipping Chicago for Taliesin spoke volumes about Vlasov's preferences for Wright's architecture over Mies's. Vlasov traveled to Madison with only an NAHB member, a Voice of America official, a reporter from the *Practical Builder*, and an interpreter. They then piled into the car of Wright's son-in-

[148]The following account of Vlasov's trip to see Wright is drawn from two sources. The first is his presentation to his Moscow colleagues in January 1956. See RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, ll. 26-29. The second is the article Claudia Boynton wrote for the *Practical Builder*. For the longer, undated and unpublished version of her article used here, see Claudia Boynton, "Visiting Russian Architect A. V. Vlasov Pilgrimages to Frank Lloyd Wright," *Practical Builder*. See the article in the file, "Russian Housing Delegation Visit (1955-1956)/News Clippings" in the National Association of Home Builders and National Housing Endowment Archives, Box 08-038; F-16. For a shorter, published version of her article, see her contribution to "Enroute with the Russians," *Practical Builder* (December 1955): 19-21.

law for a 40-mile car ride to the estate. Boynton later noted that "alone with us in the car, Vlasov was more talkative, seemed more relaxed --- but excited, none-the-less, over his imminent visit with Wright." Liberated from his colleagues, and apparently any minders, Vlasov headed to Wright's estate in a different state of mind on what Boynton aptly described as "a pilgrimage."[149] Gone were the interminable visits to America's suburbs and tedious discussions about new construction technology. An architect of the Stalin years and its aesthetic priorities, Vlasov had already made clear back home his resistance to the simpler designs of mass housing.[150] Seeing Wright transported him back to a time when architecture was still art, as he understood it, and before Khrushchev's obsessions with cost and reinforced concrete made his professional life miserable.

Vlasov found what he was looking for on the day he spent with Wright, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law. "He was in awe," Boynton recalled, and a tad nervous on account of being "in the position of a 'youngster' in the presence of a world master." (see figure 8) In 1947 such a statement would have elicited charges of anti-patriotism and subservience to the West from party ideologues like Zhdanov and possibly Vlasov himself. By 1955, he evidently felt comfortable enough to show such deference and respect to Wright, even in front of a journalist. To be sure, Vlasov's own retelling of the visit omitted this part of Boynton's description, but nonetheless communicated his affection and admiration for Wright. The American architect reciprocated by telling him how much he liked Russians (although not their government) and asked him to send his regards to Soviet architects he had encountered. When Vlasov did so back in Moscow, he mentioned some of these architects including Karo Alabian, Vladimir Shchuko, Vladimir

[149]Boynton, "Visiting Russian Architect."

[150]Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, 112.

Gel'freikh, and Boris Iofan. Vlasov also praised Wright's estate, where 60 students from around the world studied and worked in his studio, but also lived on the property and tended his farm, apparently without pay and free of charge. He admired how, "with the finest taste," Wright had decorated his home with objects brought back from China, India, Burma, and the Soviet Union. Vlasov also told his colleagues that he agreed with Wright's taste for classical music and dislike of America's lowbrow cultural tendencies, such as "boogie-boogie and contemporary American music, [which] he hates."[151]

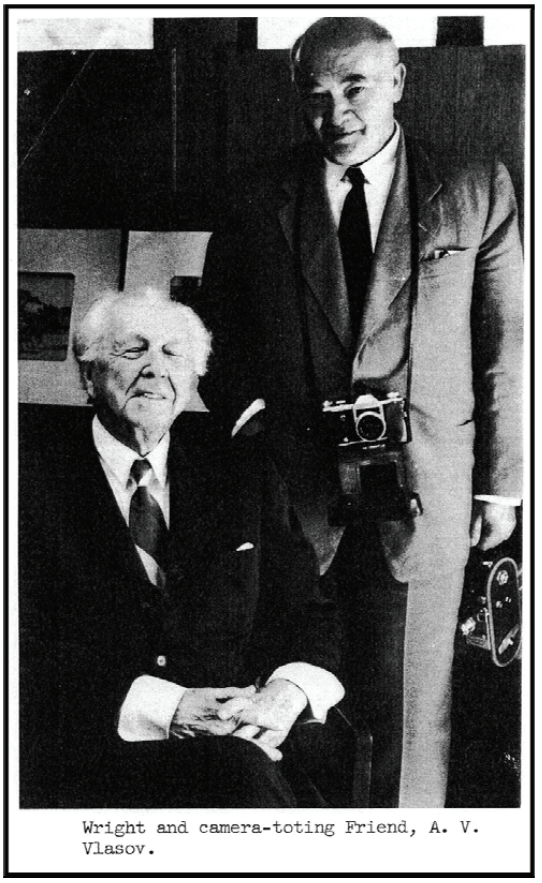


Figure 8. Vlasov visits Wright at his Taliesin estate. Source: Boynton, "Visiting Russian Architect A. V. Vlasov Pilgrimages to Frank Lloyd Wright." Unpublished and undated article located in the file, "Russian Housing Delegation Visit (1955-1956)/News Clippings" in the National Association of Home Builders and National Housing Endowment Archives, Box 08-038; F-16. This photograph is reproduced here with permission of MB Media LLC.

[151]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, ll. 26-29. Boynton, "Visiting Russian Architect."

Insofar as architecture and aesthetics were concerned, the two men found themselves in much agreement. Both expressed their mutual dislike for Le Corbusier, whom Wright described as "dead from the neck up." They discussed his impact on Chicago's architecture through Mies van der Rohe and Boynton attributed to both men the assessment that Le Corbusier's architecture "has no heart." Vlasov insisted that Le Corbusier's popularity was a thing of the past among Soviet architects and wished it would not return. This conversation must have been an especially bittersweet moment for Vlasov, who had recently lost his post as Moscow's chief architect and was witnessing the emergence of a neo-constructivist aesthetic at home in Khrushchev's call for cheap, prefabricated mass housing. Touring America's suburbs had probably given Vlasov little respite from the soulless aesthetics of mass housing until he visited Wright with whom he could commiserate about the architectural nightmare Le Corbusier had inflicted on the world. On the road trip back to Madison, Vlasov sang Wright's praises once again. "Until today I had seen only the technical phase of architecture in America," Boynton quoted him. "Today I saw the other phase which is the artistic side, and now I feel that I'm getting a rounded picture."[152]

Back in the USSR

Whatever pleasure Vlasov had in seeing Wright was soon dashed by an incident that turned the spirit of cooperation that had shaped most of the tour into an ugly episode of Cold War politics. In this case, American journalists' misinterpretation of a reference to Vlasov in the November 1955 decree on "excesses" in Soviet architecture cited above touched off a media circus and expectations of Vlasov's defection that infuriated Khrushchev. Initially based on an Associated Press account announced by radio on November 9 and published in several newspapers on

[152]Boynton, "Visiting Russian Architect."

November 10, the media claimed that in its decree the Soviet government had dismissed Vlasov from his post as Moscow's chief architect and stripped him of his honors.[153] Realizing that Vlasov was a member of the tour and assuming the worst for him, journalists visited him and the delegation at their New York hotel before their departure on November 11 to know whether or not he wished to remain in the United States.[154] Playing up the scene in the hopes of a defection, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* ominously noted that "last night Vlasov was reported staggered in his Hotel Plaza suite…. Nine [architects] were packing last night, but Vlasov was 'away' from his hotel, giving rise to speculation whether he would be aboard the [ocean] liner."[155] The journalists' reaction was not only motivated by their desire for a bit of sensationalist reporting. Like the rest of the world's Soviet watchers, they were trying to make sense of the Soviet Union after Stalin through a lens that was still shaped by their understanding of Stalinist repression. What other fate could a Soviet elite expect after being denounced in a decree?

The delegates were initially unaware of the decree and expressed doubts about its content regarding Vlasov.[156] Indeed, the decree had merely criticized his architectural work for its "excesses" and referred to him and another architect, Dmitrii Chechulin, as "former chief architects of the city of Moscow."[157] Journalists had erroneously interpreted "former" to mean that Vlasov had only just been fired from this post. Their confusion may have also stemmed from

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[153]Spyshnov noted in his presentation that the AP report was first heard on radio on November 9. RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, l. 39. "Moscow Raps Plush Building; Fires Top Men," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 10, 1955. "Soviet Architects Lose Posts," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1955. "Soviet Dismisses Top Architects," *New York Times*, November 10, 1955. "Soviet Architects Fired," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 10, 1955.

[154]Spyshnov noted this in his report. RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, l. 39.

[155]"Moscow Raps Plush Building."

[156]"Soviet Builders Leave after Tour," *New York Times*, November 11, 1955.

[157]"Ob ustranenii izlishestv."

the fact that the decree had specifically fired, demoted, or stripped the honors of several other architects. This likely led journalists to assume the same applied to Vlasov, even though the decree did not indicate this. The story followed them as they crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Cherbourg, France, upon which French newspapers and the Russian émigré press in Paris picked up the story. When he got off the ocean liner in Cherbourg, a person speaking in broken Russian pulled Vlasov aside and asked him if he wished to seek asylum.[158] Rebuffing that overture, Vlasov joined his comrades on a train to Paris, where they were met at the Gare Saint-Lazare on November 16 by a raucous group of journalists, students, and Russian émigrés trying to urge Vlasov to defect. Vlasov and the delegation eventually made it out of the train station and held a press conference at the Soviet embassy the next day where he and other delegates blasted the Western media for misinterpreting the decree and trying to force him not to return home. Explaining that he had a family in the Soviet Union and that he was a patriot, Vlasov asked the journalists who had sought his asylum a simple question: "Who gave you the right to cast such a shadow on a person?"[159] The French newspaper *L'Aurore* was reluctant to accept the Soviets' official explanation and smelled a conspiracy to orchestrate "a fake Vlasov affair to make us forget the real affairs" of several Soviet defectors.[160]

Until the Vlasov affair, the Soviet leadership had apparently tolerated everything the Western

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[158]"Soviet Architect Assails 'Saviors' Who Sought to Bar His Return," *New York Times*, November 18, 1955. "Au cours d'une conférence de presse à l'ambassade de l'U.R.S.S. l'architecte soviétique Vlassov se dit victime d'une 'provocation'," *L'Aurore* (Paris), 18 November 1955. "Delo Vlasova," *Russkaia mysl'* (Paris), November 19, 1955.

[159]J. de Castellane, "M. Vlassov dément et accuse," *Le Figaro* (Paris), November 19-20, 1955. For other newspaper reports about the scene at the train station and the press conference, see "Exiles in Paris Try to Seize Soviet Aide," *New York Times*, November 16, 1955. "Popytka spasti Vlasova v Parizhe zakonchilas' neudachei," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, November 17, 1955, 1. "Russkie antikommunisty v Parizhe pytalis' ubedit' Vlasova izbrat svobodu," *Rossiia* (New York City), November 17, 1955. "'Kidnap Try' Foiled, Says Vlasov," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 18, 1955. "Vlasov uveriaet, chto on vsei dushoi stremitsia nazad v Moskvu," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, November 19, 1955.

[160]"Au cours d'une conférence de presse à l'ambassade de l'U.R.S.S."

media had said about its housing experts touring the United States and the lessons they were learning about the American way of life and how to apply modernist design to the postwar home. But the unexpected turn that the lesson took at its end with the media's representation of Vlasov's alleged desire to defect had crossed a sensitive line. The media's frenzy over Vlasov made explicit what the lesson plan always implied: that the Soviet Union was an inferior country and that given the chance its citizens would want to remain in the West. Such implications had not been clear at the start of the tour, but had rather grown over its course as reporters filed articles daily showing the Soviet housing experts studiously learning how the American home fused modernist design with mass consumption and postwar prosperity. The discursive pretext to American reporters' assumptions about Vlasov's certain, terrible fate back home and his logical desire to defect was provided by the many articles they had written describing the delegates as regular guys on a company junket picking up a few goodies for the wife and kids, ogling the local girls, and having a few drinks in New Orleans with a fellow from the old country. Before even writing the Vlasov affair, journalists had already constructed the housing experts as reasonable technocrats in coats and ties who would hardly want to face the wrath of the Soviet government when an alternative was possible. Vlasov's predicament upon being denounced by his own government signaled to American journalists that at last an opportunity had presented itself whereby a Soviet citizen would act according to his true desires: to make the complete transition to being the Western businessman he had already been depicted as in the media by simply refusing to return to the Soviet Union. To their astonishment, Vlasov left New York on time. Joined by French newspapers and the Russian émigré press, the American media's sensationalist reporting and the scene at the Paris train station provoked the Soviet leadership to fall back similarly on a Cold War playbook to make sense of the incident and launch a response.

Reporting on the delegation's press conference, *Pravda* condemned the incident as a "rude provocation by French police organs." The Soviet chargé d'affaires in Paris issued a formal diplomatic protest at the French Foreign Ministry blaming the French police for orchestrating the first attempt to take Vlasov at Cherbourg, despite the fact that he had diplomatic immunity, and then letting the "hooligan assault" take place at the Saint Lazare train station.[161] Khrushchev, somewhat predictably, gave the affair extra life in early December while on tour in Burma where he threw a tantrum at a pagoda about the Western media and its role in the incident. When the issue came up, he first joked with a Soviet architect working in Burma, "Be careful or you might be invited to America." But then he showed his anger. "There are some very stupid people in America. After we criticized Comrade Vlasov, they tried to persuade him to stay. The French also repeated this stupid mistake the Americans had made." He told the French journalists at this impromptu press conference, "You should turn pink with shame." "But I would like to remain white," answered one. "According to your political color you can remain even black, but if one has faith and shame, one should turn red," Khrushchev concluded.[162] Western newspapers relished the "outburst" by Khrushchev and pointed out that he did it spontaneously at a holy site in Burma.[163] This led to further recriminations from the Soviet side, now not only about the reporting on Vlasov, but how the media had depicted Khrushchev's comments.[164]

Vlasov himself appeared in an interview in *Pravda* on December 5, in which he related every stage of the affair from the American media's misinterpretation of the Soviet government's decree on architectural excesses to the scene at the train station. The French police's attempts to

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[161]"Grubaia provokatsiia frantsuzskikh politseiskikh vlastei," *Pravda*, November 18, 1955.

[162]"Khrushchev Tirade Rakes U.S., Britain," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 2, 1955.

[163]"Khrushchev Breaks Into Outburst Against West," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1955.

[164]"Russia Opens Attack on Western Press," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 6, 1955.

isolate him from the delegation at Cherbourg were particularly insulting and scandalous since, Vlasov claimed, it violated his diplomatic immunity bestowed upon him as a deputy to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. But the French police was not the real culprit. In contrast to *Pravda*'s earlier statement from November 18, Vlasov accused the "American police" of organizing everything at the behest of unnamed groups that had harassed the delegation during the tour in order to torpedo the exchange's goal of "widening and strengthening ties between the American and Soviet peoples." The affair had finally revealed how things really worked in the West. In the United States itself, the American police had planned the entire affair "with help from the reactionary rabble and the American press." But its power reached across international boundaries, Vlasov explained, as the American police had manipulated the French police to continue the affair once the delegation left New York. He determined that the French media had also been manipulated by the American police and then "tried to outdo the American press" with its coverage of the incident. It was especially disconcerting that "such primitive police schemes could arise in France, known for its democratic traditions." To underline the gravity of the affair and what it suggested about Franco-American relations, Vlasov gravely concluded that "cooperation between the American and French police had passed from the realm of criminal to political provocations." Despite his dire assessment, Vlasov ended the interview hopeful that American and Soviet housing experts would continue meeting and noted that an American housing delegation had already been invited to tour the Soviet Union in 1956. To emphasize Soviet superiority over the West, Vlasov assured readers that their American guests would be treated well and not suffer the kind of ordeal he had endured.[165]

The Western media eventually seemed to accept the official Soviet explanation that Vlasov

[165]"Beseda s arkhitektorom A. V. Vlasovym," *Pravda*, December 5, 1955.

had never intended to defect. But reporters kept tabs on him after the incident to confirm that nothing bad had happened to him upon returning to the Soviet Union. The *New York Times* noted his participation at the 3rd Congress of Soviet Architects in late November 1955.[166] Speculating that Soviet authorities were aware of the Western media's continuing interest in Vlasov, another report noted a late December press conference at the Academy of Architecture in Moscow "whose main purpose seemed to be to establish that the academy's president, Alexander V. Vlasov, was in good standing." By quoting Vlasov's comment about "the valuable lessons we learned" in the United States and their intent to implement them, the newspaper underlined once more how important it was for the Western media to frame the 1955 tour as a lesson the Americans had prepared for the Soviets.[167] Reporting on Vlasov continued into the following year when the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted in June 1956 that he had been named vice-president of the Academy of Construction and Architecture[168], which succeeded the Academy of Architecture. Vlasov's demotion to vice-president reflected the Khrushchev regime's emphasis on construction and engineering that the new academy's title signaled. Nevertheless, Vlasov finished his career as a gainfully employed member of the Soviet architectural elite and died in 1962.[169]

While the incident in Paris likely had no effect on Vlasov's already declining career, it allows us to see the reports he and Spyshnov gave to their colleagues in early 1956 in a more complete light. In his presentation, Vlasov made only an oblique reference to the affair when he noted that

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[166]"Architects Pick Vlasov," *New York Times*, November 27, 1955.

[167]"Vlasov Calls Visit to U.S. 'Valuable'," *New York Times*, December 31, 1955.

[168]"Criticized Architect Gets New Red Post," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 26, 1956.

[169]See Vlasov's entry in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 3rd edition, volume 5 (Moscow: izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1971), 150.

the American government's approach to the delegation had been "unfriendly and went as far as the most scandalous provocation."[170] His criticisms of the American way of life, especially popular culture, may have also echoed some lasting resentment over the affair. Whereas Vlasov either put the incident behind him or simply downplayed it in his talk, Spyshnov recounted it in detail from the scene at the hotel in New York before leaving the United States to the incident at the Gare Saint-Lazare and the subsequent press conference. The media's misrepresentations of the November decree, outlandish theories about Vlasov's imminent demise, and bizarre claims that Soviet secret police agents had whisked him away struck Spyshnov as indicative of a Western media gone wild.[171] He addressed the incident toward the end of his presentation, but the shadow it cast on the entire tour was strongly suggested in his other observations on the strange workings of the Western media. What sounded at first glance like Spyshnov's dutiful repeating of Soviet propaganda on the American press turned out to be a rather compelling way for him to relate what the delegation had experienced on their tour and how Vlasov's incident had shaped it.

Spyshnov's claims that "the American press exerts tremendous influence on the psychology of the average American" and "creates the kind of thinking the government needs" echoed standard propaganda. But he also noted the American media's love for sensationalism, which resonated with the delegation's own experience. In making these comments, he may have been thinking of the Soviet delegates' own psychological state of mind as the constantly observed subjects of the American media, which he described a moment later. They had been followed by "tens of correspondents" who had taken "thousands of pictures" but only published what they

[170]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 459, l. 43.

[171]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, ll. 39-41.

thought to be the "most striking" ones. Subjected to more daily press coverage than they had probably ever experienced, the delegates, Spyshnov's report showed, had avidly followed their own story in the pages of American newspapers, on television, and on radio instead of just touring suburbs and construction sites. The American spectacle they had come to find most fascinating and disturbing was the one that featured representations of themselves.[172]

Spyshnov suggested that the coverage could be quite jarring to the delegates who one day saw a colleague's photograph plastered on the front page of the *Boston Globe*, in which he was shown filming with his movie camera, under the large headline, "Soviet Cameras Click in Boston." (The delegate was actually Vlasov who was filming architecture on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[173]) Sometimes their words were simply misrepresented. *Fortune* magazine allegedly reported that a delegate had claimed donuts to be "a Russian invention." Spyshnov countered that the delegate had simply remarked that Soviet donuts were as good as the one the magazine caught him eating. The coverage occasionally struck the housing experts as simply funny and based on poorly informed assumptions about Soviet citizens. Echoing images of the delegates discussed above, Spyshnov explained that "early on newspapers noted with surprise that Russians dress in good European suits and that it's impossible to distinguish them from Americans." He proceeded to recount a humorous tale of an American reporter who tried to pass himself off as a member of the delegation by growing a beard and wearing a hat and coat he believed made him look Russian; in contrast, not one of the delegates sported any facial hair. They were surprised to see in a New Orleans newspaper that

[172]Ibid., 7-8.

[173]"Soviet Cameras Click in Boston," *Boston Evening Globe*, October 5, 1955.

the journalist had nonetheless successfully slipped into a photograph of the delegation.[174]

Spyshnov discussed the Vlasov incident in Paris toward the end of his presentation, thereby suggesting that it was an extreme example of the Western media's irresponsible coverage he had already described. The affair was indeed the culmination in an unintended lesson about the Western "free press" that Spyshnov was now teaching his colleagues in Moscow in the language of Soviet propaganda. Like the architects in 1947, he was taken aback by the unpredictable and duplicitous behavior of a media that injected Cold War polemics where it did not belong, especially regarding Vlasov. Spyshnov echoed the architects' response letter to the *Architectural Review* in 1948 when he expressed his doubts that a professional code of ethics could restrain the American media. In his harshest criticism, he concluded that American reporters, acting not against but "out of professional interests," did not even write what they believed.[175] The editors of the *Architectural Review* had done much the same thing in their 1947 introduction, but at least seemed to realize it by the end of the exchange in 1948.

Lessons learned

By framing the *Architectural Review* affair and the 1955 tour as "two lessons in modernism," this essay argues that the Western media involved in the exchanges were articulating two sides of an evolving modernist design discourse in the mid-20th century. The *Architectural Review* gave voice to the highbrow modernist discourse of "absolute standards" in architecture free of the kitsch that market capitalism and totalitarian socialism produced. The mass press in 1955 articulated the fusion of modernist design with mass consumption and the housing programs of

[174]RGALI, f. 2466, op. 1, d. 460, ll. 7, 21-22.

[175]Ibid., 7.

the postwar city. To be sure, the *Architectural Review*'s lesson was more didactic and explicitly orientalist than the conciliatory and integrative lesson the NAHB and American newspaper reporters gave their Soviet visitors. Nonetheless, to greater or lesser degrees, both interactions were predicated on hierarchies and power dynamics characteristic of teaching a lesson. In both exchanges, the Western participants claimed an exclusive purchase on universal aesthetic standards and the means to bring them to the people on a mass scale, while the Soviet Union was cast in the role of either failing in 1947/1948 or catching up in 1955. By thinking of the exchanges as lessons, I argue, we can better understand the power dynamics that shaped these interactions from the outset and led to their transformation into Cold War spectacles. In each case, the Western media presupposed an inferior Soviet subject who had to be taught something by his Western counterparts. The Soviet leadership's refusal to accept these power dynamics completed the transformation of the exchanges into acrimonious Cold War incidents.

In contrast to the Soviet Union where the press was the voice of the state and was subjected to intense review and censorship, the behavior of a "free press" unaccountable to anyone seemed at times arbitrary and deeply unfair to the Soviet architects and housing experts. In 1947, the *Architectural Review*'s introductory essay shaped how party ideologues read the three architects' articles by confirming Stalin and Zhdanov's worst assumptions regarding the intelligentsia's lack of patriotism and its subservience to the West. In 1955, American reporters' misinterpretation of a Soviet government decree encouraged them to manufacture a tale of Soviet political repression and Cold War intrigue where none existed. In both cases, the Western media played a critical role in shaping the trajectory of cultural exchanges that began with good intentions and ended with bitter recriminations. For the architects and housing experts, this was an unexpected and sobering lesson in the unpredictable workings of the Western "free press".

In contrast to the architects in 1947, the housing delegation in 1955 learned to engage the media in ways that initially helped produce largely positive representations of the tour before things got out of hand. Even during the Vlasov affair, Soviet officials dealt with the incident at the Paris train station by holding a press conference to confront the media and present their side of the story. Like the tour itself, such engagement with the Western media suggested the Soviet Union's greater willingness to expand contacts with the West after Stalin's death. Khrushchev's own unscripted interjection into the Vlasov affair at his own press conference in Burma indicated that he, too, was learning how to handle the Western media in his own somewhat comical manner. But learning these lessons across the Nylon Curtain was not a one-way street. American reporters were discovering that Soviet technocrats were not unlike American businessmen and shared many of the same goals of building a prosperous postwar world. Their very presence in the United States and the fact that Vlasov remained alive and employed after returning home was an early indication to Western reporters that life really was changing in the Soviet Union after Stalin. For the Western media and Khrushchev personally, the 1955 tour was thus a trial run, long forgotten in popular memory and largely overlooked in historical scholarship, that shaped how each side would view and treat the other in subsequent encounters such as those in 1959 when the United States and the Soviet Union exchanged national exhibitions and Khrushchev journeyed across America.

As the 1955 tour suggests, the learning process in these exchanges went both ways. The same held true in the *Architectural Review* affair where the editors learned some important things about themselves, even if they never discovered how their words had contributed to the investigation and honor court the Soviet architects had endured. Sober reflection on what the editors understood to be a Soviet architect's subjugation to the state made them realize that they

were greater believers in liberal philosophy and the sanctity of individual autonomy than their Marxist worldview allowed. But when it came to architectural worldviews, they ultimately conceded that perhaps they had more in common with their Soviet counterparts than they had first admitted. The editors realized that the modernist discourse in which they had initially addressed the architects was at odds with their own architectural philosophy. Having begun the exchange reciting modernist dogma, the editors ended it by expressing a range of views on professional autonomy, alternatives to modernism, and the impending fusion of design with mass consumption. In short, the exchange had broadened the editors' horizons, but left them asking questions that many politicians did throughout the Cold War: how did we arrive at such a misunderstanding with our Soviet counterparts and what could we do to find a way out? For their part, the Soviet architects had followed the opposite path of the editors. They began the exchange in 1947 with a broader worldview on postwar reconstruction and housing, and ended it by reciting Stalinist dogma to atone for their sins in the eyes of the Party.

The trajectory of this exchange from good intentions to Cold War tensions suited the Soviet leadership by playing into Stalin and Zhdanov's domestic aims of bringing the intelligentsia to heel. It bears repeating that the exchange's transformation occurred *despite* the best efforts of the Soviet architects to avoid being drawn into Cold War polemics. In 1946, Arkin, Bunin, and Bylinkin sent articles to the *Architectural Review* with the expectation that such polemics did not have a place in a genuinely professional exchange of opinion on architecture and reconstruction. Neither the journal's editors nor party ideologues in Moscow shared the architects' search for a de-politicized professional exchange. What had motivated the architects to take their approach? At the honor court, they claimed they had done this by mistake. Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that, like many other Soviet citizens, the architects may have expected that victory

in the war had irreversibly changed Soviet life for the better and allowed for greater openness to the outside world. Pursuing cultural contacts with the West on a purely professional level would fit such expectations to extend wartime cooperation between the allies into intellectual life. By pushing or just maintaining the boundaries of the permissible, the architects were already exercising under Stalin what would later become commonplace for the intelligentsia during Khrushchev's thaw. Arkin's tentative steps at re-examining the architectural debates of the cultural revolution were later expanded into a major professional discussion of the constructivist past under Khrushchev.[176] For these reasons, their exchange with the *Architectural Review* stands as a critical, yet little understood turning point in the Stalinist leadership's crackdown on their profession and the intelligentsia as a whole after the war, and hinted at the discussions to come under Khrushchev.

In 1955, the housing experts similarly sought a professional exchange of opinion devoid of polemics. As reported in the media, they focused on learning about building techniques and comparing notes with their American counterparts rather than disparaging the American way of life through Cold War invective. They acknowledged differences in the American and Soviet approaches to housing, but tended not to frame these as proof of the Soviet Union's pre-eminence, seeking instead to emphasize shared goals and even anxieties when it came to women and consumption. In contrast to what the Stalinist leadership had expected of the three architects in 1947, the housing experts were sent to America by a leadership ready to admit again that the Soviet Union was not superior in all things and needed to catch up. To be sure, Khrushchev continued to assert Soviet superiority in his famous "kitchen debate" with US Vice-President Richard Nixon in Moscow and on his own tour of the United States, both in 1959. His bombastic

[176]On architects' discussions under Khrushchev about the legacy of constructivism, see Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw*, 105-40.

claims of Soviet pre-eminence provided Western reporters with precisely the Cold War copy they craved. The housing specialists in 1955, in contrast, played the role of cultural diplomats who saved their criticisms until they got home. Vlasov, probably the most well traveled member of the group, was more inclined to leave the surveying work to his construction industry colleagues while he focused on being a tourist and planned his visit to see Frank Lloyd Wright. His impromptu journey to the American architect's estate reflected a desire to re-establish contacts with Western counterparts on a professional footing outside of Cold War politics. It also gave Vlasov the chance to commiserate with a master architect about the negative influences of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, whose modernist aesthetics appeared to be making a comeback in Khrushchev's plans to shake up the architectural profession and resolve at last the Soviet Union's housing shortages.

Despite the changes Khrushchev introduced in Soviet housing and architecture, Vlasov was able to continue working. He even secured a spot on a high-profile tour of the United States that enabled him to visit Wright. While the three architects in 1947 were unable to enjoy such contacts with the West, they too kept their careers and suffered only stern reprimands. On one particular issue, however, Vlasov's fate diverged significantly from those of the architects in 1947. In the cultural context of late Stalinism, the criticism they endured at the hands of the *Architectural Review* elicited an attack on their honor as Soviet citizens by party ideologues. In contrast, whatever Khrushchev thought of Vlasov's aesthetic preferences, he had his back when the Western media chose to treat him unfairly. Even though the government had issued a decree specifically criticizing Vlasov (a rather unpleasant thing to do while he was out of the country), Khrushchev would not tolerate a Western media that depicted his man as a potential defector

desperate to flee the Soviet Union. One can only imagine how such a rumor would have figured into Zhdanov and Stalin's opinion of their errant architects.

Looking beyond these two particular exchanges, this essay suggests that thinking about other interactions across the Nylon Curtain as "lessons" may be a fruitful way to examine their internal dynamics and how the individuals involved acted the way they did. This framework can help us think through when and why the political dynamics of such exchanges – in the cultural and professional spheres, but also perhaps in economic relations, diplomatic interactions, and even military relations – intensified or lessened over time, the roles individual actors played in shaping these exchanges, and the forces that lay beyond their control. Such analysis can reveal the line beyond which one side or the other was no longer willing to be taught and how that line shifted over time. To be sure, "lessons" have represented a power dynamic at the heart of the West's historical relationship with Russia dating back to what Larry Wolff terms the philosophes' "addressing" of Russia in the 18th century Enlightenment. The most recent history of that relationship in the 1990s exhibited the latest highpoint in the West's desire to teach Russia lessons about universal truths in economics and politics, and its assumption that the Russian leadership had an obligation to its people and the world to learn these lessons. But like the two incidents examined here, the lessons of the 1990s ultimately presupposed an inferior relationship with the West that Russia's leadership eventually found to be at odds with how it viewed its place in the world.

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