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Italo-Soviet Architectural Exchanges and Postmodernism under Late Socialism

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A global movement, architectural postmodernism cannot be reduced simply to the cultural logic of late capitalism, nor should its analysis be restricted, as in recent revisionist histories, to the geographical confines of the Eastern Bloc. By revealing that the ideas, design strategies and images that make up postmodern architecture did not belong squarely to either side of the Cold War geopolitical divide, this paper argues that a full understanding of the movement requires an inquiry going beyond the scope of a single ideological context.

The emergence of architectural postmodernism is to be located in the interstitial space between the 'capitalist West' and the 'socialist East'. Yet familiar narratives of knowledge transfer from the former to the latter are reductive and fail to capture historical reality in all its complexity and ambiguity. For instance, Aldo Rossi's work was known and may have been consciously replicated by Soviet architects. Less acknowledged is the fact that, in the Italian context, the rise of architectural postmodernism went hand in hand with the consolidation of a 'tradition of study of Soviet architecture'. Rossi was just one among many Italian architects — such as Paolo Portoghesi, Carlo Aymonino or Vittorio Gregotti — who, undertaking a critique of modernism, drew crucial inspiration from Soviet architecture, particularly Socialist Realist theory and practice.

Keywords: Soviet Union; postmodernism; Cold War; Estonia; Georgia; Italy; Ukraine; Aldo Rossi

Introduction: 'A Roundtable that Never Was'

The July–August 1989 issue of *Arkhitektura SSSR* [The Architecture of the USSR], which was the foremost architecture magazine in the Soviet Union, contains a curiosity: the transcript of a fictional roundtable on the theme of the fate of old cities, one in which Soviet architects exchanged their views with Aldo Rossi, Léon Krier and Alexander Papageorgiou-Venetas. The fictional character of this meeting resides in the fact that the young Soviet architect-critic Leonid Khaichenko, as the moderator of the roundtable, assembled quotes from recent writings by Rossi, Krier and Papageorgiou-Venetas to create a semblance of a colloquium. The quotes come from specific sources: Rossi's essay 'What Is to Be Done with Old Cities', which gave the roundtable its title, Krier's essay 'The Reconstruction of the European City' and Papageorgiou-Venetas's book *Continuity and Change: Preservation in City Planning*. These all foreground the issue of 'safeguarding' historic cities, which Khaichenko characterized as an 'international issue' no less urgent in the Soviet Union than in the West. 'Our own cities, too, need safeguarding', Khaichenko asserted, exhorting his readers to 'familiarize themselves with what the Western architects proposed'. At the same time, he warned against uncritical acceptance of foreign models. Khaichenko held that foreign models had first to be reworked and transformed before they could be made useful. His fictional roundtable, then, was a sort of demonstration of method, to the extent that Khaichenko took quotes from Western sources and transformed them into an instrument of critique. For instance, he divorced Rossi's critique of the 'tourist-oriented conservation' of historic cities from its original context and instrumentalized it in his own critique of the disastrous renovation of Moscow's historic Old Arbat (Khaichenko 1989: 114).

The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that Khaichenko's transformative engagement with his sources paralleled the modus operandi of late Soviet architects, whose postmodern work abounds in 'formal echoes' of the architecture of the capitalist West but avoids being a slavish copy of it (Jameson 1991: 134). For instance, designs by Aldo Rossi were well known in the Soviet Union, and there were deliberate attempts to reproduce them, but such attempts always produced simulacra whose relationship to the original is, to borrow a concept of Rossi's, at best an 'analogical' one. Analogies are, as Rossi once explained, mere 'associations and correspondences' (Rossi 1996: 349). They are 'detached from specific place and specific time and become instead an abstract locus existing in what is a purely typological or architectural time-place', and their referential ambiguity resists interpretation in terms of the conventional dichotomy between original and copy (Eisenman 1982: 8). Incompatible with dichotomous thinking, late Soviet analogues of Italian postmodern designs draw attention to themselves, to what they reveal about the specific historical conditions under which analogical architecture

was adopted as a strategy. As the geopolitical gap between the communist East and the capitalist West began to close, a vast, all-encompassing semiotic field opened up in which free-floating architectural signs, defying all boundaries and dichotomies, kept on circulating in all directions and replicating themselves until the field became saturated with simulacra 'suggesting no possibility of a return to an original being' (Baudrillard 1994: 99). Against this backdrop, the interdependence of socialist culture and capitalist culture emerged more clearly into view, an interdependence that, in the postmodern conjuncture, manifested itself in the production of Soviet analogues of Italian postmodern designs on the one hand and in Rossi and Paolo Portoghesi's indebtedness to Soviet Socialist Realism — the basis of their postmodernism — on the other.

Simulacra: The Soviet Reception of Aldo Rossi's Work

Khaichenko also appropriated Krier's critique of the hypertrophy of 'industrial rationality', bringing it to bear on a commentary on 'the ecological disaster surrounding Lake Baikal' and the 'destruction of historic city centers' throughout the Soviet Union — for him, the destruction of the natural environment and the destruction of old cities were two sides of the same coin. Then, he proceeded to give Soviet postmodernism a remarkably clear definition: it consisted in jettisoning, as 'Christian de Portzamparc, James Stirling, Ricardo Bofill and Oswald Matthias Ungers' had done in the West, the 'radical modernist principles' endangering both the natural and built environment. The tyranny of modernism knew no ideological boundaries and led to dire consequences on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and this meant that Soviet architects, in dealing with this problem of universal significance, had lessons both to offer to and draw from their Western colleagues. At the same time, the specificities of each ideological context made it the case that the adoption of a foreign solution must be undertaken with caution. Khaichenko, characteristically, reminded the reader that Western practice was far from perfect and should never be blindly replicated; it must first be subjected to a thoroughgoing critique before a Soviet architect could make use of elements drawn from it. Significantly, he judged one of Krier's projects to be utterly impracticable and concluded that it was a whimsical, 'personal' and hence bourgeois experiment, rather than a serious attempt to solve 'concrete problems' (Khaichenko 1989: 115).

Here, the paradoxical character of Soviet architectural postmodernism reveals itself — that is to say, the contradictory way in which, in the years leading up to and during perestroika, Soviet architects enjoyed greater access to Western materials and were more ready to dialogue with their ideological Other than ever before but at the same time remained deeply wary of the differences separating the two blocs,

as well as of the seeming impossibility of eliminating them. Their wariness made itself felt even when it was the work of people like Portoghesi and Rossi, progressive architects engaged in leftist politics, that they sought to replicate. The West was at once a source of inspiration and anxiety, at once an object of desire and critique. In the Soviet architectural press, Western practice drew praise and criticism in equal parts, as for instance in Khaichenko's 1988 article on Rossi's Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, in which he expresses his boundless admiration for Rossi while also underscoring the Italian architect's failure to 'bring into sharper relief monuments functioning as visual dominants' (1988: 181). This article bears certain similarities to the young Soviet architect's fictional roundtable mentioned at the outset, which it predates by a year. In both, Khaichenko assigns a central place to the figure of Rossi, whose work is represented through abundant illustrations. However, if illustrative material bears a direct relationship to text in the 1988 article and reinforces its expository character, the relationship between image and text is hardly straightforward in the latter (**Figure 1**).
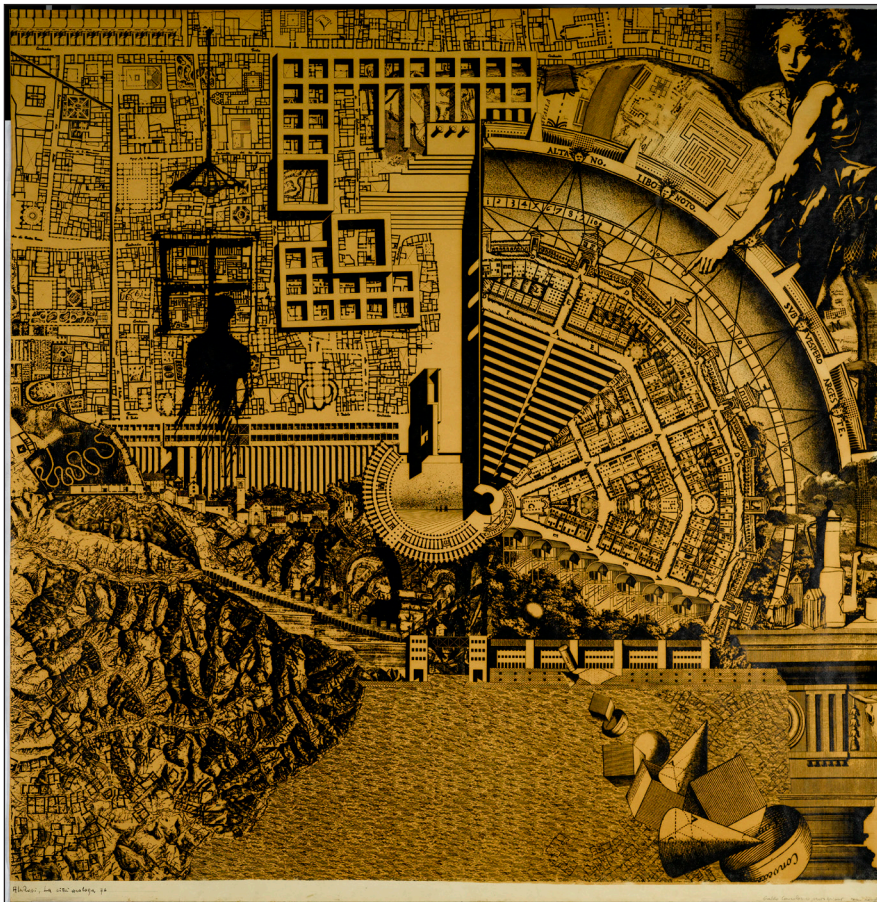

Figure 1: Aldo Rossi, *La Città Analoga*, 1976. © Eredi Aldo Rossi, courtesy of Fondazione Aldo Rossi.

The function of the reproduction of Rossi's 1976 *Città analoga* [Analogous City], placed at the end of the text in the transcript of the fictional roundtable, remains unclear until this montage, containing 'purely architectural references', reveals itself to be a sort of visual correlative of the roundtable, a montage of texts drawn from various sources (Rossi 1984: 166). Rossi's *Città analoga* and Khaichenko's fictional roundtable are predicated on the same 'compositional procedure' (Khaichenko 1988). Through his interventions, Khaichenko transformed an array of quotes from writings by Western theorists into a manifesto of Soviet postmodernism, while Rossi's *Città analoga* is a metacritique, a visual treatise on citation as a creative act.

Among the purely architectural references that make up *Città analoga* are autobiographical allusions to buildings that Rossi designed, such as his Residential Block D in Gallaratese, Italy. This building evidently left an impression on Soviet architects such as Villen Künnapu, an Estonian, and Iu. P. Platonov, a Russian; both made analogical references to its neo-rationalist façade. The façade of Künnapu's collective farm administration building in Peetri, Estonia, marked by the 'varying rhythms' of its numerous apertures (Kurg 2021: 119), evokes Rossi's without being a slavish copy. Platonov's Iu. A. Orlov Paleontological Museum also has an analogous facade, one where the regular rhythm of the windows on the upper level forms a sharp contrast with the irregular rhythm of the apertures below. This tension between the regular and the irregular, hardly specific to his residential block in Gallaratese, is a recurring theme in Rossi's work. Both Platonov's museum and Künnapu's collective farm building, then, exemplify a transformative engagement with a Western model. Once transposed into the Soviet context, the language of Western postmodernism took on an entirely different function, namely that of giving architectural expression to the late socialist conditions that existed in the Soviet Union on the eve of its collapse.

Platonov's museum makes another ambiguous reference to the Gallaratese housing, of which Rossi's block is just one part. There is, in its inner courtyard, a sort of Greek open-air theater that may have been inspired by a similar open-air theater forming the compositional center of Carlo Aymonino and Rossi's Gallaratese housing (**Figures 2** and **3**). The earlier date of the housing complex makes it tempting to immediately identify the former as a copy and the latter as the original, but important differences in scale and function foreclose an easy conclusion. At the same time, the Gallaratese housing project was published and known in the Soviet context, and Aymonino and Rossi's membership in the Italian Communist Party may have meant that their work was, so to speak, a politically correct source on which to draw. The project is mentioned, for instance, in R. A. Katsnel'son's *Sovremennaia arkhitektura Italii* [Contemporary Italian Architecture], published in 1983. This and other Soviet

Figure 2: Carlo Aymonino and Aldo Rossi, Monte Amiata housing complex, Gallaratese, Milan, 1967–1974. Photo by Da Hyung Jeong, July 15, 2021.

Figure 3: P. Platonov, Iu. A. Orlov Paleontological Museum, Moscow, Russia, 1987. Photo by Da Hyung Jeong, August 30, 2021.

references to Italian postmodern design, given their ambiguous character, are identifiable as simulacra in Baudrillard's sense. What complicates the picture even more is that Aymonino's theater is itself a copy — that is to say, a copy of an antique prototype that encapsulates the architect's indebtedness to classical sources. What is lost in a work reduced to a simulacrum 'is its *aura*, ... its aesthetic form ... and, according to Benjamin, it takes on, in its ineluctable destiny of reproduction, a *political* form', Baudrillard asserted (Baudrillard 1994: 99; italics in original). The political import of Platonov's amphitheater, a postmodern simulacrum promising no return to an original, resides in its sublimation of an archetype into a pure form 'detached from specific place and specific time' and, by extension, from a specific ideology (Eisenman 1982: 8). Peter Eisenman, in his preface to Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*, explains that such sublimation is central to analogical architecture, which 'begins when history ends' (1982) — that is to say, when the architect embraces pure architectural forms that, radically divested of political meaning, freely cross the boundaries between the communist East and the capitalist West and render ideological difference meaningless.

On the Semiotic Complexity of Late Soviet Architecture

In fact, Platonov had long embraced analogical architecture. Among his early works containing references to the architecture of the capitalist world is his competition entry for the Centre Pompidou, which reveals a debt to Louis Kahn's National Assembly in Dhaka. The particular semiotics of this work parallels and helps us better understand that of the Iu. A. Orlov Paleontological Museum. Platonov's allusion, whether conscious or not, to a well-known project by Kahn finds a justification in the fact that the Estonian American architect's work had achieved critical acclaim and become a valid object of emulation in the Soviet Union. Here, as in the case of Platonov's citation of Rossi, a paradox reveals itself: in the end, allusions of this kind failed to constitute a transcendence of political difference, which was reasserted through the insistence on the political correctness of the source. As for Kahn, he had visited the Soviet Union in 1965 to promote the state-sponsored exhibition *Arkhitektura SShA* [The Architecture of the USA], and Vincent Scully, who joined him on the trip, would later remember that their Soviet hosts were 'infinitely kind and deeply respectful' (Scully 1986: 71). Regardless of Kahn's political alignment, Soviet critics deemed his work exemplary, discerning in it a 'quiet monumentalism' and praising its 'resistance to the dematerialization of architecture symbolized by glass parallelepipeds' — that is, its postmodern character (Ikonnikov 1973: 517).

Platonov's competition entry also suggests that Soviet architects sought to evade the production of simple copies through strategic use of indirect, mediated reference.

The mediated reference that the Georgian architects Vakhtang Davitaia and Shota Bostanashvili's Glory to Labor Memorial in Kutaisi, completed in 1976, makes to Kahn's National Assembly is a case in point. The memorial only partly resembles and therefore avoids being an easily identifiable copy of its original while bearing an unmistakable analogical relationship to something else altogether, namely, Platonov's competition entry. This double referentiality ensures its semiotic complexity and allows it to be a simulacrum 'detached from specific place and specific time', an 'abstract locus existing in what is a purely typological or architectural time-place' (Eisenman 1982: 8). To exist in such a time-place meant to be divested of political and ideological meaning, to be unburdened by a semantic obligation; alluding to both capitalist architecture and socialist architecture, the memorial allegorizes, precisely by virtue of its illegibility, the new historical reality that was beginning to emerge amid unprecedented efforts to bridge the cultural gap between the two blocs.

The National Bakery #8 in Tbilisi, Georgia, begun in 1980, is another example of Davitaia and Bostanashvili's strategic use of ambiguous reference (**Figure 4**). In one part of the bakery complex, hip-roofed houses are raised up on stilts. These may be an allusion to Rossi's Casa Bay project or to the *oda sakhli*, a traditional house of western Georgia in which the authors may have discerned a clear expression of Georgian national identity — as opposed to the transnational, Soviet identity imperialistically imposed on ethnic minorities, which was increasingly coming under scrutiny in various discursive

Figure 4: Vakhtang Davitaia and Shota Bostanashvili, National Bakery #8, Tbilisi, Georgia, 1980–1983. Photo courtesy of David Bostanashvili, Tbilisi, Georgia, c. 1983.

contexts in the late Soviet Union. Crucially, Davitaia and Bostanashvili's designs drew, on the whole, a favorable response from the Soviet critical apparatus, which apparently turned a blind eye to the fact that their double referentiality sometimes allowed them to carry a potentially subversive message. The critic A. V. Riabushin, for instance, sought to give an ideological justification for the 'polysemy' of the duo's work by stressing how a polysemous architectural text, being 'open–ended, inexhaustible … [and] always ready to accommodate whatever ideas or associations the viewer might project onto it', perennially resists what Marx derogatorily called 'objectification [*opredmechivanie*]' (Riabushin 1990: 14), or the process by which the meaning of a text becomes irreversibly determined so as to leave the interpreting subject with no opportunity to exercise his or her agency.

To be sure, less ambiguous references to the architecture of the capitalist world were also made, and it is significant that Rossi's work was the object of many of these references. T. V. Lazarenko, Iu. S. Shalatskii and I. P. Shpara's postmodern intervention into the historical Podil district of Kyiv, Ukraine, which dates to 1984, is a case in point, for many of the forms deployed there unmistakably derive from Rossi's vocabulary (**Figures 5** and **6**). The colossal pier in the corner of Konstantinovskaia Street and Obolonskaia Street in Podil, for instance, echoes an analogous device that Rossi used in two of his designs, namely his Kochstraße housing in West Berlin and

Figure 5: T. V. Lazarenko, Iu. S. Shalatskii and I. P. Shpara, residential block in Podil, Kyiv, Ukraine, completed in 1989. From 'Kvartal V-14 na Podole' (1989: 37).

Figure 6: Aldo Rossi, Kochstraße housing, Berlin, Germany, 1981. Photo by Gunnar Klack, July 28, 2012. Wikimedia Commons. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:IBA-87-Berlin-076-Aldo-Rossi-Wohnbebauung-Wilhemstr-Kochstr-a.jpg.

his Gruppo Finanziario Tessile building in Turin, Italy. As for the pediment above the corner entrance to one of the new residential blocks in Podil, it may derive from Rossi's Centro Direzionale di Fontivegge in Perugia, the central part of which has a sort of classical temple front complete with a pediment, or else it is a more distant formal echo of the triangular superstructure of the Monument to the Resistance in Segrate, Italy, one of Rossi's earliest works. Whatever the precise point of reference might have been, the Ukrainian architects clearly sought to allude to Rossi's work, and this in an unambivalent way.

At the same time, their intervention into Podil is not without ambiguity or complexity, to the extent that explicit formal references of the kind discussed above coexist with more implicit references made in discursive contexts, for instance in the description of the project published in the January–February 1989 issue of *Arkhitektura SSSR*. This text abounds in Rossian tropes such as 'collage [*kollazh*]' and 'rationality [*ratsional'nost'*]' and reveals a conceptual debt to the Italian architect that, significantly, goes unacknowledged, although the lack of any mention of his name hardly prevents Rossi from being strongly present in the text ('Kvartal V-14 na Podole', 1989: 32). Lazarenko, Shalatskii and Shpara, for instance, explain that their embrace of collage

went hand in hand with their interest in the possibility of 'organizing historical strata and time slices in a non-hierarchical manner' — it is just this possibility that Rossi explored in *Città analoga* — and with their search for 'new relationships with the past' (1989: 34). This mirrors Rossi's search for 'a different sense of history conceived of not simply as fact, but rather as a series of things, of affective objects to be used by the memory or in a design', for an 'analogical' relationship with the past that is 'sensed yet unreal, imagined yet silent; it is not a discourse but rather a meditation on themes of the past, an interior monologue' (Rossi 1976: 349).

There were various channels through which late Soviet architects could become acquainted with specific examples of capitalist architecture. Among these were 'foreign architectural journals', from which, in Lazarenko, Shalatskii and Shpara's opinion, Soviet architects too frequently 'borrowed compositional strategies' without adequate reflection on the problems that may arise when two mutually exclusive cultures clash with one another (1989: 32), as well as exhibitions, of which *Al'do Rossi* [Aldo Rossi] is a noteworthy but hitherto unknown example (**Figure 7**). This 'first-ever display of
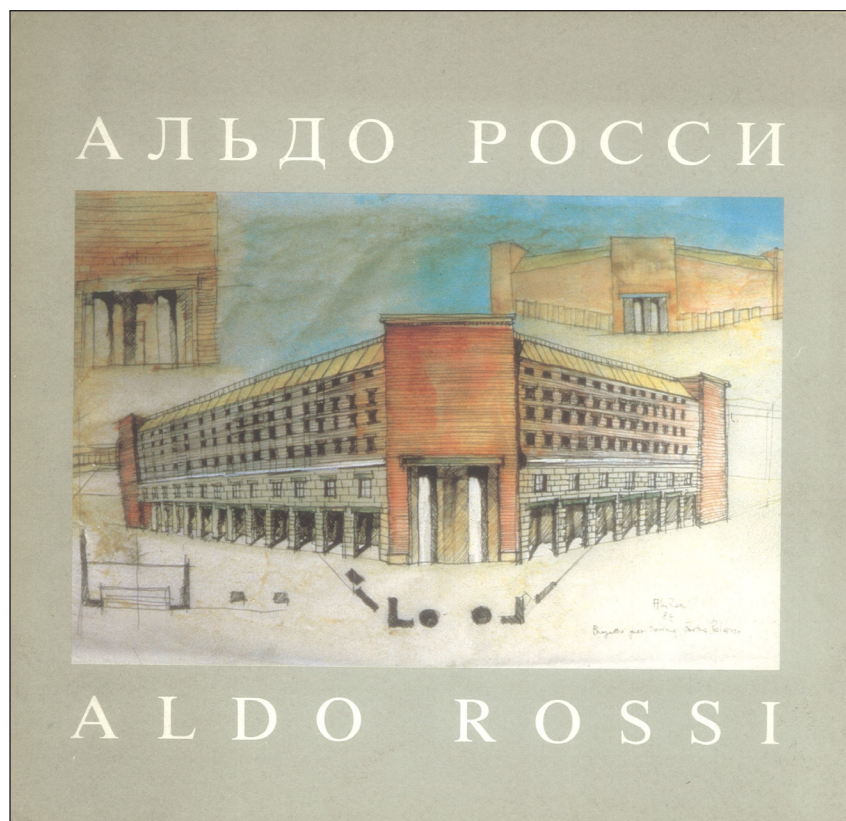

Figure 7: Cover of the catalog of the exhibition *Al'do Rossi* (Barbieri and Braghieri 1987), held at the Central House of the Architect, Moscow, USSR, 1987.

work by an Italian architect in the Soviet Union' opened in 1987 in Moscow and featured original drawings by Rossi, including those for projects where he experimented with the neo-rationalist temple front (Barbieri and Braghieri 1987: n.p.). The venue for the exhibition was Tsentral'nyi dom arkhitektora [Central House of the Architect], a hub for discussions on the newest developments in world architecture where postmodern works by Estonian architects had not long ago been shown to great acclaim. Crucially, the exhibition catalog argues that Rossi's work possesses a 'didactic value'. Umberto Barbieri and Gianni Braghieri, the organizers of the exhibition, call the architect a 'master [*master*]' in the catalog, suggesting that his work offered lessons to its Soviet audience.

At the end of the catalog, we once again find *Città analoga*. Here, as in Khaichenko's fictional roundtable, the collage functions as a sort of pictorial conclusion to the proposed narrative, and the earlier date of the catalog hints at the possibility of, on Khaichenko's part, knowledge of and a conscious attempt to replicate the device. Additionally, Barbieri and Braghieri also made the editorial choice of including Rossi's Teatro del Mondo in their narrative, as if to suggest that they were, through their exhibition, repeating the journey that this itinerant theater had 'spectacularly' made across the ideological divide in 1980 (Barbieri and Braghieri 1987), although the significance of the Teatro del Mondo resided not only in what it did but also in how it looked. Its design was inspired by something Rossi had seen on the other side of the Iron Curtain, namely the Moscow Kremlin. In *A Scientific Autobiography*, in which he recounts a trip taken to Soviet Moscow when he was 'around twenty years old' (**Figure 8**) (Rossi 1981: 40), Rossi admitted that the campanile of the Teatro del Mondo

> might be a lighthouse or a clock; … a minaret or one of the towers of the Kremlin: the analogies are limitless, seen, as they are, against the background of this preem- inently analogous city [Venice]. I think it was at Izmir that I watched and heard the awakening minarets in insomniac dawns; in Moscow, I experienced the *frisson* of the Kremlin's towers and sensed the world of the Mongols and of wooden watchtowers set on some boundless plain — I sensed things in this way far more than as elements reducible to those we call architecture. (1981: 67)

Rossi's fascination with the Moscow Kremlin was a longstanding one, and, tasked with the design of a medical equipment factory in Syzran, Soviet Russia, he again drew inspiration from its 'towers, reliefs and salient points that constitute an accentuation of the landscape'. He proposed a sort of industrial Kremlin whose 'brick towers of modest height' (**Figure 9**) were to sharply contrast with the 'infinitude of the great plains of

Figure 8: Aldo Rossi (third from right) with members of the Italian Communist Party in the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia, 1954. © Eredi Aldo Rossi, courtesy of Fondazione Aldo Rossi.
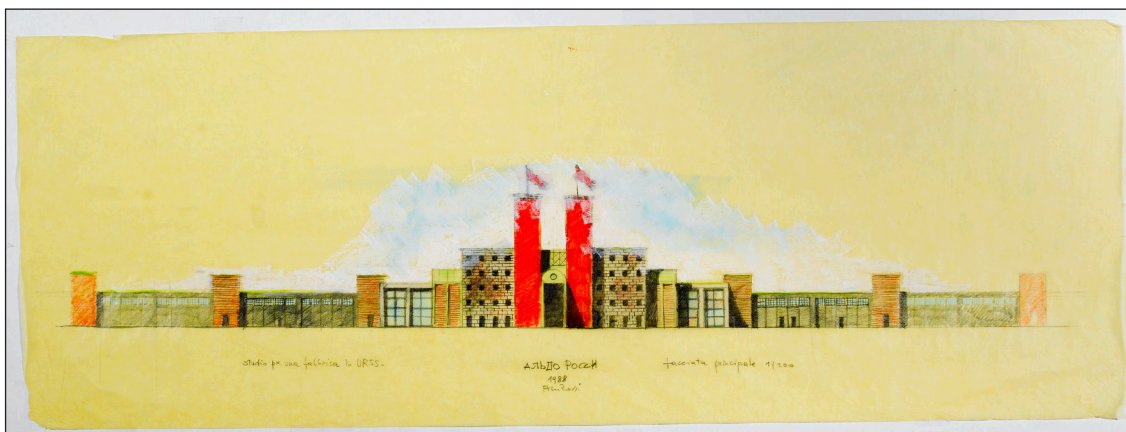

Figure 9: Aldo Rossi, project for a medical equipment factory in Syzran, Soviet Russia, 1988. Rossi has signed his name in the Cyrillic alphabet in this drawing. © Eredi Aldo Rossi, courtesy of Fondazione Aldo Rossi.

the Volga basin', evidently seeking to evoke 'the world of the Mongols and of wooden watchtowers set on some boundless plan' (Rossi n.d.). Rossi had long been interested in defensive architecture, a topic that receives substantial attention in his manifesto-like *L'architettura della città* [The Architecture of the City], in which he reflects, for instance, on the roles of fortresses in the genesis of cities. The city of Vila Viçosa, for example, emerged 'between the walls of a castle', while the amphitheater of Nîmes was transformed by the Visigoths into a fortress whose walls came to enclose a city of 'two thousand inhabitants' (Rossi 1984: 88, 87).

In the end, the commission for the medical equipment factory in Syzran went to the Yugoslav firms Rad and Montazh, but this does not diminish the significance of Rossi's project, which serves as evidence that, by the late 1980s, the Iron Curtain had become so porous that not only ideas but architects themselves could routinely cross it. Despite the skepticism toward its applicability to socialist architecture, Western theory steadily appeared in Soviet books and periodicals, and, while occasional exhibitions of work by Western architects enabled a more direct encounter and engagement with concretizations of that theory, nothing challenges the received notion of an impenetrable Iron Curtain more than the fact that Rossi could find a work opportunity in the late Soviet Union, despite his involvement in leftist politics. Remarkably, Paolo Portoghesi also came close to designing a building in the Soviet Union, a 'fast-food eatery' in Moscow that would serve 'the kind of lunch Americans eat in a hurry' ('Fast-Food Poultry in Moscow' 1985: 8). The ideological bases of socialist architecture and capitalist architecture were different, and each had arrived at modernism differently, but both now faced the problem of the exhaustion of modernism and the necessity of ushering in the postmodern — the postmodern understood, in a temporal sense, as that which comes after the modern and, in a dialectical sense, as an antithesis to the modern. Portoghesi's insistence on a 'proletarian' architecture that 'pleases the people', for instance, could find equal support in both blocs (Portoghesi 1981: 88). Meanwhile, neither socialist architecture nor capitalist architecture is the explicit target of the critique that Rossi mounts in the description of his Syzran project. Instead, Rossi attacks 'outdated theories of functionalism' in general, on which he places the blame for the predominance of buildings lacking 'architectonic dignity' in both the capitalist world and the socialist world (CCA Rossi).

'Communist East,' 'Capitalist West'

The start of the 1980s had seen a rapid reversal of the détente of the 1970s and deterioration of relations between the Soviet Union and the West. Vehemently criticizing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the West boycotted the

1980 Moscow Olympics, and Ronald Reagan delivered his famous 'evil empire' speech in 1983, prompting the Soviet Union to lead a retaliatory boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. In Italy, anti-communist hardliners were adamant that, even at the risk of jeopardizing the Italian share in the construction of the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhhorod pipeline, all ties with the Soviet Union had to be severed immediately. The pipeline, the importance of which continues to be felt today, was to be the latest addition to a vast natural gas transportation system stretching from the depths of Siberia all the way to Western Europe.

A turning point occurred with Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985. Young and reform-minded, Gorbachev championed rapprochement with the West, conceding that a fundamentally 'new approach' to diplomacy was necessary given that profound and significant 'changes in contemporary world development ... required rethinking and comprehensive analysis of all factors involved' (Simes 1987: 477). The tone of Gorbachev's speech of welcome to the Italian prime minister Bettino Craxi, who visited the Soviet Union on May 29, 1985, is telling. 'Your visit to the Soviet Union is a clear sign of the desire of both sides to give an additional impetus to Soviet-Italian political contacts', Gorbachev said, going on to stress the 'mechanisms and instruments of cooperation' perfected by the two nations over the years, 'such as ... a number of bilateral documents on economic, scientific, technical and cultural exchanges' (Gorbachev 1987: 90).

Binary thinking in terms of a 'capitalist West' and a 'communist East' increasingly lost meaning as the two blocs, in pursuit of increased mutual trust and peaceful coexistence, drew closer to each other than ever before. By 1988, Gorbachev could even speak of a shared European cultural heritage that rendered ideological differences irrelevant:

> Some in the West are trying to 'exclude' the Soviet Union from Europe. Now and then, as if inadvertently, they equate 'Europe' with 'Western Europe.' Such ploys, however, cannot change the geographic and historical realities. Russia's trade, cultural and political links with other European nations and states have deep roots in history. We are Europeans. Old Russia was united with Europe by Christianity ... the history of Russia is an organic part of the great European history. (Gorbachev 1988: 190)

After the signing of the first Italo-Soviet cultural agreement in 1960, new protocols were introduced on a biennial basis. Often, there were separate protocols relating to each of the artistic disciplines in which the two countries sought opportunities for cooperation. The protocol for 1966–1967, for instance, concerns 'cooperation in cinematography', and a United States Department of State research memorandum published in 1968

reports that, with the protocol in effect, Soviet films began to be widely shown in Italy, 'both in theaters and over television', as well as that a joint Soviet-Italian film was 'in progress' (Hughes 1968: 39). Although the memorandum does not mention its title, the film may be identified as Vittorio de Sica's 1970 *I Girasoli* [Sunflower], partly shot in and produced with funding from the Soviet Union. That de Sica was, like Rossi and Portoghesi, involved in leftist politics is a crucial detail.

The memorandum reveals an important aspect of the nature of cultural exchange between Italy and the Soviet Union, namely the key role played by nongovernmental organizations. It points out that the Italian government was only minimally involved in cultural exchanges with the socialist world; in 'some towns under communist control', or towns where the Italian Communist Party had a strong presence, entities other than the central government would occasionally take matters into their hands and 'arrange appearances of East European artists directly' (Hughes 1968: 39). L'Associazione Italia–URSS [The Italy-USSR Friendship Association], which boasted a multitude of local branches spread across both Italy and the Soviet Union, was one of the most influential and salient among them, and its contribution to architectural exchange between the two countries cannot be underestimated.

The Armenian chapter of the Associazione, for instance, was instrumental in bringing *Al'do Rossi* to Yerevan, as well as in facilitating the research on Armenian church architecture jointly undertaken by the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, then under Portoghesi's leadership. The results of this research are published in the series called *Documenti di architettura armena/Documents of Armenian Architecture*, in Italian and English, which featured contributions from both Italian and Armenian scholars. The special variety of Byzantine architecture that took root throughout ancient Armenia, an embodiment of the exceptionally long history that Christianity has in the region, forms the exclusive subject of the journal, which Portoghesi described as an effort to 'present for the first time … examples of Armenian architecture, supplying for each monument an exhaustive and mostly unpublished collection of photographic illustrations as well as a complete series of plans accompanied by … historical, critical and illustrative essays' (Facoltà di architettura del Politecnico di Milano/Accademia delle Scienze dell'Armenia Sovietica 1974: cover). The series also served, crucially, to symbolize cooperation between scholars from the two countries and hint at the possibility of overcoming ideological differences through cultural and scientific exchange.

As the editor of *Documenti di architettura armena*, Portoghesi probably had opportunities to visit Armenia and see, in addition to the churches and other monuments

that his team was studying, examples of socialist architecture. A photograph of A. O. Tamanian's House of Government of the Armenian SSR is reproduced in his *Album degli anni Trenta* [Album from the Thirties], which contains reflections on formal analogies between Italian architecture and Soviet architecture of the 1930s. Among historical buildings, the tenth-century Haghpat Monastery appears to have left a particularly strong impression on him, to the extent that the 'intersecting arches' of his Mosque of Rome, a project dating to 1974, are a borrowing from the monastery. Portoghesi did not fail to mention that arches of this kind were used 'for the first time in history' in Armenia before becoming 'one of the means by which Islamic architecture achieved maximal formal and technical expression (Portoghesi and Coppa 2002: 31)'.

Portoghesi may have drawn inspiration for his unrealized sports complex in Foligno, Italy, from Soviet architecture of the so-called revolutionary period, which stretches from the October Revolution to the Second World War. He attached a special meaning to buildings built during this period and may have sought, in his designs, to allude to them, to the extent that he regarded them as commendable examples of proletarian architecture. It may not be coincidental, for instance, that the sports complex was to have a star-shaped plan analogous to that of Karo Alabian, Vasilii Simbirtsev and Boris Barkhin's Red Army Theater in Moscow, with which Portoghesi would have been familiar given the frequent reference made to it in Italian architectural discourse. Bruno Zevi, for example, mentions it in his 1953 *Storia dell'architettura moderna* [The History of Modern Architecture], in which he characterizes it as typical of the 'neoclassical reaction' against constructivism (Zevi 1953: 192). At the center of the complex, there would have stood a tower, the helical form of which would have constituted an unmistakable reference to Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International.

A certain nostalgia for an idealized past conditioned Portoghesi's preference for early Soviet architecture, the same nostalgia that led him to reminisce, in a critique of the reductive rhetoric of the Italian Communist Party, about the 'wealth of themes of socialism in its original form'. In a dialogue with the architect Mario Pisani, Portoghesi said, 'I became a socialist because, at the time, I could still identify a space that had held up under the test of history [*uno spazio collaudato dalla storia*] and still possessed a great richness ... despite numerous internal divisions' (Pisani and Portoghesi 1989: 254). However, as Rossi prophetically warned in a 1955 speech addressed to a congress of Italian communist architects, there was the danger that such idealism could lead to a paralysis of criticism, to the blind application of 'distant and incongruous citations to our architectural culture' (Rossi 1955).

Paradoxically, L'Associazione Italia-URSS was both a bridge and a barrier. It played a critical role in the exchange of architectural knowledge across the Iron Curtain but, at

the same time, also tightly controlled the bilateral flow of information. For instance, even as it actively sought the participation of Soviet professional organizations in the 1988 Milan Triennial, the Associazione closely monitored the distribution of 'information flyers' to its Soviet invitees. As revealed in a letter by Corrado Crippa dated August 22, 1985, it could also whimsically change the content of a landmark exhibition of Soviet architecture slated to open at the Castello Sforzesco on November 4, 1987, deciding at the last minute that the original idea of showing radical designs by young and rebellious 'paper architects' had to be rejected in favor of a less provocative display covering the entire history of Soviet architecture (Crippa 1985). In the end, the exhibition was given the title *L'architettura sovietica 1917–1987* [Soviet Architecture 1917–1987] and made to coincide with the celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution. A concomitant conference was planned, and this, hosted by the Politecnico di Milano and with the expected participation of Soviet experts, was to be a rare opportunity for a direct Italo-Soviet dialogue. For an unknown reason, however, the Associazione did not permit the dispatch of a letter that Cesare Stevan, dean of the faculty of architecture at the Politecnico, addressed in 1985 to his Soviet colleagues, in which he stressed the existence of 'a *tradition of study of Soviet architecture*' in Italy and the importance of a continued exchange of expertise for the maintenance of this tradition (Stevan 1985; emphasis mine).

'Tradition of Study of Soviet Architecture'

Significantly, Rossi was one of those who made a foundational contribution to the 'tradition of study of Soviet architecture' brought into relief by Stevan in the above-mentioned letter. Rossi's *L'Analisi urbana e la progettazione architettonica* [Urban Analysis and Architectural Design], a report published by the research group that he led at the Politecnico during the academic year 1968–69, contains the following vindication of Soviet architecture, which establishes it as a legitimate 'object of study':

> Soviet architecture has thus far constituted a case of conscience with bourgeois intellectuals … Their attack on Soviet architecture often took the form of an attack on the socialist state and the radical and social democratic culture that it sustained. Everyone seems to accept Zevi's interpretation of the history of modern architecture, which equates communism with fascism — he does not shy away from the saddest and most injurious anticommunist slogans. Academicism, Stalinism and eclecticism are the terms in which he understood the difficult [Stalinist] period that Nikita Khrushchev's intervention sought to, by re-embracing all the bourgeois terms, liquidate. (Rossi 1974: 61)

These words suggest that Rossi took a critical stance on modernism, particularly modernism as it was co-opted by the bourgeoisie and pitted against academicism and eclecticism, which constituted viable alternatives for him. Revealingly, he characterized Ivan Zholtovsky, an important representative of Stalinist academicism, as a 'most distinguished' architect and insisted that, if a 'formal analysis of the entirety of Soviet architecture' lay beyond the scope of the report, it would suffice just to mention the Stalinist skyscrapers. In a different context, Rossi praised the way in which these 'eclectic monuments' express a 'real sentiment' unlike bourgeois art, which is 'alienated from man and reduced to an object of consumption' (1975: 58).

Portoghesi, too, regarded 'the choice of the classical language' as a positive development, as something that occurred not arbitrarily but in conjunction with a turning point in Soviet politics, that is to say, 'in coincidence with the adoption of the politics of five-year plans' (Massobrio and Portoghesi 1978: 191). The five-year plans, central to Stalinism, conditioned the birth of 'new industrial centers … that served to … celebrate the workforce through a functional and monumental restructuring of pre-existing centers'. While 'these new centers followed the dictates of rationalist planning to the extent that they guaranteed maximal economy and simplicity of realization', when it came to 'giving form' to the urban space, 'the criteria of representativeness [*rappresentatività*] and symbolism [*simbolicità*] were foregrounded'. No less postmodern than this emphasis on the representational and symbolic function of architecture is Portoghesi's evocation of typology, in terms of which he sought to interpret the new 'public edifices' erected during the 1930s, emblematic of 'academic classicism' and 'explicitly symbolic of the new organization of society'. He paid particular attention to the way in which the design of 'theaters, schools and municipal government buildings' would frequently allude to 'the Palladian language', as well as to the attempts to 'mix traditional elements with elements of modernity' or the tendency to 'apply stylistic decoration to new typological organisms' (1978: 192).

A certain dichotomy lay at the heart of the Italian tradition of study of Soviet architecture, which was bifurcated into, on the one hand, an inquiry into the Constructivist avant-garde's contributions to the genesis and propagation of international modernism and, on the other, preoccupations with the Stalinist legacy and the lessons that it seemed to offer to those seeking ways to overcome the crisis of modernism, to look beyond the limits of modernism. For Rossi and Portoghesi, as well as others who belonged to the latter group, Stalin's 25-year rule corresponded to a distinct chapter in the history of Soviet architecture, to a discrete historical period during which developments took place, whereas the former group saw this period as one of regression. Those who dismissed Stalinist anti-modernism as reactionary

included Vittorio de Feo, whose *URSS: architettura 1917–1936* [USSR: Architecture 1917–1936] eulogizes the avant-garde, and Vieri Quilici, whose extensive commentary on Soviet architecture also reveals a commitment to modernism, albeit a less explicit one.

The significance of Quilici's *Architettura sovietica contemporanea* [Contemporary Soviet Architecture], published in 1965, lies in the way in which it shifted the discursive focus from the historical to the contemporary. Unlike those who fixated on a privileged past, whether this be the utopian legacy of the Constructivist avant-garde or the proto-postmodernism of the Stalinist rearguard, Quilici chose to focus on the present moment and concerned himself with the past only to the extent that it may be revealed as 'an actuality that continually renews itself'. If the opposition between the Stalinist ideal and the Constructivist ideal, ultimately reducible to that between 'art' and 'technology', seemed reincarnated in the form of an opposition between 'realism' and 'empiricism' in the postwar period, the introduction of a third element, namely 'society (*società*)', distinguished the present moment from the past (Quilici 1965: 10–11).

Symptomatically, the notion of society is central to Quilici's discussion of recent developments in Soviet architecture, which he views as a cultural manifestation of Nikita Khrushchev's post-Stalinist 'revisionism', as an architectural celebration not of art nor technology but society (1965: 99). Under Khrushchev, Stalinist academicism and eclecticism gave way to a 'neo-Constructivism' that found a convincing expression in V.S. Egerev, V.S. Kubasov, F.A. Novikov and I.A. Pokrovskii's Palace of Pioneers in Moscow, one whose resemblance to its historical counterpart is restricted to the level of form (1965: 188). At the level of content, neo-Constructivist architecture rejects all forms of utopianism and aspires to a more direct engagement with society, to the simultaneous 'satisfaction of man's material needs' and 'mirroring of reality in artistic images' ('il rispecchiamento della realtà nelle immagini artistiche') (1965: 98). To that extent, it is more akin to Stalinist Socialist Realism, of which the sumptuously decorated Moscow metro is identified as the most characteristic example that fulfills, beyond their primary function, a secondary function of serving as 'palaces for the people' and expressing 'the beauty and grandeur of the Stalinist epoch' as well as the 'the care of the Soviet state for the working people.'

At the same time, Quilici's prioritization of content is marked by a certain myopia, an obliviousness to important developments taking place at the level of form. As late as 1979, he continued to regard the content of architecture, that is to say, its function within society, as its most critical aspect; he understood the dialectical relationship between 'quantity' and 'quality', increasingly foregrounded in Soviet architectural discourse, strictly in terms of content, omitting mention of the various ways in which Soviet architects began to speak of a crisis of modernism and to turn greater attention

to the joint problems of form and expressivity (Quilici 1979: 335). In the postmodern conjuncture, Soviet architects increasingly turned to the use of historical forms in their pursuit of an architecture serving an expressive and semiotic function. However, Quilici's contribution to Jean-Louis Cohen, Marco De Michelis and Manfredo Tafuri's *URSS 1917–1978: La città, l'architettura* [USSR 1917–1978: The City, Architecture], a collection of essays published in 1979 on both the past and present of Soviet architecture, is devoid of any reference to such practice. This contrasts with Selim O. Khan-Magomedov's reflections on how Soviet Armenian architecture expresses national identity, which was once negated by 'modernist tendencies like rationalism and constructivism' (Khan-Magomedov 1979: 287), as well as with the mention that Aleksei E. Gutnov makes of the 'critique' of the 'monotony' and 'uniformity' of Soviet new towns and the renewed interest in the 'restoration of the historic centers of Vilnius, Tallinn and Tbilisi', in contextualism and the harmony between 'the functional and aesthetic characteristics' of cities (Gutnov 1979: 369).

Against this backdrop, Silvia Milesi's 'Fra internazionalismo e regionalismo. Alcuni giovani architetti di Tallinn' [Between Internationalism and Regionalism: Young Architects from Tallinn], published in the November 1986 issue of *Casabella*, forms an important counterpoint to Quilici's eulogy to modernism and its reincarnations. Milesi laments that, in Soviet Estonia, the modernist 'rejection of national styles' set the stage for 'an invasion of those profiles seen on the other side of the gulf', that is to say, for an uncritical reception of Finnish modernism that resulted in the predominance of 'expressionless box-like architecture' and the foreclosure of 'interest in genuine materials and in the perfection of the finishes' (Milesi 1986: 8). If these conditions produced a generation of architects who found themselves trapped in a 'creative vacuum' and troubled by a 'sense of inferiority' to their northern neighbors, their successors successfully reinvigorated Estonian architecture through 'experimentation with new formal languages', through the pursuit of a 'complexity' that 'never degenerates into cacophony' and through 'play' and sometimes even 'irony' (1986: 8, 27, 25). Crucially, the turn of phrase here echoes Charles Jencks's identification of 'irony, parody, displacement, complexity, eclecticism and realism' as the essential elements of postmodernism (Jencks 1986: 15). No less significant is the special attention that Milesi pays to the Estonian architect Vilen Künnapu's work. His flower shop in Tallinn is among the projects photographically represented in the article.

Venice and the Architecture of the City

Although his letter to the USSR Union of Architects was intercepted by the Associazione, Stevan's conference did take place. Among those present was Andrei Ikonnikov,

a historian and critic who directed research on capitalist architecture at NII istorii i teorii arkhitektury [Central Scientific Research Institute of the History and Theory of Architecture] in Moscow. In this capacity, Ikonnikov frequently visited the West and regularly corresponded with Western architects, including Robert Venturi. Exceptionally, Ikonnikov could write directly to Venturi, whom he had befriended in 1965 and was wont to call 'dear Bob' in the letters that they exchanged. In one of them, dated July 1, 1966, Ikonnikov expresses his wish to receive a book on 'new Italian architecture' — Venturi had already procured the 'first and the second volumes of Le Corbusier' and books on Kenzo Tange and Paul Rudolph for Ikonnikov (Ikonnikov 1966). Ikonnikov describes how his recent 'travel through Italy' had sparked an interest in the subject matter, the most interesting aspect of which was the 'amazing unity between the old and the new ... the lively ancienty [sic] and *ewige Form* in the new', that is to say, the symbiosis between the traditional and the modern best encapsulated by the 'Torre Velasco [sic] in Milano'. He continues, 'During a long time I was skeptical towards new baroque architecture, but now having seen [Luigi] Moretti's and [Giovanni] Michelucci's buildings I felt possibilities indicated in that manner of building'. It is hardly surprising, given this favorable assessment from a veritable doyen of Soviet architectural criticism, that Moretti and Michelucci's work soon found its way onto the pages of Soviet architecture magazines and into the canon of acceptable sources.

Still recounting his Italian trip, Ikonnikov added that he had 'the most fantastic remembrances' of Venice, a city that figures prominently in his *Arkhitektura goroda* [Architecture of the City], published in 1972. Remarkably, this book has the same title as and repeats many of the arguments of Rossi's 1966 *L'architettura della città*. For instance, Ikonnikov's sustained discussion of defensive architecture is reminiscent of Rossi's fixation on Vila Viçosa, the amphitheater of Nîmes and the Moscow Kremlin, though the Soviet critic's privileged example is a domestic one: the medieval fortress of Baku, Azerbaijan. He pays attention to the city that arose within the walls of the fortress — Ikonnikov, too, viewed fortresses primarily as that which gives birth to and shapes cities — and underscores the 'artistic value' of the 'narrow streets with sudden turns' connecting the 'monuments' (Ikonnikov 1972: 153). The use of these and other tropes found within Rossi's work clearly reveals a referential impulse.

At the same time, there are important differences between Ikonnikov and Rossi's theories of the architecture of the city. A certain undercurrent of idealism is discernible in Ikonnikov's text, which portrays Venice as a perfection, as a standard by which the success of Soviet cities was to be measured. If Rossi refrained from commentary on contemporary practice, *Arkhitektura goroda* abounds in comparisons between

Soviet neo-Constructivist architecture, largely deemed a failure by Ikonnikov, and the contextualism of Italian architects such as Ignazio Gardella. Ikonnikov held that Venice was the antithesis of the modern Soviet city to the extent that it is marked by a clear 'isolation' of transport arteries, or canals, from pedestrian streets and by a picturesque array of *calli*, shops and houses forming a meaningful contrast with the expansive Piazza San Marco — the piazza, unlike anything conceived by Soviet architects, is an authentic urban form that functions as a special kind of 'open-air foyer' promoting socialization (1972: 22, 145). In Venice, any intervention into the fabric of the city would have been predicated on utmost respect for 'the imprint of each century', while Soviet modernism's disregard for context had tended to result in clashes between 'irreconcilable scales', for instance between the incongruous scales of Moscow's Old Arbat and New Arbat. Without 'intermediary elements' ensuring a seamless transition between the picturesque alleys and Baroque edifices of Old Arbat and the concrete high-rises of New Arbat, aesthetically pleasing contrasts of the kind seen throughout Venice are foreclosed in Moscow's Arbat district. As an illustration of this, Ikonnikov included a photograph in which the seventeenth-century Church of Saint Symeon the Stylite is seen dwarfed by an adjacent concrete high-rise (1972: 163).

If Venice was an ideal for Ikonnikov, Rossi held it to be an 'interrupted work', a 'historical accident' and, crucially, an 'analogous city', analogous because it is 'inapprehensible in its entirety', because one can only experience it in a fragmentary manner (1984: 18, 35). 'Only that which a spectator can hold in view [at a given moment], what can be seen [at that moment], is of artistic importance: for instance, the single street or the individual plaza', Rossi declared in *L'architettura della città*, implying that a city is to be read as a collage, as an aggregate of parts, each of which is capable of evoking the whole even when divorced from the original context. He insisted that, if the Piazza San Marco 'stood with the Doge's Palace in a completely different city, as the Venice of the future might be, and if we found ourselves in the middle of this extraordinary urban artifact, we would not feel less emotion and would be no less participants in the history of Venice' (1984: 124). The towers of the Moscow Kremlin, by extension, could also be transposed into an entirely new context without losing its eloquence or its emotive content, as Rossi's Teatro del Mondo and Syzran project confirm. Such transpositions depend on the semantic stability of Moscow as a city-collage.

Marxism and Architecture

Carlo Aymonino viewed Rossi's *L'architettura della città* as a Marxist work, belonging to the same discursive context as his own *Origini e sviluppo della città moderna*

[Origins and Development of the Modern City], which he was commissioned to write by the journal *Critica marxista* [Marxist Critique] in 1965. Aymonino explained that both were written when 'there had yet to be a Marxist reading, done by an architect, of the origin of the problems affecting the development and transformation of cities' (Visconti and Capozzi 2008: 25). While Rossi's text is not explicitly political, Aymonino's Marxist urban analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the bifurcation of the modern city into a bourgeois city and a proletarian city. The bourgeois city 'ignores the subaltern zones' and 'sanctions a typological differentiation of buildings and zones accentuating the division of labor within the urban settlement', which can only be undone through revolution (Aymonino 1971: 30, 31). Revolution renders possible new typologies, such as 'palaces for the people', and these then become the basis of the 'socialist city', which Rossi does not fail to, however briefly, subject to analysis in *L'architettura della città*, opposing to it the 'capitalist city and its spatial division' (Rossi 1984: 141, 134).

That the experience of socialist cities left an indelible mark on Rossi is well known. Visiting East Berlin with Aymonino in 1961, Rossi was struck by the monumentality of Stalinallee, which for him was a 'notable experiment', a 'significant urban intervention … with which the most antiquated concept of zoning is negated [and] … a real proposal for an urban life distinct from bourgeois solutions' was put forth (Rossi 1975: 29). As for the 'broad streets of Moscow', these inspired him to seek an 'alternative' to the 'petit-bourgeois culture of modern architecture', to explore 'the possibility that architecture could be unified with popular pride' (Rossi 1981: 40). He reminisced in *Scientific Autobiography* that 'a friend recently sent me a postcard from Moscow which reproduced the university [of Moscow] … and I noted with joy how these buildings are authentic monuments that also have the capacity to be faithful to that holiday atmosphere which is displayed on every tourist postcard'. To the extent that Lev Rudnev's University of Moscow and other examples of Stalinist monumentalism gave concrete expression to 'a social movement', to 'an expanding class that found in tradition that which is valid and strove to represent it', these were serious works of architecture that offered valuable lessons to the 'popular realist' artist (1975: 24).

'When I say that I am not modern I am declaring my rejection of moralizing in architecture, a moralizing that rages like this in no other artistic discipline', Rossi once said in an interview, citing, as examples of this moralism, the modernist hostility to all forms of historicism and the vehement criticism to which his work had been subjected simply because of 'his liking for Stalinist architecture'. As if retorting to

his critics, he said, 'Stalin had buildings constructed with columns and therefore all of Soviet architecture should not be rejected simply because of its use' (Rossi 1994: 26). Rossi's aversion to moralism, which was a form of critique of modernism, echoed Theodor Adorno's, especially as it was given expression in the latter's 1965 lecture 'Funktionalismus heute' [Functionalism Today]. An attack on '[bourgeois] puritanism', this lecture critiqued the blind cult of rationality sustained by capitalist *ratio*, as well as the de-monumentalization of architecture and its incarceration in the present moment (Adorno 1997: 8). To revitalize and re-monumentalize architecture, it was necessary to reembrace ornament. Precisely because ornament was, in the words of rationalist critics, a 'mere decaying and poisonous organic vestige', it could provide a link with the past and liberate architecture from the shackles of bourgeois presentism (1997: 6). Clearly under Adorno's influence, Rossi suggested in 1972 that the monumentality of BBPR's Torre Velasca in Milan resides in its refusal to be reduced to a mere function, that is to say, to a mere office tower; in its singular relationship to the Milanese 'landscape' (*paesaggio*), 'landscape' in this context signifying a space in which the past and the present coexist (Rossi 1975: 487).

Ikonnikov, too, stressed the way in which the Torre Velasca is suspended between the past and the present, the way in which the '*arc-boutants* and buttresses of Milan Cathedral' received a modern interpretation there. In this sense, the tower perfectly encapsulated the 'synthesis of tradition and novelty' essential to Soviet postmodernism, which began as a politically motivated critique of the neo-Constructivism normalized under a deposed First Secretary (Ikonnikov 1973: 447); Khrushchev had famously condemned all forms of architectural excess. The tower and other works by BBPR clearly had valuable lessons to offer, but, expectedly, Ikonnikov made a point of underscoring the progressive politics of the group and its 'active fight against the fascist regime' in *Mastera arkhitektury ob arkhitekture* [Masters of Architecture on Architecture], a key text that established and consolidated a Soviet canon of Western architects. Once made canonical, the Torre Velasca inspired the design of many Soviet buildings, among them the tower of the Soviet Embassy in Havana, Cuba (**Figure 10**), which was intended to evoke the towers of the Kremlin, as was Rossi's Teatro del Mondo, and remind, in the architect A. G. Rochegov's words, 'the compatriots working so far away from home of the motherland's splendor and uniqueness, as well as the purity and originality of her architecture' (Rochegov 1984: 70). Riabushin, the same critic who commented on the polysemy of Davitaia and Bostanashvili's work, characterized the embassy building as 'minimalist', as something oscillating between modernism and historicism and resisting reductive interpretation, whence its 'ambiguous semantics' (Riabushin 1990: 137).

Figure 10: Aleksandr G. Rochegov, Soviet Embassy, Havana, Cuba, 1978–1987, model. From Rochegov (1982).

No less minimalist is L. N. Pavlov and L. Iu. Gonchar's Lenin Museum in Gorki Leninskiye, Russia (**Figure 11**). The formal austerity of this building, which occupies the site of the farmstead where the Bolshevik leader spent the final days of his life, befits its mortuary function, and the abstracted columns of its façade find a formal echo in two Italian projects. Gruppo romano architetti e urbanisti (GRAU)'s New Cemetery in Nice, France, which postdates the museum, features analogous columns that may be allusive, even though it is also probable that both the Soviet and Italian architects were inspired by the columns of Vittorio Gregotti's much earlier science faculty of the University of Palermo. In any case, the juxtaposition of GRAU's cemetery and Gregotti's science faculty in the Soviet Georgian architect-critic R. R. Lordkipanidze's illustrated survey of contemporary Italian architecture, published in 1988 and appropriately prefaced by Ikonnikov, seems hardly coincidental. Her deliberate choice of photographs of the buildings that foreground their 'minimalist' columns reveals that the analogous relationships were not lost on her.
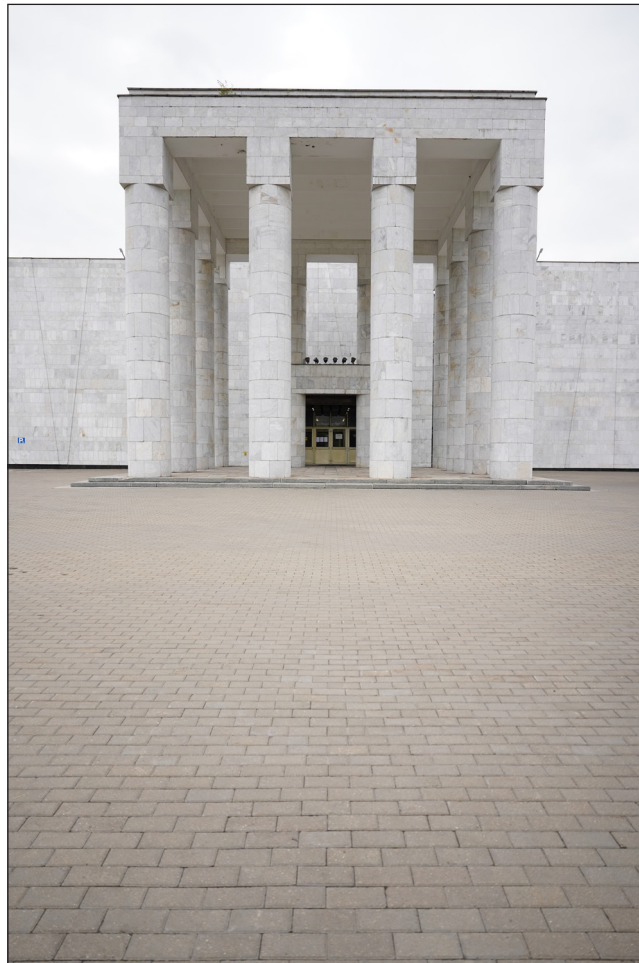
Figure 11: L. N. Pavlov and L. Iu. Gonchar, Lenin Museum, Gorki Leninskiye, Russia, 1979–1980. Photo by Da Hyung Jeong, August 30, 2021.

Conclusion: 'Comrade Ambassador of Architecture'

At the start of 1988, an exhibition of Vittorio Gregotti's work opened at the Central House of the Architect in Moscow, and, later that year, *Arkhitektura SSSR* ran a special feature on the Italian architect titled 'V. Gregotti: mir, otrazhennyi v arkhitekture' [V. Gregotti: The World as Reflected in Architecture]. Highlighting Gregotti's role in the consolidation of ties between the architectural professions of Italy and the Soviet Union, the special feature strikingly names him 'comrade ambassador of architecture of Italy to the Soviet Union' and compares him to 'the Dutch leaders of the De Stijl group, Le Corbusier and the principal members of the Bauhaus, who ushered in the dawn of collaboration between Soviet architects and progressive architects from the West' ('V. Gregotti' 1988: 74).

The favorable Soviet reception of Gregotti's work was reciprocated by Gregotti's own interest in and engagement with both the past and present of Soviet architecture. For instance, having returned to direct the magazine *Casabella* in 1982 after a 20-year hiatus, Gregotti addressed a letter to Riabushin, at the time secretary of the USSR Union of Architects, in which he identifies 'the present state of Soviet architecture' as a principal theme to be treated by the new *Casabella* under his directorship and expresses his wish that his Soviet colleague kindly provide 'information or reportage on architects, buildings or … well-defined theoretical or doctrinal problems' (Gregotti [1982]). It is against this backdrop that Silvia Milesi's 'Between Internationalism and Regionalism: Young Architects from Tallinn', analyzed above, appeared. At the same time, Soviet architecture of the revolutionary period was of no less interest to Gregotti, whose *Il Palazzo dei Soviet: 1931–1933* [The Palace of the Soviets: 1931–1933], published in 1976 and co-edited with Quilici and Alberto Samonà, is a comparative analysis of modernist and historicist competition entries.

Despite Gregotti's wishes, Riabushin soon proved unable to help, the KGB having discharged him from his secretarial post after judging his 1985 translation of Charles Jencks's *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* to be an 'ideological sabotage' ('Feliks Novikov' 2020). For all its insistence on reform, the Gorbachev administration maintained a conservative stance on the question of cultural exchange across the ideological divide, continuing to sanctify the Iron Curtain and regarding with suspicion all that this formidable geopolitical barrier failed to keep out. Against this backdrop, the embrace of postmodernism was inevitably charged with political meaning in the Soviet context, where it took the form of critical engagement with ideas originating in the West and of analogical references to formal aspects of work by Western architects. The new formal language that Rossi, Portoghesi and Gregotti, among many other ambassadors of architecture of various nationalities, helped introduce into the Soviet Union became the means by which to give artistic expression to the crisis of socialism and attendant shift in the Soviet value system from monism to pluralism, from a dogmatic insistence on clarity of meaning to a growing acceptance of ambiguities and polysemy. At the same time, the bilateral nature of Italo-Soviet architectural exchange must be stressed. As shown in this paper, a substantial Italian tradition of study of Soviet architecture existed that formed the discursive context of Rossi and Portoghesi's critique of modernism, which was predicated on an engagement with both the present and the past of Soviet architecture.

Author's Note

I dedicate this article to the late Professor Jean-Louis Cohen, whose sagacious guidance was crucial to its conception and completion. All unpublished sources used here may be consulted at archival institutions in Los Angeles, Milan, Moscow, Montréal and Philadelphia that are accessible to the general public. The research for this article was conducted before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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