Франц 1790 года.
Sustained research on the launching of the Stalin revolution of the late 1920s and early 1930s has demonstrated that state policies were improvised and profoundly chaotic. Remarkably, however, the result of this muddled social-engineering gamble was not ignominious collapse but the formation of a new socio-political order, known in the Anglophone world as Stalinism and within the USSR as socialism. Herein lies a challenge for would-be interpreters.

One could call attention to the outcome of the 1930s and argue that critical elements of continuity in ideas and political organization must somehow link the programmatic campaigns begun in 1929 back to 1917, as Stalin himself maintained. But it is also possible to portray the Stalin-era as an unremitting upheaval, emphasizing the haphazard nature of policy conception and implementation, diminishing the importance of ideas, and arguing for discontinuity between the second revolution and 1917. In such a way two sides of a non-intersecting dialogue have taken shape, between what can broadly be described as the totalitarian view and its many critics.

In one highly influential attempt at synthesis, Moshe Lewin sought to combine an analysis of events in the 1920s and the subsequent grand mobilization with a macro-level characterization of the resultant Soviet “system.” Acknowledging the “system’s” apparent stability, Lewin nonetheless highlighted the confusion of its origin and disparaged the unforeseen outcome as a pathology (Stalinism, not socialism).1 Another influential commentator, Sheila Fitzpatrick, has stressed the intended linkages between the October Revolution and Stalin’s radicalism, but she argues that after 1932 a conservative turn set in, rooted in the cultural preferences of the new elite. To characterize the resulting society, she referred to a peculiar “Soviet” mentality, not

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1. See especially his two essays, “Grappling with Stalinism” and “Society, State, and Ideology during the First-Five Year Plan,” in Moshe Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 286–314 and 209–40, respectively. With regard to the latter essay, it is interesting to note that Lewin did not write comparable essays on the nature of society during the Second or Third Five-Year Plans.
so much denying the existence of socialism as avoiding the issue. Both Lewin and Fitzpatrick, it might be noted, have focused most of their work on the period of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32).

To understand not only how a certain stability emerged from improvisation but also the resultant nature of Soviet society, it is necessary to extend one's purview to encompass social realities for the entire decade of the 1930s, at a minimum, and to analyze those realities not as the formation of a demonic system or a conservative elite's mentality but as an ongoing societal-wide search for socialism in economic organization, political practice, social structure, popular culture, the nature of housing and domesticity, urban form and just about everything else one could think of, from styles of dress to modes of reasoning. This essay represents an admittedly schematic effort to conceptualize the Stalin revolution as just such a search for socialism by exploring the example of the socialist city.

Socialism as Noncapitalism

In the search for socialism, no one, including the self-appointed revolutionary leaders, knew what it was. What they did know was that whatever socialism turned out to be, it would not be capitalism. Capitalism had bourgeois parliaments, socialism would have Soviets of workers' and peasants' deputies. Capitalism had the anarchy of markets, socialism would have planning. Capitalism had the exploitation of private property, socialism would have societal property. Capitalism had selfish individualism, socialism would have collectivism. In short, building socialism meant the eradication and thus the transcendence of capitalism. Within a steadfast if vague noncapitalist orientation, however, much remained to be discovered and settled.

Did planning mean centralized decision-making in absolutely all matters? Or could a planned economy also permit forms of direct, ostensibly market-like relations between firms that remained state-owned? In factories designed and partly built by capitalist firms and containing capitalist-invented technology, were there socialist forms of labor? If not, what did that say about the purported moral superiority of socialism? In terms of the municipal economy, if there was no private property, would there be no trade? If there was such a...
thing as socialist trade, how was it to be organized? And what of the law? Was there a specifically socialist justice? How were socialist courts supposed to function? Would there even be crime?

What did a socialist city look like? Did a rejection of individualism and a commitment to collectivism mean that socialist housing should not be built to accommodate the family, or was the family compatible with socialism? What of socialist culture: did it signify workers writing poetry, or workers becoming "cultured" by reading Pushkin? Should socialism permit popular entertainments, and if so, what kind? Was jazz socialist? Capitalist? Neither? If jazz was capitalist, could it nonetheless be permitted, provided there were enough other cultural activities that were unambiguously socialist, whatever that might be? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, could or should a socialist revolution create a new elite, and if so, was this just?

Of course, the Soviet regime was a dictatorship and on these questions unconditionally binding decisions backed by the threat of coercion were handed down from Moscow, without discussion beforehand and with little opportunity to give direct voice to reservations afterward. But the realization of socialism in practice—from shop-floor production campaigns to non-private trade, from domestic living arrangements to organized recreation—involves the participation of people, affording ample opportunities for the circumvention of official strictures, spontaneous reinterpretations of the permissible cloaked by professions of ignorance, and myriad other forms of indirect challenges, as well as the discovery of unintended realms not envisioned by the decrees. No one except perhaps certain labor colony inmates with little to lose had a completely free hand to act as they saw fit, but even leaving aside calculated petty transgressions, living socialism according to the perceived rules made for its share of surprises.

In this regard, one of the most striking aspects of life in the 1930s was the constant effort to name and characterize the many surprising, as well as mundane, phenomena encountered in daily life, and then explain their relation to socialism, from the machinations of the shadow economy to the endless search for political enemies. New categories of thinking appeared, old ones were modified; nothing stood still. This inescapable tangle of discussion and explanation was made especially complex given the periodic shifts in policies and laws, sometimes one hundred and eighty degrees, such as the reversal on abortion and divorce in the mid-1930s.

Abrupt policy changes have usually been taken as evidence that contrary to the regime's claims, there was no single ideology, and that in general, ideology had less influence over the shape of events than other, "more practical" considerations. To argue thusly, however, is to overlook both the process of searching for socialism, rooted in a rejection of capitalism, and the enormous
commitment of resources by the regime to maintain the appearance of a single ideology and relate all events to that ideology, a struggle that the inhabitants of the USSR had no choice but to take part in. Life under Stalin was enveloped not merely in constrained experimentation, but in perpetual explanation where neither mistakes nor reversals could be admitted, and where socialism, understood as the antithesis of capitalism, served as a universal point of reference that could undergo some change but could never be dismissed.

Further misunderstandings surround the shift on abortion and the family in the mid-1930s because it was accompanied by a marked revival of the Great Russian past. These developments (in combination with the rehabilitation of the Orthodox Church during the war) have been interpreted as constituting nothing less than a "great retreat" away from the original goals of the revolution, if not a counter-revolution. But proponents of the great retreat interpretation of Stalinism fail to consider that there was no comparable "retreat" on private property of land and the means of production, or on the hiring of wage labor, whose absence were seen as the defining characteristics of socialism. It was in this unwavering repudiation of "exploitation" that the USSR’s claims to have brought about a civilization distinct from capitalism were grounded, whatever the other vacillations.

The strengthening of the family and the promotion of Great Russian nationalism are better appreciated as, on the one hand, part of the groping for an understanding of what constituted socialism and, on the other, as indicative of a strategic shift from the task of building socialism to that of defending socialism, a shift first noticeable with the anxious attention given to the civil war in Spain, where Hitler supported Franco’s "counter-revolution," and to Mussolini’s successful imperialist war in Abyssinia. It was around this time, 1936, that socialism in the USSR was declared built in its foundations and yet the external threat, rooted in what was called capitalist encirclement, appeared more menacing than ever.

This paradoxical combination of triumph and heightened vulnerability was used as one of the principal devices to stoke the terror of 1936-38, a multi-layered episode that contemporaries struggled with little effect to comprehend and accept. Not even the enormously dysfunctional terror, however, proved capable of invalidating the USSR’s claim to being a socialist society and therefore the fulfillment of October. Such a claim continued to make sense, and motivate people the world over, until the very end in 1991—a circumstance that the historian may or may not find abhorrent, but has no right to dismiss, and every obligation to explain. One can argue that millions of peo-

ple were ignorant or deceived. Or one can try to understand how so many people could have reasoned the way they did, holding apparently contradictory views, fearing terror yet believing that they had built, and lived under, socialism.

The Socialist Form of Settlement: Inadvertent Linear Cities

A special role in the building of socialism was held out for cities. Unlike the period before the revolution in Russia, when the central authorities feared cities as anomalies of development and dangerous threats to the socio-political order, after 1917 the new authorities came to view cities as the epitomes of progress and the prime bulwarks for the new order. More than that, cities were welcomed as the training grounds for producing the armies of model citizens whose collective activities would increase the Soviet state's great-power potential. Even though on the eve of the war in 1941 only one-third of the population lived in cities, the revolution in Russia was a decidedly urban-centered one.

But whereas the basic design of the new state-owned factories seemed obvious enough—one as good as what the capitalists had—the design of the new socialist cities appeared far less certain. Towards the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, a wide-ranging debate took place on the nature of the socialist city and the "socialist" form of population settlement. Proposals varied, ranging from super-urbanist to de-urbanist. To simplify a bit, the urban form that gained favor as the one most "socialist" turned out to be the so-called linear city.

5. The embrace of the city in revolutionary Russia could claim an extended genealogy in the experience of Europe, where cities had long been celebrated as the principal agent of civilization. See, for example, Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1961) or Jacques le Goff, "The Town as an Agent of Civilization," in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe and the Middle Ages*, ed. Carlo Cipolla (London: Collins, 1972), 77-106. The nature of socialism in the Soviet countryside is an altogether different matter, and beyond the scope of this essay.

6. An enormous literature on the problem of the city under socialism poured forth, the bulk of it in periodicals and pamphlets, too numerous to list. This literature has been the focus of a substantial body of scholarship, which has examined the supposed benefits of comprehensive planning, the work of individual architects and architectural institutions, the evolution of various styles, the importation of ideas from the West and in turn the contribution by Soviet architects to the "modernist movement." For an introduction to this literature, see S. Frederick Starr, "Visionary Town Planning in the Cultural Revolution," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-31*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), 207-40; idem., "Writings from the 1960s on the Modern Movement in Russia," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 30 (1971): 170-78. Paradoxically, the attention bestowed upon prominent individuals and architectural institutions has shed little light on Soviet urban life during a period of intense construction.
First articulated in 1882 by Arturo Soria y Mata (1844-1920) in a series of articles for the Spanish newspaper El Progreso, the linear city was proposed as a devise for connecting existing cities. It captured the imaginations of many celebrated architects in the early part of the twentieth century when blended with the nineteenth-century French socialist Tony Garnier's designs for a planned industrial city. One of the most prominent Russian architects, Nikolai A. Milutin, chose just such an industrial linear city for his 1930 manifesto, *The Problem of the Construction of the Socialist City.* Similarly, foreign architects invited to the USSR in the 1930s, such as the German Ernst May, brought the industrial linear city idea with them.

In the form in which it came to the USSR, then, the linear city was based on, and celebrated, industry. It divided the urban space into two zones, production and residential, the former critically important, the latter simply unavoidable. The zones were made to run parallel, to minimize the distance between work and home, with a green belt wedged in between, to reduce the ill effects of industrialism (a garden-city-inspired touch). Just how far in each direction the parallel lines would run, and what could be done if the inhabitants of the northern end of the residential zone happened to work in the southern end of the production zone, remained unclear. Residential scale, if contemplated at all, was generally small, in contrast to industrial scale, which was frequently as large as could be.

A vehicle for promoting productive activity, the linear city seemed well-suited to become the properly “socialist” form of urban settlement because building socialism came to mean building heavy industrial factories. Proposed...
new communities, as well as the many existing ones scheduled for transformation, were, or would shortly become, glorified factory-towns. An urban form that promoted and celebrated industry, running it parallel to life, encapsulated the view that not markets, or exchange, but production, especially large-scale factory production, was the basis of a truly advanced civilization.

Undulating terrain at various sites forced an abandonment of the linear city layout in practice. But if the residential and industrial zones could not be made to run parallel, the residential zones were still built as a series of self-contained units adjacent to each other, on the pattern of municipal worker housing abroad, especially in Germany. This meant planning mini-communities, or settlements (Siedlungen), which included standardized apartment buildings, a fixed number and assortment of shops, and enough basic public facilities so that the inhabitants need not leave the mini-community to satisfy their needs. In the USSR, these self-contained cities in miniature, each accommodating between 2,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, were called kvartaly, or superblocks (later, they were remained mikroraiony, micro-regions), with the buildings arranged so as to form enclosed inner courtyards. Several superblocks built together, in whatever pattern the local topography allowed (usually not far from the factory), were hailed as the socialist form of settlement.

Through it all, the accent remained on production. Well before any superblocks were drawn up, the industrial territory was laid out, ground broken, and construction begun on the factory shops. This prioritizing often left little physical space for the vaunted superblocks, which even when there was space often were not built because available human and material resources went first of all to factory construction. The workers, for whom the socialist cities were ostensibly being designed, ended up living in tents, parked railroad cars, mud huts, and above all wooden barracks. As a further concession to expediency, this makeshift housing almost always abutted or was located directly on the territory of the industrial enterprises the workers built and then labored in.

In the rush to industrialize, an uncanny parallelism of living and production zones unwittingly took shape: factories were built with makeshift worker residences wrapped around them, like an outer layer of human insulation. The resultant settlement pattern amounted to, ironically, the very linear city that had been the fantasy of the architects and planners—only without the protective green belt. The "garden city" ideal, which arose as a reaction to the horrors of industrialization, fit badly with an unapologetic Prometheanism. In

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10. Socialism, in the words of Milovan Djilas, was "a slogan and a pledge, a faith and a lofty ideal, and, in fact, a particular form of government and ownership which would facilitate the industrial revolution and make possible improvement and expansion of production." Djilas, The New Class (New York: Praeger, 1957), 18.
the end, though, the socialist city in practice did remain true to its primary inspiration, conceived not around the market, or exchange, but production. Through the swirling soot and smoke one could discern the contours of inadvertent linear cities, which formed less into straight lines than slightly curved ropes, with the urban inhabitants lashed to industry.

The Socialist Way of Life: Communalism, but Collectivism?

From the beginning, the excited talk about the socialist city encompassed not only a new form of settlement, but also the question of a new “way of life” [byr]. In personal terms the new way of life began with the acquisition of literacy, improved hygiene, respectable forms of recreation, and the use of polite language—what in general was called kulturnost', in contrast to the bezkul'tur'e of the unwashed masses held down by capitalist oppression. Alongside kulturnost' new urban inhabitants were also expected to evince what were called socialist attitudes toward labor, meaning feats of superhuman exertion and other sacrifices undertaken not for selfish reasons, such as increased pay, but for the general good. And of course, everyone was expected to demonstrate unquestioned loyalty to the party and its directives. Kulturnost', superhuman exertion, and public manifestations of loyalty were often richly rewarded; just as their absence was sometimes punished.

Beyond the merely personal, there was a societal dimension to the push for a new way of life, which was also rooted in a rejection of capitalism and incorporated into the structure of the urban environment. By definition socialist cities were not supposed to have either private trade or private manufacture. To fill the void, a system of managed distribution was introduced, whereby people exchanged allotted coupons and a nominal amount of money for fixed amounts of specified goods at what were called distribution points. In the mid-1930s, this anti-trade system of rationing gave way to what was called socialist trade, a form of exchange conducted in state-owned shops, with goods manufactured at state-owned enterprises and sold at “hard”—that is, stable, low—prices. Socialist trade was oriented not to profit-making or satisfying the whims of those few possessing discretionary income, but to meeting the basic needs of the entire society.

Under socialist trade, however, shops themselves were notoriously scarce, as were the consumer goods and services they were supposed to provide. The socialist city turned out to be largely without “a first floor,” or commercial infrastructure; scavenging, conniving, and purchase for resale (“speculation”) became a way of life, as did spot investigations of sales personnel, anti-speculation campaigns, and show trials of notorious self-suppliers and speculators. But the class of exploitative legal private traders was conspicuous by its absence, while the public clamor and participatory campaigns against
those who engaged in illegal private trade served as eloquent testimony to the
population's expectations regarding social justice, assumed to be the *sina qua
non* of the distribution of goods under socialism.

At the same time, the new way of life associated with the socialist city
was based on a rejection of the “bourgeois” family, as seen in the organiza-
tion of housing. Rather than as rooms or apartments, socialist housing was
conceived in terms of living space (*zhilaia ploshchad*), an aggregate amount
of floor area, of unspecified configuration, measured in square meters, with or
without hard boundaries. Living space permitted, and indeed came to signify,
a reorientation of housing away from the family and toward the collective.
Each urban resident, standing in equal relationship to all others, was to oc-
cupy a fixed amount of space, determined by scientific norms for health and
hygiene. Such an approach meant that a greater number of people could be
housed in less space and, furthermore, that in any given structure it would not
be necessary to provide for the full range of needs of each discrete household.
People would have access to common facilities, from baths and laundries to
kitchens and public canteens.

To be sure, the notion of living space as a way to conceptualize housing
first arose in tsarist Russia, when the desperate shortage of lodgings in cities
meant that finding or affording a separate room was beyond the reach of most
people, who instead rented a corner, or simply a cot, in someone else’s
room. Yet the concept took on a new significance after 1917, for if in
tsarist Russia the subdivision of apartments and rooms resulted in the dreaded
coming together of strangers and different families, in Soviet Russia this un-
avoidable situation was heralded as a new collectivist model for human rela-
tionships, in combination with the anticipated proliferation of public ser-
ices, hospitals, and schools.

11. See Joseph Bradley, “From Big Village to Metropolis,” in *The City in Late Imperial
Russia*, ed. Michael Hamm (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 14–15; idem, *Muzhik and
Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985),
211 ff. Soviet approaches to housing grew out of, but also in many ways transformed, the pre-
revolutionary understanding of the “urban question” in Russia as it had emerged in the nine-
teenth century. Then the issue was framed chiefly as a problem of rectifying the squalid, un-
healthy and unsanitary living conditions of the great bulk of the population. After October I917
the urban question became one of transforming human consciousness and behavior, and aug-
menting the power of the state. See Michael F. Hamm, “The Modern Russian City: An Histori-

12. The resemblance of Soviet notions of housing to the ideas of the nineteenth-century
French thinkers Charles Fourier and Henri-Claude Saint-Simon, both of whom had an enor-
mos impact in Russia, has been noted by Milka Bliznakov, “Soviet Housing During the Exper-
imental Years, 1918–1933,” in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History*,
ed. William C. Brumfield and Balir A. Ruble (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press and the
Woodrow Wilson Center, 1993), 93 and 95.
Much of the emphasis on collectivism was no doubt expedient. Immediately after the revolution, most large, single-family apartments were reassigned to several families, who shared the kitchen, toilet, and bathroom. Such lodgings, where there were usually as many families as rooms, gave birth to the expression "communal apartment" (kommunalka). But the first permanent buildings in the socialist cities of the 1930s, also called communal, were purposefully designed as square "cells" joined by a corridor, with shared washrooms and toilets on the corridor, and sometimes without even shared kitchens (usually added later). In the new housing, expediency joined with what were thought to be anti-capitalist conceptions.

The common washrooms, toilets, and kitchens of communal apartments forced inhabitants to devise ways to live with each other; not surprisingly, disputes were common. To handle these everyday conflicts "comrade courts" were organized in each building (and in many of the barracks). Attached to the house managements or commandments, these courts could impose sanctions, such as public censure or small fines to be turned over to a fund for the use of the whole building, or they could require the guilty party to perform certain tasks needed by the residents. The efficacy of this juridical approach is hard to gauge. Just as frequently, it seems, the feuding parties sought the intervention of outside authorities, no matter how trivial the alleged offense. Such disputes, moreover, were not always innocent misadventure.

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13. Indeed, one scholar has noted that "no one can fail to see the potentialities for disputes, grudges, insults, petty thieving, riotous children, and noise inherent in crowded Soviet housing conditions." John Hazard, *Soviet Housing Law* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1939), 110.

14. Hazard, *Soviet Housing Law*, 114-17. Writing of a later period, one scholar points out that "the jurisdiction of these courts extends primarily to petty cases of intra-apartment order, such as the manner in which dwelling [i.e., living] space is to be used by several families, the right of passage through a room occupied by another tenant, the resettling of persons occupying utility space (kitchens, corridors, pantries, etc.) into the dwelling space of individuals who have agreed to share their accommodations with them, the manner of utilizing useful non-dwelling [obshchaia] space in apartments, internal apartment discipline (the cleaning of space used in common by all tenants, the closing and opening of outside doorways, hours during which silence is to be observed), the keeping of animals in utility rooms, and so on. The most frequent cases among the tenants involved disputes over how much tenants are to be assessed for repairs and the maintenance of collectively used facilities and for municipal utilities." Timothy Sosnovy, *The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union* (New York: Research Program on the USSR, 1954), 215. Regulations governing the conduct of residents of communal apartments (such as quiet hours, playing of radios, and so on) were apparently first drawn up only in 1949. See *Spravochnik upravliaushchego domom* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1951), 19-20.

15. In a hilarious fictional account of communal apartments life under Stalin by a former Soviet citizen, the narrator explains that "the managers, the courts, the militia, are swamped with a sea of complaints, denunciations, declaration on 'the impossibility of living with citizen so and so,' . . . on 'the need to evict citizeness so and so,' . . . on 'the summoning to court for slander of citizens so and so.' In the process, "every wretched little sign of civilization—a ra-
derstandings. One way to dislodge someone from his or her living space—perhaps in order to free the space up for oneself, a relative, or a friend—was by denunciation.

No better window onto Soviet domestic life could be had than that provided by a 1935 central decree, "On the Struggle against Hooliganism." The decree stated that hooligan-like behavior on the part of tenants was "particularly inadmissible." By way of illustration, the decree referred to "the holding of regular drinking bouts in the apartments, accompanied by noise, fights, and abusive language; the inflicting of beatings (especially of women and children), casting insults, threatening revenge by capitalizing on one's work status or party position, perverse conduct, baiting of nationalities, defamation of character, other kinds of mischief (throwing out another person's belongings from the kitchen and other rooms used in common, spoiling food prepared by other tenants, damaging other things and products, and so on)."

In sum, living space formed an arena in which the petty struggles of everyday life were fought, challenging the urban inhabitants to show the extent of their resourcefulness. With more than one generation living together and with several people frequently living in the same room, all manner of tricks were required to secure some privacy. Marital and sexual relations were complicated, often requiring planning rather than spontaneity. Bargains permitting exclusive use of the space for certain periods of time had to be struck with other residents. At the same time, this organization of housing proved to be highly conducive to mutual surveillance, which was not merely encouraged but rewarded by the authorities.

Life in the barracks, meanwhile—the bulk of new housing actually built in the 1930s—was even more communal. At first, all barracks were built in the form of dormitories, with large, common areas. Barracks sometimes contained small separate rooms, often with jerry-built walls, but for the most part families lived in the large common rooms, hanging a cloth or a sheet for
a modicum of privacy. Soon, so-called dormitory (obshchie) barracks were converted into what were called "individual-room" (komnatnye) barracks, with each tiny room usually housing a separate family. For food, laundry, bathing, child care, and a variety of other needs, families in the barracks were supposed to rely on the same public facilities available to the residents of the communal spaces in permanent buildings.

In both the new brick buildings and the wood barracks, the housing built under socialism was designed so as to encourage an economy of resources and an ethic and practice of cooperation, making possible a new mode of existence called "communal" living. Yet because of strong personal preferences, as well as a shortage of adequate communal services, people struggled to live as separate families. The result of such communalism without complete collectivism was paradoxical: nominally equivalent and therefore interchangeable inhabitants reconstituted themselves as families, but within a housing structure designed against them.

In the mid-1930s, the authorities recognized as much in the blueprints for new housing. This time, not cells or single rooms but apartments became the basic housing units, each to be occupied by a single family and to have a separate kitchen and toilet. Such a family-oriented design was part of a broad policy shift by the regime. Motivated by a desire to spur population growth and inculcate reverence for hierarchy, and sobered by widespread juvenile delinquency and appalling infant mortality, the Soviet regime belatedly embraced the family unit as not only compatible with socialism, but one of socialist society's basic building blocks.

Notwithstanding the policy reversal and the construction of self-contained apartments, however, communal apartments continued to be built. And although much of the permanent housing built after 1934 was reconceptualized to accommodate the family unit, communal facilities were expanded and the anti-family notion of living space was retained. Not only were construction targets for housing conceived and expressed in amounts of living space, a number of operations performed on the housing stock were carried out on the basis of it. In place of sequestering whole buildings, for example, as had been done in the period immediately after the revolution, the authorities "penalized" individuals for having "excessive" space: living space above certain arbitrarily determined "norms" was either taken away or subject to significantly higher rent charges. Similarly, a person legally qualified for new housing on the basis of his or her current amount of living space which had to be below a certain arbitrarily established "norm." As for these norms, not even the authori-

17. A typical statement of the commitment to communalism can be found in the discussion of family life in the new city of Magnitogorsk. See Magnitogorski rabochii, 20 February 1930. For further discussion, see Sosnovy, The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union, passim.
ties' humiliating inability to meet their own hygienic standards reduced the attraction for them of the category of living space: it was easily quantifiable and as such permitted ready manipulation of the urban housing stock, often for political ends.

Moreover, ownership of living space was not private but public, usually by the industrial enterprise that built and managed it, sometimes by the municipal authorities. Living space could not be bought or sold; it was allocated, although occupancy, once established, was generally permanent. The municipal authorities were responsible for registering and monitoring occupancy, yet evictions seems to have been rare, even in the case of hooliganism. Rents were subsidized, comprising less than 10 percent of income. Homelessness was considered a social evil on a par with idleness. Housing under socialism, understood as living space, was treated as a public good, not a commodity.

It must be kept in mind that in the search for socialism, the specific forms of municipal economy as well as those of housing organization underwent small and sometimes large transformations, the inevitable result of trial-and-error probings. At each moment the details were subject to considerable criticism and hand-wringing on the part of ordinary people and officials alike. This quotidian drama of experimentation and correction, discussion and awareness, took place within the parameters of a world in which capitalism had been eliminated yet socialism was still coming into being. Whether any particular practice or phenomenon was truly socialist preoccupied people from all walks of life, sometimes even after central authorities intervened with definitive pronouncements.

Local newspapers of the 1930s are treasure troves of talk about the precise characteristics, as well as the many incongruities, of the new, specifically socialist society. Further insights can be gathered from the indefatigable efforts to communicate the values of the new society to the next generation. It was already a powerful statement that in the superblocks comprising socialist cities, schools occupied a privileged place, often situated within the inner courtyards formed by facing residential structures. Schools taught the basics (reading, writing, arithmetic), along with a heavy dose of history and civics, all in the name of championing socialism. Lessons predicated on developing

18. Laws permitted the formation of cooperatives that could undertake to build and own housing, as well as what were called individual constructions (a type of bungalow). Neither cooperatives nor individual constructions were plentiful, however. For examples, see E. D. Simon et al., Moscow in the Making (London: Longmans, 1937), 143–72. Huts made of boards and mud, called zemlianki, which were built by their occupants, appear to have been de facto owned, for when the authorities announced that such structures were to be summarily removed because the land was needed, they sometimes promised the displaced residents nominal monetary compensation.
an ethic of collectivism were reinforced by participation in organizations such
as the Young Pioneers and Komsomol, and by the many forms of entertain-
ment that were made available in the campaigns for kulturnost', from songs
and films to theater and belles-lettres. In short, socialism was a mode of exis-
tence, and an accompanying consciousness.

Architectural Forms of Socialism

What was the socialist city going to look like? How would its designers
give physical expression to the promotion of productive activity and a collect-
ive form of existence? Excluding the odd residential building actually com-
pleted in the 1920s, we can say that there were three basic periods of Soviet
housing architecture. The initial period of the 1930s was characterized by se-
vere functionalism, eschewing of ornamentation, and box-like structures ar-
ranged in rows. In outward appearance, these brick boxes covered with stucco,
said by some critics to be capable of inspiring only afficionados of prison ar-
chitecture, complemented the innumerable wooden barracks (also covered with
stucco). Together they formed the first image of residential architecture under
socialism.

The period of the 1930s, in which only a small percentage of the urban
population lived in what were called permanent buildings; gave way to what
retrospectively would become known as the “golden” period of the late 1940s
and early 1950s. This was the epoch of “Stalinist architecture” (a term whose
pejorative usage in English remains at odds with the prices of these structures
in the post-Soviet housing market). Great monumental facades, sometimes
evoking the spires of the port city of St. Petersburg even in landlocked cities
thousands of kilometers from the sea, decorated what remain to this day
largely well-built structures. Inside, the high ceilings, ornamentation, and
general attention to detail provided urban dwellers a welcome contrast to the
often brutal boxes of the 1930s. Stalinist residential architecture came into its
own in the early 1950s, although many buildings were completed only after
Stalin’s death.

Towards the end of the 1950s, a major shift occurred in Soviet architecture.
Individually designed buildings were forbidden, to be replaced by prefabricatedive-story apartment buildings made of concrete panels. Prefabrication had
been used in the 1930s, but on a limited scale. Now it became the exclusive
form for residential architecture (hence the designation of the 1940s and 1950s
as a golden age). These sometimes poorly constructed prefabricated concrete
structures, in left-handed and right-handed variants, mostly came in a single
color, grey. Built under Khrushchev, they are still derisively referred to as
Khrushchoby, a pun on hovels (trushchoby). But the prefabricated buildings
enabled far more people to escape the barracks than had been the case in the
epoch of the well-built, monumental edifices constructed under Stalin. And in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Khrushchev-era five-story prefabricated boxes gave way to Brezhnev-era twelve- and fourteen story ones (with splashes of external color to differentiate them), which could accommodate even more families.

Throughout all three periods of socialist architecture superblocks, now called micro-regions, remained the dominant planning units. In the best of circumstances, shops, schools, canteens, clinics, and roads were built into the micro-regions, along with the apartment buildings. To the extent to which the micro-regions were equipped according to design, they seem to have proved capable of serving as the basis for the realization of the desired neighborhood effect. In any given city, micro-regions varied in their degree of completeness and hence desirability as residential locations, but their very existence bespoke a scientific approach underlying urban planning under socialism.

It should be pointed out that as more and more permanent housing was built in the postwar period, permitting the removal of barracks and other temporary structure, the linear-city settlement pattern of adjacent residential and industrial zones which had arisen in the 1930s was gradually replaced by separate zones encouraged to grow in opposite directions. This deliberate divergence provided for more breathing space, although it also made greater demands on public transportation facilities. Urban sprawl, thought to be a relic of the capitalist past, made its appearance even under socialism, where basic limitations on growth were more or less enforced but where the sheer size of urban populations eventually far exceeded the orientation parameters first set down long ago.

Severe functionalism, ornamental solidity, and prefabricated concrete—such have been the three “styles” of residential architecture under socialism. None of the three has been unique to the USSR. The first style was characteristic of “modernist” architecture at the turn of the century; the second, redolent of Nazi Germany, Italian fascism, or New Deal American architecture of the interwar period; and the third, none too different from postwar residential housing in other parts of the world, from the suburbs of Tokyo and Paris to the new cities of Central and South America. But these echoings were generally unknown to the urban inhabitants of the USSR, who in any case were more likely to understand the socialist nature of their cities less from architectural style than from the near total predominance of heavy industry in settlement patterns, the subsidized rents and infrequent evictions,

19. A further factor influencing urban form was the relocation of industry to the east during the war. In many cities in the Urals and Siberia, Tomsk and Novosibirsk being prime examples, the relocation prolonged the inadvertent linear-city tendency of the 1930s.
the general tilt toward collectivism, and above all the absence of capitalist trade and private property.

Lest anyone doubt that Soviet cities—and by extension, society—were socialist, Stalin offered a clarification. In an interview with a foreign correspondent in 1936, the year of the new Constitution and the proclamation that socialism had been built in its foundations, the leader of the USSR explained in plain language that “our Soviet society is socialist because private property in factories, land, banks, and the means of transport has been repealed and replaced by societal [obshchestvennaia] property.” By this term Stalin meant “state, that is, national [vsenarodnaia] property, and collective-farm-cooperative property.” To underscore the importance of this point, Stalin added that neither Italian fascism nor German National ‘Socialism’ has anything in common with such a society... because there, private property... has remained untouched.20

Legacy of the Socialist City

As contemporaries in the USSR came to discover, the elimination of private property brought about a process of thoroughgoing statization (ogosudarstvenie), and gave rise to a class of functionaries who exercised a kind of de facto ownership over state-controller property. An extravagantly oversized state administered by an aggrandizing official class was an old story in Russian history. But with the socialist revolution these historical tendencies were greatly magnified and, at the same time, recast as a progressive achievement. Among some long-time participants in the Russian revolutionary movement, and even more so among social democrats abroad, there were those who voiced objections to this largely unanticipated turn of events, decrying it as a defilement of socialism, or even as just another form of capitalism. Yet to the majority of people who participated in building it, what arose haphazardly in the USSR in the attempt to suppress capitalism was understood as socialism, and I would argue, broadly accepted for that reason.

What is important here is not our understanding of what socialism might be, but the conception held by the people of the USSR. For them, socialism meant not only a sense of social justice in the distribution of scarce goods and nearly free housing, but also employment, pensions, public canteens, paid vacations and organized leisure for working people, accessible health care, and education, and well as a host of other concrete measures that were centered around peaceful economic development, reflected in property relations, and given physical expression in the built environment. Whatever its ambiguities or disappointments, socialism afforded ordinary individuals the means to ac-

quire a niche, as well as a sense of identity and pride, in an urban society that
did seem to be qualitatively different—in comparison with capitalism.

The antagonism between socialism and capitalism, from which socialism
began and which was made that much more pronounced by the Great Depres-
sion, remained central not only to the definition of what socialism turned out
to be, but also to the mind-set of the 1930s and beyond that accompanied so-
cialism’s construction and appreciation. This antagonism helps explain why
no matter how substantial the difference might become between rhetoric and
practice, architectural form and utopian promise, people could still maintain a
fundamental faith in the fact of socialism’s existence in the USSR and in that
system’s inherent superiority. Despite the Soviet regime’s manifest despo-
tism and frequent resort to coercion and intimidation, people could think the
USSR remained socialist because it was not capitalist, which in the interwar
period was synonymous not with wealth and freedom but poverty and ex-
ploration, as well as imperialism and war.

Contemplation of the rejection of socialism in the USSR implied a return
to capitalism, with its many deficiencies—a turn of events that for a long
time was unthinkable. Once the image of capitalism changed, however, un-
derstandings of socialism could potentially change as well. Juxtaposed against
a new image of buoyant capitalism, life in the socialist city underwent almost
complete condemnation. This is an important part of what happened in the
1980s. Glasnost’ involved a proliferation of comparisons between socialism
and capitalism on all the big questions keyed to notions of social justice,
from schools and medical care to the living standards of working people and
the pensions of the retired or infirm. Socialism was seen to have lost its
competition with capitalism, and therefore ceased to have a basis for exist-
ing.21

In the 1990s, private property has been haltingly and inconsistently rein-
troduced. But the legacy of socialist cities, from their privileging of industrial
production to their denial of the market, will take some time to overcome.
Meanwhile, although seriously undermined, the commitments to collectivism
and social welfare have been reasserted. The practice of constructing self-con-
tained micro-regions with buildings arranged around inner courtyards also
seems destined to endure. As far as the future of architectural form, to gauge
what may lie in store for them, we could do worse than look at what sur-
rounds us in the United States.

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21. This is one of the principal themes explored in my book, Steeltown, USSR: Soviet Soci-