

## **Underground Utopia:**

*Civil and Social Engineering Discourses of the Moscow Metro during the Stalinist 1930's.*

### *Introduction*

The Moscow Metro can be acknowledged, to the present day, to be one of the boldest achievements of the Stalinist 30's, with two key sections completed in record time and publically opened too much pomp and ceremony. The building of the Moscow metro system was a huge scale construction programme which included other gigantic undertakings such as the Moscow – Volga canal (completed in 1937 – 38) and the projected but never completed Palace of the Soviets [Illustration 1], all would demand the requirements of vast labour resources and materials. The project(s) would all contribute to the aspirations of Stalin's Soviet leadership towards competing with the developments of the industrial west. Despite the locality and geographical specificity which was always going to lean towards Moscow, the metro system was designed to incorporate the entire Soviet Union. Throughout the 1930s the Moscow metro would be known as a major engineering achievement of the Soviet Union's industrialisation programme. However from the time of initial reception of the metro it was also planned to be one of the most beautiful underground systems in the world and no expense would be spared on its architecture and decoration.

The construction of the metro system would have great historical importance when defining this supposed 'Stalinist Style'. The architecture of the metro system would be the first time that we see any actual execution of the depicted art ideology of Socialist Realism, within a structural format. Paper executions had been conceived for grandiose architectures, but the Moscow metro would later act as pinnacle template that could eventually be translated to structures above the ground.

The metro stations are a perfect example of Socialist Realism within architecture, when looking at the symbolic content of Soviet art from the Stalinist era; the best example is present within the Revolution Square station [Illustrations 2 – 3]. The space possesses a strong echo of Renaissance culture which is then applied to a communist situation; through the linear almost never ending corridors, over life-sized bronze figures are arranged in a format that would depict various soviet types, soldiers, industrial and agricultural workers, students, sportsmen and woman are represented in an heroic light and setting. The figures are quite clearly been used as a symbolic template for the beings that represented just how

eminent the Soviet Union was and would be used as a mechanism to eventually change a person into someone worthy of representing the state to an outside world.

Typically a Metro system in the western world would provide a technical convenience for people travelling from one place to another; Stalin's Metro would not follow this typical pattern. The Moscow metro stations of the Stalinist era would function in a completely different way from what was been built around the same time in western societies even though Moscow's system on both engineering and to some extent aesthetics took inspiration from the Gant's Hill Station which was part of the London Underground. The Moscow metro of the Stalin era was not and foremost an ordinary source of public transport, but acted as a template for the design and function of an actual city of the communist future.

This paper will examine and analyse the Moscow underground of the 1930's as an instrument of civil and social engineering and the effect this had upon the in-migrating peasant population. In order to understand the discourse of the Moscow metro system an analysis must be made to appreciate the situation in which the metro was to be produced and to understand the Russian ideological values which was to be seen in the specificity of Stalinist architecture; resulting in the necessity to go back and review the principle urban construction programme (The General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow, 1935) and the major aesthetic theories that have been instrumental in moulding the architectural character of the Moscow metro.

### *The Reconstruction of Moscow*

After the Soviet government moved the capital back to Moscow during the early years of the regime, it was clear that the city could or would try to function as the pinnacle symbol of the ultimate Soviet State. Between the years of 1929 and 1941 the Soviets embarked upon a huge project to transform the industry and economy of a nation. The decreasing likelihood of an international workers' revolution, coupled with fears of invasion, persuaded the Soviet leadership to take control of what was predominately a backward nation into what was to be a leading industrial powerhouse. Five-year plans were to be implemented throughout the early 1930's and frequently the goals of these plans were more than unrealistic and the ethos of plan fulfilment would come to dominate Soviet society.

In April 1930 Lazar Kaganovich<sup>1</sup> a close colleague of Stalin, was appointed as Moscow Party Leader and soon announced his plans for the reconstruction of the capital city, stating '*I consider that Moscow should be, and will be a laboratory to which people from all over the Union will flock to study its experience*'<sup>2</sup>

Kaganovich's plan was directed to the social situation and the more pressing needs of the Soviet person: housing, food distribution, public transportation, hygiene and sanitation and the provision of green spaces and park land all came under analysis for the reconstruction of Moscow. The timing of Kaganovich's intervention clearly marked out the growing sense of crisis, which was predominately going to be blamed on the mixture of pre-revolutionary bourgeois society. The over inflated demands of the first Five Year Plan<sup>3</sup> which necessarily led to a vast influx of peasantry moving to the city seeking employment in the newly developed factories with over 25 percent of the total volume of industrial production for the whole of the Soviet Union was concentrated in Moscow and the surrounding areas. For example during the early stages of the first Five Year Plan (1929-32), the population of Moscow escalated from 2.2 million to 3.7 million<sup>4</sup>, which calculated to an increase of 50 percent.

The wave of urban in-migration was not surprisingly stronger within the younger generation of Soviet citizens and by the mid 1930's just under a million of a total population of no less than four million was aged between 20 and 30.<sup>5</sup> The demographic reconfiguration made Moscow a very 'youthful' city. Inevitable the in-migration to the city only outlined the further

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<sup>1</sup> Lazar Kaganovich (1893-1991) was a ruthless Bolshevik leader of working class origin, Kaganovich had a reputation for 'getting things done' regardless of the cost. His nicknames the 'iron commissar' and 'chief boss' were well deserved, but so too was his reputation as a man of the people, a charismatic and handsome leader who mixed with workers and delivered thunderous speeches full of venomous hatred for class enemies. See Andrew, J. (2000) *A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization*, Technology and Culture, Vol. 41, No 4, pp. 697-724.

<sup>2</sup> See L.M Kaganovich, *Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and Other Cities in the USSR*, Trans. By Martin Lawrence (London [printed in the USSR]: Lawrence, 1931) as stated in O'Mahony, M. (2003) *Archaeological Fantasies: Constructing History on the Moscow Metro*, The Modern Language Review, Vol 98, No. 1, pp 138-150.

<sup>3</sup> The First Five-Year Plan was officially launched nationwide in January 1929. The 1,700- page document, entitled 'The Five-Year Plan for National Economic Construction', made huge demands. The following year, in a feverish atmosphere encouraged by dubious reports and unconfirmed achievements, many of these targets were raised higher still and demands were made that the Five-Year Plan be completed in four. For full details on the First Five-Year Plan see Nove, A. (1992) *An Economic History of the USSR 1917-91* London: Penguin.

<sup>4</sup> O'Mahony, M. (2003) *Archaeological Fantasies: Constructing History on the Moscow Metro*, the Modern Language Review, Vol 98, No. 1, pp 138-150. During the 1930's over two million peasants moved to Moscow resulting in major sociological transformation of the population. See Hoffman, D (1994) *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow 1929-1941*, New York, Cornell University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

problems surrounding the lack of service facilities. In response to the problem as previously mentioned Kaganovich's reconstruction programme called for the transformation of the entire urban space in and surrounding the city; which would change Moscow from a dilapidated city with a shaky infrastructure (which was inherited from capitalism) into a capital that was worthy of the proletarian state.

The above mentioned commodities were only one sector of the reconstruction of Moscow and still remained a problem late into the 1930's. The physical transformation of the city was also (and most importantly) a means and a metaphor for the transformation of the new Soviet Citizen which would eventually be followed through by the means of aesthetics.

### *Socialist Realism*

The major planning efforts for a renewed Moscow were undertaken after Stalin had won the leadership struggle and the party had begun to use personal preference only. It is unclear from lack of evidence what Stalin personal aesthetics were, if he had any, but in the early 1930's around the same time the reconstruction programme was adapted the party sought to impose a unified aesthetic doctrine of 'Socialist Realism' upon all artistic expressions within the Soviet Union.

The Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 which saw the idealised art form set in stone and it was at the congress that Andrei Zhdanov who was then secretary to the Communist Party and Stalin's chief cultural commissar gave his speech highlighting the policies of Socialist Realism.

'Our literature is the youngest of all literatures of all peoples and countries. And at the same time it is the richest in ideas, the most advanced and the most revolutionary literature...

Comrade Stalin has called our writers, engineers, of human souls. What does he mean? What duties does the title confer upon you?

In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simple as 'objective reality', but to depict reality in its revolutionary development'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> After the dissolution of 'competing' art groups in 1932, the principle event determining future soviet culture policy was the first Congress of Soviet Writers held in Moscow August- September 1934. An English translation of Congress speeches appeared as H.G Scott (eds), *Problems of Soviet Literature*, London, 1935. This was reprinted as the *Soviet Writers Congress 1934*, London, 1977. The Extracts were taken extract from Andrei Zhdanov's speech at the Congress of Soviet Writers, Harrison, and Wood, 2007: 426 – 429.

Socialist Realism was an instrument designed for the pure communication of art to the increased number of peasants that had arrived in the city as part of the reconstruction programme and ultimately it was the death of the Russian avant-garde; for a nation considered to be the political avant-garde of the day, Socialist Realism would adapt a classical aesthetic and the avant-garde artist would begin the struggle for utopia against the totalitarian society.<sup>7</sup>

Now that the 'left, degenerate' art groups had been dissolved, and their conflicting aesthetic ideologies were replaced the artist or architect in this particular case must concentrate their creative abilities on the production of the Socialist Realism, a form that allows the piece of art itself to become part of the socialist dynamic. Art was to become realistic enough to be comprehensible to the people without being a mere copy of external reality, and that was useful and educational. The artist therefore must not dwell on the negative, static characteristics of society but it must now convey the positive progressive side of socialist life by representing the inner world and deeds of its outstanding workers and leaders; by bringing into salient relief a deliberately magnification of an image of the 'typical' that is given social-historical phenomenon of a synthesis of human passions.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of Socialist Realism can be seen by many Soviet theorists does not imply to a definition of styles or forms. It permits a variety of stylistic methods and freedom of development for creative individuals, rejecting only the kind of art form that does not give an objective idea of the object portrayed. A great part of the development of Socialist Realism was provided by Lenin himself who had little time for the ultra modern and would concern himself with producing plans for 'monuments' that would honour the great revolutionaries.

A striking feature of the aesthetics of Socialist Realism tend to scope is given to monumental art that was adapted from the Leninist ideology stated above and allowed sculptors and painters to collaborate with the architect. Hundreds of artists associated with different genres in order to create and contribute to the decoration of new buildings, the halls and auditorium of the Moscow State University, the Agricultural Exhibition along with the Moscow Metro

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<sup>7</sup> The Russian avant-garde of the time was the Constructivist movement and more can be found on the struggle for utopia in Margolin, V. (1997) *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

<sup>8</sup> Voyce, A. (1956) *Soviet Art and Architecture: Recent Art and Architecture*, Annals of the American Academy of Political Social Science, Vol. 303, pp. 104-115

and various memorials and public buildings throughout the Soviet Union all came under scrutiny.

Many of the large buildings are adorned with sculptured figures in dramatically enthusiastic attitudes, replete with expressions of Socialist endeavour. A prime example could have been seen in the projected concept for the Palace of the Soviets, where architects designed a colossus monumental statue to Lenin which would have been positioned on top of the building itself.<sup>9</sup> Along with the notion of art to educate and communicate the Socialist message through the act of 'monumental' construction in a totalitarian society would push architecture towards the contradicting the realities of social life in a feeble attempt to construct an ideal city, a forlorn reference to the grandeur of the ancient world.<sup>10</sup> Maybe here the real definition that would be more appropriate explanation of 'Socialist Realism' emerges as the realism of social deception.

All the practices that have been stated above are governed by the perpetual transformation of social relations, in particular those of class (which will be analysed later in the paper) at particular moments, these relations can become reified, that is objectified; in construction, architecture, literature and within the set language itself which cause a point in Soviet culture where the ideology becomes cement that simultaneously binds and disguises the reality of social life.

The Moscow metro was as much an ideological project as it was an engineering feat and can it be said through technology and false imagery that it was the ultimate locale for sculpting the body politic from peasant to worker and undeveloped to the developed society?

### *Technological Style*

The original plan for the Moscow metro had ostensibly been drawn up with the sole intention of relieving the transportation problems of a significant number of urban workers. In the June plenum report that Kaganovich delivered he highlighted the waste of time and energy expended by workers in commuting:

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<sup>9</sup> A more detailed account of art and architecture in the Stalinist era that focussed around Socialist Realism can be found in Tarkhnov, A and Kavtaradze S. (1992) *Architecture of the Stalin Era*, New York: Rizzoli International Press.

<sup>10</sup> Charley, J. (2009) *The Dialectic of the Built Environment: The Making of an Imperial City*, The Journal of Architecture, Vol. 1, pp. 10-37

‘At present workers living in the Dongaverovsky suburb and in other outlying sections of the city are obliged to waste a considerable amount of time in travelling to the centre or to districts in opposite parts of the city. They spend as much as one and a half to two hours daily travelling. The building of new factories in the Proletarian, the Stalin and other districts, and the settling of large numbers of new inhabitants in these districts make it essential that we take immediate measures to provide them with adequate means of transport’.<sup>11</sup>

The section of the paper that follows does not give a detailed historical description of the Moscow metro (that work has already been done) rather it offers a reading into the discourse of the metro as a symbolic formation of ideology that would allow modern technologies and most importantly the ‘machine’ to change the in-migrating peasants into fully fledged Bolshevik paid labours or workers. With the above in mind is it a possibility that the metro’s symbolic and physical fabrications was purely produced to help stabilise a fractured social structure?

At a tremendous cost the first five-year plan (1928-1932) had managed to build rudimentary foundations of heavy industry, forced collectivisation, political enemies and militant attacks on all traditions complemented a frenetic programme of socialist construction, which Stalin stated would solve a century of backwardness in just ten years; the first five year plan was not just a form to solve the countries ‘backwardness’ problem it was also stated that the plan would mark a continuation of the revolution by the construction of socialism in one country. The metro would introduce the next stage of the scientifically determined process of constructing socialism; the Bolsheviks sought to transform Moscow into a fitting symbol to showcase world socialism, now the other projects that could have potentially stolen the symbolic limelight away from the metro were stumbling. Soviet engineers failed in their efforts to erect the Palace of the Soviets which would have been a triumphal meeting place for the citizens of the USSR (and eventually beyond).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The original speech can be found in Kaganovich, *Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and Other Cities in the USSR*, pp 56 The extract was taken from O’Mahony, 2003:143-144.

<sup>12</sup> To make room for the Palace of Soviets the Bolsheviks blew up the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, built in the nineteenth century in honour of the victory over Napoleon. Now a new Christ the Saviour has been raised on the same spot. The Moscow-Volga canal suffered a happier fate, becoming a major symbol of the new Moscow when it was completed in 1937. For a discussion of the Palace of Soviets fiasco, see E. Kirichenko, *Architectural Monuments of Moscow* in Andrew, J. (2000) *A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization*, Technology and Culture, Vol. 41, No 4, pp. 697-724.

The Moscow Volga-Canal would also reach completion too late (1937) to serve as a concrete, steel and marble monument for the arrival of socialism; therefore resulting in the role falling to the metro. As the future capital of the proletariat and a showpiece of socialism the city of Moscow would have to build the first *socialist* metro and could be nothing more than the most imitable underground system and when the first line was completed in May 1935 (six months over deadline) propagandists hailed the Moscow subway, '*the best in the world*' and was the ultimate sign of socialism's superior ability to conquer nature.

Despite the grandiose proclamations, the project was riddled with numerous difficulties from the very inception. First among these was the problem of personnel. Pavel Pavlovich Rotert, the engineer chosen by the Council of the Peoples Commissars in 1931 the head Metrostroi (the organisation charged with the construction of the underground), recounted a significant number of difficulties in assembling the much needed qualified staff of technicians. Only a handful of the engineers recruited had experience building a metro and in addition there were only several who had actually seen an underground system in their travels abroad.<sup>13</sup> This rather serious problem was exacerbated by the fact the Metrostroi was forced by political pressure from above to rush headlong into the construction process, even before the final plans had been completed.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, in the rhetoric that accompanied just about every aspect of the Moscow metro its obvious shortcomings were quickly recast as the opposite, and would be depicted as a great strength.<sup>15</sup>

In the eyes of the Soviet leadership the fact that skilled engineers and construction technicians efficient enough in the art of building an underground system were few and far between; however this would prove to be an option worth taking when it came to the production of the Moscow metro system. Experience of building the metro would provide an object lesson in how the universal shortage of skilled technical personnel in the Soviet Union could be solved. As Stalin notes in his speech that was delivered to a group of steel workers

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<sup>13</sup> The situation wasn't helped by the fact that the political authorities had arrested the most experienced engineers on trumped up charges of counterrevolution in 1928 and 1930. By the 1930s the Soviet Union had also exhausted foreign currency reserves, leaving few resources to pay for equipment and foreign expertise. Khrushchev, who forged his own career as a point man for the construction of the metro, recalled that the metro managers only had the 'vague idea of what job it would entail'. They thought the metro as something almost 'supernatural. I think it's probably easier to contemplate space flights than it was to complete the construction of the Moscow metro in the nineteen-thirties. See Strobe, T (eds) (1970) *Khrushchev Remembers*, Boston. See also Bailes, K, (1976) *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Intelligentsia, 1917-1941*, Princeton.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffman, D (1994) *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow 1929-1941*, New York, Cornell University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid



in 1934, states that the problem consisting of the lack of people to form a suitable organisation of skilled workers can be solved by two mechanisms:

‘Either we start by training people...or we begin by immediately creating machines...so that we school our people in technology – create cadres – in the very process of producing and exploiting machines. We have chosen the second path’<sup>16</sup>

Stalin’s utopian belief that you could qualify the socialist worker through a symbolic relationship to the machine is quite clearly illustrated in the bowels of the Moscow metro. Through this somewhat disillusioned belief made the underground the premier venue for Stalinist reformation of the body politic. Within the Moscow metro the limited amount of unskilled labourers would allow them to miraculously be turned into a skilled workers of the Soviet Union through the production and manipulation of technology. At the same time (and here we see a perfect illustration of Stalinist culture’s flexibility in negotiating contradictory propositions),<sup>17</sup> the discourse of the metro does not shy away from the minimizing the machine in favour of the worker’s lack of technical know-how or use of the proper equipment is promoted as a virtue. The lack technical of knowledge would allow the labourer to press beyond a mechanistic world view into the realm that exists in the utopian construction proper.

A number of scholars have stated that the above mechanical theories have left Stalinist culture’s marginalisation of the technical and professional language in favour of a single quasi religious or mythological super discourse.<sup>18</sup> The labourers, who were present at the construction of the Moscow metro as it was argued, were required to go beyond their abilities and press beyond the available norms into a realm that consisted of the fantastic and was something that can be described a ‘miracle’. To make such a utopian fairytale come true it was man not machine that was born as a result of the underground system.

The Moscow metro construction gained momentum through the 1930’s and in the process so did the social engineering project. *‘How many people recreated themselves in the process of*

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<sup>16</sup> The speech extract was taken from Liver, K. (2009) *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s*, Plymouth, Lexington Books. For the full speech see Vaiskopf, M. *Pisatel Stalin*. p346.

<sup>17</sup> Liver, K. (2009) *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s*, Plymouth, Lexington Books.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

*building the metro?*' asked one Pravda<sup>19</sup> article from 1933. In 1934 all Soviet newspapers produced headlines that read 'The Entire Country Builds the Metro' in both statements made by the Russian press stated the exact utopian effects that Stalinist culture sought to achieve, but how much of this was true?

As captured in the construction of the Moscow metro, the essence of Soviet technological style lies within the realm of the civil and somewhat revolutionary traditions of social engineering and now aesthetics. These simple traditions help transform the metro, once it went into operation, and was a pure idealised mechanism and precision instrument for constructing the Stalinist soul and body. Can the Moscow metro be seen as just a pure engineering feat that transformed the Soviet Union into a major player when it came to westernisation or can both technology and aesthetics exist together to create the perfect Stalinist being?

### *Techno-aesthetic*

The aesthetics of the Moscow metro owed a great debt to the nihilist Nicolas Chernyshevsky<sup>20</sup>, Lenin's favourite Russian rebel of the nineteenth century. Chernyshevsky rejected the romantics of the 1830's and 1840's, arguing that art was no use unless it served higher politics.<sup>21</sup> Far from simply representing the world or following his or hers 'muse', the true artist aimed to transform man and the natural world from their present imperfect state to one more rational and just. Armed with an encyclopaedia of knowledge of radical intellectual fashions, Chernyshevsky blended the positivism of Auguste Comte, English utilitarianism and the technocratic utopianism of Henri De Saint Simon in enlightenment vision that obliterated the distinction between artist, engineer, scientist and revolutionary politician.<sup>22</sup>

Lenin embraced himself greatly in the philosophy of Chernyshevsky's views, resulting in the condemnation and in some cases arrest of any artist who preached that art's proper concern was aesthetics, and not Bolshevik politics. Lenin mixed Chernyshevsky with technologically determinist interpretation of the science of Marxism. Technologies such as electric power and

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<sup>19</sup> 'Pravda' translating to 'Truth' was a leading newspaper in the Soviet Union and official organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party 1912-1991.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Chernyshevsky (1829-89) is best known for the utopian novel: *What is to be Done?* written in prison in 1869. It became a cult hit among student radicals and inspired Lenin in 1902 to use the same title in a venomous political tract aimed at his socialist adversaries.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew, J. (2000) *A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization*, Technology and Culture, Vol. 41, No 4, pp. 697-724.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Taylorism (Scientific Management System) were, for Lenin forces of production that the inefficient and exploitive capitalist order would be unable to master.<sup>23</sup> Only once these forces had been placed into a socialist system, that these same technologies would accelerate the gloriously planned march towards communism and guarantee the victory of the revolution.<sup>24</sup>

In the years following Lenin's death, the Bolshevik's eroded even further the fine boundaries between technology, science and art. All joined the arsenal of revolutionary tools for transforming nature and excising defective humanity from the face of the earth.<sup>25</sup> Stalin was the one that led the aesthetic assault. In the Soviet newspapers were also leading the assault on propaganda and just like they did with the construction of the underground and would persistently hail Stalin as the '*architect of socialism*' and the '*great engineer of history*'. Stalin involved himself with every aspect and detail of construction, how to build sidewalks, how to build bridges, how to rebuild river banks, where to put garden, how to build schools, how to build canals, and of course how to build a subway.<sup>26</sup>

The writer and Stalinist enthusiast Maxim Gorky completed the aesthetic vision behind the Moscow metro. He was also a key participant in an early Bolshevik movement known as *bogostroitel'stvo* (god building), which existed as a faction within the party before 1917, and believed that the masses needed a unified set of rituals and symbols that would all the citizens to bid their feelings to the goals of the regime. These symbols would act as a mirror image of the specific religious right and would eventually replace religion as the new motivating force, unifying the toiling multitudes and directing them to conquer nature and destroy capitalism.

By 1934 a new group of workers finally arrived in to inscribe the party's vision of Soviet civilization onto the metro's columns, frescos, chandeliers and over 23,000 square feet of marble facings. It would be ornamentation of specific elements throughout the metro that would help transform the underground space into a church of modernity, offering Soviet communication on every ride. The party official decree on the design of the metro station came in March 1934 with the simple command to architects to '*make them beautiful*', which promoted architects '*to philosophise about our own risk and terror regarding what the Soviet*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Also note for Lenin's determinist view of technology as a force for constructing communism, see Coopersmith, J. (1992) *The Electrification of Russia, 1880–1926* Ithaca, N.Y., 151–91. On Soviet Taylorism, see Stites, R. (1989) *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, New York, 145–64.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew, J. (2000) *A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization*, *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 41, No 4, pp. 697-724.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

*metro should be*'. One art critic saw the terse mandate as a challenge to the narrowly pragmatic character of Western civilization, its inability to consider broader political possibilities for design. By way of contrast, the Moscow metro should embed ornamentation with appropriate political messages in a purely functional object, thereby proving the *'utility of beauty'* in Soviet life.<sup>27</sup>

Saying utility and beauty can merge and exist together is one thing, but this utopian theory would prove difficult for the architects and finding the right design elements in which to accomplish the specific goal stated would be another issue completely. Metro architects searched for points of theoretical departure. One architect simulated a way of using different subways from around the world that were defined either by pure economic utility on one hand and pure aesthetic on the other. The New York subway was the most technologically sophisticated, the drab stations embodied what can be seen from the Soviets point as pure economic advantage, and this fault was shared with the Paris metro. The same architect praised the London metro for aesthetics [Illustration 4], but said impure motives tainted its achievements: competition from the bus lanes had forced the London managers to result to pure elaborate architecture, and this approach was seen as purely 'superficial'

Such imposing spaces provided the opportunity to convey the specific grandeur of Soviet civilisation that was unleashed from the constraints of capitalism like their western technological counterparts. The Moscow metro on just about every station was specifically laid out with huge open spaces to allow the free flow of passengers into and through the stations, but they also wanted to create open spaces for more festive architectural solutions. In other words the architectural solutions would consist of elaborate decoration that included art and sculpture that would depict the social utopia sought after by Stalin's Soviet society. If we compare the Moscow metro with the metropolitans of the west the thing that makes the biggest impact is the unprecedented sweep of the design and construction. Architects would express this grandeur above all in the height of the ceilings.

Soviet underground ceilings would ascend to 5.6 metres, compared to 2.7 meter in New York. If New York's platforms stretch just 3.5m then the Soviet's would stretch from 4 to 22 metres. But most important aesthetic act that Soviet architects used to create this underground

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Utopia was lighting. The ‘*barbarous syncretism*’<sup>28</sup> of Stalinist civilisation, a trait then enables a free modulation between industrial/mechanical metaphors as well as their organic and biological equivalents throughout the culture’s ideological and mythological discourses. The illusionist or this case the architect had to create pathos that of the architecture and lighting of the metro underscores this by creating the paradoxical impression that the passenger is high above the ground even when he or she is deep beneath the earth.<sup>29</sup>

The metro was to act as an embodied rapprochement of the real and the ideal. It was necessary not to conceal the metro’s ‘*undergroundness*’ as a fault but also to emphasise the fact as an advantage (just like the lack of technical knowhow was seen as virtue in the process of transforming the peasant to paid/skilled labourer in the construction stages). Architects of the Moscow metro had to create the perfect aesthetic balance that produced this specific illusion of being in a palace, that in reality was located underground, but ideally the Moscow metro would be a man made space that was subsequently stood outside of the utopos (no place) and stood within the eutopia (good place); which would contribute to Stalin’s utopian vision for the future communist city.

In 1938, the chief artist for the Mayakovski station [Illustration 5] urged Muscovites, ‘*Raise your head, citizens, and you will see the sky.*’ Below the surface Soviets would find themselves surrounded by images preparing them for labour and defence. To see these specific mosaics the passengers had to stand directly underneath them and cock their head backs and have their eyes in a fixed position on a heaven of Soviet power. Aesthetic were particular important as mechanism for teaching Soviet power and for converting peasants into docile urbanites.

### *Conclusion*

The Moscow metro system was a brutal programme of hyper industrialisation, collectivisation, and urbanisation that turned the Soviet Union into a society of displaced and disoriented peasants. Out of the sociological and geological quicksand the Moscow metro emerged as a symbol of a new order, marked by clear social and political hierarchies, reflected in granite and marble. The metro also embodied the Soviet Union’s unique and efficacious technological style, cantered on an ethic of bold risk-taking that the Soviets

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<sup>28</sup> Liver, K. (2009) *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s*, Plymouth, Lexington Books.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

claimed was impossible under capitalism. It taught social discipline to the multitudes of peasant in-migrants streaming into the capital, which was threatened by social and political chaos, and instilled in them a sense of awe of the communist party. A visible symbol of looming prosperity and seeming validation for all the sacrifice and suffering of the first five-year plans, set against the backdrop of a capitalist world in a seeming collapse and lapsing into fascist dictatorship, but the Moscow subway may have been one of the Bolsheviks' most effective social engineering tools.

The peasant in-migration to Moscow might have been the biggest social effect on Russia during the 1930's. If it wasn't for the dynamic of the city changing I have to ask if the Moscow metro would have ever been constructed. Party bosses constructed assiduously combined operational and aesthetic functions to organise social space and discipline new city residents. Under their management the metro celebrated socialism, provided a pulpit for preaching and educating communist values and offered a way for people to get to work in the morning.

This complex fusion of the beautiful and the functional, the ornate and the useful created a delicate balance and occasional discomfort for the master builder himself. Kaganovich once accused the metro architects of '*unjustified ornamentation*<sup>30</sup>'. Religious elements in the architecture occasionally offended his aesthetic sensibilities. '*These aren't cathedrals, after all, but stations of the underground railroad*<sup>31</sup>' he remarked. But not even Kaganovich could turn back the rejection of Western-style utilitarianism.

Throughout the 1930's and towards the end of the Stalin era, stations would become more ornate and monumental as the metro grew. Like a mirror held up to Soviet political self-perceptions<sup>32</sup> monumentalism and an elaborate political iconography reflected a sense of approaching perfection in the social and political body itself; but in this overwhelming peasant country that consisted of civil engineering on levels never before seen by anyone of the Soviet Union, did the Soviet system transform the peasants or did the peasants transform the Soviet system? In concentration of the Moscow metro the final question has to address how successful was the Moscow underground system as a tool for social engineering?

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<sup>30</sup> Quotation taken from Andrew, J. (2000) *A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization*, Technology and Culture, Vol. 41, No 4, pp. 697-724.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Soviet authorities would concentrate most of their time and persisted in trying to mould former peasants into model proletarians. Through intensive construction programmes that sought to achieve the above with the belief that the peasant would change their whole being while actually constructing the metro and then finally through specific symbolisms of the aesthetic quality of the underground stations was somewhat of a mythological stance. The only thing that was achieved was the inability of the Soviet authorities of achieving such an idealised society; they presumed that you can simply install a consciousness that was alien to the peasant population. Soviet leaders did not understand that peasants had their own culture and own way to conceptualise the world.<sup>33</sup> The urban environment did not instantly transform new arrivals, in part because the city itself was changing as a result of their in-migration and presence, but also because former peasants draw upon useful elements of their past to guide their behaviour whether they were present in the Moscow metro or not. The subculture of these new city dwellers maintained those certain aspects of their village life and culture, which would help them respond to the new tasks and power relationships they confronted in Moscow. Migration traditions and village networks would help them find housing and work; so in this sense peasant traditions contributed enormously to the industrialisation drive by channelling labour to the city.

Soviet authorities were the most eager to define the new workers, their control over the media and other ideological resources allowed them to establish the dominant political discourse, a discourse in which conscious proletarians supported the Soviet state.<sup>34</sup> Peasants who had moved to the city had learnt to deal with the Soviet authorities and official discourses. Those who aspired to advance in the system had to play by its rules and even those who merely sought material benefits from the Soviet state had to speak its language. The official discourse, construction of the metro and Socialist Realism did not change the identity of former peasants; it was a mere series of mechanisms that would set boundaries for them. The village based subculture of the in-migrating peasants could subvert the official Soviet discourse but it could not erase it.

Ideology and ruling truth, the Soviet leadership held could never penetrate '*to the core of the people's soul*'.<sup>35</sup> Communist Party leaders sought to monopolise the existence of the authoritarian rule that set forth one interpretation of history; one all-encompassing ideology

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<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, D (1994) *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow 1929-1941*, New York, Cornell University Press

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

and world view, one correct social identity for manual workers through construction and an aesthetic discourse that ultimately failed in the intended purposes, as the millions of peasants that would fill the Soviet workforce passively resisted the above attempt to allow authority to define who they were.

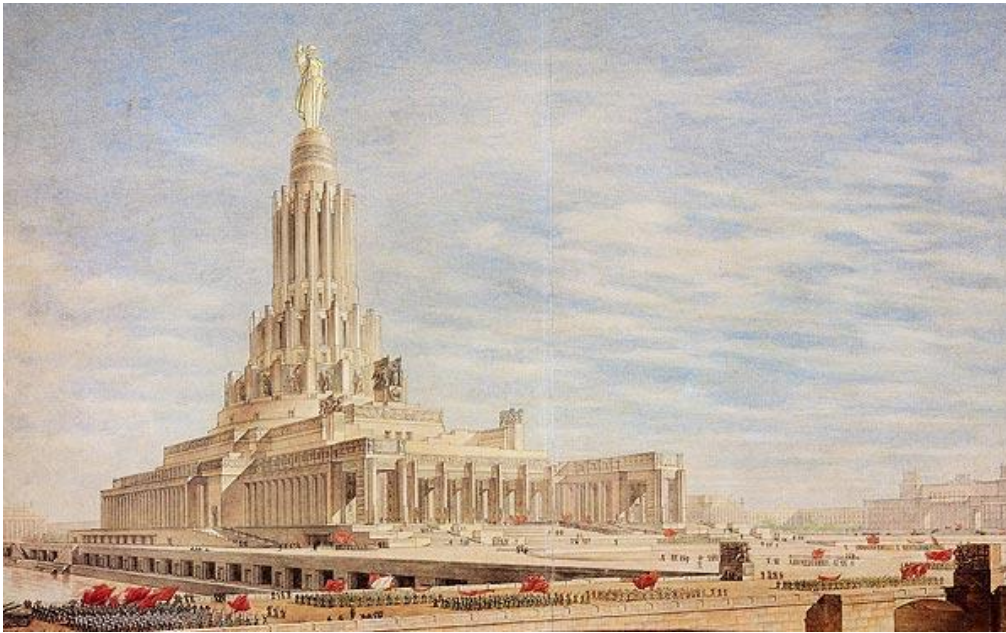


*Illustrations*

**Illustration One:**

*Palace of the Soviets, Moscow 1935, Architects: Boris Iofan, Vladimir Shchuko and Vladimir Gelfreich.*

(Architecture of the Stalin Era, p 31)



**Illustration Two:**

*Revolution Square Station, Moscow 1938 Hall, Architect: Alexey Dushkin.*

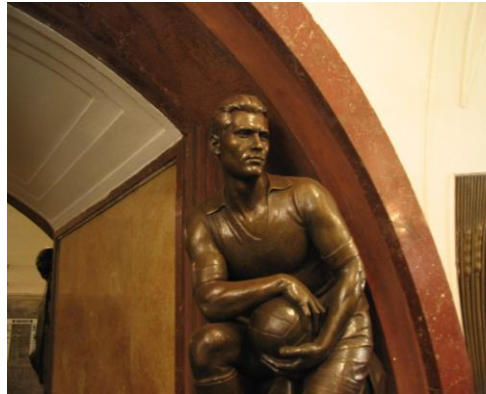
(Architecture of the Stalin Era, p 93)



**Illustration Three:**

*Revolution Square Station, Moscow 1938, Sportsman Statue Detail, Architect: Alexey Dushkin.*

(<http://www.superstock.com/stock-photography/Metro+Moscow>)



**Illustration Four:**

*Gants Hill Tube Station, London 1930 (officially open after the war in 1947) Architect: Charles Holden.*

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gants\\_Hill\\_tube\\_station](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gants_Hill_tube_station))



**Illustration Five:**

*Mayakovski Metro Station, Moscow 1938, Architect: Alexey Dushkin*

(Architecture of the Stalin Era, p 92)



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