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► To cite this version:

Fabien Bellat. AN UNEASY METAMORPHOSIS : THE AFTERLIFE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM IN STALINIST GARDENS. Rethinking Marxism, 2017. <hal-03792647>

HAL Id: hal-03792647

<https://hal.science/hal-03792647v1>

Submitted on 30 Sep 2022

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AN UNEASY METAMORPHOSIS : THE AFTERLIFE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM IN STALINIST GARDENS

Metaphorically speaking, the attitude of the USSR towards its citizens often had something of Cronos devouring his children. Or, perhaps another mythological image might be even more apt: Daphne's metamorphosis into the laurel tree illustrates well the transformation of former Constructivist architects into designers of Stalinist landscapes. At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, a number of architects who served the Soviet modernity were either put aside by the regime, or had to envisage a radical adaptation to its new cultural context. Indeed, if a failed hope could still have an afterlife, then what happened to all those people who believed in Constructivism?

Metamorphosis is indeed a keyword. Creating Soviet gardens demanded a reordering of nature, both at the level of the landscape itself and at the level of public perception and taste. However, landscape architecture is almost absent from political texts. If a number of essays consider the role of the city in the new socialist world, neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor Bukharin said anything specific about the use of nature in the city center. According to Trotsky, "The man will be incomparably stronger, more intelligent, more subtle. He will have a more harmonious body, more rhythmic movements, a more melodious voice ; daily life will assume eminently theatrical forms."¹ Yet, to achieve such a goal, it presupposed building both sport and cultural facilities: stadiums, theaters and gardens would be some of the architectural programs likely to enable this sovietization of habits. In a similar logic, but with more practical words than the ostracized Trotsky, Anton Makarenko, an educator in labor communes, insisted on outside activities being a key ingredient for the education of a true Soviet man². These requirements asked for new constructions and landscaping without giving any guideline regarding the forms that these constructions and landscaping should take. Actually, except for the requirement for fresh air and some public gardens near workers' homes, architects had a free hand to choose what a Soviet garden should look like. In fact, the frontline was located elsewhere.

For the Constructivist architects, organizing their professional and artistic survival was indeed the top priority. Finding programs where they could still work, in a fragile balance

¹ Service, R. 2011. *Trotsky*. Paris : Perrin.

² Makarenko, A. 1939. *Kommunisticeskoe vospitanie i povedenie*. In *La fabrique du soviétique dans les arts et la culture. Construire/déconstruire l'homme nouveau*, ed 2012 L. Kastler and S. Krylosova, 21. Paris : Institut d'Etudes Slaves.

between their convictions and what was expected from them, led them to reconsider more carefully the design of parks. Since landscape architecture was now part of the milieu of the new Soviet citizen, parks of leisure and rest took on new importance as essential places for experimenting with political education and mastering propaganda.

Revolution and landscaping

“The Russian revolutionary enthusiasm, combined with American efficiency, this is the essence of Leninism”³ – thus spoke Stalin. If such a sentence seems more like a slogan than a true guideline for artists in charge of creating soviet facilities, the insistence on spirit, undergirded by US efficiency, seemed likely to promote the creation of new forms, supposed to embody the Revolution. Consequently, the Decree “On the reconstruction of the way of life” signed by the Central Committee in May 1930 discussed the best blueprints to build a socialist way of life in conjunction with the Five-years Plan. First of all the Party organization was supposed to help this movement, and to direct it ideologically. Then, blaming hurried attempts to reconstruct the way of life in one leap, the Decree urged for new rules guiding the construction of workers’ cities near great industrial centers, collective facilities, schools, laundries.

Landscape wasn’t forgotten altogether though: the official text also insisted on the urge to have “a green zone large enough between the residential zone and the productive zone”⁴.

Apparently, landscape was given the same importance of an ideological tool as urbanism and industry. This was an innovation: before the Revolution, creating parks was mostly a private matter in Russia.⁵ Such a document was both mandatory and hesitant: the goals were clearly outlined, but no real conceptual framework was drawn. Indeed, Stalin’s close lieutenant Lazar Kaganovitch appeared skeptical about the hypothesis of a specifically proletarian architecture, denying it a *sui generis* form, advocating instead for a process of struggle, after which will emerge an art expressing “the grandeur of socialist construction”⁶. Soviet architecture was indeed an

³ Stalin, J. 1939. *Les questions du léninisme*. Moscow : State publishing in foreign languages, p.87. My translation from the French version of this book.

⁴ Milioutine, N. 1930. On the reconstruction of the way of life. In *Sotsgorod*. Moscow : Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party.

⁵ The imperial palaces and gardens like Peterhof or Tsarskoie Selo were mostly used by the Romanov family, not open to the public (unlike to Versailles, even in XVII^e century), except for rare special occasions. So these majestic places had only a scarce influence on the creation of public parks in prerevolutionary Russia : few town parks were created before 1917, like the Hermitage Garden in Moscow, opened in 1894. Kolosova, V. 2012. Darstellungen der Gärten und Symbolik der Gartenblumen in russischen Volksliedern vor dem Hintergrund der slavischen Folklore. In *Gartenkultur in Russland*, Centre of Garden Art and Landscape Architecture : pp.25-28.

⁶ Khlevniouk, O. 2001. *Stalin and Kaganovitch. Letters 1931-1936*, Moscow : Rospen, p.269.

insoluble problem, Soviet parks were even more so. Stalin wasn't very explicit about how to create Soviet parks, however several of his comments on some ideological goals could be and were interpreted by architects as tacit directions for their own duties.

According to the General Secretary, the mobilization of youth was "of particular importance after the consolidation of the proletarian dictatorship, in the period of extensive work on culture and the education of the proletariat"⁷. Stalin repeatedly commented on the need for the education of workers, especially the young generations, which became the favorite target for propaganda efforts that tried to control both their thoughts and their free time. In this logic, campaigns against illiteracy, the construction of new libraries, the building of workers' clubs, evening lessons on Marxism are some of the most well-known tools used by the regime to create a socialist way of life. Other urbanism-minded methods such as organizing outdoor readings, initiating open summer theaters in parks or designing a river bank for hosting concerts could also join the arsenal of effective propaganda tools.

These ideological stances required new collective habits and new places. The *subbotnik* or communist 'volunteer Saturday', encouraged by Lenin himself, used the slogan "Let us build a new society!" But it was more of a political projection than a real description of the tasks that should be accomplished in these *subbotnik*⁸. Several city administrations often used that convenient method of a free labor force as a collective *corvée* for cleaning the garbage, or planting trees⁹. As the budgets for urban planning were often underestimated, the *subbotnik* was quite useful for architects in charge of parks. If you couldn't expect from an average man to be an efficient stonemason, you could at least guide him through a simpler task of planting trees or flowers. Besides, ideologically speaking, such exercises in collective planting could be used as an easy and not too demanding way to involve citizens in the construction of a socialist society.

The method was extensively used from the 1930s to the 1960s, helping a number of important soviet cities to build landscaped parks as a counterpart to the extensive industrialization of the country. It was even used in October 1945 in Leningrad for planting trees at the Primorski Victory Park, as a way to involve survivors of the city blockade in the celebration of USSR triumph over Nazi Germany¹⁰. Specific neighborhoods also organized

7 Stalin, J. 1939. *Les questions du léninisme*. Moscow : State publishing in foreign languages.

8 Lenin, V. 1920. From The First Subbotnik On The Moscow-Kazan Railway To The All-Russia May Day Subbotnik, Pervomaïsky Subbotnik, Moscow, *Collected Works*. Progress Publishers, volume 31 : 123-125.

9 Dehaan, H. 2013. *Stalinist City Planning. Professionals, Performance, and Power*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press.

10 Kirschenbaum, L. 2006. *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1945 Myth, Memories, and Monuments*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

collective landscaping and gardening works : for instance, a few years after the end of the Stalin Era, the Soviet trade unions claimed that 350 000 union-members participated in these outdoor activities¹¹.

The Architects involved

At first, modern architects believed that the regime demanded a completely new cultural foundations. Stalin himself claimed that the revolutionary spirit was “an antidote against inertia, routine, conservatism, stagnation of thought, slavish submission to ancient traditions¹².” Such a speech called for breaking with the past and inventing new prospects. Several soviet architects could only approve such a postulate, which supported their own ambitions. Trained for the greater part before the Revolution by talented academic masters, the future Constructivists knew traditional architecture all too well, but their heart and wits pushed them to practice modern theoretical/formal experiments instead.

Constructivism was not a unified movement, being practiced by several distinct architectural associations. But those architects who wanted to invent a new revolutionary civilization shared initially the same desire for structural openness, presenting technological choices as going hand in hand with ideological clarity, flooding the workers life with light and hope. A symbiotic conception linking art with life was supposed to develop a working method “which would make impossible in principle the dualism between social content and form, and which would guarantee us the creation of an integral, unified and holistic architectural system.”¹³ The constructivists thought first that new forms could be achieved by using correctly new materials, and through new modes of construction erasing all previous traditions – in a logic supposed to be coherent with the communist reorganization of society. This ideal of “constructive honesty” consequently became the foundational rule enabling the striving to redesign every human habits. In this great project, architects saw in architecture the most efficient tool for changing the very meaning of cities. The built environment should support the political struggle, gradually transforming the land use in a modern functionalist logic: the revolution was to be accomplished in the daily actions of the inhabitants of collective housings and of the users of industrial facilities. From the point of architecture, a large use of concrete and glass was seen

11 Fedor Potachnikov, F. 1959. *USSR Trade Unions activities in the field of housing and public services*. Moscow : Central council of USSR Trade Unions.

12 Stalin, J. 1939. *Les questions du léninisme*. Moscow : State publishing in foreign languages.

¹³ Guinzburg, M. 1928. Constructivism in architecture. *Sovetskaïa Arhitektura*, N°5. 12-30.

as a correct answer for the task of creating new socialist conditions in Russia. However, as the constructivist soon understood it to their own dismay, this theoretical idea was not that easy to translate into actual architectural practice in a country where glass production was still not barely industrialized,

A competition organized in 1929 for the Magnitogorsk master plan became a battlefield used by different groups of architects to put forward innovative concepts. For instance, the Organization of Contemporary Architects (OSA) proposed a plan – designed by a collective including Mikhail Okhitovitch (1896-1937), Ivan Leonidov (1902-1959), and Mikhail Bartch (1904-1976) – which included a green zone that separated the industrial and the living zones¹⁴. This method was supposed to prevent the propagation of diseases, to encourage leisure, and to increase the air quality. But that separation was not very convincing spatially and functionally, as Nikolai Milioutine (1899-1942) pointed out; therefore he proposed an alternative version synthesizing various competition proposals¹⁵. This plan was supposed to have a larger green zone, and the residential area should have been “entirely surrounded by greenery¹⁶”. These good intentions did not do a good job of hiding an extremely naïve conception of landscaping. They thought they would plant some trees in a picturesque modernized English fashion and that it would be both physically sound and creatively contemporary. But behind Leonidov’s fascinating abstract drawings – done in Moscow – there was actually no practical solution regarding what could be done about greenery in Magnitogorsk’s harsh climate **(as shown in ill.1, the landscape is treated only as a secondary part of the project)**. Even worst, the few trees shown in the documents were unfortunately not enough for creating a green screen able to protect the inhabitants from pollution of the industrial zone¹⁷. Despite its revolutionary enthusiasm, the OSA group showed some of its limits as it failed to adapt its brilliant conceptual frameworks to the complex reality of building a socialist city¹⁸. Only by ignoring reality one could construct an ideological city.

14 So the professionals first discussed the topic, preceding the Central Committee decision next year. A clue showing that the power was following with some late urban debates.

15 Milioutine, N. 1930. *Sotsgorod*. Moscow : Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party.

16 Idem.

17 Gozak, A. Leonidov, A. 1988. *Ivan Leonidov*. London : Academy Editions.

18 For a larger reflexion on Magnitogorsk, Kotkin, S. 1997. *Magnetic Mountain Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley : University of California Press. I also focus on some lesser known aspects of the city first years : Bellat, F. 2015. *Une ville neuve en URSS, Togliatti*. Paris : Parenthèses.

Their project attracted unfair critics, aiming at sidelining these architects – especially Leonidov, who was seen by Arkadi Mordvinov (1896-1964) as a “wrecker¹⁹”. As Mordvinov concluded, in the tone of a great Soviet Inquisitor: “An intensified struggle must be conducted on two fronts: both with utopian invention, and with the stagnant utilitarian attitudes and routine, the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois phenomena and directions in architecture²⁰.” Trained in Constructivist methods, Mordvinov was ambiguously rejecting on the one hand the most inventive aspects of the movement and, on the other hand, the ghost of historicism. However, neither he nor any other critic noticed the lack of effective thinking about urban landscape in the OSA and in Leonidov’s projects for Magnitogorsk.

Landscape was probably the weakest part in the Constructivist general thinking, revealing their unpreparedness to design an alliance between architecture and nature that could be able not only to create a sustainable urban environment, but also that would revolutionize the role of greenery in lifestyles. However, the oversight of the landscape’s role in creating Soviet towns was soon to be of major importance for both the disgraced Constructivists and the architects of a more traditionalist bent.

Indeed, professors like Alekseï Chtchoussev (1873-1949) or Ivan Zholtovski (1867-1959) envisaged jointly updating their works. As a matter of fact the young USSR practiced naturally a dynamic stylistic coexistence, a complex interpenetration of architectural reflexes. A good illustration of this tendency to mix several aesthetic approaches is the end of the 1920s when the contestation of the Constructivist sphere of influence was initiated by the students of the modern pioneers themselves. This context allowed for the survival of Constructivist conceptions where they were not expected. Some architects adapted successfully to the neo-academic aesthetic of the Stalin Era, like Moïse Guinzburg (1892-1946), Nikolai Kolli (1894-1966) or Andreï Burov (1900-1957), who sometimes managed to stay at the forefront of the architectural stage. For all those who did not have such a good reputation, the road to Canossa was even more difficult. These architects tried to find a specialized niche where they could work according to their artistic convictions.

This general reflex of professional adaptation pushed some great Constructivists to become specialists in designing gardens. The design of gardens did not offer the same rationalist *a priori* than that of cinemas for instance, which could on the contrary lead to purely ornamental choices. Yet – and this is the most interesting part of the Soviet approach to the question – the

19 Mordvinov, A. 1930. Leonidovism and the harm it does. *Art to the Masses*, 8-16.

20 Idem.

landscape program allowed paradoxically an unexpectedly syncretistic approach that adeptly turned historical sources into a crucial foundation of modernist projects.

Actually, the ground was already well prepared. Among the theorists and most modern practitioners, many taught the history of parks to their students. In 1929, Nikolai Ladovskii (1881-1941) made his students work on the remodeling of the Gorki Park. In particular, Mikhail Mazmanian's (1899-1971) general analytical plans of the evolution of gardens were born out of this initiative²¹. The visual graphics of this work carry the obvious influence of Leonidov, with its white lines on a black background, and its layout confronting a general plan to analytical study and photomontage. This typical Constructivist approach, however, **was used in order to describe the park of Versailles (as the Ill.2 shows, the drawing try to isolate the main lines of the classical garden, creating a kind of abstraction).** ~~already used much earlier for creating the park of Versailles~~. Mazmanian's project, isolated it may seem at first sight, indicates that in Soviet modern circles the example of Versailles not only wasn't rejected as an obsolete heritage, but also, and more importantly, it was duly studied and used as a theoretical basis for its various Sovietized versions. At the beginning of the 1930s a particular type of infrastructure programs allowed creators working in the Constructivist spirit to formulate modern conceptions while meeting burgeoning neo-academic expectations: stadiums.

A former student of the *Soviet Palladio* Ivan Zholtovski and former assistant of Le Corbusier on the Centrosoyouz building, Nikolai Kolli became an expert on sport facilities. During the 1930s, he worked on several stadiums for Moscow, and was involved notably in the construction of the Stalingrad stadium and its reconstruction after 1945. These projects were quite schizophrenic : their plan and structure were in the best functionalist logic, the façades were almost baroque, and their general layout was a landscape design clearly drawing from the French formal garden. That model was carefully chosen – for instance it enabled a geometric division of area, with large grassed compartments, organized in a hierarchy of spaces, leading to the main stadium in both an effective and majestic relationship with the main stadium. There the abstract geometry of Constructivism and modern functionalism were successfully merged with a Stalin Era neo-academic expression, in which the French classical model was updated with subtlety. With these stadium projects, Kolli managed, not without a certain deftness, to remain faithful to his commitment to both modernity and traditional culture. His project offered a modern aesthetic which nonetheless was able to serve more academic needs of Stalinist propaganda.

Following Kolli's experiments, another former Constructivist, Georgi Vegman (1899-1973), developed in 1939 a prototype for the standard stadium **(the Ill.3 used a bird-eyes view**

21 Khan Magomedov, S. 2011. *Nikolay Ladovsky*. Moscow : Russian Avant-Garde.

in order to show clearly the organization of the garden space in this facility). This project also used the hierarchical spirit of the seventeenth century formal garden, with its symmetry, while the grassy lawns were repurposed into sport areas easily accessible by wooden walkways and adorned at key points with gazebos. The French influence cleverly distorted by Vegman helped to forge a new typology: the classical geometry was indeed useful for creating an imaginative standardized landscaped architecture. Unexpectedly, recreation grounds of *Ancien régime* aristocrats turned into a model for proletarian leisure projects in the USSR. This dialogue between monumentality and functionality convinced other Constructivists that green spaces could provide them with a creative autonomy they no longer had on other projects.

Leonidov : landscaping as aesthetic survival

Seen as the prodigy child of Constructivism – even by academic masters like Chichoussév and Zholtovski – Ivan Leonidov surprised many by remaining a visionary with almost no finished projects under his belt. He was a son of a peasant family and an apprentice of an icon painter; the Revolution offered him new prospects. Acceding to the Vkhoutemas workshops in 1921, Leonidov turned to architecture, notably by working with an older innovator, Aleksandr Vesnin (1883-1959). His radical diploma project in 1927 on the topic of a Lenin Institute brought him fame among Soviet architects. However, in spite of his perfect social biography according to Soviet criteria, he suffered attacks by rival architectural groups, especially from the more politicized young wolves of the VOPRA²². Ideological in their nature, these onslaughts gradually prevented him from teaching. Gradually, he lost all his influence on the Soviet scene, turning into soon a pariah who could create only paper architecture.

Facing this professional ostracism, Leonidov tried to survive, dedicating himself to landscaping projects. In 1932, his proposals for the Hermitage and Tverskoy Boulevard gardens in Moscow used in all appearance a classic vocabulary, albeit significantly reworked **(as the Ill.4 shows, the architect reworked the urban space as an abstract leisure ground)**. He transformed the vegetal exedras into shelters for crystalline compositions with hyperboloid vases using neon tubes to complement plants²³. The whole was supposed to be a “green carpet” helping workers to find some rest in the heart of the city²⁴. Unable to accomplish anything in

22 Organization of Proletarian Architects – see Khan Magomedov, S. 2011. *Ivan Leonidov*. Moscow : Russian Avant-Garde.

23 Idem.

24 Kopp, A. 1975. *Changer la vie, changer la ville*. Paris : 10/18.

Moscow, in 1934 Leonidov joined the team of his friend Moïse Guinzburg, who was then in charge of building spa facilities in Crimea, under the supervision of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry.²⁵ There Leonidov continued his appropriation of classical forms: the Artek project (a children's camp) explicitly quoted the Caprarola Villa Farnese, with its pentagonal plan and its logic of multiple axes, using the topography to place a stadium in the lower parts of the plot, then modeling grass-sloped pyramid which would serve as an amphitheater in the Greek spirit, using ramps to lead to the majestic pentagonal parterre **(in the Ill.5 the artistic intention is drawn like a world map)**. In these palatial plans, the architect incorporated a world map hinted at by plant and rock patterns, envisioned as a geographical exploration tool for young pioneers. Quite naively, Leonidov expected that his project – at least in its decorative parts – could be partially realized by the Komsomol youths. So the children too were supposed to give freely to the State their labor force in a *subbotnik*. This mobilization of youth was aimed at involving the future Soviet citizens in the construction of their own leisure places (under the scrutiny of the Party). From an ideological point of view it was a good way to give responsibility to the youngsters; from the architect's standpoint it was a free labor force able to create step by step his socially conscious project. As a result, from a young age, Soviet citizens were prepared to contribute to the building of a new socialist environment.

In his attempt to appropriate the legacy of Italian or French gardens from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Leonidov was not merely an emulator. He expressed old models through a modern geometrical language, and by adding a landscaped world map, he retained the pedagogical function so typical of Constructivist parks of culture and rest. Actually, the Constructivist idea of the educational function of flowerbeds was used without major changes by the Stalinist neo-academic culture; it was only slightly modified through references to Italian and French classical gardens. Here the creative process had a double effect. First of all, Constructivist gardens were supposed to involve the citizens directly in the shaping of a socialist way of life. Secondly, the modernization of a classic legacy intended to give a larger intellectual scope to the Soviet people, presenting them as the rightful heirs of a world heritage. Unfortunately, these projects were, for the most part, too ambitious and disconnected from the practical realities of the USSR, and probably already out of fashion ideologically, and, as a result, they were confined to private offices and architecture museums as paper models, never to see the light of day.

25 Khan Magomedov, S. 2011. *Ivan Leonidov*. Moscow : Russian Avant-Garde.

Leonidov did work on a garden stair in Guinzburg's sanatorium project in Kislovodsk (Russia's North Caucasus). Initially Guinzburg had entrusted this secondary element to Viktor Kalinine (1906-?), whose design envisioned a somewhat modernized structure used in Art Deco French gardens. Leonidov's alternative proposal made the most out of the landscape's qualities: the architectural landscape was conceived in such a way as to take advantage of the slope of the hill. Small amphitheaters were installed where the height difference was most important and flatter sections were used to create small squares decorated with benches and fountains. Everything was designed in imaginative forms blending Constructivist geometry with classical inspirations, with modest equipment enabling sport and cultural outdoor activities. Leonidov's project at Kislovodsk functioned as an effective tool for outdoor gatherings, like poetry recitals or theatric performances. Indeed, it was meant to overcome the "cultural backwardness"²⁶ denounced by Stalin, offering an adequate location for "meeting the cultural needs of the workers"²⁷, as the same Stalin advocated. An outcast of the Stalinist society, Leonidov at the same time was ultimately and paradoxically useful to the state's propaganda – as a creator of landscapes allowing "an easy and cultured life"²⁸.

Gorki Park : from Constructivist projects to the Stalinist garden

Following Leonidov's example, other leading moderns envisaged the drawing of parks as a way to keep Constructivist conceptions afloat. Such was the case of Moïse Guinzburg and Konstantin Melnikov (1890-1974) in their projects for Gorki Park. This site had a famous history as a place of architectural experiment.²⁹ Starting in 1922, a competition had been organized to accommodate the All-Russia Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition in the park. The entries were submitted mostly by pre-revolutionary authors³⁰. In the end, Zholtovski's project was selected, and put into motion in 1923. The first general layout and the pavilions were the result of Zholtovski's cooperation with Viktor Kokorin (1886-1959) and Nikolai Kolli. The project was a version of a classic model with a number of Constructivist features; the hierarchy of the classic

26 Stalin, J. 1939. *Les questions du léninisme*, Moscow : State publishing in foreign languages.

27 Idem.

28 Idem.

29 Evstratova, M. Koluzakov, S. 2012. *Temporary structures in Gorky Park : from Melnikov to Ban*. Moscow : Garage.

30 Such Ivan Fomine (1872-1936), Vladimir Chtchouko (1878-1939), Ivan Zholtovski, Nikolai Lanceray (1879-1942), even if Ilya Golossov (1883-1945) sent a proposal more marked by the new experimental spirit.

flowerbed grid was offset by a more inventive formal purism. Zholtovski's plan created a central axis around which were organized both the pavilions and the plantations, but its architectural approach favored a semi-opened court, closing off potential space. As Chtchoussev pointed out: "the contrived nature of the central part of the parterre constrains, with its cold breakdown, the further development of the exhibition³¹." The focus on the use of space was thus becoming a major point in Soviet architecture : old devices, more adapted to closed palaces or gardens, were no longer sufficient. More open spatial structures had to be created, in order to allow for the effective organization of people's activities in the park.

The first of its kind, Gorky Park sparked important debates on how to tie new approaches in the classic experience. New projects – the Tobacco pavilion by Melnikov's and the Milk pavilion by Georgi Goltz (1893-1946) – implemented experimental styles of architecture in a classic landscaped weft. This strange admixture reached its double outcome: it produced majestic impact on every visitor, designed as it was as an aristocratic French park, while boasting Soviet economic achievements through the modern dynamism of the pavilions. Far from being an artistic somersault, the Soviet revival of organizational principles used in the French gardening style was to the contrary useful for highlighting the modernism of the pavilions, with their huge advertisements or slogans that reflected the new life and products of the Soviet society.

This synthetic characteristic of the place still guided the later projects in the 1931 competition for the remodeling of the park but a new social and political context introduced some major differences. The previous competition took place in 1922, when Constructivism was rising to its prominence; in 1931 Constructivism was already being actively marginalized. The 1931 competition resulted in the considerable change of scale of the park: it was supposed to include now the Krinski bridge to the Lenin's Hills, linking both banks of the Loujniki meander of the Moskva river. Despite this monumental scale of the plan, Guinzburg still envisioned the space with a functionalist logic in mind: following his previous works of the 1920s on disurbanism, he forefronted separate zones of sport and leisure activities without a visible hierarchical organization of the territory.³² The architect remained loyal to the Constructivist ideal of a place modeled by abstract geometry, which was seen as the best way to provide New Soviet Man with modern spatial constructions for sport, leisure and outdoors trips.

31 Alekseï Chtchoussev, A. 1923. (without title). In *Architecture. Monthly newsletter of the Moscow Architectural Society*, n°1-2. 32-34.

32 Kopp, A. 1975. *Changer la vie, changer la ville*. Paris : 10/18.

Other projects by Vitali Dolganov (1901-1969) **(the Ill. 6 express the search for a geometric way to handle the urban landscape)** or Liubov Zaleskaïa (1906-1979) were based on a similar logic, although they shyly tried to insert classic flowerbeds along interrupted axes. These projects showed how Constructivists struggled to integrate this syncretistic logic; it were the architects who adapted themselves to the neo-academic standards who were able to provide such works more easily. Paradoxically, it was Melnikov who offered one of the most ambitious projects **(the Ill.7 used the same method as previously shown)**. Because of his Soviet pavilion built for a 1925 Paris exhibit or his workers' clubs, Melnikov **became** ~~was (and is) still considered as~~ one of the great names of Constructivism, yet his proposal for Gorki Park attempted at synthesis, a trend that could be traced in several of his projects (notably the classicist staircases of the Kaoutchouk club in 1927 or his project for the Palace of the Soviets Competition). The landscape project allowed him to work out his syncretic approach before his major project for the Narkomtiazprom in 1934. Using the alluvial meander under Lenin's Hills, Melnikov envisioned a monumental half-circular kneecap, while the outside curve was pinked like a gigantic mechanical wheel, forming what resembled landscaped flutes. In this majestic armature, similar to the Versailles hierarchical organization of space, Melnikov placed a number of landscaped facilities for leisure and rest. Fountains and basins were also conceived according to the synthetic logic: historical forms were expressed in a minimalist geometrical language. Melnikov's version of Gorki Park was a syncretistic landscaped experiment, placed somewhere in between an assertion of the new Soviet man and an assimilation of classic sources. The legacy of Versailles's was helpful for adding some glamor to industrial symbolism. With this bold reference, Melnikov originated a genre in which classical heritage served as a strong framework for Soviet ideology. He created a remarkable precedent, which his ambitious colleagues did not neglect.

The fact that the ideas proposed by Guinzburg and his fellow Constructivists were not adopted and that Melnikov was removed from his post were clear signs of their loss of influence. Finally, in 1934, the onus was on Aleksandr Vlasov (1900-1962) to restructure the site **(as the Ill. 8 +9 show, the projects are becoming more ambitious, summoning the world heritage to serve the new aspirations for grandeur in the USSR)**. Vlasov was awarded a diploma in 1928 at the Moscow Civil Institute of Engineers and had thus started his career with a modern formation. His visionary project for the Palace of the Soviets showcased his perfect assimilation of the Constructivist principles. However, Vlasov was, along with Karo Alabian (1897-1959), Arkadi Mordvinov, and Mikhail Mazmanyán, among the "young wolves" who knew how to prove their ideological dedication to the Party. At the same time, these "young wolves" infiltrated little by little professional groups such as the VOPRA and especially specialized

publications like *Sovetskaia Arkhitektura*. Thanks to his work on Gorki Park, Vlasov managed to reach the first circle of Stalinist builders. On this occasion, he benefited from the support of the venerable Zholtovski, who underlined specifically Vlasov's interest for the architecture of gardens, thereby helping him obtain the post of the chief architect of Gorki Park³³. Zholtovski saw in Vlasov an architect who was equally influenced by modernity and by a wish to master the classic legacy and, as such, he recommended him for the job, not without afterthoughts though. In 1935 Vlasov also worked on a large project for the Moskva meander, redesigning it with alleys inspired by Le Nôtre's work in Versailles and Chantilly. Vlasov intended to create a large artificial harbor with artificial islands forming a huge world map. The Constructivist sense of social pedagogy was alive and strong in the project, but it was infused now with a Stalinist purpose: a lesson of geography was blended with a classical sense of greatness. The Second World War interrupted the realization of the project; it was never to be finished in its original grandiose form; after 1945, Vlasov remodeled the site in a less extravagant way, emphasizing the Versailles-like atmosphere in the park, creating in the end a subtle blend of former Constructivist elements with Sovietized details of the Tuileries-like garden. With Gorki Park, Vlasov achieved one of the best Soviet landscape syntheses: as a piece of art, the park stands at the crossroads between Constructivist experiments and a Sovietized refashioning of a Le Nôtre Versailles legacy (**III.10**).

Korjev, or the double face of gardens

Vlasov's case was far from being isolated. Mikhail Korjev (1897-1984) was another architect who succeeded in the same game. Korjev was one of Nikolai Ladowski's best students; already his coursework showed a very promising creator in-the-making. Between 1924 and 1927, he collaborated with Ladowski's on the Red Stadium project along the slopes of Lenin's Hills. During the 1930s, he produced many plans and blowprints; some of them were even partially realized (like the Ismailovski and Lefortovo Moscow parks). His early works combined a very Constructivist sense of pedagogy with a targeted use of the spatial rigor of the classical French garden. Indeed, as Leonidov or Vlasov, Korjev also designed parterres in the form of world maps (the idea was quite popular in the USSR as it alluded to the global nature of the Revolution). Flowerbeds were lined up with banners, posters and slogans from the arsenal of Marxist-Leninist propaganda (**in the III.11 the architect is attempting a last use of modern**

33 Evstratova, M. Koluzakov, S. 2012. *Temporary structures in Gorky Park : from Melnikov to Ban*. Moscow : Garage.

landscape ideas). Korjev's clever fusion of propaganda with Constructivist touches framed as modernized classicism was a useful tool for transforming the garden into an implicitly political place.

After the World War Two, Korjev entered the competition for the restoration and extension of an eighteenth century historical park at Kouskovo (near Moscow ; **the magnificent Ill.12 shows the progress of the architect in his creative adaptation of the XVII^e century design methods**), but his masterpiece was his design for the Moscow State Lomonossov University garden (**in the Ill.13 this use of the French formal garden is now perfectly obvious**). At Kouskovo, Korjev's proposal was certainly more classic-like, but it did tweaked the inherited formal frames, using channels in an imaginative way and playing with lines of force and geometric ornaments which remained subtly influenced by Constructivism. Paradoxically, his work for the University garden used even fewer of these modern traits. Instead, as if magnifying this regime's accomplishments, the design asked for a place that would rely mostly on classical legacy.

These two gardens are perfect examples of the cultural ambiguity of Stalin's era. According to Stalin, it was "necessary to fight the tendency to be confined in the strictly national framework³⁴." What Korjev had created can be seen as a perfect illustration of this policy: in the context of bloated post-war chauvinism, the University garden transformed the environment into a peculiar synthesis of American skyscrapers and the Versailles park (**Ill. 14+15**). Korjev gave the USSR a garden that blended the world's two cultural symbols—for the purpose of the Soviet regime. Given its Versailles feel, Korjev's garden was a good answer to Stalin's insistence on the worldly importance of the Revolution. As Stalin put it, "The revolution is a radical shift in the way of life and traditions, in the culture and ideology of the exploited masses worldwide. This is the reason why the October Revolution is a revolution of international and even world order³⁵." Despite its apparent anachronism, Korjev wove together tradition and modernity, the national and the international, giving the garden the global dimension the General Secretary requested. Using fragments of royal past and modernity, the USSR was inventing itself as a synthesis of the world's cultures.

This process was quite similar to the mannerist aesthetic of the Renaissance, where "[c]ultural awareness of the time presents itself as both revolutionary and traditionalist, and it

34 Stalin, J. 1939. *Les questions du léninisme*. Moscow : State publishing in foreign languages.

35Idem.

simultaneously works to isolate but to unify existing artistic trends³⁶.” If Stalin's speech was characterized by disjuncture between words and real acts, the work of architects like Korjev managed to implement with undeniable subtlety the targets set by ideology. The Renaissance ideal of synthesis found in the Stalinist regime an unexpected heir, where even landscape was used to educate people in matters of politics. Indeed, gardens are not innocent places, far from it. Versailles in Louis XIV's France ; Lomonosov University in Stalin's USSR, these two parks fulfill the same function: shaping nature to further a political agenda. Korjev's projects provided an excellent instrument for the state's propaganda, which started paying more attention to the Soviet citizen as a participant in the greatness of Stalin's state.

Aside from his realized works or unrealized projects, Korjev had a major role in formalizing the Soviet approach to landscape. In 1940, he published a textbook that oscillated between a reminder of Constructivist approaches and an assimilation of processes of the formal garden, while staying carefully descriptive so as to avoid ideological content.³⁷ After destalinization, Liubov Zaleskaïa, a close colleague of Korjev, had more freedom to write on the topic. Her 1964 book *Lessons on landscape architecture* was a brilliant survey of worldwide landscape practices, in which Soviet Constructivism was presented as an example of aesthetic movements of the past that contributed to the production of the second Soviet modernity³⁸. Constructivism became an heritage: its social theories were then long forgotten, but its inventive forms and shapes continued to project long and vivid shadows.

Leningrad : from Constructivism to resurrection of classicism

Relatively distant from Moscow's debates, Leningrad was not reduced to imitation or to apathy, in part because of its very different urban context. The former capital may have lost to Moscow its best prerevolutionary architects, such as Vladimir Chtchouko and Ivan Fomine, but that only gave the city more latitude for developing its own version of modernity.

New projects for Leningrad preserved some Constructivist features over the 1930s. A competition for the Krestovski stadium organized in 1933 was a good example of this trend.³⁹ Most submissions were still Constructivist in spirit, using the Krestovski peninsula as a vast open

36 Panofsky, E. 1983. *Idea*. Paris : Gallimard.

37 Korjev, M. 1940. *Architecture of parks*. Moscow : State publishings for architecture.

38 Zaleskaïa, L. 1964. *Lessons on landscape architecture*. Moscow : State publishings for construction.

39 Khan Magomedov, S. 2009. Aleksandr Nikolski. Moscow : Tvortsi Avangard.

space for sport activities.⁴⁰ For instance, a project by unidentified authors under the motto of TsPKO – probably students of the Leningrad Academy of Architecture – imaginatively used the island form to rebuild the embankments like a fortress of the classic age, with moats and triangular curtain walls in the spirit of the French military engineer Vauban. This project probably tried to create a modern Soviet equivalent of the first general plan of Saint-Petersburg designed in 1717 by Jean-Baptiste Le Blond. More simply, Evgueni Katonine (1889-1984) tried to highlight in his proposal the flatness of the peninsula with a design that would enable wide vistas across the landscape, which in turn afforded sport facilities a view on the Neva's mouth or on the Gulf of Finland.

None of the projects were considered satisfactory, and the jury was finally commissioned Aleksandr Nikolski (1884-1953) for building the stadium. Nikolski's work on the Krestovski stadium between 1934 and 1941 still showed a large formal influence of Constructivism, however, the spatial conception was then conceived in a spirit of grandeur that could easily compete with Versailles. The buildings could still be labelled Constructivist, due to their crystalline volumes, but the general urban composition glorified the central axis, turning the Soviet stadium into what the castle was to the classic formal garden. The Krestovski stadium excelled in syncretism: the play on the major axis was inherited from the classic age; the picturesque layout of the park had the English flavor, and there were even numerous traces of Constructivism in architectural details. Majestic and strangeness, the project succeeded in giving prominence to this remarkable site.

Unlike Nikolski who adapted himself to neo-academicism only with mixed results, Nikolaï Baranov (1909-1989) had an easier time with appropriating the formal landscape model for modern needs. Trained in the pioneer atmosphere of Constructivism, Baranov was typical of the 1930s arrivistes who condemned Constructivism for promoting an aesthetic foreign to the Soviet mentality. Nevertheless, from 1944 onwards, Baranov furthered Nikolski's vision on landscape as a foundation for its own works.⁴¹ The Park Pobeda (Victory Park) in Leningrad, supervised by Baranov, combined the axial composition of hierarchical French-style landscape elements with subsections of the picturesque English-style garden. Baranov also used flowerbeds shaped as geometrical floral crystallizations, which echoed the experiments of French modern gardens of the 1920-1930s as well as the Constructivist tendency of the 1920s. The celebration of the victory was closely linked with the ideas of leisure and rest that were articulated by

40 Luntz, L. 1934. *Parks of culture and rest*. Leningrad : Gostroizdat.

41 Kirschenbaum, L. 2006. *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1945 Myth, Memories, and Monuments*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Constructivists two decades earlier. An example of syncretism of sorts, this Soviet variant of landscape style was not a simple resurrection of classicism, but an active revision of several aesthetic models – a heterogeneous architectural construction created to better serve a triumphant Soviet Union.

Gardens of the second Soviet modernity

This Soviet variant of the French-style formal garden, planted on the ruins of Constructivism and cobbled together by Stalinist neo-academicists did not end its history during the architectural destalinization in 1954. Trained under the aegis of neo-academicism, such architects as Iakov Bielopolski (1916-1993), Félix Novikov (1927-), Sergueï Speranski (1914-1983), Anatoli Polyanski (1928-1993), or Evgueni Rozanov (1925-2006) had the opportunity to design monumental ensembles that preserved traces of classic compositions while embodying simultaneously a new approach to the legacy of Constructivism.

With the Memorial of the Stalingrad battle, Bielopolski envisioned a gigantic commemorative field: a park based on a main axis, a basin that mixed geometric abstraction and a lingering neo-academic monumentality, an antechamber to the sanctuary with the flame and super-human statue of victory. The ensemble was a synthetic design that finally demonstrated the multiple sources of the second Soviet modernity. Similarly, the Palace of Pioneers in Moscow, co-authored by Novikov and Igor Pokrovski in 1962, used the diagonal axis of access to dynamically introduce a vast esplanade, which skillfully alternated tiled floor with grass strips in a zebra-stripe fashion. The building paid tribute to Constructivist forms, but it was also influenced by the latest tendencies in landscape design in America (e.g. as the work of Roberto Burle Marx in Brazilia).

In these (and many other) projects, the Constructivist legacy was used as an important source, or to put it slightly differently: the Constructivist landscape experience, or at least the version of it transformed by the pressure of the Stalinist neo-academicism, had a long-lasting posterity, being used as a model for the essential parts of parks in the USSR until the collapse of the country itself.

Conclusion

Seemingly limited in its scope, the landscape projects described in this essay were a significant tool in shaping the life of New Soviet man: paths, parterres and fountains became a

crucial part of his leisure. In turn, at the time when Stalinist neo-academicism dominated aesthetic canons and urban policies, for marginalized Constructivist architects, designing socialist parks constituted one of the rare realms where they could express their artistic vision and their professional skills. All key representatives of the Soviet modernity contributed to the debate or to the landscaped realizations of the Stalinist era. Guinzburg was among the first to propose a large-scale Constructivist project for Gorki Park. Melnikov also made proposals that he tried to invent a Stalinist version of the French classical garden. Melnikov's approach turned out to be particularly seminal and was duly mulled over by Vlasov, whose own work on Gorki Park was a combination of classical tradition and Soviet modernity. This conjunction of Constructivist traces with a classic heritage was carried out to perfection by Korjev, from his projects of the 1930s until his masterful work on the gardens of the Lomonossov University during the 1950s. As for Leonidov, who was ostracized by his colleagues, he found a refuge in gardens which guaranteed him a minimal creative presence, albeit temporarily, and allowed him to see at least one of his contributions materialized.

In a way, the landscape program gave Constructivists a chance not only for their aesthetic survival, but also for their suitable presence in the Soviet architectural debate. Landscape architecture presented an articulation of modern principles with a subtle questioning of traditional forms, linking the contemporary creation with a renewal of a historic legacy. The abstract geometry of the Le Nôtre gardening school was seen by Constructivist architects as a source of inspiration for bringing together the past and the future. Strangely enough, it was the Sun King gardener who became a role model in the USSR. Quoting Versailles was seen then as a way to satisfy the need for magnificence in Stalin's USSR (III.16). But under this stylistic appearance, the socialist content was not entirely forgotten – the places still retained their pedagogical function and could be used for leisure, sports or political lectures. With its organized greenery, paths, flowerbeds, and fountains, socialist parks and gardens remained a distinguished playground for New Soviet man and a perfect scene for displaying the regime's accomplishments. Through their gardens, architects were still given a chance to experiment and to change the meaning of places. In doing so, they invented a daring aesthetic afterlife for Constructivism, a historically unique conceptual and political metamorphosis.

Illustrations

1. Ivan Leonidov, project for Magnitogorsk, 1929
2. Mikhail Mazmanyant, analytical study of Versailles park, 1929
3. Georgi Vegman, project of standard stadium, 1939
4. Ivan Leonidov, project for the Hermitage gardens, Moscow, 1932
5. Ivan Leonidov, project for an Artek in Crimea, 1934

6. Vitali Dolganov, project for Gorki Park, Moscow, 1931
7. Konstantin Melnikov, project for Gorki Park, Moscow, 1931
8. Aleksandr Vlasov, project for Gorki Park, Moscow, 1934-1937 (MUAR, Moscow)
9. Idem
10. Aleksandr Vlasov, fountain in Gorki Park, Moscow, 1937 (photo by the author)
11. Mikhaïl Korjev, project for a garden, circa 1930 (MUAR, Moscow)
12. Mikhaïl Korjev, project for the restoration of Kouskovo gardens, Moscow, 1946 (MUAR, Moscow)
13. Mikhaïl Korjev, project for the gardens of Lomonossov University, Moscow, 1948 (MUAR, Moscow)
14. Mikhaïl Korjev, gardens of Lomonossov University, Moscow, 1948-1952 (photo by the author)
15. Idem
16. Under the direction of Viktor Andreev and Georgi Zakharov, Fountain of the Friendship of People, VDNKh, Moscow, 1953 (photo by the author)