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Working Towards the Centre: Leader Cults and Spatial Politics in Pre-war Stalinism

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The Soviet Union of the 1930s saw the emergence of a new culture. Stalin's 'building of Socialism' not only meant the radical political and economic transformation of the country. The dawn of the new era also manifested itself in the fundamental reshaping of culture. Stalin's cultural revolution was not a 'great retreat' but rather an attempt to realise the utopian vision of the new socialist person and to define the new aesthetics of a brave new world. It was less a time of 'war on the dreamers' than a period of new dream weavers who reinvented culture, and by this the Soviet Union.¹

The most emblematic cultural expression of this time was the ubiquitous leader cults. The leaders were lauded as assistants of the 'birth pangs of Socialist culture'² and were praised as the fathers of all change. Cult production in the 1930s mainly orientated towards Stalin: he was at the centre of public praise and expressions of emotionality. But Stalin was by no means the only object of veneration. His 'dearest comrades' and 'close friends' always stood next to him in such public worship and on the regional level it was the local representatives who built up a cult of the lesser leaders. As even factory directors had themselves lauded by their workers, Stakhanovites were portrayed as guiding figures, and the production of art and literature built on the narrative of the spiritual leadership of outstanding artists, it is fair to say that leader cults were an overall mode of communication in the 1930s. Worshipping the leader was at the core of the ethic and aesthetic of the new emerging culture.³

In these representations leaders figured as the 'unmoved movers' of the fundamental transformation that the country and its culture underwent in those years.⁴ They were depicted as the source of all change, as leaders who could reshape vast landscapes with a pencil's sketch on a drawing board.⁵ In this staging the leaders occupied the centres of authority and represented the eye of the cyclone: While everything was tempestuously moving the leaders stayed motionless. The whole country was twisted in circles around them. In the official Soviet cosmos the leaders occupied the centre

of gravity, and by this embodied the core place within a Soviet spatial hierarchy.⁶

Their privileged position in the official mental map was ensured by an active spatial politics conducted by the Stalinist party-state.⁷ A set of techniques and mass media tried to establish a new order of space as part and parcel of the reconstructed Soviet culture of the 1930s. It was a time of general centre-building when new Soviet centres had to be marked, leaving an older pre-Revolutionary hierarchy of space behind. City planning and mass festivals were powerful tools of this spatial politics as they visualised the redefinition of space, territorialised the Soviet new centre and placed the leaders in this newly created space. Just like leader cults they were part of the Stalinist 'synthesis of arts' that expressed the emergence of a new era.⁸ They were intertwined in many ways and permanently interacted, enforcing each other but also conflicting to some extent. These different media shared the same orientation towards a new centre and expressed a Stalinist notion of centrality.

In the 1930s a general culture of centre-orientation was predominant not only in spatial dimension but also in an abstract ubiquitous fixation towards a centre of authority in all cultural fields. In Stalin's times official culture was not only 'working towards the leader' but it also worked towards the centre as a space and a notion.⁹ In the 1930s regional elites copied Moscow's efforts to restructure the order of space and fix it on new Soviet centres. They actively participated in the invention of a new culture and proved to be quite creative and self-referential. As they developed leader cults of their own and a focus on the local centre they contested Moscow's monopoly of authority. Taking a closer look at the regional landscapes – Voronezh and Novosibirsk in this chapter – thus reveals much about the tricky nature of centre-building in the Soviet Union.

Building utopia: the era of 'General Reconstruction Plans'

The 1930s were a period when *utopia* was to be territorialised and what had been *no-space* before was fixed on the spot: in official discourse the 'building of Socialism' made the Soviet Union the place on earth where the bright future of mankind dawned. The birth of a new culture and the new person took place on Soviet territory. Architecture and city planning were prominent media of the regime's self-representation and its vision of the future in that time. As a true Socialist Realist artefact, monumental architecture and the town's topographical reconstruction represented the better tomorrow in the present and allowed a first glance at how beautiful Socialism would be.¹⁰

The socialist city (*sotsialisticheskii gorod* – *sotsgorod*) – an older vision of socialist architects and city planners – was now finally supposed to be realised under Stalin's regime. But as Politburo and other party members engaged in city-building, the vision of what a 'socialist city' was to look like

changed fundamentally. The era of the General Reconstruction Plans saw a strict spatial orientation towards a new centre that was capable of representing the extraordinary quality of Stalin's reign.¹¹

The reshaping of Moscow is the most famous case of the country's reconstruction. Investment was poured into reconstructing the infrastructure and economy of the capital, symbolised most clearly by the construction of the Metro and the Moscow-Volga Canal.¹² Varying projects culminated in the General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow that was approved in a final version in 1935. Political leaders like Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich were portrayed as the master minds behind Moscow's reconstruction. They were displayed as the source of all change and acted as Soviet Hausmanns, cutting new avenues through the city's ground-map and tearing down historical buildings that did not match with their new aesthetics. But the power elite's aesthetics of style and spatial order differed fundamentally from older avant-garde visions of the 'socialist city'. All concepts of de-urbanisation, not to mention the anti-urbanist projects, were abandoned in favour of a strict centre-building that built on the traditional radial structure of Moscow but orientated a system of concentric circles and aisles towards the newly defined centre. This core spot of the political and symbolic order was to be marked by the monumental Palace of the Soviets that was projected but never built.¹³

No doubt, Moscow underwent fundamental reconstruction. But in comparison with provincial cities that mushroomed during the first Five Year Plans it was certainly not the most radical change in urban topography. The General Plan of Moscow had rejected radical models of reshaping the city's ground-map and approved a change that compromised with the traditions of spatial order. By contrast, in towns like Voronezh and Novosibirsk the city's body was resculptured in a much more radical and iconoclastic fashion.

During the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) 1921–28 local officials in Voronezh mainly tried to sovietise the pre-revolutionary heritage of space. They erected a small monument for the 'Victims of the White Terror', ornamented the facades of traditional official buildings with Soviet symbols and rebaptised older houses with revolutionary names.¹⁴ All in all the changes were not substantial, they did not aim at redrawing the whole city's ground-map.

This changed fundamentally in the 1930s. Now, Voronezh officials invested much more resources to relocate the city's centre. They created a new Soviet Voronezh with a new spatial hierarchy. The General Plan of Voronezh that was worked out by local city planners and economists in 1931–32 chose the somewhat remote *Starokonnaya ploshchad'* (Old horse square) as the future main square. The project was accepted by Moscow and by the local authorities in a final version in 1935, and within two years the architectural landscape of Voronezh was changed fundamentally. The new

buildings of the district party and Soviet Executive Committee were erected by 1937. Soon, the city's opera and ballet theatre was to follow. A look at the city's map in 1936 in contrast to the ones of 1903 or 1910 demonstrates the fundamental spatial renovation Voronezh had undergone within one decade: the nodal point of the urban infrastructure was now located at the old *Starokonnaya ploshchad'*, a place that had been at the former periphery of the town. In 1937 it was renamed as *Ploshchad' 20i-letiya Oktyabrya* (Square of the 20th Anniversary of October) and in 1940 a Lenin monument was unveiled. Name and monument equipped the square with the symbolic capital of one of the most sacred Soviet symbols.

One can spot a very similar development in Novosibirsk, even though basic conditions and prerequisites were quite different from those in Voronezh. Novo-Nikolaevsk/ Novosibirsk, as a bigger town, was very much a post-revolutionary product. The capital of Western Siberia was one of those boomtowns that mushroomed in the Soviet Union during the first Five Year Plan. Before 1917, no traditional centre had been established in Novo-Nikolaevsk. The main buildings of the railway management and the nearby station, the most important cathedral and the corpus of the city's representatives were scattered throughout the city. Therefore, there was no centre that the Bolsheviks needed to take over after the seizure of power. A 'Lenin-house' was built in 1925 on the traditional main avenue – the *Krasnyi Prospekt* (Red Boulevard) – but the first Lenin monument was erected in 1927 on the *Barnaul'skaya ulitsa* closer to the railway station and quite distant from the main boulevard. Until the end of the 1920s Novosibirsk was still lacking a clearly defined centre.¹⁵

The 1930s brought about a fundamental change in Novosibirsk just as in Voronezh. Now, the city planning of the General Reconstruction Plan aimed at fixing the centre, and 'virgin' territory was chosen to build this central square of the rapidly growing city. As in Voronezh, the city's former market place suited for the new sacred centre of Soviet Novosibirsk. The vast space of the *Bazarnaya ploshchad'* (Market Square) was chosen for the construction of a huge opera house, which started in 1931. The centrality of the square was even more emphasised by the opening of the Stalin Park of Culture and Rest that was located some distance up the main avenue and the new theatre building '*Krasnyi fakel*' (Red Torch) closer to the railway station. Now, the theatre and the railway station, the district's administrative building and the recreational park created a radial around the *Bazarnaya ploshchad'*. Toponymical change also expressed and enforced this new quality as the market square was re-baptised Stalin Square in 1935.¹⁶

A comparison of the city's maps of 1919, 1928 and 1935 shows the same spatial renovation of Novosibirsk as in Voronezh. The town's ground-map and the main buildings were now orientated towards a new renamed central square. So, a similar tendency can be observed in Novosibirsk and Voronezh for the 1930s. Spatial policy of that time reached out to so far underdevel-

oped areas. The new era that was dawning was in need of blank territories to draw the new outlines of the 'Socialist city' to come. It distanced itself from the past – both pre- and early post-revolutionary times – and aimed at creating something completely new. In the provincial towns of Voronezh and Novosibirsk spatial politics created a new urban topography in an even bolder iconoclasm than in Moscow. But it was common to all towns of the Soviet Union that city planning in the era of 'General Reconstruction Plans' was working towards a new Soviet centre.

Creating ceremonial landscapes: 'ornaments of the masses'¹⁷

Reshaping Moscow, Voronezh, Novosibirsk and other cities in the Soviet Union was not only the result of the architectural changes initiated by the General Plans. The relocation of the city's centre, which was the most important spatial renovation of the period, needed other media if it wanted to inscribe itself into the mental map of the town's inhabitants. In order to endow public space with new meaning the Bolsheviks invested much effort in crafting a festive 'ornament of the masses'.¹⁸ In the clear hierarchy of regions and cities in the USSR, the reconstruction of regional centres was intended to bolster municipal pride. The ability of regional centres to put on impressive festive displays and to outdo their rivals served to foster local identity.

Mass festivals gained importance in mapping out the new topography of the town since, in times of tight budgets, resources for monuments or other forms of architectural representation were rather limited. Changing the topography of a city was an expensive and slow undertaking. Mass celebrations were easier and cheaper to organise. The reconstruction of the town's landscape was accompanied by the renovation of ceremonial space. Soviet ceremonial choreography witnessed a similar development as city planning in the two post-revolutionary decades. While the 1920s saw a period of irritation about the nature and the place of a festive centre, the 1930s were dominated by the notion that celebrations needed to have *one* centre and by the general agreement about where this centre was supposed to be located. There had been a few years of experiment in the early post-revolutionary period, when it was discussed whether Soviet festivals should have a central point at all (since the masses were supposedly demonstrating for and to themselves only), different stages were equally evaluated and the leadership commuted between various places of symbolic action.

At the end of the NEP official festival, experts articulated harsh criticism of this plurality and de-centrality of Soviet holidays.¹⁹ In the time of general plans they also called for a centrally organised and controlled 'standardised ceremonial plan' that would give the festival a uniform character. And they called for a strict centre-building of the choreography focusing on the central *meeting* and the reviewing stand with the leaders of the party-state.

But it was not until 1932 that the debate about the orientation of Soviet celebrations towards a single centre was ended. During the violent clashes of the Culture Revolution the Soviet regime's self-definition developed only in forms of a counter-subject and in a self-perception of being isolated within society's backwardness and hostility.²⁰ It focused on its political and cultural enemies and became self-aware mainly in contrast to cultural antagonisms, for example with regard to the campaign against religion. But such a strong reference towards the enemy hindered the coming to terms with what the vision of socialism should be. The 1930s saw the destruction of church buildings and of other monuments deemed incompatible with the new order.²¹ It was a time more of destruction and denial of cultural alternatives than a period of agreement on Soviet cultural standards. The heated debates in all kinds of political and cultural fields, the general culture of harsh criticism and the lack of an overall accepted source of authority during the years of the Great Break illustrated the Bolshevik's insecurity about the centre. This also holds true for the regimes' celebrations that were to a large degree 'ritual of the counter-faith'.²² During the Great Break no consensus was reached on how a Soviet ceremonial space should be created and where the centre of it could be fixed. The polemical debates on the nature of Soviet ceremonies only ended when a new 'positivism' and public praise of the 'achievements' of socialism-building was canonised from above in 1935 and a satisfaction with the present was made obligatory.

The 1930s also saw a fundamental break with the ceremonial choreography of the first post-revolutionary decade. A closer look at the ceremonial choreography in Voronezh reveals some of this new spatial order of Soviet festivals and shows how it interacted with the town's architectural renovation during these years. In the mid-1930s the new central point of Soviet festivals in Voronezh was marked by the *Starokonnaya ploshchad'*. Columns of demonstrators from the town's districts approached the square from different directions, drawing a star-like marching order on the town's map. They met on the new central square, marching past the reviewing stand that was set up for the local leadership.

The festive choreography also included the construction site of the new Voronezh to display the 'building of Socialism' as a work in progress. The marching order included these objects in the cartography of Soviet festivals and connected the nodal points of a still wide-meshed net of Soviet achievements in the city's horizontal landscape. Celebrations referred to architecture, but architecture as well took festive arrangements into account: the main avenue leading to the future central square was built especially wide to allow impressive masses of demonstrators to enter the place synchronically. Soviet ceremonial processions and city planning jointly reinforced the new centre-building.

But the festivals' choreography and the redefinition of the town's landscape also corresponded in other ways. In the vertical dimension Soviet fes-

tival decoration aimed to enforce the bridging of still isolated symbols of the new era: buildings along the marching routes were decorated with banners, slogans, illuminations and portraits of the leaders. Festival organisers attempted to create ceremonially privileged areas and festive boulevards. Facades of Soviet core symbols and the leaders' faces along these streets covered the older building structure, and all traces of ancient Voronezh were supposed to be eliminated, so that columns ideally would move in a fully Sovietised space.²³

To create a ceremonial space of extraordinary quality, the everyday and profane needed to be repressed. Streets were collectively cleaned before the holidays, flowers were planted and personal belongings on balconies along the parades' paths, like clotheslines, were strictly forbidden. Collective cleaning of the streets also had a symbolic meaning and had a long tradition in Lenin's engagement in the collective work on the *subbotnik*. But in the 1930s cleaning also meant 'cleansing' and all 'social aliens' such as beggars, prostitutes or stray children were removed from the festive space.

The hectic activities unfolded before the festive date aimed at creating a ceremonial space that was set apart from the usual profane use of streets and places. The festival was portrayed as being the exception from the everyday – so, space had to correspond with this exceptionality. Both, ritually cleaned boulevards of decor and the columns of marchers, had their anchorage point in the *Ploshchad' 20i-letiya Oktyabrya* and, thus, linked the isolated and peripheral Soviet achievements with the new heart of Soviet Voronezh, the central square with the Lenin monument, the platform and local officialdom.

What was said about Voronezh holds true for Novosibirsk as well, showing an even sharper contrast between the 1920s and subsequent decades. By the mid-1930s the *Bazarnaya ploshchad'* had established itself as the fixed final point of all ceremonial processions. The platform was now always erected on this square to which the demonstrators marched from the different regions of the town.²⁴ The huge theatre under construction provided the backdrop for the reviewing stand of the Western Siberian leadership and seemed to demonstrate the constructive quality of the new era. And the avenues leading to the square were widened to enable a complicated marching order to enter the central square.

Staging the leader as the 'unmoved mover'

In the 1930s this centre was embodied by a small group of leaders. The elite of the party-state stood side by side up on the platform that marked the core space of the ceremonial arrangements. Here they awaited the masses and oversaw them from their elevated reviewing stand. The festive crowd reflected them like a mirror: the leaders looked into their own faces carried as posters by demonstrators, or read their own names spelled out by the

bodies of physical culture activists. The platform's personage was thereby staged as the 'unmoved mover', the core group of power that had the force of making things and people move without moving themselves. Their solidity symbolised a gravity of those who oversaw the course of history and guided the masses on the right path just as they sketched out the marching routes of the festive crowd.

Making things and people move without moving oneself was a clear expression of authority. But it also legitimised this power. The choreography of Soviet festivals had always ensured the privileged position of the leaders. In the 1930s, though, a new model of the relationship of those who led and those who were led was played out. It is worth noting that it was only during the years of the first Five Year Plan when the model of parading past by the platform became the general form of Soviet ceremonial movement. What had been a meeting around a platform in the 1920s became a demonstrators' procession past the reviewing stand in the following decade. The unorganised movement of the festive crowd turned into a military-like parade where every choreographic detail was planned and violations of the conventions were punished. The 'ornament of the masses' that unfolded under the leader's eyes was a carefully crafted stage-event.²⁵

The strict order of movement enforced the focus on the moment of passing by the leaders. The scenario of Soviet festivals tried to establish this bypassing as the anchorage point of festive emotions: all activities beforehand were depicted as an anticipatory state, that culminated in the great moment of entering the central square. Public discourse portrayed it as the very sacred core of the whole festive arrangement and anxiousness before presenting oneself to the views of the leaders was part of the official rhetoric: it was frequently stated that columns tended to rush towards the leaders, thereby disturbing the strict marching conventions. And Soviet citizens often remembered, in published narratives, the short moment when they had been so close to the leader and when he seemingly had looked at him or her personally or when he even had met them.²⁶

In the first post-revolutionary years Lenin had still commuted between different festive locations, and he had climbed improvised platforms, that were surrounded by the crowd, to address them with his speeches. The pictures of that time demonstrate – and were intended to demonstrate – the leader's closeness to the people. Although the reviewing stand was institutionalised in the early post-revolutionary years as an expression of the leaders' outstanding status, the form of a meeting around this locus still ensured the staging of a collective symbiosis in one large festive crowd. The years of the Great Break also saw a representation of the leader as one being close to ordinary people. Pictures, posters and paintings tried to catch the massive scale (*massovost'*) of the festive and other crowds and their fusion with the leaders. And leaders themselves moved to come in contact with

'the masses': they queued up in bread lines, travelled the country, climbed on dirty construction sites and rode on the trams.

These displays of direct contact between the leaders and the led came to an abrupt end in the 1930s. The elite of the party-state retreated into their freshly built fortresses – the new administrative buildings with their closed-up facades. Now, they called for meetings and bestowed the rare privilege on small groups of elected people to attend one of the leaders' receptions. They themselves made rare public appearances and by this the short moment of a glance upon them was ever more extraordinary. Withdrawing their *person* from public sight was accompanied by flooding the public space with representations of their *persona*. As pictures, images and spoken words, they became omnipresent in the 1930s: a light was always left burning in one of the windows of the Kremlin to symbolise Stalin's limitless care. He himself as a person stayed out of sight, but thousands of posters portrayed him sitting at his desk and working for 'the good of the people' at night-time.

The dates of Soviet holidays were the few occasions the leaders showed themselves to a public and the rare moment the public could make itself visible to the leaders' eyes. But even here ceremonial arrangement manifested the remoteness of the leaders as the marching columns passed by the reviewing stand in growing distance and the altitude of the platform increased in these years. Few moments of contact and direct communication between the leaders and the people were displayed: the figures on the platform waved their hands and pointed at the festive crowd, or children brought flowers to the leaders. The leaders marked the centre of Soviet ceremonial space, which in the 1930s gained much of its authority by being untouchable. It was a taboo space that the ordinary person could never enter and was only allowed a glimpse of.²⁷

The leaders' authority built on their own central position in the spatial order. Making political decisions, being in charge of military forces and the secret police or forging industrialisation were all expressions of the power statutes of the party-state elite. But to make a social system work required some form of acceptance of the authority of those in power. Even in a totalitarian dictatorship, some legitimacy of the privileged status of the leaders was required – if no one believed or at least accepted that they were supposed to be in the position of making political and other decisions, enforcing these decisions became an almost impossible task. Legitimising authority, therefore, was at the core of a regime's self-representation even in a period when fear and terror secured Bolshevik rule. It was in the nature of the Stalinist regime that it conducted a policy of brutal oppression of all deviant behaviour and the use of 'soft forms' of forging the New Soviet person and making people believe in the superiority of the system at the same time. Stalin's regime was at the same time both a police and a propaganda state, that made people fear, but simultaneously wanted

to convince them of the legitimacy of the system, its leaders and their politics. So, in the 1930s, parallel to policing, monitoring and murdering people, the power elite applied forms of making their rule legitimate. The rhetoric of revolution, the recourse to the 'will of the masses' or the rituals of elections and constitution campaigns were all part of this strategy.

As Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz have convincingly argued, occupying the accepted centre of a symbolic system is a powerful source of legitimacy. Decisions coming from such a centre seem much more legitimate than any coming from the peripheries.²⁸ Nevertheless, the locus of the centre still needs to be permanently re-established as any symbolic mapping-out becomes stable only by ritual re-enactment.

City planning and ceremonial choreography introduced a new spatial centre within the urban landscape and placed the leaders within this symbolically privileged spot. In consequence, the leaders' self-claimed extraordinary status was reinforced by their sheer occupation of this most sacred terrain. The leaders also portrayed themselves as the founding fathers of the new urban landscape. Stalin and Kaganovich in Moscow and the lesser leaders in the regional capitals were displayed as the masterminds behind the architectural renovation and the sculptors of the new aesthetic. They were the 'unmoved movers' of a spatial revolution and changed the towns' topography with a pencil. It was a representation of an artist-leader who with his almighty will could sculpt the raw material of society into the beautiful piece of art of socialism.²⁹ As the reconstruction of the cities symbolised the beginning of a new era, the leaders figured as midwives at the birth of a new epoch. They made spatial renovation possible and ensured that the new spatial order worked towards the centre they embodied themselves. The logic of such a representation worked like a self-fulfilling prophecy: the leaders' claim of being the source of all legitimate authority in the country was backed up by their self-positioning within a self-made centre created by spatial politics.

This highly political quality of spatial politics made it a contested field in the 1930s. As demonstrated, spatial politics was by no means a privilege of Moscow. The provincial leaders engaged in an active centre-building in the regional context and placed themselves within this centre. The provincial cities' reconstruction and ceremonial space lauded the role of the regional first party secretary. Local official discourse presented Iosif Vareikis in Voronezh – and later in Stalingrad and the Far East – or Robert Eikhe in Novosibirsk as the initiators of all reconstruction. A wave of renaming public institutions in their honour swept the districts and the festival crowds carried their portraits in even greater numbers than those of Stalin and Molotov. Vareikis and Eikhe were the 'unmoved movers' in the regional context. And they too organised receptions to give a small group of privileged subjects access to this taboo zone of power. In Voronezh and

Novosibirsk there existed little courts with courtiers encircling the centre embodied by the regional leader. By exploring the same media and methods of placing themselves in the centre of a spatial order, they created on a regional level what Moscow's power elite did on a Union-wide scale.

This parallelism of central and peripheral spatial politics and leader cults had ambivalent effects. On the one side it reinforced the party's effort of centre-building since it made it a common, recognisable Union-wide phenomenon. Only because local leadership also pushed the orientation towards a fixed centre did this become a Soviet cultural standard of the 1930s. The different centres were located in a spatial hierarchy that seemed to secure the extraordinary status of Moscow and Stalin as the centre of all centres. Many public rituals tried to ensure this outstanding quality of Moscow as the Soviet Rome, the cult of Stalin and his 'close friends' being the most prominent one. Stalin's name was to be lauded in all peripheral places in order to symbolise the connection of the most remote places with and the devotion to him as the source of all change and the ultimate 'unmoved mover' of Soviet socialism-building. Scientists out on the ice of the Arctic were rebound to the will and care of Moscow and Stalin just as the construction sites in the vast lands of Siberia symbolically referred to the main leader.³⁰ 'Stalin's falcons' followed the 'Stalin-route' crossing the Soviet Union and the 'whole country' sent their 'thanksgiving' towards the Kremlin that sent people out to seize the peripheries in its name.³¹ The official mental map of the Soviet Union was constructed in 'circles around Stalin' in a 'hierocentric' order.³² In this Soviet adoption of the notion that 'all roads lead to Rome' the large 'family of the peoples' looked towards the father figure.³³ He was symbolically seated in the presidium of local festive galas to manifest the presence of the far-distant. Here again, his staged absence reinforced his central authority. The capital's and Stalin's privileged position seemed to be secured by a set of rituals and symbols that all worked towards Moscow.

But on the other hand this position of Moscow and Stalin was threatened by the ambitious projects of centre-building in the regional contexts. The hierarchy of space seemed to be questioned by such competitive definitions of where the most relevant centre was to be fixed on the spot. At least, this was the perspective of Moscow that viewed regional self-centredness with growing mistrust in the middle of the 1930s. One rationale behind the Great Terror of 1937–38 was to eliminate the regional elite as networks that had partly withdrawn themselves from Moscow's tight control and, in Stalin's perception, had proved to be disobedient. The important issues of contest stemmed from the fields of political and economic decision-making, but the symbolic practices of regional centre-building were a clear expression of such threatening local autonomy and 'misuse of power'. This accusation figured prominently during the raging campaign against the regional elite that led to their almost complete destruction in the years 1937–38.³⁴ It was a strug-

gle between conflicting centres in which Moscow violently subordinated all regional self-focus and centre-building.

The Great Terror eliminated most of the well-known regional leaders of the 1930s. Their followers were more careful with placing themselves in the centre of a regional spatial order. They rather tried their best in playing out Moscow's and Stalin's superiority in symbolic practices. The regional *Stalinyada*-production was raised: Stalin portraits grew in size and numbers on festival dates, his birthday in 1939 was a Union-wide staged celebration of the 'father of Soviet family of the peoples', and the renaming policy that erased the toponyms of the 'enemies of the people' from the country's map focused even more on the small canon of Moscow's power elite.

Making Russian cities Soviet: spatial politics in a *longue durée*

The 'unmoved mover' of the 1930s proved to be mortal in 1953. But Stalin's spatial politics continued to dominate the Soviet order of space long after his death. The cities' reconstruction in the General Plans of the 1930s and the post-war reconstruction had changed the urban ground-maps fundamentally and had created a totally new topography.³⁵ And the festive 'ornament of the masses' of Stalin's times lingered on under his successors. Although the ceremonial landscapes were de-Stalinised, his portraits removed and his name erased, the choreography of Stalin's celebrations was kept largely unchanged. Festive columns continued to march past the platform on which the leadership still marked the centre of the procession. The new leaders themselves tried to restrain to some extent cultic veneration in other cultural fields. In the ceremonial landscapes of mass festivals they still embodied the symbolic core of the spatial order.³⁶

But what proved to be most influential was the general centre-building effect of spatial politics in Stalin's times. The common denominator of city planning, ceremonial stage management and the production of leader cults was the notion that every cultural practice and any discourse needed to bear a reference towards a centre of authority. In the 1930s, it was mainly a fixation on the leadership that was fostered by this mental mapping: almost every event needed to be rebound to one of the leader's initiatives. But it was also a more general cultural mode of orientation towards a centre of authority. It expressed itself in such forms as the devotion towards a 'spiritual father' in Soviet high culture, the praise of Peter the Great as state-builder, the lauding of Pushkin as the master poet and Gor'ky as a literary role model or the citing of canonical texts of Marxism-Leninism and Stalin's 'genius elaboration' of Marxist-Leninist ideology. It was a patriarchal order and a paternalistic pattern of rule at display that enforced a fixation on the centre not only in concrete spatial but also in abstract terms.³⁷ The leader cults of the 1930s were a prominent expression of centre-orientation but

they were embedded in a larger frame of cultural practices that all worked towards the authority of the centre. This notion of a centre did not wither away with the dictator's death. His successors promoted a model of authoritarian culture that was no less centre-orientated than the totalitarian predecessor. The methods to enforce obedience towards such a model were different and the centre was no longer embodied by one person. But the veneration of Lenin as the founding father, the omnipresence of the party, the emphasis on canonical text and the fixation on core symbols all articulated the continuum of centre-orientation in Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's Soviet Union.

After de-Stalinisation it was the *Soviet* nature that remained as the essence of the centre. In terminology, 'Stalinist' and 'Stalin's' were replaced by 'Soviet'. In spatial politics the Soviet heritage of change was emphasised while Stalin's role was downgraded then suppressed. The reconstruction of urban topography and reshaping of ceremonial order that had taken place in the 1930s continued to be proudly presented as expressions of the 'heroic building of socialism' in the country. Only Stalin was withdrawn from this picture. The fundamental change cities had seen in this period was now depicted as the successful Soviet transformation of old backward Russia. The re-location of the centre still served as representations of the increasing quality of the 'Soviet way of life' (*zhit' po sovetski*).³⁸

So, in the long run the reconstruction of Russian cities in the 1930s appears to be rather a Sovietisation than a Stalinisation. The post-Stalinist regime continued to build on the new order of space that was originally introduced in the pre-war decade, and managed to integrate the changes into a Soviet master narrative. It was a form of 'inner Sovietization' that expressed itself not only in colonising the cities with the Soviet core symbols but in recreating them as a new urban landscape according to Soviet aesthetic standards and a Soviet notion of a centre-orientated order of space. Making Russian cities Soviet in this narrative was the 'achievement' of the 1930s general reconstruction of society.³⁹

How this enforced reshaping of urban topography and rebuilding of the centre were perceived by those who inhabited the cities is hard to judge. The regime was undoubtedly successful in crafting the 'ornament of the masses' according to the new spatial order. And it is important to say that it was one of the main potentials of public ritual to show how much the party-state was able to make the people march along the marks of the official ceremonial landscapes. This was a powerful expression of authority as it proved the scale of obedience in public displays of loyalty. But as the regime also wanted people to like to march, it aimed at the internalisation of the aesthetic standards and spatial arrangements. It wanted to bring people's perception of space into line with the new Soviet topography. For the 1930s expressions of city dwellers or travellers being impressed by the new aesthetic and the beauty of socialism stand side by side with a stub-

born popular reluctance to accept the city's new centre. Also, older meanings of the territory colonised by Soviet city planners lived on in the form of anecdotes and rumours. The seemingly 'doomed character' of the place determined for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow is only the most famous example.⁴⁰ Legends like these transmitted an unofficial collective memory and knowledge of former meanings of space. They at least prove that redefining a town's mental map was not an easy and immediate outcome of official spatial politics.

In the long run, though, the Soviet mental and physical reconstruction of cities did not fail to have a formative effect on the people's perception of space: today, in cities like Voronezh and Novosibirsk the *Ploshchad' Lenina* is the place where the annual Christmas market is located, just as it is the spot where demonstrations of varying political movements still meet.⁴¹ This is not only due to the size and functionality of the squares: rather, they have become 'the centre' for most city dwellers. Even though they often do not agree on the content of these political demonstrations and cultural activities, they do agree that it should be the *Ploshchad' Lenina*, where such activities take place. In a process of *longue durée* the new Soviet centres of Voronezh and of Novosibirsk that were fixed in the 1930s did manage to establish themselves as the anchorage point of urban focus. Soviet spatial politics in the long run proved to be rather successful in working towards the new centre and thereby making Russian cities Soviet.

Notes

1. N. S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat* (New York, 1946) and for 'war on dreamers', see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1989), pp. 225–52.
2. Stephen Kotkin, 'Birthpangs of Socialist Culture', *Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Occasional Papers*, 46 (1993), pp. 1–24.
3. Malte Rolf, 'The Leader's Many Bodies: Leader Cults and Mass Festivals in Voronezh, Novosibirsk, and Kemerovo in the 1930s', in Kaus Heller and Jan Plamper (eds) *Personenkulte im Stalinismus (Personality Cults in Stalinism)* (Göttingen, 2004), pp. 86–97.
4. The 'unmoved mover' is a representation well known from medieval kingship. See Horst Wenzel, 'Repräsentation und schöner Schein am Hof' in Hedda Ragotzky and Horst Wenzel (eds) *Höfische Repräsentation. Das Zeremoniell und die Zeichen* (Tübingen, 1990), pp. 171–208.
5. For the notion of the artist-leader who sculpts the raw material of society see Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1988), pp. 7–8.
6. Jan Plamper, 'The Spatial Poetics of the Personality Cult: Circles Around Stalin', in Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (eds) *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle, 2003), pp. 19–43; James von Geldern, 'The Centre and the Periphery: Cultural and Social Geography in the Mass Culture of the 1930s', in Stephen White (ed.) *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 62–80.

7. For the concept of spatial politics see Maoz Azaryahu, *Vom Wilhelmplatz zum Thälmannplatz. Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR* (Gerlingen, 1991).
8. Boris Groys has used the Wagnerian concept of a 'synthesis of arts' to interpret the pictorial arts of the Stalin era as part of larger cultural matrix. See Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk*.
9. Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer": Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship' in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (eds) *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 88–106.
10. Greg Castillo, 'Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and the National Question', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 94: 3 (1995), pp. 715–46; Chans Gjunter and Evgenii Dobrenko (eds) *Socrealisticheskii kanon* (St Petersburg, 2000).
11. Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution: Soviet Architecture and City Planning 1917–1935* (New York, 1979).
12. E. A. Rees, 'Moscow City and Oblast' in E. A. Rees (ed.) *Centre–Local Relations in the Stalinist State, 1928–1941* (Basingstoke, 2002), ch. 4.
13. In 1934 Boris Iofan, V. A. Shchuko and V. G. Khelfreikh were commissioned to design the projected palace. Now, the monumental style of neo-classicism was officially set as the aesthetic standard that was capable of representing the growth of the powerful socialist party-state. See Sona Stephan Hoisington, "'Even Higher": The Evolution of the Project for the Palace of Soviets', *Slavic Review*, 62: 1 (2003), pp. 41–68.
14. G. A. Chesnokov, *Arkhitekturno-planirovochnoe razvitie goroda Voronezha* (Voronezh, 1998), pp. 8–21, 48–53.
15. *Nasha malaya rodina. Khrestomatiya po istorii Novosibirskoi oblasti 1921–1991* (Novosibirsk, 1997), pp. 25–36.
16. *Novosibirsk 100: Istoricheskogeograficheskii atlas* (Novosibirsk, 1993), pp. 22–4. Before the park was opened a church was demolished and a cemetery was 'secularised'.
17. Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt/Main, 1977).
18. On mass festivals in the Soviet Union, see James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley 1993); Karen Petrone, *'Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades': Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000); Malte Rolf, 'Constructing a Soviet Time: Bolshevik Festivals and their Rivals during the First Five-Year Plan', *Kritika*, 1: 3 (2000), pp. 447–73; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 109–23.
19. M. Danilevskii, *Ulitsa i ploshchad' v Oktyabr'skie dni. Scenarii masovikh deistvii i metodika ikh provedeniya* (Moscow, 1927), pp. 5–15.
20. On a Bolshevik 'fortress mentality', see David Joravsky, 'Cultural Revolution and the Fortress Mentality' in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds) *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), pp. 93–113.
21. For the brutal fury against the Church and believers of all denominations, see e.g. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall. Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich, 2003), pp. 553–668; Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).
22. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 109–14.
23. 'Oktyabr'skaya demonstratsiya v Voronezhe', *Kommuna*, no. 258 (10.11.1936), p. 3; 'Gorod prinimaet prazdnichnyi vid', *Kommuna*, no. 99 (29.4.1940), p. 1. For such thoughts on vertical arrangements of Stalinist celebrations, see also Pawel

- Sowinski, 'Der 1. Mai als totalitäres Theater in der Volksrepublik Polen', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 48: 3 (1999), pp. 352–3.
24. 'Oktyabr'skaya demonstratsiya v Novosibirsk', *Sovetskaya Sibir*, no. 260 (10.11.1937), p. 2.
 25. Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, pp. 28–32. On physical culture, also see David L. Hoffmann, 'Bodies of Knowledge: Physical Culture and the New Soviet Man', in Igal Halfin (ed.) *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identities* (London, 2002), pp. 269–86.
 26. Seeing or meeting the leader during a Soviet holiday was part of the official narrative. This is partly reflected in contemporary diaries: see Nina Kosterina, *Tagebuch* (Munich 1973), pp. 20–1.
 27. And those whose right of presence in this privileged spot was redrawn soon fell victims to the purge. For example, Nikolai Ezhov was forced to leave the mausoleum during the celebration in 1938. He lost his position a month later and was shot in 1940. See Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov* (Stanford, 2002), p. 162.
 28. Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essay in Macrosociology* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 3–16, 273–6; Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power' in Sean Wilentz (ed.) *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 13–40.
 29. Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, pp. 7–8; Plamper, 'Spatial Poetics'. See also David L. Hoffmann and Peter Holquist, *Sculpting the Masses: The Modern Social State in Russia, 1914–1941* (Ithaca, 2002).
 30. Iwan D. Papanin, *Das Leben auf einer Eisscholle. Tagebuch* (Berlin, 1947), pp. 322–33. Also John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union* (Oxford, 1998). In Siberia in 1932 Kuzneck was renamed Stalinsk in the honour of the remote leader and special 'Stalin-grants' were given to students.
 31. For the orientation of the periphery towards Moscow in official discourse and the colonisation of Moscow-sent 'volunteers', see Geldern, 'The Center and the Periphery', pp. 65–8; Elena Shulman, 'Soviet Maidens for the Socialist Fortress: The Khetagurovite Campaign to Settle the Far East', *Russian Review*, 62: 3 (2003), pp. 387–410.
 32. Plamper, 'Spatial Poetics'.
 33. On the official discourse of the 'family' and the 'friendship of the peoples', see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 432–59.
 34. For the criticism of regional 'vozhdizm' on the February–March CC plenum in 1937, see E. A. Rees, 'The Great Purges and the XVIII Party Congress of 1939' in Rees (ed.) *Centre–Local Relations in the Stalinist State, 1928–1941* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 191–2.
 35. The post-war construction plans of the almost completely destroyed Voronezh did not change the ground-structure introduced in the pre-war years and expressively spoke of the city's 'restoration' (*vosstanovlenie*) or 'rebirth' (*vozhrozhdenie*). See Chesnokov, *Razvitie goroda Voronezha*, pp. 65–110.
 36. This only changed in 1981, when for the first time party leaders in Poland took a walk-about in the demonstration. It is not accidental that this renovation came from the periphery of the Soviet empire. Detailed research on festivals in the post-war and post-Stalinist Soviet Union are still wanting. On the importance and quality of mass festivals in the 'peoples' democracies' extensive research already

- exists. On Poland, see Izabella Main, 'The Weeping Virgin Mary and the Smiling Comrade Stalin: Polish Catholics and Communists in 1949' in Gabor T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf and Jan C. Behrends (eds) *Zwischen partei-staatlicher Selbstinszenierung und kirchlichen Gegenwelten: Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs (Between the Great Show of the Party-State and Religious Counter-Cultures: Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies)* (Frankfurt/Main, 2003), pp. 255–78. On Hungary, see Árpád von Klimó, 'The King's Right Hand: A Hungarian National-Religious Holiday and the Conflict between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church' in Karin Friedrich (ed.) *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston, NY, 2000), pp. 343–62.
37. On state-socialism as a paternalistic form of rule, see e.g. Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000), esp. ch. 4; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 11–13.
 38. 'Tam, gde zhivut po sovetski', *Voronezhskaya Kommuna*, no. 159 (15.7.1927), p. 2.
 39. This phrase 'inner Sovietization' is borrowed from Lewis Siegelbaum, who describes the process of making Russian workers Soviet. See Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds) *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca, NY, 1994).
 40. In Novosibirsk similar legends were told as the local Park of Rest and Culture was built on a former cemetery. Popular belief knew of numerous accidents in this park and considered it to be bewitched.
 41. Today, skate-boarders use the Lenin statue for their art. But it still is Lenin who marks the centre of the town's topography.

The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships

Stalin and the Eastern Bloc

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