

ENGINEER AGITATOR CONSTRUCTOR

THE ARTIST REINVENTED, 1918–1939
THE MERRILL C. BERMAN COLLECTION

JODI HAUPTMAN
ADRIAN SUDHALTER

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

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JEAN-LOUIS COHEN

We Will Turn Moscow into a Model Socialist City of the Proletarian State (*Prevratim Moskvu v obraztsovyi sotsialisticheskii gorod proletarskogo gosudarstva*): the title of Aleksandr Deineka's poster runs through the sheet of printed paper like a mass demonstration flowing between the blocks of a city (plate 76). What comes to mind is his countryman Boris Kustodiev's 1920 painting *The Bolshevik* (*Bol'shevik*; fig. 1), depicting the serpentine trajectory of a revolutionary crowd progressing through the streets of an old Russian city. In Deineka's 1931 poster, the procession is made of red letters, echoing the scarlet banner held by the gigantic central figure in Kustodiev's work.

Far from being grouped in dense cohorts of marchers, the tiny figures populating Deineka's spaces are walking peacefully to their everyday activities, as if the 1917 Russian Revolution had been fully assimilated and interiorized by them. They exit the places of production—the factories—to reach those of the reproduction of the labor force (to use a classic Marxian dichotomy), on foot or on streetcars or buses, as cars (a precious commodity then) drive by. While Moscow's streetcars were for the most part inherited from prerevolutionary stock, the buses bought from the British firm Leyland were kept in an extraordinary garage designed by Konstantin Melnikov, which was featured in Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* (*Man with a Movie Camera*). The same movie includes shots of Moscow's main city spaces, which might have inspired Deineka's aerial perspectives—an axial one in the left half of the poster, and a quasi-axonomic one in the right half. In the early years of the Soviet Union, a widespread enthusiasm for aeronautics had led several artists to paint views of cities seen from above. Works such as Yury Velikanov's *Square in Front of the Winter Palace* (*Ploshchad' pered zimnim dvortsom*) of 1930, and Vasili Kuptsov's *Dirigible* (*Dirizhabl'*) of 1933 are notable, as is the architect Georgy Golts's *City of the Future* (*Gorod budushchego*), a mural designed for the Moskovskii teatr dlia detei (Moscow Children's Theater) in 1928, in which the ballet of factories, houses, and trains depicted is more dynamic than the poster's layout itself.¹ Moreover, Deineka was certainly aware of the photographs shot in 1928 by László Moholy-Nagy from the Berlin radio tower, revealing the black pattern of the pedestrian paths on a background of snow.²

Immediately following the revolution and throughout the years of the New Economic Policy (1921–28), Moscow had been at the center of several attempted planning projects. The earliest of these had defined a clear alternative between full decentralization involving the creation of satellite cities, as proposed by the engineer Boris Sakulin in 1918 (on the model of British urban reformer Ebenezer Howard's garden city), and the condensation of industry and residence into the compact fabric of a "greater Moscow," as suggested in 1925 by Sakulin's colleague Sergey Shestakov (based on a scheme proposed in 1910 for Berlin). A third proposal for a "new Moscow," established in 1924 under the guidance of the architect Alexei Shchusev, deployed small-scale garden suburbs and low-density housing blocks within the existing urban fabric.³



ALEKSANDR DEINEKA
76 *We Will Turn Moscow into a Model Socialist City of the Proletarian State, 1931*
Poster
Lithograph
57" x 6'10½" (144.8 x 209.6 cm)

The first residential schemes built by the Moscow municipality responded largely to Shchusev's layout and were located on the immediate periphery of the prerevolutionary city. Diverse morphological principles were used, from the conservative enclosed blocks, which were dominant, to the parallel slabs built by Alexei Meshkov on Usacheva Street in the city's southwest, and Ivan Travin's chevron-based plan for the Shabolovka quarter in the south (fig. 2).⁴ These housing estates may be compared to those built at the same time by the German and Austrian social-democratic municipalities, which were closely studied by the Soviet experts and politicians. The cluster of apartment buildings featured in the upper-right corner of Deineka's poster combines features from several of these plans, while the vast open spaces on the left allude to the immense empty areas surrounding the factories.

Built in close proximity to the main industrial plants, which until 1930 consisted mostly of facilities already standing in 1917, the apartment blocks were meant to be combined with collective services, in order to shape the "city of emancipated labor."⁵ Besides schools and athletic facilities, two innovative building types were developed: the industrial kitchen and the workers' club.⁶ The collectivization of food preparation, a consequence of the dire food shortages that lasted until 1936, was also part of the program aimed at facilitating the "new way of life" (*novyi byt*), based on the collectivization of a number of activities—which led additionally to the design of communal houses. A network of factories managed by the municipalities was created throughout the country; these were combined with the system of workers' clubs—some eight hundred in Moscow, funded and operated by the employers, where performances and political meetings could take place, while libraries were included to foster literacy.⁷ On both halves of Deineka's poster, the factory pictured at the bottom of the image appears as the basis of all the other urban activities. The clear distribution of elements—work, residence,



Fig. 2
Aerial view of Ivan Travin's chevron-based plan of Moscow's Shabolovka quarter, c. 1930

Fig. 1
BORIS KUSTODIEV
The Bolshevik (Bol'shevik), 1920
Oil on canvas
39¼ × 55½" (101 × 140.5 cm)
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



leisure, and transportation—anticipates the gospel of the "four functions," which was preached at the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (International Congresses for Modern Architecture) at their fourth meeting, in Athens, in 1933.⁸

Deineka's poster was conceived just as the discussion of the destiny of Moscow and the other cities of the USSR was concluding. Despite the plans of the early 1920s, the landscape of the capital had not really changed, and the notes taken by Walter Benjamin during his visit of December 1926–January 1927 about the "village character" of Moscow were still relevant. He wrote: "There is probably no other city whose gigantic open spaces have such an amorphous, rural quality, as if their expanses were always being dissolved by bad weather, thawing snow, or rain." In Benjamin's view, "nowhere does Moscow really look like the city it is, rather it more resembles the outskirts of itself."⁹ Several months later, visiting the city for the first time and already trying to sell his own vision, Le Corbusier remarked that "Moscow, the embryo of a new world" continued to inhabit "the old carcass of an Asiatic town."¹⁰

In 1930, in response to a questionnaire from the city's municipality, the French-Swiss architect proposed a radical plan for the complete reconstruction of Moscow, which was flatly rejected. In the following year, a meeting of the central committee devoted to the urban economy of the USSR instructed the local organizations "to undertake the elaboration of a serious, scientifically developed plan for the building in Moscow."¹¹ In his introductory report to this watershed meeting, politburo member Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin's deputy in charge of urban affairs, affirmed: "I consider that Moscow should be, and will be, a laboratory, to which people from all over the Soviet Union will flock to study its experience."¹²

The role prescribed for Moscow in Kaganovich's speech is probably the source of the term *obraz* (model), used by Deineka in the slogan featured on his didactic poster exhibiting all the components of



Fig. 3
Pages from *Moskva rekonstruiroetsia* (Moscow rebuilds itself),
designed and illustrated by Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova
(Moscow: Institut izobrazitel'noi statistiki Sovetskogo stroitel'stva i khoziaistva
TSNKhU Gosplana SSSR, 1938)

a modern city; his mention of the “Socialist city” may be understood in the same context. Before the 1931 meeting, Kaganovich had abruptly put an end to the debates launched in 1929 on the characteristics of the future “Socialist” cities, in which the supporters of intense urbanization had opposed the advocates of complete deurbanization. He considered that, after the revolution, all the Soviet cities were de facto Socialist, and that byzantine discussions had to cease.¹³

A new cycle of reflection was opened in 1931, when teams of Soviet architects competed with those led by Germans Ernst May and Kurt Meyer, and by the Swiss Hannes Meyer (the second director of the Bauhaus), to establish a plan for the Soviet capital. In the end, the views of Kurt Meyer, a Communist planner (who had worked for the right-wing mayor of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer), prevailed. This provided the basis for the general plan approved in 1935 and signed off on by veteran city-planner Vladimir Semyonov.¹⁴ The main strategies proposed tended toward a dense city of large avenues and continuous blocks, eliminating the building types imagined by the radical architects as well as their ascetic language (such as that depicted on Deineka’s poster). This program was vividly illustrated in the large album designed and illustrated in 1938 by Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, *Moskva rekonstruiroetsia* (Moscow rebuilds itself; fig. 3), in which the graphic techniques and the architectural aesthetics are diametrically at odds with Deineka’s vision.¹⁵ Indeed, the bombastic, monumental urban space imagined for Moscow—dubbed the “Fourth Rome”¹⁶—no longer had anything to do with the sleek volumes featured on Deineka’s poster. Conceived as the representation of a city to come, it merely recorded foregone experiments the Soviet regime had hoped to forget.

1. Alexandra Selivanova, ed., *Avant-Garde and Aviation* (Moscow: Evreiskii Muzei i Tsentri Tolerantnosti, 2014), pp. 44–46.
2. The reception of the Hungarian Bauhaus was widespread in the USSR; see Sergei Miturich, ed., *Laslo Moholy-Nad' i russkii avangard* (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2017).
3. See Manfredo Tafuri, “Les premières hypothèses de planification urbaine dans la Russie soviétique, 1918–1925,” *Archithèse*, no. 7 (1973): 31–41.
4. Elena Solovieva and Tatiana Tsareva, *Novye doma: Arkhitektura zhilykh kompleksov Moskvy 1920–1930-kh godov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Plan, 2012).
5. Tafuri uses this term in “Les premières hypothèses.”
6. For further discussion of Soviet industrial kitchens, see Christina Kiaer’s essay on Maria Bri-Bein (pp. 122–27); and on Soviet workers’ clubs, see Maria Gough’s essay on Elena Semenova (pp. 82–87), both in the present volume.
7. Anna Bokov, “Soviet Workers’ Clubs: Lessons from the Social Condensers,” *Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 3 (2017): 403–36.
8. The first English-language presentation of the Athens conclusions is José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).
9. Walter Benjamin, “Moscow Diary” (1926–27), *October*, no. 35 (Winter 1985): 112.
10. Le Corbusier, “L’architecture à Moscou,” *L'intransigeant*, December 24, 1928, manuscript at the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, p. 5. (Trans. by author.)
11. Lazar Kaganovich, *Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and Other Cities in the USSR* (Moscow: Co-Operative Publ. Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1931), p. 120.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
13. On these debates and the urban practices underlying them, see Christina Crawford, “The Socialist Settlement Experiment: Soviet Urban Practice, 1917–1932” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016).
14. On the preparation of the 1935 plan, see Harald Bodenschatz and Christiane Post, eds., *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins: Die internationale Suche nach der sozialistischen Stadt in der Sowjetunion, 1929–1935* (Berlin: Braun, 2003); Harald Bodenschatz and Thomas Flierl, eds., *Von Adenauer zu Stalin; der Einfluß des traditionellen deutschen Städtebaus in der Sowjetunion um 1935* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016); and Elisabeth Essaiän, *Le prolétariat ne se promène pas nu: Moscou en projets* (Marseille: Parenthèses, forthcoming 2020).
15. *Moskva rekonstruiroetsia: Al'bom diagramm, topokhem i fotografii po rekonstruktsii gor. Moskvy* (Moscow: Institut izobrazitel'noi statistiki sovetkogo stroitel'stva i khoziaistva TSNKhU Gosplana SSSR, 1938).
16. Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

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Front cover:
JOHN HEARTFIELD
The Hand Has Five Fingers (detail), 1928
Campaign poster for German Communist Party
Lithograph
38½ × 29¼" (97.8 × 74.3 cm)
(See plate 154)

Back cover:
LIUBOV POPOVA
Production Clothing for Actor No. 7 (detail),
1922 (inscribed 1921)
Gouache, cut-and-pasted colored paper, ink, and
pencil on paper
12¼ × 9¼" (32.8 × 23.1 cm)
(See plate 13)

Front endpapers:
John Heartfield's poster (plate 154) installed on a Berlin
street for the Reichstag election of May 20, 1928.
May 1928.
Photograph by George Pahl
Bundesarchiv, Koblenz

Back endpapers:
The Mayor (Aleksi Temerin), Guards, and Peasant
Women, in Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of
Fernand Crommelynck's *The Magnanimous Cuckold*,
Zon Theater, Moscow, 1922.
Photograph by Ya. M. Tolchan
A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum,
Moscow

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Brigades, Master Technology, Increase the Cadres of
Proletariat Specialists* (detail), 1931. (See plate 53)
p. 5: GUSTAV KLUTSIS
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(detail), 1931. (See plate 74)