

IDEOLOGY IN INFRASTRUCTURE: ARCHITECTURE AND SOVIET IMAGINATION

CAROLINE HUMPHREY

University of Cambridge

Ideology does not just exist in linguistic form; it also appears in material structures. The Soviet party-state believed architecture to have a transformative effect and promoted communal dwellings in order to mould a new socialist way of life. What was the outcome? Using the examples of the communal hostel and the courtyard, the article suggests that we should take account of the eventual everyday sociality but also go beyond it to investigate how the imagination worked in such places. The material structure did not generate the socialist values quite as intended. Imaginative literature and satire are used to show that architecture acted, rather, like a prism. Ideas were deflected from it, yet not in a random way.

The relation between early Soviet ideology and infrastructure appears straightforward – yet it has a breathtaking audacity if one thinks about it. According to Marxist materialism, the base determines the superstructure, and the task of Soviet construction was to build material foundations that would mould nothing less than a new society. This reminds us that ideology is found not only in texts and speeches; it is a political practice that is also manifest in constructing material objects. After the Revolution, architecture became one of the key arenas of ideology. In the 1920s, it was actually believed that carefully designed living quarters, for example, could eliminate the conditions for individualistic and *meshchanskie* (petty-minded bourgeois) ways of life, and on this basis a new human type would become the norm: Socialist Man and Socialist Woman.¹ A new kind of building, the House Commune (*dom kommuna*), would provide the infrastructure. Previous ('obsolete') social groupings, such as the patriarchal family, the private firm, or the peasant household, would give way to the new ideal, the labour collective.²

For anthropology, the Soviet case is significant because it makes clear not only that political ideology can take material form, but also that artefacts are not material objects divorced from social relations. The latter point has long since been made with regard to 'the house', which, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) have argued, both embodies and generates sociality. But the house built by people for themselves is different from the case of state construction projects in which housing is allocated and the inhabitants are mere passive recipients (Semenova 2004). What the Soviet example requires us to think about is the particular situation where there is a definite pronounced intention of the state to make use of the materiality of dwelling

to produce new social forms and moral values. What happens in such a case?

By now it is a familiar idea in the literature that this early Soviet goal fell to pieces, and in different ways. For one thing, the disorganized economy was often simply unable to provide the necessary infrastructure. In the pioneering city of Magnitogorsk, it was not rational efficiency but disorder and poverty that reigned in the communal barracks of the workers (Kotkin 1995). Further, it is argued that even if the ideal infrastructure was built, the anticipated social and psychological metamorphosis failed to take place. The comforts of everyday domestic practices (*byt*) gradually invaded the austere spaces of even the exemplary Soviet Nakomfin apartment house (Buchli 1999). Senior managers at Magnitogorsk, far from being suffused with socialist values, were tempted by the forbidden bourgeois comforts of the village built to house foreign specialists (Kotkin 1995). In later, more prosperous periods, when it was possible to construct infrastructure more or less as the planners had designed it, the evidence again seems clear: the material base for a socialist way of life was there; it is just that people did not quite live that way. The dominant trend in the literature explains this by non-compliance, popular agency, and the subverting of official ideology with a host of everyday practices of survival (Fitzpatrick 1999). To put it very crudely, we have a now more or less accepted picture of the ideology of infrastructure as having become rapidly irrelevant, overwhelmed not so much by overt opposition as by the teeming practices of life that had their own and different logics.

This article will argue that the image thus produced is misleading. This is partly because the picture is generalized, when it is clear that some people did become virtually ideal Soviet activists while others were resolutely opposed to socialist values from the start (Fitzpatrick 2004). But more pertinent to this article is the fact that the recent debate among historians,³ in which a new account of pervasive Sovietized subjectivity opposes the earlier 'resistance' model, almost entirely ignores the presence of material structures in people's lives. It will be suggested here that the built environment, which made material certain precepts, did continue actively to contribute to the conceptual worlds of Soviet people. But the process was not straightforward, for the structures and surfaces of the infrastructure acted not as templates for generating the designated idea but like reflectors that deflected it and made it swerve aside. One reason why this happened is that the ideological role of infrastructure in late Soviet Russia came to be so completely taken for granted that people were no longer conscious of it (Humphrey 2004). Another was that the underlying politics of architecture – an unspoken strategy of harsh control – was hidden from the population, and even from the architects who carried it out (Meerovich 2003a: 172–3). Another was the distance, allowing for reflection, which must obtain between any person and a 'thing' allocated to him or her. Yet for Soviet people, although the ideology-in-objects was relegated more or less to a subconscious level, it did not cease to be an active presence and, as I shall argue, it 'surfaced' in literature. We are still left with the issues posed by Marxist materialism: what was the generative import of the physical infrastructure, and did this (how did this) interact with the imaginative and projective inner feelings of the people?

Stating the issues in this way has implications for methodology. Sometimes fieldwork – of the ‘living-there, interviewing, observing what people do, taking part along with them, collecting statistics’ kind may need to be supplemented in order to answer certain questions. The everyday life and its social relations accessed by such fieldwork do not *determine* consciousness, though they must bear some relation to it. Anthropologists have to admit that, for all our efforts, there are thoughts that our respondents never tell us, or never clarify for us, and this is not just because all thoughts are never conveyed anyway, or because of inarticulateness or lack of trust, but perhaps because some thoughts cannot be readily expressed in the form most ethnographic interaction takes (conversation, description, answering questions, and so forth). This article reaches out to imaginative literature and satire precisely because it is there that we have access to another, more far-flung, dimension of what people may intimate about their worlds. ‘Indeed’, as Bachelard wrote, ‘we should find countless intermediaries between reality and symbols if we gave things all the movements they suggest’ (1994 [1964]: 11).

Infrastructure and ‘spiritual values’

This article will be concerned primarily with the mid-Soviet period, but in order to understand processes at that time it is necessary to go back to its revolutionary antecedents in the 1920s and 1930s. Let us retrieve an incident from Platonov’s *Kotlovan* (1931), a novel which could not be published in Soviet times because of its bitter uncovering of ideological pretensions. Here the protagonists, a motley gang of despairing peasants, mournful down-and-outs, and over-energetic activists, are engaged in the first Five-Year Plan. Specifically, they are digging the foundation pit for a great project, the Proletarian Home (*obshcheproletarskii dom*). This Home is not just to provide a monumental refuge from the surrounding world for the whole village, but is to be the precious space where the longed-for socialist moral life will be attained. It is thus intended to secure the existence of noumenal being in the material world. The engineer Prushevskii’s primary concern is the ‘emplacement of the soul’ (*ustroistvo dushi*) in the projected building. Descending into the darkness of the foundation pit, and observing how the topsoil rested on a layer of clay and yet had nothing to do with this lower stratum, he ponders, ‘Does a superstructure necessarily arise out of every base? Does every production of life material yield as its by-product a soul in man?’ (Platonov 1996 [1931]: 27).

Now Platonov’s *Kotlovan* is a work of comic and terrible despair. As Seifrid has argued, it is a parody that inverts the onwards and upwards conventions of the early Soviet ‘Five-Year Plan’ novel (1992: 140–3). Prushevskii’s question must be intended, along with the other grotesque events in the story, as an ironic exaggeration of the proposition that Soviet ideology was making about spiritual transformation. We are reminded that the essence of caricature lies in hyper-loyalty to the original intent (Seifrid 1992: 142). By the end of the novel, materialist utopianism is disposed of entirely. The endeavour to organize a Collective Farm finishes in an orgy of corporeality and brutal death, while the efforts to build the Proletarian Home produce only ever more

gaping versions of the void (Seifrid 1992: 156-7). Nevertheless, it is arguable that Platonov is serious and not altogether dismissive in his probing of the theory that 'matter determines consciousness'. *Kotlován* is a novel of pathos rather than derision. And no doubt it is in part because the Soviet government continued to adhere to the theory that *Kotlován* could not be published in Platonov's lifetime. Prushevskii's apparently absurd questions are actually interesting, because they force us to think about 'infrastructure' and 'ideology' not as abstract concepts but as manifested in real material constructions and in the variety of hesitant, crude, hopeful, or aggressive feelings of the people building them and living in them.

In *Kotlován* the ironic question 'Does a superstructure necessarily arise out of every base?' appears in the context of deeper questioning of materialism. Throughout the novel wanders a sacked factory-worker, Voshchev, who searches constantly for meaning and happiness. He is briskly told, 'Happiness comes from materialism, Comrade Voshchev, not from meaning' (*schastie proizoidet ot materializma, Tovarishch Voshchev, ne ot smysla*) (Platonov 1996 [1931]: 3). The quandary for Platonov is that he accepted the tragic dominance of matter over being, which gave rise to such questions as how the 'dead body' of matter might be transformed into a vital habitable structure for humankind, but at the same time he was unable to abandon the value of spirit. This leads him to ask whether such a material structure could provide the perfect instantiation of meaningful being in matter.

This article will attempt to follow through Platonov's questions in relation to certain dwellings and spaces explicitly designed to construct a collective life, namely the House Communes and their later manifestations as *obshchezhitia* (dormitories, hostels) and *dvory* (communal courtyards). It is necessary to periodize Soviet history here. In 1930, when Platonov was writing, 'socialist life' gleamed on the horizon as something to be looked forward to, perhaps for one's children, and of course the Proletarian Home of *Kotlován* was never built. But by the Khrushchev period (1950s-60s), the modest equivalents of the Proletarian Home were an actuality. The Soviet Union was seeded with countless communal dwellings for workers and students in every town and city. Bold claims about transformations of consciousness were dimmed, though not extinguished entirely, since some preliminary form of socialism was held to have arrived already. In relation to the Soviet studies literature mentioned earlier, the advantage of taking up Platonov's questions is that they complicate the notion of ideology. Instead of a binary model (socialist theory/material construction), they suggest the presence of a further imponderable – the 'meaning' in an extended sense (e.g. the 'emplacement of the soul') actually generated by and within physical conditions. The advantage of examining the later period (1960s-80s) is that it enables us also to take into account not only the practical social arrangements that actually eventuated in these buildings and spaces, but also the imaginative writing that emerged from the experience of living in them.

This theme of social practice has been well explored for the communal apartment (Boym 1994: 121-67; Gerasimova 2003; Semenova 2004; Utekhin 2001). Now communal hostels likewise developed their own customs (zealously maintained as well as indolently ignored) for dealing with co-residents,

for by-passing custodians, for cleaning, sharing, cooking, or disposing of rubbish, and so forth. But the 'meaning' (in Platonov's sense) of living in these communal places cannot be reduced to the concepts and values deriving from adaptations to living with others. Straightforward metonymical extensions (e.g. the meaning of the commode as the epitome of domestic values [Boym 1994: 150-7], the meaning of the individual kitchen table as indicating the owner's stake in the shared flat [Gerasimova 2003: 174]) were not all that were present. Nor is the Platonovian meaning to be identified with the general 'mythologies' present among late Soviet people, such as the speculations surrounding the Russian soul or the critique of Western individualism (Boym 1994: 73-88), for these are not necessarily related to infrastructure.

Rather, Russian memoirs and fiction suggest that communal buildings had meanings and effects that were at once specific to them and at the same time refracted outwards to the very horizon of the ideologized imagination. We can think of their structures, interiors, and surfaces as having a prism-like quality. In this sense the built artefact was not only an 'actant' in a network of relations, where idea, behaviour, and artefact are co-dependent (Latour 2000). In a Latourean perspective, the material actant enforces a particular direction of action by virtue of the particular intention built into its construction.⁴ What I shall discuss is something related but different: the capacity of the material object to act also as a jumping-off point for human freedom of reflection. The building here is like the 'index' in Alfred Gell's analysis of art and agency, the 'disturbance' in a causal milieu, the material entity which motivates inferences, responses, or interpretations (Gell 1998: 37). Gell's book is extraordinarily helpful in analysing the articulation between artists' intentions, the prototypes they have in mind, and the recipients of their creations. In a politically heightened, formally ideologized historical situation such as that of the USSR, however, we have to deal with complexities of the suppressed as well as the excessive imagination. The material object and the person-recipient may be mutually constitutive of fantasy. Like rays shot off a crystal, apprehension of objects could divert (reflect, distort) the ideologized functionality into vast, or tiny, longingful projections. It is evident that such conceptual freedom existed in Soviet Russia, despite the weight of ideological instructions about 'how to think' material objects. Such imaginative refractions, as we find them in diaries, memoirs, and literature, seem utterly personal and idiosyncratic. Yet certainly in the case of literature, and even to some degree in secret diaries (Fitzpatrick 2004), such ruminations are 'social' in that they are directed to interpreting readers – that is, to one's own consciousness or that of other people – all of these, however, also being subjects of the universally distributed ideology. This last fact indicates a certain circularity. It suggests that simple and unmediated mental escape is not the only characteristic of tangential reflections. So we are led to ask whether, in some roundabout way, the imaginative-fantastic meanings spun off communal places constitute elliptical commentaries on the kernel of the ideology that was the 'idea' of the construction in the first place. This includes not only the official discourse of social transformation but also the hidden mechanism of the politics of architecture and the practices of control present in these places.

The communal dormitory and its ideology

In the historical conditions after the Revolution, ideology and infrastructure were at first out of sync. People started setting up communes before there were any buildings designed for this purpose. Indeed, in a grotesque inversion, the leaders of the Revolution established their 'phalansteries'⁵ (Lebina 1999: 161) in the luxury hotels of St Petersburg and Moscow, while workers established communes in the spacious apartments of the bourgeoisie. There was no architectural precedent for the new 'proletarian homes', not even a formula for their size or content. Architects were soon designing futuristic experimental prototypes: cubist, circular, tower-like, asymmetrical, and zig-zag structures (Khan-Magomedov 2001: 314-15). Ministries and town soviets soon set up architectural competitions, however, and these gradually established tight conventions for success. Mark Meerovich (2003a; 2003b) shows that the proclaimed policy of development of progressive and egalitarian housing for Soviet citizens overlay not only the deliberate corralling of workers into 'labour-life communes' (*trudo-bytovye kommuny*) but also a dark politics of control. Housing 'shortages' were necessary for it to be possible to award better (or worse) conditions to workers. Being allocated extra square metres of 'living space' was one of the most desired proofs of service to the state (2003b: 7). The architectural competitions specified not only the number and size of rooms, and what communal facilities were to be provided (kitchens, dining-rooms, nurseries, reading-rooms, laundries, and so forth), but they also came to calculate minimal standards for life itself. For example, cubic measurements of 'living space' were given in accordance with the amount of air necessary for a human being to feel 'normal' after a night's sleep (2003b: 9). Such norms were applied not only to new buildings but also to the existing housing stock. The policy of *uplotnenie* (condensation, packing in) saw the previous owners of apartments squeezed into one room, while the others were filled with incomers. As Meerovich shows, the 'progressive norms' upheld by architects were in fact undermined: small apartments intended for families were filled with several families, one per room, while single rooms designed for individuals were crammed with several people. Workers' barracks, with no privacy at all, were common. People were desperate to escape from such conditions into the few more spacious quarters allocated. What was established by the early 1930s was a systematic means of ruling people by means of housing (2003a: 173). But this could not be admitted by the fatherly state, nor was it understood by architects, who continued to design pleasant spaces and to protest against overcrowding (2003a: 167). The inhabitants, however, had to live with the eerie suspicion of 'being ruled' even while they were being assured of the excellence of their quarters.

Once this system was established, futuristic architectural experimentation with collective living became almost redundant. With the advent of Stalinist homogenization and neo-traditionalism in the early 1930s, the radical House-Communes were discontinued as housing for everyone and were replaced by the conventional apartment block, with few collective facilities. Meanwhile, the buildings previously designed as Communes were re-designated for the workers' and students' hostels (*obshchezhitie*, literally 'communal living-place') attached to factories, construction sites, and universities. New hostels were

built on an increasingly standardized multi-storey, corridor model (Khan-Magomedov 2001: 338–47). The hostel then found its place in a ranking of urban dwellings according to desirability, from the unheated wooden shack, through the barracks, the hostel, the shared flat in an old house, to the separate flat in an apartment block.

The *obshchezhitie* thus came to be the main form of housing for people who did not have their own apartments. In conditions of mass movement of labour from one place to another, endemic housing shortages, and constant pressure to move from rural homes to urban centres, such communal dormitories were built in large numbers in all cities. Living in an *obshchezhitie* became a regular phase in the life of great numbers of mobile and aspiring citizens. If the end-point of social dwelling was the achievement of a regular place in the productive economy with an attached apartment and perhaps a country *dacha*, living in the *obshchezhitie* came to be seen as a morally formative process.

Utekhin's comments convey the fundamental ideological meaning given to communal living in the mid-Soviet period – its capacity to engender fellow feeling and destroy self-interest and indifference.

Obshchezhitie – in the broad and narrow meaning of the word – is understood by people who are not indifferent [to others] as a valuable experience, educating the character of the Soviet person, as can be seen from a public text of instruction: '... this life with its well-known discomforts contains in itself a beneficial origin: this life is the school of behaviour among people, the school of struggle with oneself, the school of comradeship' (Morozova 1960: 79) (Utekhin 2001: 166).

The hostel is a frequent setting in the 'heroic revival' novels of the 1950s and 1960s discussed by Katerina Clark (2000 [1981]: 228–9), in which the key theme is: how can the hero be integrated into adult society? First, he/she must leave home for the journey away that marks moral/political progression. Commonly, the 'away place' to which the hero goes is associated with the new schemes of the Khrushchev regime – a construction site in Siberia, a settlement in the Virgin Lands project, and so forth. Alternatively, the hero sets off to a city for education. As the novel begins, he or she is often cynically just looking for a good time with other students. Then follows a commonplace of such novels, a transformation of moral identity. The first days at work are a test of suffering and endurance. In Kuznetsov's *Continuation of a legend* (1957), the hero, Tolya, is put to work shovelling concrete. 'Will I hold out or not?' he wonders. At the end of the day, his hands dripping with blood, Tolya just manages to drag himself back to the hostel and climb 'higher and higher' up the stairs to his dormitory room. He has made it (Clark 2000 [1981]: 229).

Here, the stairs of the hostel can be seen as a sign that perfectly converges with the ideological notion of the moral progress 'upwards' of the hero. In this novel the value of manual labour and the humble life of the lowly is to be transfigured by idealism and adventure. But what is also evident in *Continuation of a legend* is that the official ideology itself projects fantasy. In his new world Tolya finds that 'fairy tale becomes reality'. One of the workers relates an ancient legend in which the mighty Yenisei and Angara Rivers are united – the very purpose of the construction project on which Tolya is engaged (Kuznetsov 1957: 38). Tolya cannot forget a childhood vision of 'red

sails on a blue sea', which he finds again in the banners fluttering amid the toil of the construction site (Kuznetsov 1957: 52, cited by Clark 2000 [1981]: 229). This novel makes clear that the Soviet ideology was not just a matter of dull and limiting prescriptions, but was a highly complex discourse, itself having the character of romance as well as hidden threat.

Before returning to this theme, let me explore in more detail the social space and built form of the hostel, colloquially known as *obshchaga*. By their function, hostels were the dwellings of outsiders to the local scene. They were highly varied, according to the character of the institution to which they were attached (military, industrial, educational, etc.). Anyone who has lived in Russia knows that even students' hostels seemed to have their own character. There was the dormitory of the Agricultural Institute for country hicks, the one where there were lots of Kazakhs and Siberians, and the boisterous one for engineers, while in the town centre was the glamorous one where students of art lived, and so forth. The inhabitants of nearby hostels sometimes engaged in competitions, such as football games, or in symbolic hostilities (such as hanging insulting banners from the windows to annoy the neighbours). Hostels were closed to non-residents, who could not enter without permission. Therefore when a party or dance was held, queues of young people would form outside waiting for the chance to make a random 'friend' who would lend an entry card (*propusk*) for the night. As far as I have been able to discover, however, the social character of the whole hostel, which was apparent most clearly when it was seen from outside, was not the feature that gave rise to the most ardent imaginings. Rather, it was the internal structure, the built form of the hostel itself.

In the 1950s-70s, the period of mass construction, there were standardized building regulations for *obshchezhitie*,⁶ though older, more varied, hostels also continued in use. Normally, the entrance gave on to a hallway where there sat a custodian (*dezurniy*, *dezurnaya*) responsible for checking who entered and left, for locking the outer doors, turning off the lights, and so forth. On the first floor would be the office of the *komendant*, the director of the hostel. Along the centre of the building was a broad dark corridor lined with the doors of the communally occupied rooms. In the elite hostels, rooms had only two occupants, but more usually there were four to six, and sometimes up to fifteen or so. Lined with iron beds, wardrobes, and small cupboards, quite often subdivided by curtains, each room became a crowded and complex space, with more private and more public areas. A communal table often occupied the middle. Fixed to the wall was a radio transmitter, which (at least in the 1960s, according to my memories) could not be turned off, only turned down. The same programmes were relayed by radio loudspeakers outside attached to poles or trees. At one end of the corridor was a large shared kitchen. At another, the lavatories and washing facilities were located. Well-provided hostels had a 'red corner', a room intended for political education, but latterly used more for private study. Finally, larger hostels had a canteen on the ground floor or basement. This was usually a place of queues, crowded tables, and rapid eating, rather than leisurely meals, as it was open only for limited hours and service was often by shifts. This *obshchezhitie* structure, recognizable from the Baltics to Vladivostok, was intended to embody the ideas of equality, frugality, openness to others, and communal responsibility. In 1966 a new set of regulations

came into force, it being recognized that hostels were overcrowded, often had inadequate washing/lavatory facilities, frequently had only one kitchen for sixty to a hundred people, and had hardly any areas for study and leisure (Rubanenko 1976: 95). However, the next generation of hostels in the 1970s-80s were designed for even more people – up to 1,300 – and the living area per person was reduced from 4.5 to 4 sq. m (Rubanenko 1976: 95-7). Improved hostels, with groups of rooms around shared facilities rather than long corridors, were built in only tiny numbers. Needless to say, the old hostels did not cease functioning.

Given that hostels in many countries are not so very different, we might argue that the built structure underdetermined the Soviet ideology. Many features were designed with universal architectural problems in mind, such as cost-saving use of materials, adequacy of light, or plumbing arrangements. So, even if the overall structure had an ideological purpose, it would be wrong to suppose that every feature of the building had an attached ('indexical' in Gell's terms) ideological intentionality. Perhaps partly because of this lack of specificity, life in the *obshchaga* was regulated by an advice literature and specifically Soviet institutions. One of these was the *starosta*, the activist worker or student leader designated to ensure that norms were followed. Each floor had a *starosta*, who organized the inhabitants in various tasks (sweeping the corridor, cleaning the kitchen, emptying the rubbish, etc.) and issued reprimands for drunkenness, fights, and so forth, and in some hostels each room had a *starosta* too. Also present were the informers, who let the authorities know, in a clandestine way, about political infringements. These practices of surveillance were heavily moralized, standing for socialist responsibility, respect for others, cultured behaviour, and political reliability. The way they were actually carried out could give a certain character to each floor – e.g. the 2nd floor, where the bathrooms are cleaner; the 8th floor, where it is rumoured that X is an informer; the 4th floor, where Uzbeks constantly occupy the kitchen cooking mutton.

In the rooms, along with the activities of co-residents, the noises of the neighbours on either side could be heard. Utekhin has written of how people not only were used to such sounds, but many also subconsciously welcomed them. He cites a poem of the 1960s: 'I love it when beyond the wall – is music / when beyond the wall – is noise / I cannot stand the indifference / of quietness, so dense and turbid' (2001: 166). For the communist devotee, the move out of crowded communal accommodation into a flat could be traumatic, bringing fears that one was guilty of the sin of indifference to others (2001: 166-7). Utekhin suggests that this feeling was strongest during the ideological romance of the 1960s, but that the anxiety brought by loss of communal life was not confined to activists and continued to be present in later decades (2001: 167). This was confirmed to me by a friend from Buryatia, who told me that she suffered from boredom and loneliness when she left the hostel in the late 1970s for life in a flat. For what is remarkable is that life in the *obshchaga* was often *more communal* than the planners had envisaged – in fact, it created what we might call excessive communality.

There were two aspects to this, one joyful-aggressive and the other repressive. The social unit of the room was central. The same Buryat friend told me that the four inhabitants of her room, plus two girls from nearby, formed a

group with its own name, its own songs, even its own 'dialect'. Money was put into a common pot, food was shared, cooking and eating took place together, and 'going out' of an evening was done as a group. Visits to the shower and washing clothes were done with the others; even underwear and tights were passed around. An extra member of the group was incorporated by means of obtaining a larger bed and sharing it, while other women who wanted to join were discussed and repudiated. This group would go out into the communal corridor and loudly sing their songs. Unsurprisingly, there was a student who used to emerge from his room and object to the noise. He was repeatedly jumped on by the group and bundled back into his room, until 'everyone recognized our authority on the floor. After that, no-one got in our way'. My friend remembers, 'We had fun, we had no *starosta*, we had a common spirit (*obshchaya dukha*)'. Now such a 'spirit' can hardly be what Platonov had in mind. Nor does it quite conform to the self-denying, open-to-others ideal that the Soviet hostel was intended to promote. Yet respondents often mention such a warm and cheerful 'spirit', and there is evidence that the room-corridor structure engendered similar relations in other times and places too.⁷ In one case in the 1930s, the group kept a communal diary, and as with the Buryat women, its *kostyak* (core members, literally 'backbone') remained friends long after they had left the hostel (Matsui 2002: 385-96).

The darker side to such intense communality was the pressure it put on people to submit to the group. In one recent satire of the student's letter home, we read,

Dear Mummy and Daddy, It is now two o'clock at night and I am sitting in the hostel outside my door and I'm writing to you because they won't let me into the room, saying that today is not my turn to sleep ... Well, everything else is all right. Though recently my friends on the floor accepted me into their group (*obshchina*), and this means that everything that was mine before has become communal, even the crumpled trousers Uncle Gosha sent from Mongolia with the jam. They were taken as entrance fees. Now everyone wants to use them to get married in and my friends in the group gave me some Italian dark glasses but the glass has fallen out. So, Daddy, don't send me riding breeches, they are far too communal, the whole group will use them. Send me money. ...⁸

As one hostel resident recalls, the only reliable way of protecting valuables was to lock these in a suitcase, preferably chained to the bed-frame. Other accounts given by Russian friends mention the ostracism and scapegoating of individuals who failed to conform to the conventions of the room. A recent ethnography of the Russian army describes harsh practices of subordination and hierarchy in such spaces as the showers, canteen, and sick bay, the social hell of the outcast, and the supreme punishment of the detention cell (Bannikov 2002: 57-81).

In such circumstances we cannot assume a desire to be actually alone.⁹ On the other hand, hostel inhabitants sometimes needed space for private conversations. One's room, nearly always occupied, was hardly ever available; in the kitchen one could be overheard too easily; the bathroom was not only cold and smelly but could always contain an eavesdropper in a cubicle. Paradoxically, it was the most public space of all, the corridor, which could provide 'privacy'. We can see the corridor as a Latoureaan actant here. Inhabitants would

leave their rooms and 'go into the corridor' for a talk. It was the corridor's broad length and darkness that gave the space for perambulations, half-hidden smiles, an exchange of secrets. Perhaps arm in arm, in any case exclusive, a slow amble signalled that a private conversation was in train.¹⁰ The staircase likewise was a space of open seclusion, a space for illicit smoking, drinking, dealing, late-night kisses. Yet this privacy was privacy in public.

Fantasies of the *obshchezhitie*

Victor Pelevin's¹¹ novel *Omon Ra*, which appeared in 1992, is a tragic parody of the Soviet heroic genre of the 1960s. In ways it is reminiscent of Platonov, whose work, having been suppressed, was topical to writers of the first post-Soviet generation. The hero, Omon, from a conventional Soviet working background, dreams as a boy of being an airman, makes the 'journey away' to a distant air-force training camp, and finds himself suddenly drawn into a programme for preparing the first cosmonauts. The early part of the novel takes place in the hostel of the trainees.

Omon, eating his stodgy meal in the canteen, is attracted by the cardboard models of spaceships hanging from the ceiling.

I stared at one of them in admiration. The artist had gone to a great deal of effort and covered it all over with the letters USSR. The setting sun looking in on it through the window suddenly seemed to me like the headlight of a train in the metro as it emerges from the darkness of the tunnel (1994: 12).

Omon feels sad. He realizes,

The only space in which the starships of the Communist future had flown (incidentally, when I first came across the word 'starship' in the science fiction books I used to like it so much, I thought it came from the red stars on the sides of Soviet spacecraft) was the Soviet psyche, just as the dining hall we were sitting in was the cosmic space in which the ships launched by the previous camp contingent would go on ploughing their furrows through time up there above the dining tables, even when the creators of the cardboard fleet were long gone (1994: 13).

The canteen as cosmic space was Omon's literal reading of the ideological message of the instructors. His friend Mitiok takes the literalness a step further when he decides to take one of the models apart to find out if there is a cosmonaut in there. The friends discover that the model-builder must have started with a tiny plasticine man and then constructed and glued the cardboard rocket shut around him. To their dismay, they find that there is no way out for the cosmonaut: though a door is painted on the outside, on the same place in the inside are just some painted dials on the wall (1994: 15-16). The nightmare of being trapped inside, while engaged in the cosmic flight on behalf of their country, is at the core of the whole novel. When the trainees eventually become cosmonauts, their programmed entrapment in the spacecraft leads one by one to their deaths, so Omon thinks – though in the denouement it is revealed that the entire nightmare was a training exercise.

In the hostel, the dismantling of the model rocket leads to the young men's bizarre punishment. For this infringement the *starosta* and his threatening

sidekicks make Mitia and Omon crawl the full length of the corridor and back with their heads enveloped in gas-masks. Painfully crunching along the floor, Omon is brought face to face with the material of the hostel, the dust in the crack between two pieces of linoleum, a squashed insect, the painting of the battleship *Aurora* that seems to hang for ever in the same place as he slowly and agonizingly passes by. Then, the pain and fatigue seemed to 'switch something off inside me. Or else just the opposite – they switched something on' (1994: 19). Omon senses the sea murmuring far outside and hears the loudspeaker singing with children voices:

From the pure source into the beautiful yonder,
Into the beautiful yonder I chart my path.

Life was a 'tender miracle', yet at the very centre of the world were the two-storey hostel and its long corridor of punishment.

It was all so natural and at the same time so painful and absurd, that I began to cry inside my rubber snout, feeling glad that my real face was hidden from the camp leaders, and especially from the chinks round the doors, through which dozens of eyes were gazing at my glory and my shame (1994: 19).

Pelevin depicts hurtful contrasts: the star-struck youth and the punished recruit, the dream of the beautiful yonder and the humiliating crawl, the soaring cosmic path and the corridor lined with prying eyes. Yet this episode represents far more than a simple inversion of ideological values. The *obshchezhitie*, with its tacky portraits of Lenin and its gimcrack model rockets, has engendered both the new dream of space flight (for Omon only wanted to be an airman before he arrived there) and the pain of the corridor crawl. Fantasies have spun off its surfaces and come to inhabit its inner channel. It would thus be mistaken to see this as a matter of plain opposition (ideology versus fantasy). Rather, these two seem enfolded into one another in such a way that it becomes difficult to tell them apart. Pelevin/Omon's imagination is not liberated from ideology, nor yet is it a random, vagrant musing. The Soviet romantic heroism-of-cosmonauts is present as itself and it is also present as transmuted or 'diverted', and it is impossible not to see the generative capacity of infrastructure – the actual buildings people live in – as active in this transmutation.

My suggestion is that the episode depicted by Pelevin has a general import for understanding how ideology was embedded-released-diverted in and by material life. It is not just a matter of the happenstance of one novel. As evidence I cite a recent student mythologization of real accidents, in which it is clear that a satirical imaginative category ('parachutist') has been generated by the multi-story hostel.

The first time I heard of parachutists was from my fifth-year neighbours. They told a story about the Chinese on the 15th floor. What happened was this. In one of the rooms on the 15th (I can't say exactly which but I know it was on the northern side of the first block of the campus) lived a heap of Chinese. Really, a heap. Because every idiot knows that in a 'three-er' (*tryoshku*), obviously from the name meant for three people, so you'd hardly manage to cram more than four Russians in there, well you can get over

ten Chinese. And, of course, the *komendant* takes advantage of that. But that's not the point.

The Chinese were living up there in their heap and everything was normal until some great Chinese festival came up. But those poor Chinese Komsomols, before setting out for abroad (and doesn't that sound good, 'abroad to Russia', ah?), had been strictly – absolutely forbidden to drink while in Russia. But how is it possible not to drink in our *obshchagas*? When we all drink, almost every day. You only live once and your youth is passing by – *tfu-tfu-tfu* – going on!!¹² An exam, a report, a control check – that's a festival. No exam, no report to make and no check-up – that's a double festival! And not to drink at a festival ... well, that's just not serious. So the Chinese saw us living like this ... swallowing their saliva, and suddenly there was this super-mega Chinese 1 May, or something like that, and they couldn't hold out, those valiant labourers in the search for improving knowledge. They decided to celebrate. They got hold of vodka, spiced it with local resources (no-one has been able to rid the hostel of cockroaches) and got down to a drinking-bout. And they decided to do it so as to make us neighbour-aborigines jealous!

The binge was accompanied by Chinese folk songs at full throat. And so we should hear them better, they delegated two of the most artistic singers to perform from the window. And what is a window in our *obshchaga*? It's not like one of those narrow things you get in standard panel apartment blocks! The window in the Hostel is a heavy main window, 1.5 m by 1 m, with a smaller 40 cm side-window. The main window opens inwards and its hinges are at the top. In other words, to keep the window in an open position you have to put a stick or a chair or something to prop it up from below. And that's what the Chinese did.

So, dangling their bowed little legs from the 15th floor, they began the concert. Two gulps and they were roaring about the Chinese people's love for the Party leaders or some such rubbish, energetically waving their short limbs. But someone nudged the stick. It fell out. And the heavy window, sensing an unexpected unprecedented freedom, banged with all its force onto the two helpless Chinese people's bottoms. And the latter could do nothing but fall out of their nest.

In the short time it took to fall fifteen stories down and 10-15 m outwards, the pair of parachutists gave out dreadful indecipherable shrieks (which all of us for some reason took to be continuations of the folk songs) and flew onto the roadway of the street named after the famous General Antonov. Where, from the injuries sustained from the blow given by the unfamiliar asphalted earth, they instantaneously snuffed it.¹³

The short space of an article does not allow me to cite the other stories recounted by this student to exemplify the category of the 'parachutist', but the example shows how the imagination has worked with the material actants of the hostel (the ledge, the window, the 15th floor, the asphalt) and the social actants therein (the groups, the aggressive songs) to produce an allegorical figure. The 'parachutist' can be seen as a fantastic inversion of the upwards-striving student of the ideology, for it is a way of coming to terms, through irony and word play, with the fact of student suicides. As the writer explains,

The idea of the 'parachutist' doesn't really derive from the rare case when a parachute fails to open but from a new light on the English word 'paratrooper'. The distorted '*para truperov*' [the Russian translates as 'pair of corpses'] is a terribly good fit for our good hostel-mates, the flying suicides.¹⁴

I now discuss another instance of communal space, this time concerning the courtyard (*dvor*) of the apartment complex. The *dvor* is often conceptualized as children's space (see Kelly 2004; Osorina 1999). In Andrei Makine's¹⁵ *Confessions of a fallen standard-bearer* (2001) the hero is a proud member of the Pioneers, living in a communal flat in a typical mid-Soviet period housing block.

Everything in our lives seemed natural to us ... Twice in succession, first on the way to your apartment and then to ours, which was strictly identical, you had to make your way through a continuous human bustle. In the communal corridor children bowled along on their little bicycles. A man was painting a door. A woman carrying an enormous basin of boiling water emerged from the kitchen, and, with a resounding whoosh, emptied the contents into the bathtub full of washing. The corridor filled with hot steam and the smells of laundry (2001: 37-8).

Three such brick apartment blocks surround the courtyard, and this yard becomes the centre of the story.

The courtyard was the area designated in Soviet planning for recreation and communal services, and it had its own regulated social existence.¹⁶ The Soviet *dvor* was not an 'empty space' and was not devoid of ideology. It was intended to be a protected inner area, contrasted with the outer zone of streets and squares, and it was meant to generate the friendly congregation of all kinds of neighbours, especially the frail and weak. Accordingly children's sand-pits, swings, benches for old people, and tables for playing games were often located in it. There might even be a *besedka*, a little chalet for holding conversations. The planting of trees and flowering bushes in the *dvor* was an enormously strong part of Soviet urban ideology. 'Greening' (*ozelenenie*) was energetically pursued to promote healthy air, improve the micro-climate, decorate the architectural ensemble, and provide a pleasant environment for the leisure of the working masses. Furthermore, it was a process that involved the broad participation of the population (Tsentrāl'nyi 1967: 245). The inhabitants themselves were to cultivate their collective well-being through voluntary work days of planting, gardening, and watering. There were plentiful rules for such activities, concerning, for example, which tree species would be most beneficial, and their height, spacing, wind protection, and shade-producing qualities (Tsentrāl'nyi 1967: 245-55). Kelly (2004: 164-5) interestingly observes that children in the *dvor* had a good idea of the distinction between play, however unbridled, and illegal behaviour. Their games in fact often mimicked the political orthodoxies of the day, as in the game 'Search and Requisition'. Yet in the end children's *byt* was elusive: 'politicised through and through, childhood was at the same time beyond the reach of politics' (2004: 166).

In Makine's novel two special locations in the *dvor* shaped the topography of the narrator's young life. One was 'the Pit', located in the middle of the *dvor*, an 'almost mythical place', a kind of pool with high banks covered in plants that did not grow anywhere else, blue flowers, and surrounded by rustling poplars. What lay at the bottom of the Pit? Why had it not been filled in? These questions could have been answered by an old woman whose house had been demolished to dig the Pit – but she was becoming demented and never gave a straight answer. The Pit as described by Makine seems to correspond to a wild and mysterious version of the regulated greening of the conventional *dvor*.

The other significant location was 'the Gap', the only clear space between the three apartment blocks, and which gave on to the open countryside. The other corners of the courtyard were filled with musty shacks, rabbit and chicken hutches, and accumulated old junk. The Gap, on the other hand, facing north-west, brought with it cold sunsets, 'the marbled and vaporous sumptuousness of the northern sky' (2001: 27-8).

Lying on the grass, we stared silently at this vertical sky, not knowing what to make of its aerial architecture. We knew that somewhere beyond the open ground, only a few dozen miles away, lay the sea. A sea that led to unknown lands, all those Englands and Americas. We knew their cruel and unjust existence was drawing to a close, and their inhabitants would soon be joining us on our march toward the radiant horizon (2001: 28).

With a nonchalant intertextuality, Makine's Pit cross-cuts with the Foundation Pit of Platonov's *Kotlovan*. Instead of representing the void of unfulfilled socialist hope, the Pit in Makine's *dvor* is the idyllic site of completed benign sociality: it is where public reconciliation takes place between men who have quarrelled (2001: 26). But one day, after a dry summer, the Pit dries up and it is discovered to be full of human bones: it was the burial site of German soldiers. Then a Second World War bomb is found in its depths. Everyone is evacuated and the bomb is exploded. When normal life returns, the old woman has miraculously regained her sanity (not that she ever tells her secret) and the Pit is filled in and closed up, bones and all.

On one of the last days in August the inhabitants of our three buildings witnessed a scene that definitely marked the end of an era in the history of the courtyard – as well as our own.

One peaceful evening much like the others, a quarrel erupted at the domino table ... We saw big fists, heavy as bludgeons, swinging back and forth. The first bloodied face. A man on the ground. Hate-filled hisses. The shrill cries of women. The tears of frightened children. The protracted stamping, clumsy and ponderous, of men out of breath.

Finally they stopped. Confronting one another, their faces screwed up with hatred, the shirts in tatters, their lips bleeding. Filled with mutual loathing.

It was the hatred of those who suddenly see in others, as if in a mirror, the blind alley of their own lives. The fine promises for the future they had swallowed with trusting naïveté. The beautiful dream in the name of which they have spent all their lives in a narrow hole in an anthill.

And so this brawl was inevitable. They had forgotten the magic word 'Pit' that in the old days used to mobilize the whole courtyard (2001: 95-6).

Interwoven with the story of the Pit is that of the Gap, the way out from the *dvor*, the beginning of the road tramped by the Pioneers with their songs, bugles, and drums. But this glorious outwardness, this marching to the horizon of the future, is shattered when the young heroes infringe all norms through excess. Reaching the Pioneer camp, they perform for Party dignitaries. The song comes to an end, but the hero drummer fails to stop drumming, the bugler blows even louder. Not for any reason – they just do not want to stop. And even when the instructors, overcome with fury, were shoving them off the parade ground, 'we let fly our last roars from the bugle, extracted the final syncopated beats from the drum' (2001: 81). Disgraced, locked up in a store-room and then sent home, the boys acknowledge that their Pioneer careers are over. Yet they glory in their over-reaching.

The significant thing about Makine's story is that neither the covering over of the Pit, nor the eventual closure of the Gap, extinguishes the moral force of the dream. By the late 1970s, the model of the protective *dvor* had been abandoned by Soviet planners in favour of 'landscaping'. Massive housing

blocks were placed in open spaces, as Makine records in *Confessions* when the narrator revisits the scene of his childhood:

I was going through what in days gone by we used to call the Gap. Two huge apartment buildings twenty stories high had been erected at this opening. They looked like two enormous liners slowly steaming into the triangle of our courtyard one behind the other. The first of them towered from where the domino table and the Pit had been; the other was lodged in the Gap.

In any case, the triangle itself no longer existed. One of the redbrick buildings had been razed to the ground. Another looked uninhabited. Only our own still had curtains and pots of flowers at the windows. Life around these white liners was now organized on a different plan, the key points of which were the new school, the supermarket's wide plate glass windows, and a bus stop on a route that ran across what used to be open ground (2001: 108-9).

(In line with this, a friend of mine whose childhood was in the high-rise flats of the late 1970s recalls her puzzlement when her father told her to stop sitting by herself at home and to go out and play with 'her friends from the *dvor*'. He was thinking of an earlier time, the previous courtyard structure. She had no such friends; outside there was just a huge space. 'I was being reproached for something I did not understand'.¹⁷)

The novel thus records the historicity of the *dvor*, the sense of a certain impermanence to Soviet structures. This enables Makine to tie the fervour of the heroes precisely to these structures. What was all that marching and singing for? We were far from being dupes, Makine's narrator comments. We knew about the Gulag camps, about the sufferings hidden in the name of the Great War. And yet every summer we would line up in our ranks once more and set off toward the radiant horizon. There was no hypocrisy, no pretence in our ringing songs that celebrated the young Red cavalryman and the workers of the world.

For if, during our imprisonment in the little storeroom, someone had put this simple question to us: 'In the name of what does the bugle sound and the drum roll ring out each summer?' the reply would have been simple too. We would have answered quite artlessly: 'In the name of our courtyard' (2001: 83).

The *dvor* does not just stand for, it *produces*, the humanity of entrapped people and their capacity to support one another. At the end of the novel, Makine describes 'the most important thing' – a story of kindness. One day back in the narrator's childhood, a cripple, who had by some miracle obtained an invalid car, had taken his friends out through the Gap to the countryside, to a hayfield, for the sole purpose of enabling his mate from the *dvor*, a wounded soldier, to re-live a lost pleasure of his youth, cutting fresh hay with a scythe.

Conclusion

What I have discussed here is obviously not fieldwork-based ethnography and it makes no pretence to be representative (not all representations of the hostel were as dystopian as the examples used). Furthermore, using works of litera-

ture as has been done here makes it clear that the fantasies discussed are mediated by writers' sensibilities attuned to intertextuality and the domain of texts. Nevertheless, what I would point out is that these renderings of the *obshchezhitie* and the *dvor* are possible meanings, created by people who had lived within Soviet material life. The significant thing about them in relation to the theme of this article is that the presence of ideology in built form is acknowledged, and yet it is not reiterated but splintered apart.

Victor Buchli (1999) has commented on the problem of trying to understand the relation between an item of material culture and the society with which it is associated. The previous tendency to posit a direct, iconic, and even homologous correspondence between them has been replaced more recently by the perception that there is in fact a superfluity of meaning. In this situation the creation of correspondences by a regime is seen as a means of limitation, a discipline imposed on the superfluity of meaning in an attempt to garner power (1999: 6-7). Early Soviet planners were certainly aware of this issue in a practical sense, as they were occupied in attempting to convert the diverse meanings of the objects in daily life (*byt*) into new, channelled meanings for 'Soviet *byt*'. What I have pointed to is the unexpected sequels of such a process of closure. For all their politics of control, planners or Party organizers could not shut down the imagination 'from above'. The refracted meanings that we read in Pelevin and Makine are, it seems to me, closer to the problematic of Platonov. What is to be the character of the noumenal being of Soviet people? Does it really have any connection to the built constructions so carefully designed for the people's life? The question in this form may seem virtually unanswerable, and Platonov himself seems to have concluded that the mad goal of Soviet spirituality could end only in despair. And yet, and yet ... what are we to make of the fantasies generated within the hostel and the courtyard? They are not simply metaphors – though other Soviet writers created memorable metaphorical images, such as the communal apartment as the 'ship of widows' (Grekova 1981). Nor are they parables, along the lines of Kazakov's story of the 'little station' (1962), where the countryside railway halt is made to stand for all the wretched partings brought about by Soviet careerism. In the examples I have described, the material structures of the hostel and the courtyard *themselves* bring about a certain character to social life – even though this quality is not at all a simple reiteration of what had been envisaged in the ideology. The built construction seems capable, on this evidence, of acting as if like a prism: gathering meanings and scattering them again, yet not randomly. As a prism has a given number of faces, the light it scatters has direction.

NOTES

I am grateful for comments and references supplied by Elena Loukoiyanova, Galina Manzanova, Sergei Oushakine, Lena Rockhill, Vera Skvirskaya, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Alexei Yurchak and two anonymous readers for the *JRAI*.

¹ In the Marxist propaganda of the 1920s, 'daily life/being determines consciousness' (*Bytie opredelyaet soznanie*, quoted in Buchli 1999: 24). Architects, who would reform traditional *byt* into new forms, were therefore exceptionally prominent in the consolidation of Soviet socialism in this period (1999: 63).

²The labour collective was to embody the ideas of egalitarianism, self-service, good neighbourly relations, collectivism, communal work and leisure, rejection of accumulation of personal property, and the reorientation of goals and interests from the individual to the social (Meerovich 2003a: 173).

³The debate among historians pits Fitzpatrick (1999), arguing against the earlier totalitarian explanation of the USSR and therefore emphasizing heterogeneity and resistance, against the more recent work of Hellbeck (2000) and Hellbeck and Halfin (2002). Hellbeck and Halfin insist that individual subjectivity must be seen as the product of history, and that citizens in the 1930s had no choice but to think in Soviet categories for no others were available to them.

⁴An example of the material object as actant is the speed bumps known in England as 'sleeping policemen'. They are objects designed to force drivers to conform to a set of community-orientated practices. Yet the responsibility for behaviour is not limited to the driver but is distributed through the environment. As Harvey has written in relation to Latour's famous example of the Berlin key – the lock and the key are designed in such a way as to oblige the resident to lock the door behind him/her – 'the safety issue becomes a technical problem, with a technical solution. The intentions, opinions or previous habits of users become irrelevant as the key obliges them to act in a particular way' (1997: 9).

⁵The nineteenth-century socialist Fourret had created 'phalansteries' in rural France, large, self-supporting communes of workers and artisans. The term was taken up by the Soviet revolutionaries to designate their own communes (Lebina 1999: 6–7).

⁶Regulations for the constructions of hostels in this period are given in the *Kratkii spravochnik arkhitektonov* (Dyurbaum 1951: 60–3) and other reference books for architects. They specify the square metres for each inhabitant (interestingly this was less – 4.5 sq. m – for workers and employees than for students – 6 sq. m) and the maximum number of inhabitants per room (more for workers – 6 – than for students – 4). The rules also specify, for hostels of 50, 100, 200, and up to 400 inhabitants, the square metres of service areas (day rooms, store cupboards, linen rooms, etc.); the numbers of beds in the *izolyator* (a room used for people with infectious illnesses and/or miscreants); the sanitary provisions; and the size of the room for the superintendant. The space between beds is also specified – 40 cm for the long sides and 20 cm for the short sides, figures that indicate how extremely crowded hostels could be.

⁷See, for example, the vivid account given by Charlotte Hobson (2001) of her life in a hostel in Voronezh. Here too rooms were social units (2001: 124). 'It was impossible to be alone in the hostel,' writes Hobson (2001: 62).

In our room at any time of day, Ira and Joe would be dozing, friends popping in and out, and there'd be a stream of queries at the door – Could we borrow a frying-pan? A teaspoon? Five hundred roubles? Out in the corridor people were changing money, drinking, having crises of one sort or another.'

⁸<http://home.skif.net/~lesik/pismo.htm>

⁹I have encountered surprise from people in Russia at the idea that one might want to sleep in a separate room, for example.

¹⁰In Makine's *Once upon the River Love* we find:

As for Utkin, he never wrote to me from Svetlaya. But two years after my flight I saw a silhouette I instantly recognized in the dark corridor of our student residence. Limping, he came to me and offered his hand ... We talked all night in the corridor, so as not to disturb the other three occupants of my room. Perched on the windowsill in front of the frost-covered glass, we talked as we drank cold tea (1998: 191–2).

¹¹Victor Pelevin, one of the best known of contemporary Russian writers, was born in 1962 and his formative experiences were in the late Soviet period.

¹²The expression 't'fu-t'fu-t'fu' represents spitting three times to avert magically the misfortune spoken of. The Russian here is a word play contrasting two aspects of the verb 'to go': the completed action (our youth has passed) and the incomplete aspect (it is still going on).

¹³<http://londbs.narod.ru/patatroopers.html>, 1–9.

¹⁴<http://londbs.narod.ru/patatroopers.html>, 1.

¹⁵Andrei Makine was born in Russia in 1958. He emigrated to France in 1987 and writes in French, but almost all his work is an extended reflection on the nature of Soviet experience.

¹⁶ To quote from Utekhin:

Dvor – a place of active communal-social life, a place for formation of child, adolescent, and para-criminal subcultures; here are located the rubbish dump, heap of paper for recycling, empty bottle collection point, workshop for metal breaking, the back doors of shops with their residues of boxes and cases, and in former times, the woodshed. The courtyard is the zone of responsibility of the *dvornik* (yard keeper) and is an object of communal organization. Depending on the surrounding buildings (in particular if the surrounding area of buildings is large), the *dvor* becomes a complex system (2001: 186).

¹⁷ Vera Skvirskaya, personal communication.

REFERENCES

- Bachelard, G. 1994 [1964]. *The poetics of space* (trans. M. Jolas). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bannikov, K. 2002. *Antropologiya ekstremal'nykh grupp*. Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology.
- Boym, S. 1994. *Common places: mythologies of everyday life in Russia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Buchli, V. 1999. *An archaeology of socialism*. Oxford: Berg.
- Carsten, J. & S. Hugh-Jones (ed.) 1995. *About the house: Lévi-Strauss and beyond*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Clark, K. 2000 [1981]. *The Soviet novel: history and ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dyurbaum, N.S. 1951. *Kratkii spravochnik arkhitektona*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Literaturny po Stroitel'stvu i Arkhitekture.
- Fitzpatrick, S. 1999. *Everyday Stalinism: ordinary people in extraordinary times*. Oxford: University Press.
- . 2004. Pessimism and boys. *London Review of Books*, 6 May, 20-1.
- Gell, A. 1998. *Art and agency: an anthropological theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gerasimova, K. 2003. Public spaces in the communal apartment. In *Public spheres in Soviet-type societies* (eds) G.T. Rittersporn, M. Rolf & J.C. Behrends, 165-93. New York: Peter Lang.
- Grekova, I. 1981. Vdovii parokhod. *Novyi Mir* 5, 66-147.
- Harvey, P. 1997. Technology as skilled practice: approaches from anthropology, history and psychology. *Social Analysis* 41, 3-14.
- Hellbeck, J. 2000. Speaking out: languages of affirmation and dissent in Stalinist Russia. *Kritika* 1, 71-96.
- & I. Halfin 2002. Interv'yū s Igalom Khalfinom i Iyokhanom Khel'bekom. *Ab Imperio* 3, 217-96.
- Hobson, C. 2001. *Black Earth City*. London: Granta.
- Humphrey, C. 2004. Rethinking infrastructure: Siberian cities and the great freeze of January 2001. In *Wounded cities* (eds) J. Schneider & I. Susser, 91-110. Oxford: Berg.
- Kazakov, I. 1962. *La petite gare (Na polustanki)* (trans. R. Philippon). Paris: Gallimard.
- Kelly, C. 2004. *Byr: identity and everyday life*. In *National identity in Russian culture: an introduction* (eds) S. Franklin & E. Widdis, 149-67. Cambridge: University Press.
- Khan-Magomedov, S.O. 2001. *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo avangarda, kniga vtorya: sotsial'nyye problemy*. Moscow: Stroiizdat.
- Kotkin, S. 1995. *Magnetic mountain: Stalinism as a civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kuznetsov, A. 1957. Prodolzhenie legendy. *Yunost'* 7.
- Latour, B. 2000. The Berlin key or how to do words with things. In *Matter, materiality and modern culture* (ed.) P. Graves-Brown, 10-21. London: Routledge.
- Lebina, N.B. 1999. *Povsednevniaya zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: normy i anomalii 1920-1930 gody*. St Petersburg: Neva.
- Makine, 1998. *Once upon the River Love* (trans. G. Strachan). London: Penguin.
- . 2001. *Confessions of a fallen standard-bearer* (trans. G. Strachan). London: Penguin.
- Matsui, Y. 2002. Soviet diary as a medium of communality and intersubjectivity: a study of a collective diary. *Ab Imperio* 3, 385-96.

- Meerovich, M.G. 2003a. *Zhilishchnaya politika v SSSR i ee realizatsiya v arkhitekturnom proektirovanii (1917-1941 g.g.): ocherki istorii*. Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo IrGTU.
- 2003b. Vlast' i zhilishche (zhilishchnaya politika v SSSR v 1917-1940 godakh. *Vestnik Yevrazii* 20: 1, 5-66.
- Morozova, N. 1960. *Obshchee zhit'ye. Yunost'*.
- Osorina, M.V. 1999. *Sekretnyi mir detei: v prostranstve mir vzroslykh*. St Petersburg: Piter.
- Pelevin, V. 1994. *Omon Ra* (trans. A. Bromfield). London: Faber & Faber.
- Platonov, A. 1996 [1931]. *The foundation pit* (trans. R. Chandler & G. Smith). London: Harvill Press. (Kotlovan in Chevengur, A. Platonov, 367-474. Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel'.)
- Rubanenko, B.R. (ed.) 1976. *Zhilishchnoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR (nauchnye osnovy, sovremennoe sostoyanie i blizhaishie zadachi)*. Moscow: Stroiizdat.
- Seifrid, T. 1992. *Andrei Platonov*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Semenova, V. 2004. Equality in poverty: the symbolic meaning of *kommunalki* in the 1930s-50s. In *On living through Soviet Russia* (eds) D. Bertaux, P. Thompson & A. Rotkirch, 54-67. London: Routledge.
- Tsentral'nyi Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii i Proektnyi Institut po Gradostroitel'stvy Gosudarstvenno Komiteta po Grazhdanskomu Stroitel'stvu i Arkhitekture pri Gosstro SSR 1967. *Osnovy Sovetskogo grado-stroitel'stva*. Moscow: Stroiizdat.
- Utekhin, I. 2001. *Ocherki kommunalnogo byta*. Moscow: OGI.

Idéologie et infrastructure : l'imagination soviétique dans l'architecture

Résumé

L'idéologie ne s'exprime pas seulement par le langage: elle apparaît aussi dans les structures matérielles. Selon la vision du monde de l'État-parti soviétique, l'architecture pouvait avoir un effet transformateur et les logements collectifs devaient donc être encouragés pour donner naissance à un nouveau mode de vie socialiste. Quelles en furent les conséquences? À partir d'exemples tels que l'auberge de jeunesse et la cour d'immeuble, l'auteur suggère qu'il faut tenir compte de la socialisation quotidienne qui finit par se créer, et au-delà, étudier l'action de l'imagination dans ces lieux. La structure matérielle n'a pas tout à fait donné forme aux valeurs socialistes espérées. La fiction et la satire ont montré que l'architecture avait plutôt une fonction de prisme, déformant les idées d'une façon qui n'est cependant pas totalement aléatoire.

*Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RF
UK. Ch10001@hermes.cam.ac.uk*