

nonetheless, he wins by being supremely auto-reflexive and self-aware. This reviewer's only regret is that Khagi does not investigate Pelevin's Buddhism as comprehensively as she does his engagement with postmodern theory. She does of course include those explicit references to Buddhist notions that are at the core of some of his key novels, especially *Chapaev and the Void*, but a more focused analysis of the Buddhist core of his writings is perhaps what is missing from this otherwise engaging, erudite, and enlightening monograph that is now staple reading for all current and future Pelevin scholars.

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***Reclaiming a History: Jewish Architects in Imperial Russia and the USSR.*** By Gary Berkovich. Grundrisse: Publications on Architectural and Urban History, vol. 16. Weimar: Grünberg Verlag, 2020. 4 vols. 792 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. €24.80 per vol., paper.  
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Through a mixture of architectural history and collective biography adorned with hundreds of photographs and drawings, Gary Berkovich endeavors to restore the centrality of Jewish architects to Russian and Soviet history. He documents how, despite academic restrictions as well as general anti-Semitism, Jewish architects in the last decades of the nineteenth century successfully practiced their discipline across the empire. Concentrating on the construction of apartment houses, they followed the dominant trends, whereas in religious architecture they unsuccessfully attempted to create a distinctive “national” Jewish style. But being members of a diaspora that provided connections to thought outside of Russia, Jewish architects were most open to the influence of modernist thought and architectural practice, thrusting them to the forefront of the avant-garde who took advantage of the Revolution to escape classicism and exhibit extraordinary creativity. Mostly drawn to Constructivism, they “gave future generations of architects fresh and innovative methods in resolving architectural problems. . . [and] contributed immensely to the formation of Modernism. . .” (II, 203). Less persuasive is the unsubstantiated assertion that “[t]races of their Jewish upbringing and mentality can be found in every aspect of avant-garde creativity” (II, 203).

Yet while lauding the extraordinary creativity during the 1920s of such architects as Moisei Ginzburg, Mikhail Okhitovich, and Mikhail Barshch, Berkovich condemns them for participating in the revolutionary dreams of the NEP, branding them as essentially Stalinist fellow travelers for their hopes to create a “social condenser” that would usher in a more collectivist, less individualistic (and less anti-humanistic) world. Such a failure to appreciate the fundamental difference of Ginzburg's dreams from those of Iosif Stalin's creatures severely mars the analysis.

Berkovich persuasively argues that the demise of avant-garde architecture was intimately connected to the Palace of Soviets competition (1931–34), which “aimed at pivoting Soviet architecture away from creating human environment and toward fulfilling a decorative function for the State (which at this point was synonymous with Stalin” (II, 143). The competition served “to create a culture of dependence, uncertainty, and panic among the architects” (II, 153). Architecture henceforth “was reduced to propagandizing the ideas of socialism by means of embellishment” (II, 205). Unfortunately, little is made of the ferocious fights within the architectural community that facilitated the Stalinist takeover.

Architecture now entered the epoch of Socialist Realism, a “process of turning Jewish architects (along with their non-Jewish colleagues) into something more akin to stage designers. . . , the entire building industry [being] redirected toward manufacturing a canvas for painting the picture glorifying the Soviet State” (III, 15), reflected in the major construction projects of the period, such as the Moscow Metro and the Moscow-Volga Canal. Not only were most Jewish architects not purged (although he traces many who were sent to the camps, yet permitted to work as architects), but some found regime patrons. The price for survival was adaptation and conformity. “A building with façade details of any one of the acceptable styles, pimped with adequate amounts of kitsch, was acknowledged as an example of *socialist realism* in architecture, especially if the *Leader* took a liking to it” (III, 85–86). This culminated in the erection of the Stalin Skyscrapers. Given the growing anti-Semitism, it is no surprise that only three architects involved in those constructions are definitively Jewish. However, Berkovich notes, amidst this stifling of creativity and failure to develop new building types or building technology, Jewish female architects were emerging.

The post-Stalin leadership addressed the profound necessity of building new housing on a massive scale. This demanded abandoning architectural embellishment, industrializing housing construction, and exploring foreign experience—that is, copying the Modernist style. Architects soon accepted Nikita Khrushchev’s orders, with “Stalin’s socialist realism, imitating historic styles, . . . simply converted over the next several years into the socialist realism with a modernist face of the Khrushchev-Brezhnev era” (IV, 18). “Modernized Socialist Realism” demonstrated not creativity but blind copying from the west, Jewish architects with few exceptions simply following accepted trends. Marked by low-cost standardized apartment blocks using prototype designs of entire buildings, the exceptions were “experimental” (luxury) apartments, at times reviving Constructivist ideas, built for the ruling elite. As Berkovich convincingly concludes, “With the exception of members of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s, Jewish architects in Russia and the Soviet Union, just as their colleagues from the country’s other ethnicities, did not attain a level of global architecture in their creative work. . . . Nevertheless, they left a wide-ranging and large legacy in the architectural landscape of Imperial and Soviet Russia” (IV, 130).

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***Moscow Monumental: Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin’s Capital.*** By

Katherine Zubovich. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. xiv, 274 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. \$39.95, hard bound.

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The seven Stalin-era skyscrapers (*vysotki*, or *vysotnye zdaniia* in Russian) are, like St. Basil’s, an indelible part of the memory of anyone who has ever visited or lived in Moscow. Indeed, my own first impressions of Moscow are forever linked with *zona B* (zone V), a dormitory wing in the most imposing of those towers, the main building of Moscow State University on what was then known as Lenin Hills. The summer of 1970 was a perilous time in the middle of a seemingly endless and expanding Vietnam War. We had just bombed the port of Haiphong. Yet that building, with its creaky oak parquet and capricious elevators, seemed to enfold and protect—not so much a building, but an entire universe. Little did those of us in the IREX Summer Exchange know of the ghosts beneath those parquet floors.