

Title: The Architectural Cult of Lenin, between Mummy and Colossus
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The study of 1930s Stalinist architecture frequently invokes a paradigm in which avantgarde iconoclasm gives way to a monumentalist aesthetic. The Lenin Mausoleum—housing the leader’s corpse—and the never-built Palace of Soviets—topped with his statue—are seen as textbook examples of this shift. Scholars cite the history of the two structures’ design between 1924 and 1934 to illustrate the ossification of early Soviet dynamism and revolutionary expectation into socialist realism’s stately grandeur and epic sweep. Many have suggested that this aesthetic turn reflected a change in the Soviet attitude to time—abandoning the radical ideals of historical rupture, negation, and revelatory estrangement in favor of the more conservative principles of cultural evolution, affirmation, and the accumulation and preservation of value.

By contrast, in this paper I argue that the architectural Lenin cult does not sacrifice rupture for continuity, but attempts to inhabit a point of contradiction at which the two temporalities collide. This thesis is demonstrated by examining the mausoleum and the palace together as a single architectural narrative, interpreted (or performed) in temporally multivalent ways. The two buildings are linked by their common emergence from the architectural discourse of anthropomorphic superbldings—imaginary structures that embody the Soviet collective and the power that unites it. Together they stage a drama in which the temporally suspended (mummified) Lenin rises as a living, deathless colossus. This figure can be interpreted alternatively as a metaphor for communist selfgovernance, deferred ever further into the future, or a more “mythic” image of humanity’s palpably imminent consummation. While the former interpretation reflects a monumentalist attitude to time (continuity), and the latter, an opposed eschatological one (rupture), I argue that both were not only available, but encouraged in Stalinist culture, as each resolves the ambivalence of the other.

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