Tom Cubbin. *Soviet Critical Design: Senezh Studio and the Communist Surround.*

Cultural Histories of Design. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. vii, 226 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Index. Plates. $135.00, hard bound; $37.95, paper.

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Tom Cubbin's Soviet Critical Design explores the history of the Senezh Studio between its inception during the cultural Thaw and its dissolution in 1992. At the intersection of philosophy, cultural theory and scientific-technical aims, the studio was conceived through and informed by a reevaluation of Karl Marx's writings about art, productivism in the early twentieth century, and the development of neoproductivism in the 1960s. Cubbin follows the trajectory of the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics (VNIITE), part of the USSR Union of Artists, and its interactions with Senzeh designers who toed the line between following central directives and using their unique position to push back against certain bureaucratic and stylistic demands that were required of other media. Yet, Cubbin tackles more than an analysis of the Senezh design projects, its history, and the ideas of the studio's founders Karl Kantor and Evgenii Rozenblium: in many ways the author utilizes the studio as a microcosm of developments, ideas and philosophies that emerged during and after the Thaw in the applied arts.

Cubbin's monograph is organized chronologically, and he begins his study of the critical design practice of artistic projecteering at Senezh by explaining the contextual background of its foundation in 1964. The first chapter, clarifies how "both technical aesthetics and artistic projecteering were rooted in the intellectual discourses of the 1950s..." and that practitioners and theorists in the 1950s and early 1960s borrowed "heavily from avant-garde theories of the 1920s to produce a contemporary theory of communist production art" (50–51). Furthermore, Cubbin explains that during the Thaw, theorists positioned the role of the artist designer as one who engaged in a fusion of scientific-technical transformation and creative labor to generate a material environment conducive to neoproductivism (based on the Senezh Studio's co-founder Karl Kantor's theory of design). This compliments Ch. 2, in which the author delves into the studio's methods. The studio attempted to facilitate the integration of art with technology (or vice versa) and the emergence of new methodology based on the "production of art of the future," though this was only theoretical. Nevertheless, "Senezh was unique in its attempt to fuse compositional unity in art to the wider environment...transferring the ideals of art to reality...[which] served as a conduit for the introduction of new ideas and ideals to the nascent Soviet design culture" (95).

In Ch. 3 and 4, the author examines two divergent trends in the legacy of critical design from the generation of artists who came of age during the Thaw. The former involved the museification of modern cityscapes through "participatory methods and historical consciousness to break through the semiotic cage of the socialist built environment" (131). In designers' attempts to protect historical buildings and spaces, they conceptualized alternative means and models of using these existing places to preserve sites of memory. The author posits that some Senezh artists used these models as a means of optimistic activism against the "excesses of urban modernization that were deemed dehumanizing" (132).

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The following chapter investigates futurological alternatives, whose followers believed that past ideas should be modified by successive generations, rather than simply preserved for posterity. The final chapter traces the demise of the communist surround and the closure of the Senezh studio. Ultimately, while artists were "fundamentally invested in the revaluation of culture during perestroika . . . the destabilization of temporality . . . left practitioners unclear as to what a studio like Senezh might be for in the post-Soviet context," and the surround became increasingly irrelevant (192–93).

The Senezh Studio was in many ways a melting pot of designers, theorists and visionaries from the Soviet intelligentsia who imagined and reimagined and created what Cubbin titles the "communist surround." In perhaps the greatest conceptual contribution of this work, the author explains the "surround" as "an environment that supports forms of intellectual and creative freedom that would be essential components in the spiritual transformation of mankind" (2). Furthermore, as a whole, Senezh experimental projects, and what the author titles "artistic projecteering" entailed "the construction of milieux that enable[d] new forms of information exchange and assembly to liberate the individual from a mind-set that engenders a passive relationship to objects, environments and ideas" (7). While artistic projecteering was a "marginal practice," more a concept than a concrete practice, its relationship to the communist surround illuminates the "hopes, ideals and frustrations of the late socialist intelligentsia more broadly" (12).

Eleanor Rees. *Designing Russian Cinema: The Production Artist and the Material Environment in Silent Era Film.*

KINO—The Russian and Soviet Cinema. London: Bloomsbury, 2023. ix, 264 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Filmography. Photographs. £76.50, hard bound.

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Oscillations between the collective and the individual—or divergent heavings toward one or the other conceptual polarity—are evident nearly everywhere in the arts of Russia's early twentieth century, most self-consciously so in the years just after the Revolution. And "of all the arts" (Vladimir Lenin), cinema, then a form still emphatically in its infancy, seems to express this ambivalence literally: the tension between individual and collective was not only a common thematic strain in early Russian and Soviet cinema, but also a practical, institutional dilemma. Who should qualify as "the filmmaker"? Who are the artists, and who part of the technical and administrative team? Who should be credited individually? Is cinema the product of collective efforts or of individual achievements? And yet, early scholarship on Russian cinema tended to foreground the individual filmmaker-director, then to build knowledge of auxiliaries within the filmmaking apparatus from this position (Elizaveta Svilova via Dziga Vertov; Natan Zarkhi via Vsevolod Pudovkin, etc.).

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