ist era and provides short accounts of the most recent stages of construction when, from the second half of the 1950s, the monumental characteristics of the Stalinist years were almost completely lost.

The second part of the book, “Un monument littéraire à édifier. L’Histoire du Métro de Moscou,” focuses on one of the fundamental chapters of the emergence of the literary “myth of the metro.” This was part of a never-completed grandiose project called the History of Manufactures and Workshops (Istorij a fabriki i zavodov, 1931–36), where the history of the metro was an essential component. Maksim Gor’kij considers this “historical-literary enterprise” to be part of the many efforts that make up a “collection of the living memory of companies and large building sites in the industrialization period” (115). Exploring this extraordinary source by combining and interweaving different levels of interpretation, Bouvard analyzes the large and complex tissue of actions, symbols, and strategies that made the Red subway—a “shock” workplace privileged in the receipt of manpower and materials—a unique technical, artistic, and ideological showcase in the history of the Soviet capital, and in many respects of the Soviet Union, in the interwar years. These key aspects were perfectly summed up in the celebratory speech given by Kaganovich, the main political and organizational figure behind the metro and the Moscow reconstruction plan itself. Soviet workers, this political leader emphasized, would see their future in the subway. With this victory over the underground, the government of workers and peasants had demonstrated its capacity to create “a prosperous and culturally elevated environment.” The speech was published by the main newspapers and then repeatedly reprinted with the explicit, unambiguous title “The Victory of the Subway is the Victory of Socialism.”

Placing the metro worksite accurately at the core of the town-planning and design debate in the 1920s and 1930s, the third section, “Un monument d’architecture. Les palais souterrains du Métro,” explores the design decision-making process under the control of the Arkhplan, a joint political and technical commission chaired by Kaganovich, whose name the subway carried until 1955. Its architectural achievements and symbolic features make the Moscow subway not only one of the most important infrastructural works of the twentieth century, but also the most significant architectural work of socialist realism. Bouvard’s research examines the articulations of this phenomenon, one that cannot be reduced, as often believed, to the simple imposition of a classical style. It was rather an attempt to achieve an organic and timeless merging of historic and modern patterns thought to be capable of giving caractère to the various parts of the work. Its development is clearly legible in the various construction stages of the “most beautiful underground in the world.” This interpretation allows one to grasp the meaning of a work intended to represent utopia, though implemented in a society that—as we now know—was going through one of the most tragic periods of its history.

Bouvard’s work is based on systematic and thorough research in the main archives of Moscow, in particular the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the Institute of World Literature (IML), and the archive of the Communist Party. Interweaving with great intelligence various levels of inquiry, the text is addressed to a wide range of specialists. It deals with the history of architecture, town planning, and infrastructure and explores a crucial episode of Soviet literary life. Above all, Bouvard’s study offers a significant contribution to the urban history of Soviet Moscow, a topic that, until a few years ago, had only been subject to a few explorations. Among the book’s credits, it highlights over the last few years the development of a recent specialized European historiography on the Soviet era, one that has opened many new windows on one of the most fundamental chapters of twentieth-century history.

ALESSANDRO DE MAGISTRIS
Milan Polytechnic

Notes

Christopher Whitehead
The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery

If Berlin gave birth to the purpose-built public museum with the construction of Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Altes Museum in the 1820s, Victorian London arguably served as the building type’s most active incubator. The power of the British Empire both facilitated collecting on an unprecedented scale and celebrated the display of these collections as an appropriate expression of imperial greatness. As ad hoc facilities for the storage and exhibition of the nation’s riches began to burst at their seams, ambitious new purpose-built museums sprang up throughout the capital city: notably the National Gallery (William Wilkins, completed 1837), the British Museum
(Sir Robert Smirke, completed 1852), the Natural History Museum (Alfred Waterhouse, opened 1881), and the South Kensington Museum (now called the Victoria and Albert Museum; Ashton Webb, 1899–1909).

In no case was the museum building process simply a matter of meeting self-evident needs. Instead, the physical construction of museum architecture contributed to the conceptual construction of epistemological categories that we now take for granted. While the British Museum was once understood as the repository for all of the nation’s collections, the design of new museums involved establishing the borders between antiquities, fine art (defined in the nineteenth century as easel paintings), “useful” arts, and natural history. In each venue, this important cultural work was complicated by other issues, particularly the emergence of new professional identities (whether on the part of architects, engineers, scientists, or art historians) and debates over the relationship between a given museum and its various audiences.

The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery seeks to contribute to this story by offering a close examination of the National Gallery in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Rather than tracing the construction of Wilkins’s Trafalgar Square building, it focuses on the intense debates fueled by the growing dissatisfaction with that structure and its site. Too small to hold a diachronic collection of paintings by covering every available wall surface to engage the gentleman’s imagination writ large. It was to be a site that sought to engage the serious study of art, including even some who used the gallery as a pleasant spot to consume their midday meal, the site also increased the number of “idle and unwashed” museum-goers whose very presence was understood to exacerbate the indoor pollution so damaging to the pictures (126).

Judged from the point of view of actual construction, the ensuing history is a frustrating one. No fewer than four select committees of Parliament and a royal commission took up the National Gallery question and seriously contemplated erecting a new building, first at Kensington Gore (near the new South Kensington Museum) and later on the grounds of Burlington House, with its more contemplative atmosphere. A new building for the Trafalgar Square site was the subject of a fractious 1866 design competition. Ultimately, however, political wrangling, professional jealousies, and governmental penury thwarted these ambitious plans, and the built results of these efforts were modest indeed: interior alterations by James Pennethorne (executed in 1860); and an addition of several rooms designed by Edward Middleton Barry (one of Charles Barry’s two architect sons), constructed between 1868 and 1876.

What makes the story worth pursuing, argues Christopher Whitehead, is the extent to which it illuminates the active role played by museum architecture in “producing specific discourses about the works of art on show” (xiii). He uses the National Gallery to highlight a number of issues, with particular attention to the tensions between two strategies for displaying art. The more conservative one—which Whitehead characterizes as “historist”—treated the public art museum as a private gallery writ large. It was to be a site that sought to engage the gentleman’s imagination by covering every available wall surface with a diachronic collection of paintings of different sizes, selected solely with an eye to quality and arranged to create aesthetically pleasing juxtapositions of color, form, and content—all within a rich and historicist architectural setting. The more progressive “historiographic” approach identified the public art museum with a comprehensive collection displayed in an explicitly didactic arrangement that facilitated the exercise of judgment on the part of the connoisseur, even as it offered basic art historical instruction to neophytes. As Whitehead points out, being able to scrutinize the paintings was newly important in these historiographical displays, which called for paintings to be hung in no more than two lines with a modicum of space around each.

Historians of museum practice have noted these two approaches before. In The Birth of the Museum, for instance, Tony Bennett related the shift in display strategies to the formation of a bourgeois public sphere and the development of liberal subjectivity. Sidestepping many of the issues raised by such cultural theory, Whitehead delves deeply into the specifics of a particular time and place. Having mastered what must have been a daunting written record, he identifies who supported new display techniques, who did not, and—to a certain extent—why. Sometimes the insights are surprising, such as the extent to which the historicist approach was valued not just by elites (who were accustomed to the look and tone of private galleries), but also by those who interpreted the chronological emphasis of historiographical displays as a disregard for artistic quality and thus an affront to national pride. Equally intriguing, Henry Cole, Richard Redgrave, and other organizers of the South Kensington Museum publicly supported treating the National Gallery as the repository of the highest quality paintings in order to highlight the progressive museological practices of their own institution. In 1860, engineer Francis Fowke (also closely associated with the South Kensington Museum) suggested an ingenious, albeit unexecuted, compromise: on the building’s...
entry axis, a large, double-height, top-lit, centralized room would serve as a tribune. It would be a space comparable to the Louvre’s Salon Carré and, like it, intended to house the collection’s masterpieces. Smaller, single-height galleries would house historiographical displays of the rest of the paintings.

Whitehead also differs from other historians of museum display by focusing more explicitly on the architectural ramifications of these conflicting approaches to the display of art. One of the major reasons the Wilkins building suddenly seemed so inadequate was the dramatic increase in wall space needed to rehang the existing collection in the sort of linear organization mandated by the historiographical approach. At the same time, the new emphasis on visibility required a wide range of room sizes: grand rooms that would allow visitors to stand back from large paintings as well as more intimate spaces to encourage the close examination of smaller works. Given the importance Eastlake placed on displaying drawings and engravings in close proximity to associated paintings, this approach also called for a subsidiary range of rooms to parallel and not interrupt the evolutionary presentation of national schools.

One of the architectural implications of this history is the extent to which new, historiographical ideas of display thrust nineteenth-century architects into an almost untenable position. It is hard to imagine a public museum building that could meet all the requirements of historiographical display—arranging paintings both chronologically and by national schools in rooms related to the size of the paintings and creating parallel galleries for the display of drawings and engravings—unless it were designed for particular works in a particular collection. Yet, the related drive to develop a comprehensive collection also presupposed constant acquisition and a collection perpetually in flux. Little wonder that nineteenth-century museums were so rarely considered resoundingly successful.

Whitehead’s challenge is similar: how to present the chronological development of the National Gallery while also investigating important museological issues. His solution is to organize the book into two parts. In part one, “The Development of a Public Museology,” five thematically focused chapters provide context and elucidate issues to help readers understand the implications of the chronological narrative presented in the five chapters of part two, “The National Gallery 1850–1876.” The organization almost works, although it seems to have emboldened the author to include every detail of the lengthy deliberations covered in part two.

Given the welcome architectural focus of the book’s analysis, Whitehead’s failure to treat architecture as legitimate historical evidence in its own right is disappointing. The meager forty-five black-and-white images are ganged at the center of the book and reproduced at so small a size that their details are impossible to discern, a treatment that makes the book’s ninety-five-dollar price tag exorbitant. Moreover, the argument ignores what the designs themselves contribute to our understanding of issues raised in the written sources. How, for instance, might we interpret the prominence of domes in the designs submitted to the 1866 competition? Are they intended to evoke ecclesiastical architecture, providing the churchlike spaces that would allow art to be displayed in something akin to its original context (an approach, Whitehead points out, advocated by Gustav Friedrich Waagen, director of the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin)? Or are they outward expressions of tribunelike spaces, indicating some compromise with the historiographical arrangements in other parts of the plans? What of interior views that reveal the presence of low balustrades separating viewers from the paintings on display, especially given contemporary concerns about working-class gallery-goers? Are these barriers solely an attempt to prevent inexperienced visitors from touching works of art? Or, given the frequency with which figures were depicted leaning over these railings, did they function as supports that encouraged the kind of close examination of the paintings favored by Eastlake and others?

If The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain does not confront all of these architectural issues, it nonetheless underscores the value of deeply contextualized studies of individual buildings. It also demonstrates the key role that architectural design played in a process perhaps too complex and too protracted to be called the “birth” of the public museum.

Abigail A. Van Slyck
Connecticut College

James B. Garrison
Foreword by Steven McLeod Bedford
Mastering Tradition: The Residential Architecture of John Russell Pope

Chris Wilson
Photography by Robert Reck
Facing Southwest: The Life and Houses of John Gaw Meem

What is the role of history in the home? These publications examine how two American architects, one a firm traditionalist and the other a more individualistic designer, forged their own relationship between past and present. Both John Russell Pope (1874–1937), an East Coast classicist, and John Gaw Meem (1894–1983), a New Mexico regionalist, designed houses that referred to the past while establishing an identity very much of the present. Both Pope and Meem, two understudied but significant architects whose reputations declined somewhat in the postwar period, are ripe for reassessment today. James Garrison’s Mastering Tradition: The Residential Architecture of John Russell Pope and Chris Wilson’s Facing Southwest: The Life and Houses of John Gaw Meem supplement earlier studies that focused on the public buildings of each architect.1 These new texts