Title: Two Kislovodsk Stairs: The Evocation of Power in the Design of a Climbable Space
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Modern art history, in the wake of Giddens' social theory, acknowledges that a work of art can become an active generator of power structures, as well as entering into social relationships with human agents. With this in mind, I would like to examine two landscape staircases in Kislovodsk constructed in the late 1930s and based on similar aesthetics: the staircase of Ordzhonikidze sanatorium designed by Leonidov, and the Cascade staircase, featuring many similar motifs, by Zalesskaia and Shevchenko. Leonidov's staircase has never enjoyed much popularity as a landmark in Kislovodsk, although the "squeaking" dragonfly inlaid in the ground of its theater-shaped section has always attracted spectators. Currently removed from the sanatorium's jurisdiction, it now verges upon a ruin. The Cascade staircase, in contrast, has been always famous and the city of Kislovodsk, together with its current owner, the same Ordzhonikidze sanatorium, recently ordered its renovation.

Why have these stairways had different fates? Why does the community feel like climbing the Cascade stairway and introducing it to tourists, while it shuns Leonidov's stairway, despite its distinctive visual style and the impressive view it reveals. Besides obvious considerations (such as inconvenient location and the official ban on Leonidov during his lifetime), I will argue that the answer to these questions involves an analysis of the symbolic order Leonidov's design conveys to the recipient. What does one feel while experiencing the staircase, what image of oneself does it suggest, what system of values and tastes does it evoke or question? Abandoning it to a state of neglect and disrepair could be an efficient response on the community's part to the power structure the staircase generates. Therefore, I will try to describe the order the staircase conveys on the basis of individual and collective responses to its existence.