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Architectures of Life-Building in the Twentieth Century

Russia, Germany, Sweden

Irina Seits



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Architectures of Life-Building
in the Twentieth Century
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Irina Seits

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To my mother Liudmila Seits

Abstract

The modernist concept of *life-building* as an architectural method for improving the conditions of everyday life originated in Europe during the 1920s. This book explores three modes of functionalism by way of a comparative analysis of both the theoretical discourses and architectural practices associated with functionalism in Russia, Germany, and Sweden. These three countries made significant contributions to the application of functionalism within mass housing construction, the overarching purpose of which was to transform the traditional home into a rational living space.

This study provides both close readings of foundational modernist texts as well as an empirical study of the avant-garde heritage in Russia, Germany, and Sweden. As a special case study, a visual analysis of IKEA catalogues is presented, the purpose of which is to provide an illustrated history of modernist aesthetics within mass produced living spaces, from the era of functionalism up to the present day.

Det modernistiska begreppet *livsbyggande* ("Life-Building") som en arkitektonisk metod för att förbättra vardagslivets villkor, uppstod i Europa under 1920-talet. Denna bok undersöker tre former av funktionalism via en komparativ analys av teoretiska diskurser såväl som arkitekturpraktiker i Ryssland, Tyskland och Sverige. Dessa tre länder gjorde viktiga bidrag till funktionalismens tillämpning inom storskaligt bostadsbyggande, med det övergripande syftet att förvandla det traditionella hemmet till en rationell plats för liv, "living space".

Denna studie innehåller både närläsningar av grundläggande teoretiska texter inom modernismen och en empirisk studie av avantgardets arv i Ryssland, Tyskland och Sverige. En speciell fallstudie utgörs av en bildanalys av IKEA:s kataloger, med syftet att ge en historia i bild av modernismens estetik inom storskaligt bostadsbyggande från funktionalismen till idag.

Keywords: architecture of the twentieth century, modernism, Soviet avant-garde, functionalism, constructivism, life-building, Russia, Germany, Sweden, urban theory, IKEA, living space, everyday life, home.

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Architectures of Life-Building in the Twentieth Century: Russia, Germany, Sweden

And it began so marvelously
Sigfried Giedion

Introduction

The analysis of the *life-building* concept as a modernist method for the production of living space is the central focus for the present book, where the concept's formation and development will be investigated through three modes of functionalism.

The notion of the *living space* is connected to the notion of *home*, though they are not merely synonymous. In fact, this book explores the distance that during the twentieth century had formed between the *home* and *living space*. I will follow the way that the notion of *home*, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced and endorsed a huge part of the *living space* agenda, passes through various political, social, and – what is primarily in focus here – aesthetic determinations; precisely, it is in the interlocking and intersecting of these fields that the course along which, if one can say, the *home* journeys during the last hundred years can be traced. An understanding of this notion, often taken as the centre of family life, was, in the course of one hundred years, radically transformed.

The study will investigate a series of transformations that the traditional *home* has undergone under the stewardship of the modernist aesthetics of life-building, and from the vantage point of the present, to ask: what part of contemporary living space does the home occupy, and how have modern mass housing solutions and urban planning affected the spaces we live in today?

Any study seeking to broach the problem of contemporary *living space* runs into immediate difficulties, owing to the fact that the concept is extremely broad; a thematic study about living space can be accessed in various ways, researched from different perspectives, and from within a variety of academic fields.

The concept of the three modes of functionalism

If the present study can be said to make a theoretical contribution, then it is on account of its endeavour to distinguish between three *modes* of space production within the aesthetics of architectural modernism.

The three modes of functionalism, as I name them, are the modes by which the living space is produced through an application of the notion of *life-building*. These modes are not to be confused with types or versions of functionalism but as the ways through which the production of the new living space is achieved.

In the present study, I trace the route along which architectural functionalism proceeded during the twentieth century. Depending on the context, this development takes a different level of intensity and extension. In Sweden, the line of development is the straightest, while the most dramatic and extreme vacillations in the fortunes of functionalism occurred in both Russia and Germany. By offering a comparative analysis of modernist theory and the architectural practice of functionalism as it developed in the three countries chosen for the present thesis, I outline the main distinguishing features that are most characteristic of each case, thereby conditionally dividing European functionalism into the three modes. I turn to Russia, Germany, and Sweden, since I consider these countries the most representative of modernist aesthetics alongside the functionalist method as its working tool, through which the life-building concept was to be realised. By investigating these three modes, I reflect on the contribution that functionalism has made to the formation of the contemporary living space – the space within which we, or many of us, call our homes.

I offer the conditional division of European functionalism into Russian, German, and Russian modes, basing the differences on the respective radicalism and intensity of their methodological application and artistic expression.

In the current thesis, I intend to overcome the conventional perception that each mode of functionalism is a coded way of speaking of a “national” concept, as if each mode were enclosed within and limited to the national borders of European countries with very different political regimes. I claim that the functionalist method did not originate separately in each country; it was principally a global modernist theory that developed in the space and time of modernity, and that initially had no direct relation to any national borders. The continent lived through modernity, and modernity encompasses the complexity of a historical period, acquiring different theoretical and visual frames and forms within different territories. And yet those differen-

ces were not framed entirely by political borders and were based not only on the level of localities; they were rather set within the aesthetics of functionalism. This means therefore that the main criterion for distinguishing between modes should be the levels of intensity of their theoretical and material practices.

On the objectives of the study and its methodological approach

The methodology of such a project inevitably acquires a patchwork character; in order to knit a broader picture of what the living space is and to reflect on what it is already not, one must be guided by history, which means first gathering together the various puzzles, mosaic pieces, fragments, and shards of material scattered in the political, aesthetic, and intellectual history of the twentieth century.

The aesthetics of the contemporary living space is its conceptual, visual, and ideological skin that gains visibility through an identification, presentation, description, and analysis of its fluid and unstable components. The 'reading' and the analysis of this skin is the focus for the present study.

So as to reveal the history of the conceptual and material formation of the living space, I intentionally limit myself to what I see as the core historical period from out of which today's living space has emerged. I turn to what I regard as the most relevant material artefacts (mostly architectural objects), concepts, texts, and events which, while by no means exhaustive, are nonetheless considered the most indicative for my present purposes. Hence I aim at articulating, depicting, and comprehending the contemporary living space, which in turn requires the application of different methods, which I consider to be the most suitable and efficient in each case.

One of the methods that I apply in this book is a visual analysis of the images from IKEA catalogues, which record the visual development of the contemporary living space from the early 1940s up to the present. Through this analysis my aim is not to produce another history of IKEA's business development or the history of its products and their consumption; I intend instead to visualise the paths of transformation within the living space and its representations through the catalogues of one of the largest furniture dealers. IKEA's ambition goes far beyond selling furniture; the company claims to sell a particular way of living, a certain way of organising domestic space as well as of representing the desired home.

The historical period under investigation is relatively restricted in scope. I shall take as my point of departure the end of World War I. This point already indicates some significant transformations in the very constitution of everyday living within the European continent. Certainly, it is obvious that previous ages had paved the way for these transformations, and whenever opportune to do so I will return to them in the form of texts and architectural examples extracted from earlier decades. It is, however, principally the modernist architectural theory and practice of the 1920s and 1930s – which experimented with architectural and housing solutions on a social scale – that, for this study, is considered as the historical ground on which the aesthetics of the contemporary living space is formed. A focus on modernist architecture offers two advantages: first, it affords the possibility of defining both the visualisation of the contemporary living space through its material architectural forms; second, it allows attention to be directed towards the embeddedness of social relations and everyday practices within architecture. For these two reasons, the architectural theories and practices of the modernist era – i.e. 1920 and 30s Europe – are considered as experientially formative and conceptually grounding for the contemporary state and definition of living space – the primary topic for this thesis.

The countries of Russia, Germany, and Sweden that are offered for comparative analyses in the current book are not the only candidates that might have been chosen for this study, nor can it be said that architectural projects, which were realised in many other parts of Europe, could be taken as any less indicative of the transformations to be analysed here.¹ Having said all this, the three chosen cases are the most programmatic in resembling the systematic transformations of the concept of the living space on a general state level. In the 1920s and 1930s, a modernist architectural practice that applied an avant-garde functionalist aesthetics was widely supported and financed by these countries' governments. It is precisely this partnership between modernist art and the state that makes the mass housing construction projects in Russia, Germany, and Sweden as paradigmatic cases for the architectural and spatial transformations affecting not only these countries but impacting on the European region as a whole.

—

¹ To name a few: The Austrian "Red Vienna" estate built in 1926–1930 by Karl Ehn in Karl-Marx-Hof; in Holland: the famous concrete village of Betondorp in Watergraafsmeer built by Dick Greiner in 1923–25; the projects by Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud, such as the Spangen estate of 1919–1923 and the Kiefhoek estate of 1928–1930 in Rotterdam; the BABA colony in Prague started in 1932 to the masterplan by Pavel Yanakhad.

This project is not exclusively a study on the history of modernist architecture. Rather it aims at articulating how the understanding of the very idea of a home and domesticity changed, owing not only to the influence of modernist theory, but also to the development of the welfare state, as well as finally to the legislation and implementation of new housing policy. The present thesis is an attempt to trace and analyse transformations in everyday living practices by, through, and within the realisation of mass housing projects that aimed at reforming the lives of whole cities and countries through the architectural, aesthetic, and ideological transformation of the living environment. The systematic and extensive nature of these changes can be captured by *life-building* – a concept I will properly introduce below.

In order to trace the transformations of both the living space and domesticity in the three selected cases, I will examine the theoretical background that not only preceded but often developed and matured along with the architectural constructions of the new living space through the interwar period. Also integral to the overall study is an analysis of the shifts and changes in modernist theory that take place against the backdrop of the building of the welfare state, mass housing construction, and urban planning.

The visual and comparative analyses of architectural practice in Russia, Germany, and Sweden during the interwar period will be presented in the second empirical part of this book. The first part is of a more theoretical character, introducing a series of close readings of some of the core original texts written at the time. These selected texts were instrumental in helping to manifest, articulate, and disseminate modernist theory that would later be, or was simultaneously translated into architectural practice. Through a closer reading and analysis of these texts, the history of the formation of the contemporary living space is traced, allowing for a definition of the *living space* as a concept as well as for the articulation of the philosophical grounds and methods of operation comprising the theory of *life-building* theory. Together, these two parts of the dissertation offer an analysis of the translation of modernist theory into architectural ‘life-building’ practice.

Since my overarching goal is to articulate and analyse the concept of the living space, whose intellectual formation is both complex and fluid, I turn to a variety of texts of different genres and styles – from manifestoes of the 1920s and 1930s, such as those penned by constructivists in the Soviet avant-garde magazine *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura* (*Contemporary Architecture*) or the Swedish functionalist manifesto *Acceptera*, to the fundamental works of the leading proponents of modernism, such as those by Siegfried Giedion, as well as to the essayistic and illuminating texts of Walter

Benjamin, who had witnessed first-hand the transformations that the living space was undergoing in the Soviet Union during his stay in Moscow.

The analysis presented of avant-garde architecture in this study has been affected by my own experience of modernist heritage. After visiting *siedlungen* in Berlin, *zhilmassivs* in St. Petersburg, *dom-kommunas* in Moscow, and *collective houses* in Stockholm, I began reading them as texts and artefacts that not only symbolise social and aesthetic experiments of their own period, but that translate modernist ideas of the new living space into our contemporaneity.

My own everyday living practices cannot escape the IKEA objects that in turn were produced under the influence of modernist aesthetics. The objects themselves witness and transmit modernist ideas, forming and nearly controlling the immediate surroundings of contemporary everyday life. I do not here intend to provide a comprehensive critical analysis of IKEA as a business, marketing or cultural phenomenon. I turn instead to a visual analysis of its catalogues, which reveal the transformations that notions of home and domestic life have undergone during the twentieth century.

Henri Lefebvre: the Production of Space and the Critique of Everyday Life

In order to speak about the production, formation, and the reformation of the new living space in a way that allows for a complex and variegated account to come to light, I will draw upon the terminology and theoretical constructions developed by Henri Lefebvre.

The theory of social space and its production was introduced and summarised by Henri Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space* (1974).² Lefebvre introduced the use of the term “social production of space” and “spatialisation” as one of the modes of space production from a natural “absolute” space. He was among the first who theorised space beyond the traditional scientific understanding of the notion as a “strictly geometrical” and “ultimately a mathematical one.”³ At the same time, he was equally dismissive of the rather liberal usage of the word *space* in various discourses by different thinkers. Multiple meanings would often be impressionistically ascribed to the term with no proper investigation and analysis about its nature forthcoming:

² In this study I use the following edition: Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*. Nicholson-Smith, David (Transl.). (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991)

³ *Ibid.*, p.1.

We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psycho-analytic topologies, and so on and so forth. Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly fundamental epistemological studies is not only the idea of ‘man’ but also that of space – the fact that ‘space’ is mentioned on every page notwithstanding.

Lefebvre develops an analytical method that allows for each historical mode to be described. Three interrelated components comprise the method: everyday practices and perceptions; representations of space, and the spatial imaginary of the time.

Lefebvre’s theoretical work had a significant impact on modern urban theory, drawing attention away from the space itself to the social mechanisms and relations that participate in its production and perception.

Lefebvre distinguishes between various modes of production of space – from initial *natural* or *absolute* space to the complex *social* space – through the process of *appropriation*. Thus, he argues that *the social space is a social product*;⁴ each society appropriates in its own way natural absolute space, transforming it into the social space. What results is the complex constitution of the produced social space. The emphasis on, as well as the objectives of the study of social space thus shifts from the study of the space as a physical constructed entity, that is ‘*things in space*,’ to the study of the very process by which this space’s is produced. As he argues, “if the space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production.”⁵ At the same time Lefebvre argues against both economic structuralism and the mechanical production and reproduction of space, an understanding which was widely applied in the very countries in focus for the present research – in the case of Russia and Germany, during the interwar period, and in Sweden, after the war.

According to Lefebvre, adopting a mechanical or structural understanding of space fails even to reach the very goals that it initially sets for itself: “Even neocapitalism or ‘organised’ capitalism, even technocratic planners and programmers, cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication.”⁶ In the process of the production of space a hegemonic class plays the crucial role of commander,

⁴ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, p. 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and where space cannot stay intact from having been hegemonised.⁷ Lefebvre here follows the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, who had theorised the politics of hegemony in his *Prison Notebooks*. Space plays a crucial role “as knowledge and action” in the “existing mode of production”, becoming the means and the system within which class hegemony is exercised,⁸ as well as a tool for the reproduction of the hegemonic class.

A second significant text for this thesis is Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life*, which was first published in 1947, later followed by a new edition in 1958 with an expanded foreword. This particular text of Lefebvre’s supports the arguments articulated by modernist thinkers whose texts I will subject to a closer reading in the theoretical part of my thesis from a socio-philosophical perspective.⁹

Even though everyday life as a subject of both aesthetic and architectural transformations was in focus for practicing architects and avant-garde thinkers in the 1920s, Lefebvre was one of the first who introduced the critique of the everyday into the wider fields of sociology and philosophy. This makes it an efficient and appropriate theoretical structure, which, while being situated outside of the pure architectural and aesthetic fields, serves as a complementary perspective that can justly draw out the grounds of the architectural functionalist method that sought precisely to transform everyday living space.

A central concept of Lefebvre’s *Critique* is *alienation*. The concept brings together the predicament facing both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie who are separated from themselves, making their ways of living fragmentary and ‘artificial.’ For Lefebvre this is an inevitable existential consequence of living in any capitalist society:

This alienation was *economic* (the division of labour; ‘private’ property; the formation of economic fetishes: money, commodities, capital); *social* (the formation of classes); *political* (the formation of the State); ideological (religions, metaphysics, moral doctrines). It was also *philosophical*: primitive man, simple, living on the same level as nature, became divided up into subject and object, form and content, nature and power, reality and possibility, truth and illusion, community and individuality, body and consciousness (‘soul’, ‘mind’).¹⁰

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⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Here I use the following edition: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. (London; New York, 1991)

¹⁰ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 249.

Lefebvre argues for the reconciliation of the wholeness of life and for the ‘rehabilitation’ of the “total man,” who is alienated neither from the products of his labour and the means of cultural and spiritual growth, nor from the achievements of technological progress that altogether elevate the life of, first of all, the worker from mere economic survival to a life that is lived in the wholeness of being. Lefebvre’s *Critique* is indeed the critique of modernity with its enhancing and yet diminishing devotion to technological progress. This critique, Lefebvre argues, should not be enacted from the outside of the everyday, as “we cannot step beyond the everyday.”¹¹ Instead the critique should operate within and by each and every aspect of the everyday life, as he states:

Far from suppressing criticism of everyday life, modern technical progress realises it. This technicity replaces the criticism of life through dreams, or ideas, or poetry, or those activities which rise above the everyday, by critique of everyday life from within: the critique which everyday life makes of itself, the critique of the real by the possible and of one aspect of life by another.¹²

The achievement of the wholeness of everyday life is to be carried out through its reformation by all possible means – philosophical, architectural, political, etc. These means, when complexly applied, will lead not to the evolution but to the revolution of everyday life, of which the “total man” is an integral part. Lefebvre’s approach to the ‘rehabilitation’ of the totality and wholeness of living through the revolutionary transformations within its everyday trivial routines is itself deeply rooted within modernist aesthetics. This modernist impulse was also incubated within the functionalist method that would be applied to the production of the new living space. Similar to the modernist architects, Lefebvre does not properly touch on the destructive aspects of the revolutionary means of producing the new living space; he is insistent though on couching the necessity of producing the new life in radical and revolutionary terms. As noted by Michel Trebitsch in the “Preface” to the 1991 first volume edition: “Seen in this light, *Critique of Everyday Life* opens up yet another avenue, one that leads beyond rural sociology, beyond urban sociology, and beyond Lefebvre’s later thinking on the production of space: the theme of the production of the everyday, of revolution as the revolution of everyday life.”¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹² Ibid., p.9.

¹³ Trebitsch, Michel. “Preface.” In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 27.

Louis Althusser and the ISAs

Another theoretical resource that plays an important role in the present work – though it will not be applied in any systematic way – is the theory of ideology and state ideological apparatuses (ISAs) developed by Louis Althusser. I certainly acknowledge the tensions and difficulties that exist when bringing together certain concepts developed by Lefebvre and Althusser, since they are located at the opposite ends of Marxist critique. However, while recognising these problems, I do not intend to digress into a comparative analysis here in this study. On formal, critical as well as methodological levels, I find the use of both thinkers helpful, and in two notable ways: first, they provide a way of articulating the reasons for modernism's failure in Russia and Germany – a point on which Althusser is most applicable; second, they provide a way to consider the persistence of functionalism in Sweden, specifically, as well as more generally its further modified existence in Europe throughout the twentieth century – an area of the study for which Lefebvre's urban theory applies most effectively. This is to say, Lefebvre and Althusser offer particular theoretical insights that provide fitting theoretical backgrounds against which particular themes, contradictions, ambivalences, and problematics about the production of living space in the self-understanding of representatives of the modernist avant-garde (i.e. the ideologues, theoreticians, essayists, practitioners of architecture, etc.) are brought into relief.

Under the new regimes established in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany in the 1930s, modernism could not reproduce the conditions of its own production and thus was forced into ideological retreat. The process leading up to, and including, this eventuality can, I suggest, be analysed by applying Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and the continuous ideological struggle that follows therefrom for control of the state apparatuses. A change in the ruling ideology, according to Althusser, will change the means of production – specifically, in the context of this study, the production of space, which forms the terrain upon which the struggle for a new cultural hegemony plays itself.

The functionalist architecture of the modernist avant-garde can be considered a cultural ISA in all three countries, playing as it does a crucial role in establishing the new state ideologies, not only in post-revolutionary Russia and the newly formed Weimar Republic, but in Sweden under social-democratic rule too.

According to Althusser, multiple ISAs belong mostly to the private domain, while RSAs (repressive state apparatuses), such as the police, army, courts, etc. – to the public domain. Yet, he argues that this distinction immediately collapses; ISAs can operate both privately (e.g. families) and publicly (schools, churches). The main distinction is in actual fact the following: that while RSAs operate through repression and by violence, ISAs, even if they may include repressive elements, operate in, by, and through ideology.¹⁴ As Althusser writes in a rather general definition of ISAs:

[...] the Ideological State Apparatuses are multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’ and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms.¹⁵

The avant-garde supported the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the Weimar Republic in Germany; in both contexts there was a willingness on the part of the avant-garde to apply its own radical modernist aesthetic to the building of a new society. In the case of Russia, it declared itself the main translator of the new socialist ideology into material architectural forms, thus becoming a major tool in the construction of a new reality.¹⁶ The avant-garde, as an avowed supporter of revolution and political novelty, was welcomed by the newly formed states, and thus for a period the principles of modernist architecture were institutionalised.

Avant-garde architecture in Russia encompassed and synthesised all the necessary features and roles demanded of an ISA. It shielded the Bolshevik State Apparatus, which, as is the case with all state apparatuses, contains two bodies: “the body of institutions which represent the Repressive State Apparatus on the one hand, and the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses on the other.”¹⁷

The governments of the three countries under study allowed modernism to exercise its ideology and aesthetics on an unprecedentedly large scale. Mass construction of both housing and public spaces, as well as the incorporation

¹⁴ For more on both the definitions and distinctions between RSAs and ISAs see: Althusser, Louis. *On ideology*. (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 15–22.

¹⁵ Althusser, Louis. *On Ideology*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Here and later I refer first of all to the architectural avant-garde, but it is equally valid to apply the same description to other forms of avant-garde activities at the time, including other forms of visual arts, literature, theatre, cinematography, etc.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

of new types of buildings, raised architectural experiments to the level of becoming not only the stakes of the new ideology, but also, and more decisively, constituting the very sites for the translation of that new ideology into an everyday and materialised form.¹⁸ Not that this means that avant-garde architecture simply became the means for establishing the political and ideological hegemony of the newly formed governments, entirely servile to the new state ideology. Rather it preserved its aesthetic and ideological autonomy; while it supported the ruling ideology and the revolutionary ideas that the new ruling ideology represented, the artistic avant-garde had not fully dissolved within it. In the end, modernist architecture, which, for a time, during the early years of the Soviet state, had become one of the most influential ISAs, was soon a victim of the repressive side of the very state apparatus it had supported, and struggled against it. If modernism had been entirely acquiescent with the Soviet state, and could no longer operate “beneath the ruling ideology”, there would have been no reason to radically shift the architectural ISA from functionalism to Socialist Realism. According to Althusser, it is the state as being “beneath the ruling ideology” that serves as a necessary condition for the ISA to operate, despite the possible inner contradictions and dispersions that are harboured within it:

If the ISAs ‘function’ massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, *beneath the ruling ideology*, which is the ideology of ‘the ruling class.’¹⁹

Althusser outlines the importance of the educational ISA for the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production. If it was once the Church and the family that ensured the ideological maintenance of social formations, in his own time the Church is replaced “*in its role as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus* by the School.”²⁰

The reforming of the educational ISAs was a top priority in both Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany.²¹ In the first post-revolutionary years, repre-

¹⁸ As Althusser notes, “the Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle” (Althusser, 2008: 21).

¹⁹ Althusser, Louis. *On Ideology*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²¹ For more on the early post-revolutionary reforms in artistic education in Soviet Russia see: Evseyev, Mikhail. “Becoming Tools for Artistic Consciousness of the People. The Higher art school and independent art studios in Petrograd (1918–1921).” In: *Baltic*

representatives of the avant-garde took responsibility for educational reform in the Soviet State, seeking to do so in the shortest time possible. With its capacity to extend its reach to the masses, architecture acquired an important appendage to the educational ISA; and steeped at the time in modernist ideology, it aimed at the production of an innovative educational living space that would have an impact on people through its materialised architectural forms, turning the produced environment into a new ‘common sense’ for its residents.

Through modernist architecture, the new ideology was to be materialised, while new representations of the real world were constructed in order to establish new social relations between people as well as between the people and this imaginary or constructed world – as Althusser puts it, ideology constitutes the “conditions of existence of men, i.e. their real world.”

[...] it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that ‘men’ ‘represent to themselves’ in ideology. But above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world.²²

Thus, architecture reproduced the imaginary relation of people to their real living space, thereby confirming Althusser’s theses that not only does “ideology have a material existence,”²³ but also that “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.”²⁴

In this study, I will follow Althusser’s lead and assume the material existence of ideology. While studying the architectural objects from a certain historical bloc, the purpose will be to trace the contours of the hegemonic ideology from the architectural forms themselves.

When applying the theories and methods developed by Lefebvre and Althusser, I do not intend to give a critical analysis of their writings. What I do instead is to appropriate certain elements of their theoretical and methodological constructions, as well as their theoretical vocabulary and terminology, that I consider useful and efficient when writing on the relations between architectural theory and practice as they developed during the

Worlds, 2017, vol. X:3. Special section: *Russian Revolution in Art & Aesthetics*, pp. 35–44. For the German case the history of Bauhaus school is indicative.

²² Althusser, Louis. *On Ideology*, p. 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

1920s, as well as architecture's relation to state policies in the twenties and thirties. These theories are also to be kept in mind, when I reflect on the overall destiny of modernism and its contribution to the formation of the contemporary living space.

On the historiography of modernism

This book is the outcome of one of the very first studies that treats the various approaches within modernist theory and architectural practice without separating and isolating functionalism to a very specific region. Rather, it understands functionalist aesthetics to have developed in parallel (though still in its own ways) in different parts of Europe, thereby demonstrating the epistemological unity of its aesthetics. All three countries that are considered representatives of these different ways of operation of functionalism, which I call 'modes': – Russia, Germany and Sweden, – in the interwar period were united by the same modernist aesthetics, and I consider it important to stress this unity in the present research. A comparative analysis of functionalism as developed in these countries, even though it faces them against each other, demonstrates their common grounds that allowed modernism to become one of the most vital and productive tools for the formation of contemporary living space on a global scale.

On Russian historiography of the architectural avant-garde

Historiography on Russian modernism, or the Russian avant-garde, which in the field architecture was represented by the art and theory of constructivism, is itself vast. In the first chapter I turn to the texts that were produced by the architects, who were representatives of constructivism and who articulated the architectural theory and practice of constructivism by publishing in periodical issues of leading architectural magazines of the time. Yet, I limit myself first of all to those texts and publications that deal with questions of the aesthetic language of constructivism, on the one side, and in relation to the reformation of the notion of home and the idea of the production of the new living space, on the other.

There are many texts and documents from the period under study that can be classed as grounding for the theory and practice of the Russian avant-garde. These include published manifestoes, such as *Constructivism*

by Alexey Gan of 1922,²⁵ which declared war on art and proclaimed the principles for a new mode of artistic production, using the term *constructivism* almost for the first time in a published edition. Among the key theoreticians and architects of the Russian avant-garde was Moisey Ginzburg, whose writings during the 1920s and 1930s have an important place in the present study. Ginzburg was working on an elaboration of the theoretical and aesthetic principles of constructivism and their implementation into architectural construction on an industrial scale. Ginzburg paid special attention to the problems associated with reforming the notion of home and to the solution of a housing problem through mass housing construction and urban planning, while publishing extensively in various periodic issues, as well as through his key monographs, such as *Ritm v Arkhitekture* (1923),²⁶ *Stil' i Epokha (Style and Epoch)* (1924),²⁷ and *Zhilische (Dwelling)* (1934).²⁸

Many of the theoreticians of the Russian architectural avant-garde were building architects who articulated principles for a modernist architecture. Almost immediately they sought to implement their designs, turning their principles into real objects, developing new types of buildings, introducing new means for both urban planning and the spatial organisation of the living environment. Here, I will name just a few: El Lissitzky; Ivan Leonidov; Alexander Nickolsky; Konstantin Melnikov; Alexaner Rodchenko; Nickolay Ladovsky, and others. These figures combined architectural practice with theoretical works, editorial practice, teaching, as well as establishing contacts with international avant-garde groups. Even the briefest overview of their theoretical heritage goes beyond the physical limits of the present study, and yet their contribution to the aesthetics of modernism still requires research and academic evaluation.

On the West-European (German and Swedish) historiography of architectural modernism

What holds for Russian historiography applies equally to the historiography on German architectural modernism. A huge theoretical and architectural heritage was formed by modernist thinkers and practicing architects who

²⁵ Recent English Translation: Gan, Alexey; Lodder, Christina (ed., transl.) *Constructivism*. (Barcelona: Editorial Tenov, 2013)

²⁶ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Ritm v Arkhitekture*. (Moscow: Sredi Kollektionerov, 1923)

²⁷ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha*. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo, 1924)

²⁸ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Zhilische*. (Moscow: Gosstroyizdat, 1934)

worked in the Weimar Republic; they helped produce the new aesthetic and constructive means by which a new living environment could be formed, one that would improve the everyday lives of the people. Modernist aesthetics were institutionalised and propagated through the school of Bauhaus, whose leader, Walter Gropius, was an organiser, ideologue, and a theoretician of German modernism; he realised a modernist aesthetics through his architectural, administrative, and theoretical works as well as through his teaching practice.²⁹

Another representative of German modernism, whose theoretical works functioned as a ground for the subsequent development of a modernist aesthetics and a functionalist method was: Bruno Taut with *Alpine Architecture* (1919), *The City Crown* (1919), and *The Dissolution of Cities* (1920)³⁰ along with his numerous articles; Taut would later influence urban theory, as well as help to constitute the expressionist theme within modernist aesthetics.

In Berlin, one of the case cities for the present research, a new living space was realised owing largely to the governance of the chief city planner Martin Wagner, one of the leading architects and theoreticians of German modernism.³¹

In 1920s Germany the publication of many manifestoes served as the grounds for establishing a modernist aesthetics. They helped to indicate a course towards the realisation of functionalist methods in architecture as well as articulating new principles of mass housing constructions. Important texts in this regard include: Taut's *Programme for Architecture* (1918); *New Ideas on Architecture* (1919) by Gropius, Taut, and Behne; *The Problem of a New Architecture* (1919) by Erich Mendelson; *Principles of Bauhaus Production* (1926) by Gropius and other manifestoes and declarations, which for the present study have been used in their English translations.³²

German manifestoes, and theoretical works of the period have been the objects of study and analyses already at the time of their publishing. One of

²⁹ Among his major works used in this thesis are: Gropius, Walter. *Scope of Total Architecture*. (New York. Harper and Bros., 1955). *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1965)

³⁰ See bibliography list for full references.

³¹ In this thesis I mostly refer to his work: Wagner, Martin. *Das Wachsende Haus. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Städtischen Wohnungsfrage*. In: Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, vom 22. Oktober bis 14. Dezember 2015, pp.1–144.

³² See: Conrads, Ulrich (ed.); Bullock, Michael (transl.). *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971)

the most notable ideologues during the period was German architectural writer and art historian Adolf Behne. As Molly Wright Steenson notes in the translation of some excerpts of Behne's *Eine Stunde Architektur* (1928),³³ a text that was written to accompany the Werkbund exhibition of 1927 in Stuttgart, Behne "proposes a new way of dwelling and living [neu wohnen] in which spaces respect their inhabitants."³⁴ In this and other grounding works – such as *Der Moderne Zweckbau* (1926)³⁵ and *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen* (1927)³⁶ – Behne is one of the first historians and critics of living space and its production through architectural means. In his book *The Modern Functional Building*, Behne introduces a historical model of living space development, specific to the modernist era, which reveals the sense and the direction of transformations within the notion of living space, from the façade building to the architectural organisation of reality: "I. No Longer a Façade but a House. II. No Longer a House but Shaped Space. III. No Longer Shaped Space but Designed Reality."³⁷ He traces the changes within both living environments and domesticity through an analysis of architecture both as the living space and as the space for living in different historical periods, up to the era of German Werkbund.³⁸

The major features of Swedish functionalism are distinguished in the present thesis through a close reading of three founding texts on Swedish modernism: *Beauty in the Home* by Ellen Key (1899),³⁹ *Better Things for*

³³ Behne, Adolf. *Eine Stunde Architektur*. (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1928).

³⁴ Behne, Adolf. *Eine Stunde Architektur (Excerpts)*. Translation from German and introduction by Molly Wright Steenson. In: *Pidgin* 6 (2009), p. 246.

³⁵ In this thesis the following English translation is used: Behne, Adolf. *Modern Functional Building*. (Santa Monica: Getty, Oxford UP, 1996)

³⁶ Behne, Adolf. *Neues Wohnen – Neues Bauen*. (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1927)

³⁷ See: Behne, Adolf. *Modern Functional Building*. (Santa Monica: Getty, Oxford UP, 1996).

³⁸ Deutscher Werkbund is the German Association of Craftsmen formed in 1907, comprising of united artists, architects, designers, and industrialists, so that they could establish and develop new forms of industrial production for architecture and design. The Association prepared the ground for the Bauhaus School and its theoretical and methodological approach to education, training, and industrial design production. Deutscher Werkbund aimed at developing cooperation between manufacturers and artists to improve the means of artistic and architectural production and to elevate Germany as an international leader in these fields. Werkbund set a goal to integrate technologies of traditional craftsmanship and of industrial mass production, claiming that the quality of all elements of living space production from sofa cushions to the city building were equally important.

³⁹ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home." In: Creagh, Lucy, Käberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 32–57.

Everyday Life by Gregor Paulsson (1919),⁴⁰ and the *Acceptera* manifesto (1931).⁴¹

CIAM

An important role in the development, distribution, and implementation of modernist principles was played by CIAM, *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (International Congresses of Modern Architecture). The Congress was initiated by Le Corbusier and Siegfried Giedion in 1928 at the Chateau de la Sarraz in Switzerland, where twenty-eight international architects signed the *La Sarraz Declaration*⁴² – a program on the fundamental conceptions of the new architecture. The Congress existed until 1959, attracting leading architects of the time to exchange ideas about the development of modern architecture.⁴³

The grounding research on the history of CIAM and its programmatic achievements was introduced by Eric Mumford, in his work *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism – 1928–1960*.⁴⁴ In the present thesis, I take the most significant texts by the founder and the first chief secretary of CIAM, Siegfried Giedion, as representative of and formative in establishing the theoretical background for what I call *the German mode of functionalism*.⁴⁵ The works by Siegfried Giedion have been extremely influential and widely read since

⁴⁰ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life”. In: Creagh, Lucy; Kåberg, Helen; Miller Lane, Barbara. (eds.) *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 72–125.

⁴¹ Asplund, Gunnar; Gahn, Wolter; Markelius, Sven; Paulsson, Gregor; Sundahl, Eskil; Åhren, Uno. *Acceptera*. In: Creagh, Lucy, Kåberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 140–347.

⁴² See the text of declaration in English translation in: Conrads, Ulrich (ed.) *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 109–113.

⁴³ Among the founders were such prominent architects as Karl Moser, who became the first president of CIAM, Hendrik Berlage, Victor Bourgeois, Pierre Chareau, Sven Markelius, Josef Frank, Hugo Häring, Arnold Höchel, Huib Hoste, Pierre Jeanneret, Ernst May, Hannes Meyer, Hans Schmidt, Mart Stam, Rudolf Steiger, Szymon Syrkus, Henri-Robert Von der Mühl, and Juan de Zavala. The invited Soviet delegates – El Lissitzky, Nikolai Kolli, and Moisey Ginzburg, were not present at the first Congress due to a delay in obtaining their visas. Later CIAM was joined by Minnette de Silva, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Uno Åhrén, Louis Herman De Koninck (1929,) and Fred Forbát. In 1941 an American branch of CIAM was founded, headed by Harwell Harris.

⁴⁴ Mumford, Eric. *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism – 1928–1960*. (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2000)

⁴⁵ On the choice of Giedion as a representative of the German mode of functionalism and on the specific selection of the texts that are subject to a close reading and analysis, see *Part I, Chapter III* of the present thesis.

their initial publication. Indeed, the analyses of his texts as well as considerations of his institutional significance are still subject to continuous study. Among the most important texts on Giedion is Sokratis Georgiadis' *An Intellectual Biography* (1993).⁴⁶

On the structure of the thesis

As aforementioned, the present thesis is divided into two parts – one theoretical and the other empirical. In the theoretical part I outline the main features of the three modes of functionalism. These characteristics will be presented by studying those texts that contributed significantly to the articulation of modernist theory in each country. In the second, empirical part, I analyse the translation of modernist theoretical principles into architectural practice, comparing those architectural objects, housing estates, and strategies of urban planning that emerged during the interwar period in the targeted countries and that had an influence on the further formation of the living space throughout the twentieth century.

In the current thesis, I intend to overcome a perception of the modes of functionalism as a sort of “national” concept, as if these functionalist modes could be enclosed and limited within the national borders of European countries with very different political regimes. I claim that the functionalist method did not originate in each country as an isolated and separate phenomenon. Functionalism was a global modernist theory that developed in the space and time of modernity and that initially had no direct relation to any national borders. The entire continent lived through modernity, though not uniformly. Rather, encompassing the complexity of the historical period, it acquired different theoretical and visual frames and forms in different territories; and yet those differences were not framed *entirely* by political borders and were based not *only* on more local determinations. Fundamentally, in order to think the specific differences comprising the three modes of functionalism, these differences must be set within the *aesthetics* of functionalism. Accordingly, this means that the central points of differentiation are to be outlined in terms of the levels of *intensity* of their theoretical and material practices, not simply by and through geo-political contextualisation.

⁴⁶ For this thesis I use English translation: Georgiadis, Sokratis. *Sigfried Giedion: An Intellectual Biography*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

With respect to the differing levels of intensity of functionalism, the following set of claims are to be advanced in this study: first, the most radical instantiation of architectural functionalism as a mode of living space production is the Russian one – this applies to its theory, method as well as its practice; a less radical, but more practically and socially oriented instantiation is referred to as the German mode; finally the humanistic, consumerist, and ‘comfortable’ mode – articulated and practiced in Scandinavia – is referred to as the Swedish mode. Here the point needs to be stressed once again: these modes were not operating exclusively within the borders of the three abovementioned countries. On the contrary, examples of each mode can be discovered in each of these states as well as in other places on the continent. Hence, the national names given to the modes refer to those countries, they do so principally because they serve as paradigmatic cases, which allow specific differences to be indexed between different modes of functionalism with greater ease and clarity. If Russia, Germany, and Sweden are representative of the different levels of intensity of functionalism, then this is because the different interpretations of its methods and its aesthetic were practiced and realised in the most programmatic and consistent ways. These three countries are also of specific interest to this study, since it was precisely in Russia, Germany and Sweden that the functionalist method of living space production was openly embraced at the state level. It is owing to this fact that the industrial means of mass housing construction can fall within the scope of a study on modernist aesthetics.

The three modes of functionalism

The Russian mode

I call Russian functionalism *the radical* mode; the new living space was absolute and complete, requiring unconditional adjustments from its tenants. The newly built environment was to transform its inhabitants into the “men of the future;” it was to improve their psychological, mental, and intellectual state through the construction of a ready-made milieu, which would take control of all aspects of their living. Constructivists fixated on the amalgamation of dwelling, working, and social (public) spaces into a homogeneous living space; the construction of such a united and open space left no opportunity for its tenants to appropriate it in accordance with their own individual desires and private needs. It was the living space for the men of the future, not for the ‘here and now’.

For a definition of the Russian mode of functionalism, alongside an articulation of its distinguishing features, I refer to those texts that are devoted mostly to the aesthetic, theoretical and constructive research undertaken by Russian avant-gardists, and through which the specificity and aesthetics of the newly produced space can be revealed.

As part of an exploration of the Russian mode, functionalism is first represented through an analysis of the theoretical works by Moisey Ginzburg, as well as the manifestoes and discussions in leading architectural journals of the 1920s and early 1930s, which at the time attracted high-profile authors.

It is impossible to separate Russian constructivism from other architectural modernist trends of the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, when constructivism developed and practiced its theory in architecture, Russia was not yet isolated from the rest of the world. Foreign architects were not only invited to visit Russia to share their experiences, but many received commissions from Soviet government.⁴⁷ Cooperation between Soviet constructivists and foreign architects was rather tight and it was supported on a state level. Constructivists were turning to their foreign colleagues to obtain new strategies for the production of space in Soviet cities. Germany and Sweden, in this respect, were the countries that contributed the most to the development of international cooperation with Soviet Union.⁴⁸

The Russian mode of functionalism is articulated and analysed in the first two chapters of this study. The first chapter: “The Architectural Language of Constructivism and the Destiny of a Materialised Utopia,” is a theoretical study of those texts that were responsible for the articulation of the distinctive features of the artistic language of the Russian architectural avant-garde. This will, in its turn, allow for a consideration of the architectural practice of the period as the building strategies realised in mass housing production in the 1920s, through which the radical character of the Russian mode of functionalism will be explicated.

⁴⁷ E.g. the Red Flag Textile Factory built by Mendelsohn in Leningrad in 1926–1930-s, or Tsentrosoyuz Building by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret in Moscow in 1928–1937. Even in the next era of Stalinism, after Constructivism was criticised and prosecuted, the greatest foreign modernists as Le Corbusier, Mendelsohn, Perret and Gropius were still invited to participate in the contest for such global project as Palace of Soviets. In the 1937 Frank Lloyd Wright attended the Congress of Architects in Moscow.

⁴⁸ On the international cooperation between Soviet and West-European architects see *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

The first chapter is devoted to the architectural language of the Russian avant-garde as articulated by its theoreticians and practicing architects. It suggests a critical analysis of constructivist theory by comparing it with the architectural theory of antiquity (Vitruvius) and classical theory (Hegel).

In the second chapter, I analyse the nature of the Russian mode of functionalism, reflecting on the origins of its high intensity as well as on its destiny as an artistic movement. One way in which this will be achieved is by engaging in a close reading of the “Moscow”⁴⁹ essay by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin’s own records on his stay in Moscow provide this study with an invaluable witness. He experienced the changing face of Moscow’s urban space in real time, and thus a consideration of Benjamin’s essay will not only give an insight into what was happening on the streets at the time, but to address the consequences of the Russian avant-garde via Benjamin’s situated observations.

The second theoretical chapter on the Russian mode of functionalism explores “*The New Optics for the Space of the 1920s.*” It does so by offering an interpretation of two essays by Walter Benjamin: “Experience and Poverty”⁵⁰ and “Moscow.”⁵¹ A consideration of both allows for a deeper comprehension of the urban spaces of Moscow, Leningrad, and Berlin during the interwar period, at which time these spaces were the very material for the architectural experiments being conducted by Russian and European functionalists. These texts – along with Benjamin’s essays on “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,”⁵² “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,”⁵³ and “The Author as Producer”⁵⁴ – have been selected to understand the very realities with which modernist architecture had to deal. They make possible a revealing of the origins of functionalism, of its different modes, as well as serving to anticipate the

⁴⁹ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow.” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 22–46.

⁵⁰ In: Benjamin, W. (1999). *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. Harvard University Press, Pp.731–736. Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty.” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 731–736.

⁵¹ In: Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow.” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 22–46.

⁵² In: Benjamin, Walter. “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”. In: *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 14–26.

⁵³ Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In: *Illuminations*. (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 219–253.

⁵⁴ In: “*The Author as Producer.*” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 768–782.

further development of the functionalist method and the destiny of its realised objects in Russia and Germany.

For this reason, I introduce a critique of the Russian mode of functionalism, which was external to it, not external from the perspective of time – i.e. from a different historical and historiographical period – but from the point of its observation and critique. As described above, as a German visiting Moscow, Benjamin was a stranger in that very physical space. The process by which the Russian mode of functionalism was implemented was being observed and documented by an outsider, who, at the same time, was a contemporary of that period and who physically experienced the urban space that was undergoing severe transformations in the grip of the Russian mode of functionalism. As one of the most incisive and attentive critics of modernity Benjamin offers a rich source from which to understand the nature of various expressions of modernity, including its Russian mode. Furthermore, as a modernist thinker himself, Benjamin was profoundly aware of the artistic, philosophical, and political stakes at play in the social and political experiments of the Russian avant-garde. Finally, as a German intellectual who found his way to Moscow, Benjamin also serves as a bridge between the Russian and German modes of modernism, and rather helpfully he even makes the suggestion of seeing Berlin through seeing Moscow.⁵⁵

The German mode of functionalism

The example of Germany during the Weimar Republic is to be considered as the most representative of the West-European mode of functionalism, both with respect to an understanding of its methods and aesthetics. For this reason, it is referred to as the German mode.

To articulate the major features of the German mode of functionalism – which I will also refer to as *the practical mode* – I turn to the texts by Sigfried Giedion.⁵⁶ As both a theoretician and a practitioner of West-European functionalism, Giedion introduced and disseminated the program of functionalism through not only his theoretical discourse and his architectural practice, but also in his administrative and institutional capacity as the

⁵⁵ See: Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow.”

⁵⁶ The major texts that I refer to are *Building in France, building in Ferro-concrete* (1928); *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New tradition* (first edition 1940); and to *Mechanisation Takes Command. A contribution to anonymous history* (1948). See bibliography list for complete references.

first-secretary general for *Congrès internationaux d'architecture modern* (CIAM). He was later to become a key figure in the historiography of modernism. Giedion was not German by nationality, and, in fact in his work he did not concentrate specifically on Germany. He spoke more elevatedly, addressing “our civilisation” in a broader sense that besides Western Europe also included United States. Yet, his aesthetics and practice were closely connected to and an influence on the production of the living space in Germany at the time.

Moreover, Giedion was one of the initial producers of a functionalist aesthetics and its most influential practitioner. Giedion would emigrate to the United States. Not only did this mean that he was later to have a physical distance to Europe, but in his historiographical work written while living in the United States, he would provide a critique of the very method and aesthetics of which he was one of the key pioneers. As part of this critical re-evaluation, he would end up suggesting further and alternative means of dealing with modernity.

Thus, the reading of Giedion that I offer below can be also considered as a theoretical background and external critique to the texts by the major apologists of Swedish modernism that follow after this chapter.

In order to elucidate the differences between Russian and German modes, I highlight several themes and categories that I find to be the most characteristic of the German mode. These include: collectivism and the problem of the break between thought and feeling; industrial production the discovery of new materials, and the ambiguities surrounding the achievements of technological progress; history, and relations to the past and to tradition. As part of this exploration of themes, I shall juxtapose the features of the Russian mode as outlined in the previous chapters with the reference to Moisey Ginzburg, on the one side, and Adolf Behne, on the other, thereby bringing two important theoreticians of modernism into an imagined dialogue. The same method is applied in the next chapter devoted to the Swedish mode of functionalism.

Returning to the German mode of functionalism, I should note that being both more practically and socially oriented, the goal was to improve and arrange more rational existing living conditions. The potential to reform the social milieu was keenly recognised, and yet, unlike the proponents of the Russian mode, it was assumed that inhabitants would not have to experience a complete transformation of their living practices. Though a collective way of living was promoted, the legitimacy of individual types of dwelling, such as separate apartments, town houses, and

villas, was never questioned, which was in stark contrast to their Soviet counterparts. In this way, a both the separate apartment and the town house were more typical as models for living in the German mode of functionalism.

The Swedish mode of functionalism

The Swedish mode of functionalism – what I will also refer to as *the social mode* – articulated its aesthetics later than both the Russian and German instantiations. This historical fact is not insignificant (as the chapter will explore). Functionalism arrived onto the Swedish scene as a method after having undergone in Europe both self-critique and revision regarding its failures and achievements. The Stockholm Exhibition of the 1930 can be considered a milestone that established Swedish functionalism as a leading aesthetical movement. The exhibition itself opened up the kingdom's space to the full-scale transformations that the aesthetics of modernism carried within itself. The consequences of these were in turn duly noted and then widely propagated through the famous manifesto, *Acceptera*. The *Acceptera* authors analysed and summarised the basic principles of European modernism and pronounced that it was necessary to accept the fact that functionalism, as itself an expression of modernity, had already been spreading for a while and that it was an inevitable part of contemporary reality.

I have mentioned above that while dividing European functionalism into three modes, I consider the level of intensity of their aesthetical and practical expression the major dividing line, and the 'national' names that have been ascribed to each mode do not and should not result in framing the limit of each mode with respect to geographic or political borders. Yet, it should be remarked, and it can be considered another distinguishing point, that while the Russian and German modes were steeped in the universalism and internationalism of the avant-garde, the Swedish mode did speak in terms of a national movement. Circumstances can account for this: the Swedish mode had developed already under the pressure of the European heritage of functionalism. Proponents of modernist experimentalism in Sweden experienced a certain resistance to the most radical expressions of its aesthetics as well as to its politicised ideology. What was historically and contextually distinctive about the Swedish mode was that it suggested a famous "third" or "Swedish" way, so as to avoid the extremities of both the Russian and German modes.

The source for the Swedish mode of functionalism was the same modernity that Sweden shared with the rest of the world, but the reality to

which it applied was not the revolutionary future of the Russian mode and not the desolation that resulted from defeat in World War I in the Weimar Republic. It was rather the local, domestic reality that had not been shaken by the historic events and threats of the first decades of the twentieth century, even though distant tremors could still be felt in Sweden.

Swedish functionalists practiced the entire range of dwellings and settlement planning that had been developed by the international Avant-garde, from *dom-kommunas* to luxury villas. The main goal was the construction of *Folkhemmet* ('the People's home') – a living space that would preserve the benefits of private homes and yet was adjusted to the rational settlement of as many people as possible. The potential of reforming architectural space was valued by representatives of Swedish functionalism, and yet it was not to play a significant role in regard to mass housing solutions. Ultimately, as shall be discussed, the contemporary tenant and her demands were of the highest importance.

In the current study, I aim to articulate those aesthetical, methodological, and ideological aspects of European modernism that affected contemporary living space and that are still in use in our everyday life. In this regard, the Swedish mode is the most applicable among the three, since it placed the notion of the home and the goal of its systematic improvement at the core of its aesthetical and ideological program. The idea of transforming society by improving the living space within which everyday life happens, places the person at the centre of modernist ideology in its Swedish mode. Here, not only does the person become an object of transformation, she becomes a cause of these transformations, whose 'real' needs are first to be defined. Only then is the living space to be conceived; it must be moulded and adjusted in order to suit and satisfy her needs.

The three modes of functionalism in practice: from home-building to life-building

The aim of the second part of the thesis is to introduce and analyse the new types of mass housing that were being developed during the interwar period in Russia, Sweden, and Germany. These mass housing programs were a practical application of the three modes of functionalism analysed in the first part of the book. Hence, I will trace how modernist theory and aesthetics were realised by and through architectural practice; how they reformed and re-constituted the living space of the time, as well as how they contributed to the production of contemporary living spaces in the region.

In contrast to the first part of the thesis, I do not organise the chapters of the thesis around the modes of functionalism, but rather I build the three modes around the results of their application, namely the new types of buildings and housing estates. By adopting this strategy, it is hoped that the three modes of functionalism can be brought into a comparative analysis but through their architectural products.

Existenzminimum and the ‘New *Byt*’ as the main tools for the new life-building

The first chapter of this part gives an overview of the *grounding concepts* that were used as guidelines in the constructive practice of avant-garde architects. They also served as grounding principles in developing new types of buildings. These housing projects were a product of combining functionalist methods with modernist aesthetics, and applying them to mass housing construction. The grounding concepts discussed in this chapter include: *Existenzminimum*,⁵⁷ initiated by the German avant-garde but seriously worked through by their Russian colleagues, as well as the *New Byt* concept that suggested a new organisation of everyday living practices by means of a negation of the material side of living. This latter category assumed a radical transformation of the living space; it played with the logics of liberation, declaring that man must be emancipated from all material possessions for the sake of intellectual and spiritual growth. The *New Byt* concept was elaborated by Russian constructivists, such as e.g. Boris Arvatov, in their theoretical works.

Soviet *Dom-kommuna* and Swedish *Kollektivhus* as life-building strategies, and *Kommunalka* as an immediate housing solution

There are various architectural objects and examples of urban planning that might have been chosen for the purposes of analysing functionalist building practice. I have firstly selected the most exemplary ones, that is, objects and types that can be considered as illustrative of the three modes in focus for the present study. Among the examples of functionalist architectural practice were the development and mass reproduction of buildings that organised living space in a new way. Among those are the *dom-kommunas* in the Soviet Union and *kollektivhus* in Sweden. These types of dwellings

⁵⁷ The minimum size of the living space that each citizen should be eligible for, which was established as a norm of around 9 square metres per person. See more in *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

introduced innovative ways of realising the German concept of *existenzminimum*, which was received by other countries as a guiding principle of the new production of living space. Through an analysis of the genesis of these types of houses I reflect on how the concept of minimal living space, organised in the most rational and functional way, was to alter everyday life in modernist towns and the lives of its inhabitants. Moreover, the chapter will show how the concept of *existenzminimum* was interpreted and implemented by each of the three modes of functionalism as new housing types were investigated and architectural objects finally realised.

Reflecting on the history of the origin and integration of *dom-kommunas* and *kollektivhus* into the living space of the 1920s in both Soviet Russia and Western Europe makes possible an understanding of the precise transformations by which both the everyday practices of their tenants and the overall organisation of cities were affected.

Building new living space through Siedlingen and Zhilmassivs

The third chapter of the present part of the thesis offers a historical overview and analysis of the living space clusters that became the innovative products of the functionalist method. They were responsible for altering the constitution of the old cities as well as drawing up the urban plans for the new settlements built during the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, the method itself, at least in its application to city planning, was influenced by Ebenezer Howard's notion of the garden city, which was implemented, to a greater or lesser degree, in each of the three countries. The modernists' interpretation of the garden city concept had resulted in new experimental forms of housing estates – *zhilmassivs* in Soviet Russia and *siedlungen* in Germany. In this chapter I aim to provide a critical analysis of the architectural interpretation of the garden city, which materialised in all three of this study's cases.

In the case of the Soviet Russia, the garden city concept became not only a source of inspiration for how new socialist settlements should be developed, but it also served as form of ideological and political critique against the state that sought the further concentration of power, with housing distribution being seen as a means to exercise control over the population. In tracing the destiny of the theory of the garden city in Soviet Russia I

refer to the historical analysis of the formation of socialist cities, as provided in the works by Russian architectural historian Mark Mejerovich.⁵⁸

In the German context, I reflect on the interpretations of the garden city concept offered by the leading modernist architects and theoreticians, Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, and Martin Wagner. The latter of these figures was in charge of city-planning in Berlin, thereby representing both the architectural community and the official municipal policy in regard to mass housing construction. A detailed description of the architectural heritage of Berlin modernism is provided by Markus Jäger in a volume prepared for the nomination for inscription of the six Berlin *siedlungen* on the Unesco World Heritage List,⁵⁹ which was later assembled into a book.⁶⁰ I use both editions as historiographic sources for comparative analyses of German *siedlungen* and the Soviet *zhilmassivs*.

IKEA Case: from “Better Things for Everyday Life” to the “Better Life for the Many”

The last chapter of the section is dedicated to an investigation into the special case of IKEA. A consideration of this allows me to trace one of the ways through which modernist aesthetics still operates within the contemporary mass production and optimisation of living space – what I refer to as the Swedish mode of functionalism.

I claim that IKEA is one of the direct heirs to European functionalism. It accumulates all major features of its Swedish mode. It is difficult, of course, to evaluate whether the functionalist method was consciously taken as a guiding idea for the development of the company’s design and marketing strategy. What is obvious, however, is that at the point of IKEA’s emergence, functionalism defined in Sweden the style and the method of the age. Ingvar Kamprad never hid the fact that he picked up and appropriated all contemporary, innovative, and modern ideas so as to turn them into successful marketing strategies. In a published interview, he admits that “in

⁵⁸ *Gradostroitel'naya Politika SSSR 1917–1929. Ot Goroda-Sada k Vedomstvennomu Rabochemu Poselku / From the Garden-City to the Departmental Workers' Village.* (2018); *Rozhdenie i Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada / Birth and Death of the Soviet Garden City* (2007). See bibliography list for the full referenes.

⁵⁹ Jäger, Markus. Nomination for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List: *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style.* (Berlin, 2006).

⁶⁰ Jäger, Markus. *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style.* (Berlin, München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012).

the beginning we pinched ideas from wherever we could find them.”⁶¹ It was this appropriative strategy that allowed his company not only to grow into one of the world’s largest firms, but to become one of the symbols of the Swedish welfare system’s principle of social sustainability, as well as being based on the main principles and values of European modernism.

An inspiration for the methodological approach adopted in my diachronic reading of IKEA catalogue images is Beatriz Colomina’s *Privacy and Publicity*, first published in 1994.⁶² Through an analysis of the architects Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, Colomina reads architectural photographs as mediating spaces for the representation of architectural objects, interiors, and exteriors, as well as the relations between them. I adopt this insight of Colomina’s and apply it to a reading of IKEA catalogues images. Colomina’s approach to analysing images of architectural spaces as media spaces that, on the one hand, produce their own architectural reality and, on the other, return architecture to the realms of ideas on various levels of spatial and temporal interrelations, is helpful in this final chapter’s endeavour to reflect on the living space presented in the IKEA catalogues. Through a diachronic analysis of the material, I seek to capture the complex field of interrelationships revealed in and through the catalogue’s presented images of: interiors, exteriors, and the transitions between the two; the public and private spaces and their intersections; the objects within and outside depicted living spaces and their representations; as well as the relations between a presented living space and its interaction with the everyday routines and practices of its inhabitants.

An analysis of the IKEA catalogues is introduced in this study as a separate case, but which is nonetheless exemplary and illustrative of the three modes of European functionalism that have contributed to the formation of the modern living space. IKEA’s case is exemplary since it can be read as a translator of functionalist theory into practice, while its catalogues archive the transformative processes affecting the formation, production and consumption of the living space throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

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⁶¹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*. TITEL books AB for IKEA of Sweden AB, Litopat S.p.A., Italy, 2013.

⁶² In the present thesis I refer to the following edition: Colomina, Beatriz. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996)

PART I
Russia, Germany, Sweden:
The Three Modes of Functionalism



CHAPTER I

The Russian Mode of Functionalism: The Architectural Language of Constructivism and the Destiny of a Materialised Utopia

When compared to previous “classical” epochs, both the character and the structure of architectural language from the 1920s appears as somewhat unique. The architecture of the Russian avant-garde was to have a global impact on the development of architecture during the twentieth century. “Constructivism”, as the new trend came to be generally called after the publication of Alexei Gan’s *Constructivism* manifesto in 1922,¹ offered an entire spectrum of new means, through which architects aimed to reach new levels of expressiveness and perfection when creating an architectural image. Traditional and new materials, as well as existing constructions that were previously understood in purely utilitarian terms, were now interpreted not only constructively, but aesthetically as well.

The present chapter has several intersecting aims:

1. to introduce the term “constructivism”, focusing on how it was defined and how it was applied to the architectural movements of the 1920s;
2. to introduce and describe the methods adopted by constructivists in both their architectural practice and theoretical works;
3. to introduce and analyse the reception history of constructivist theory and aesthetics in Russian historiography from the 1920s up to the 1930s, at which point constructivism was abandoned as a viable architectural movement;
4. to reflect on the reasons for constructivism’s failure in Russia after 1932 by, first, considering the so-called “creative discussion” that took place within the pages of the professional literature during the

¹ Gan, Alexei; Lodder, Christina (ed., transl.) *Constructivism*. (Barcelona: Editorial Tenov, 2013)

1930s and, second, by illuminating the inner theoretical contradictions of the constructivist method.

The present chapter aims at outlining the artistic qualities and aesthetic components of the newly developed architectural language, what I shall be calling specifically the artistic language of constructivism. By “the artistic language of architecture” I mean the totality of formal and compositional means by and through which architecture not only expresses its architectural idea, but moreover produces emotional and aesthetical effects on the viewer, declaring and confirming its functional and aesthetic grounds. It serves to highlight and underline features of its own internal structure, thus forming an architectural context that can be subject to aesthetic and artistic evaluation and critique. This architectural language was the common language of modernism, various dialects of which were spoken across Europe in general and in Russia, in particular. Since my claim is that the Russian avant-garde constitutes the most radical instantiation of the modernist language, I shall begin by identifying and analysing the basic grammar of the Russian mode of functionalism.

First, however, a few words are needed on the use of the term *constructivism* for the present research. Constructivism will be used to capture all the avant-garde trends that existed in modernist architecture during the 1920s. Despite the ideological contradictions present therein, the different trends, groups, and studios of the period can nonetheless be understood as forming stylistically a solid architectural movement, which can generally be called “constructivism”. During the thesis, however, I will use the terms “constructivist”, “functionalist” and “modernist” architecture interchangeably.

Today, after eighty years, it is no longer as crucial as it once seemed to divide the architectural avant-garde into its different movements (i.e. constructivism, rationalism, suprematism, etc.). To speak of the architecture of Russian constructivism is a way of capturing avant-garde architecture. Indeed, as Tatiana Maklakova remarks in her monograph *Arkhitektura Dvadsatogo Veka [Architecture of the Twentieth Century]*, “starting with the 1970-s all trends of development of Russian architecture of this period are united under the term of Russian Constructivism.”²

Even in the 1920s, when creative tensions between architectural groups were treated more sensitively, the major ideologues of the Russian avant-

² Maklakova, Tatiana. *Arkhitektura Dvadsatogo Veka [Architecture of the Twentieth Century]*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Assotsiatsii Stroitel'nikh Vuzov, 2001), p. 24.

garde recognised nonetheless a certain internal stylistic unanimity between the various groupings that populated the scene. In 1924 Moisei Ginzburg wrote in his monograph *Stil' i Epokha* [*The Style and Epoch*]:

Doubtless there is no randomness in how there exists a tendency in contemporary art for lapidary and for an ascetic language of constructive forms; likewise there is no randomness in why certain epithets have been appropriated by different artistic groups. “Constructivism”, “rationalism”, and other similar nicks are simply external expressions of tendencies of the present, which is deeper and more fruitful than it might seem on first glance and that are born by the new aesthetics of the new mechanised life.³

A principal purpose for the present chapter is to distinguish specific features of artistic architectural language in Russian Constructivism within certain texts by Russian researchers of architecture. The study of architectural constructivism in Russia has not been prevalent in either Soviet or Russian historiography. For a variety of reasons, problems directly connected with its heritage alongside problems of a theoretical nature, have dropped away from the Russian historians' attention. As a consequence, the question of the artistic language of constructivist architecture remains one of the least examined within the tradition of the Russian avant-garde. Not that the question raised in this study is altogether absent. One of the central ideologues of constructivism, Moisey Ginzburg, already stressed the importance of clearly registering the formation of a newly developed grammar for artistic expression: “Art is a live and changing process, which is tightly connected with the epoch, giving birth to its own appropriateness, sensation, its own language in each epoch.”⁴

Ginzburg was one of the first practicing architects of the avant-garde who started talking about the method of constructivism in terms of a specific architectural language.

In the present chapter I intend to highlight formal and aesthetic features of constructivism within the studied texts. Certainly, the current work cannot claim to be exhaustive, especially since much of the groundwork is still to be undertaken to produce a comprehensive reconstruction of the instruments and the means of artistic expressiveness articulated by the ideologues of the Russian avant-garde in their written texts. Moreover, the

³ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha* [*Style and Epoch*]. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1924), p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

problem of the artistic language of architectural constructivism possesses several peculiarities.

First of all, the architecture of the 1920s is still far from being recognised as part of what constitutes the most artistically valuable parts of Russia's architectural heritage, neither among the general population nor by the municipal authorities who are responsible for its preservation.⁵ Second, Constructivism is associated primarily with a practical, rather than an artistic attitude towards reality. Third, the question of the artistic language of constructivism scarcely interests researchers. This is not surprising, since the architects of constructivism themselves declared that artistry was not paramount in their work.

At the moment of its formation constructivism was more of a social project than it was artistic. For instance, from one of his major books *Constructivism – Kontseptsiya Formoobrazovaniya [Constructivism – A Concept of Form Origination]*, Khan-Mahgometov notes that “a reader can be surprised by the use of such word combinations as “aesthetics of constructivism”, “stylistic of constructivism”, “artistic form” and others.⁶ He reminds his reader that in their declarations and through their manifestoes constructivists preferred to speak not of a new *style* but about a new *method* of architectural creativity. At the same time, he continues: “Constructivism

⁵ There are long-lasting discussions ongoing in various media on the subjects why there is so little appreciation towards constructivist architecture among the general Russian population, which results in its neglect and destruction. For instance, Marat Khusnullin, the vice mayor of Moscow, who is responsible for the questions of city building policy and construction, had summarised the “unattractiveness” of constructivism in one of his interviews by saying: “We stand for constructivism, though I personally believe that these houses should be left as monuments to how one should not build. We must preserve two or three complexes.” (the citation widely circulated through mass media; here I cite one of the leading Russian newspapers *Vedomosti* (published on 07.06.2016, accessed on 12.06.2018). . Even though they caused a barrage of criticism among the professional architectural community as well as from proponents of modernist architecture, these sentiments from an influential official still reflect a common attitude towards constructivist architecture among the general Russian population. In an interview given to the TV channel *Dozhd' [Rain]*, one of the architectural critics, Maria El'kina, reflects on how people still closely associate constructivist buildings with that dramatic historical period of the 1920s and 1930s, the architecture of which symbolises the lost hopes for a better future. According to El'kina the fact that there exists no agreement about how to evaluate and comprehend this traumatic historical period is one reason for rejecting this particular heritage (the episode from 22.03.2017, accessed on June 12.06.2018) https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/republic_na_dozhde/pokushenia_na_konstrukтивизм-430410/

⁶ Khan-Mahgometov, Selim. (2003). *Constructivism – Kontseptsiya Formoobrazovaniya [Constructivism – A Concept of Form Origination]*. Moscow: Strojizdat, p. 23.

as a creative trend possesses highly expressed artistic and stylistic definition, and it is that very stylistics of constructivism that influenced greatly on the style of the twentieth century as a whole.⁷”

In turn, the very study of constructivism’s artistic language brings with it further difficulties. First of all, the theoretical and ideological concept of constructivism was developed in parallel with the process of the physical construction of its architectural objects. It was loudly accompanied by manifestoes, programs and theoretical works by its ideologues. Undoubtedly, this whole paper trail finds its visual expression in the material works themselves, and yet these alone constitute only one of the factors that form the specificity of the architectural language of constructivism.

Architectural practice is not a mere translation of constructivist theory. On the one hand, architectural practice interprets and materialises the theory; on the other, it creates the means of artistic expression that contradicts declared theoretical statements. As a result, in the realised objects of constructivism we can identify a certain aggregate of common features that affect our perception and allow these objects to express their social and artistic functions. Here another problem of the artistic language arises – that of our perception, of the way we understand and appraise the artistic features of constructivist architecture. Through different historical periods the way in which constructivist architecture has been received has fluctuated between admiration and rejection. The history of the reception of constructivism as an artistic trend has, as of yet, not been written. The present chapter should, in this regard, be considered as one of the first efforts to reflect on this problem from a historical perspective.

One of the first and leading historiographers of the Russian avant-garde, Selim Omarovich Khan-Mahgometov, reconstructs the history of the formation of the theoretical concept of constructivism in his works. And yet, he does not focus on the problem of the artistic qualities of studied objects in his analyses. In the present research, I shall contend that the category of aesthetics is relevant to an understanding of constructivist architecture. To this end, I have selected texts that are not only related to the architecture of constructivism, but possess if not a stylistic analysis, then at the very least some statements on the means of artistic expression specific to constructivism. Despite an exorbitant amount of literature referring to word “constructivism”, few texts touch upon its formal qualities. A developed historiography of this problem can hardly be spoken of, let alone a mature

⁷ Ibid.

historiography on constructivist aesthetics. At this point my aim will be to extract reflections on the artistic quality of constructivist architecture from different texts that were published in Russia between the 1920s and early 1930s. I will also provide a brief overview of the relevant literature that was published in the later Soviet decades as well as in the post-Soviet period.

The manner in which the texts for the present chapter have been selected is rather simple. I take all accessible published texts where constructivism is discussed as an artistic trend.⁸ I have deliberately avoided going into the socio-political context of early Soviet literature, since this has recently garnered much attention in both academic and popular literature. Considering the limited scope of this part of my research I have restricted myself to those texts that expound on the artistic qualities of constructivism, doing so on both a deeper and higher level than merely the sloganising of the movement's ideologues. As for the major historians of Soviet architecture, such as Khan-Maghometov and Ikonnikov, I analyse primarily their final works on the subject, since these texts resume many of the main statements that can be said to comprise their specific treatments of the concepts of interest to this study.

This chapter is subdivided into three sections, the structure of which possesses a loose chronological character. In the first two sections I will offer a definition of constructivism on which I will subsequently rely for the rest of the study. As part of this definitional undertaking, I shall give a brief analysis of the process of formation of aesthetic qualities of constructivism, as well as provide an evaluation of the formal features of constructivist architecture. The materials used for the reconstruction of the formation of constructivist theory are primarily articles drawn from the *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura* (SA) [*Contemporary Architecture*] magazine as well as published works by Moisey Ginzburg, the main theoretician of the new trend.

In the effort to reconstruct functionalist theory the theoretical principles, which were declared by its founders and practitioners, ought to be separated from not only their own practice but also from the reception of both the theory and the practice. In order to approach the turning point of the 1932 decree on the dissolution of artistic organisations, after which constructivism failed to defend its theoretical principles and was finally abandoned, I

⁸ I do not analyse archive materials, documents, unpublished memoirs, and private correspondence by the architects and their contemporaries.

will reflect on the inner contradictions within the constructivist method itself by relating it to classical architectural theory.⁹

Through studying these texts I will analyse whether the bombastic manifestoes of the constructivists were in real conceptual opposition to the basic tenets of classical architecture (i.e. to its grounding and major principles), or whether they primarily rejected the stylistic stencils of the nineteenth century's eclectic age that had cited external features of the gone epochs merely for the decorative purposes.

Another problem that I touch upon here is the 1930s discussions between the 'former' constructivists and the newly-born apologists of the declared "socialist realism". I was first confused by the readiness with which the masters of constructivism adjusted the meaning of the functionalist method so that it conformed to the endeavour of the socialist realists to assimilate and develop the "classical heritage" (as if it was first and foremost a question of 'survival', in both the professional and the literal senses of the term). Both the constructivists and the socialist realists found themselves in confusion that surrounded the very meaning of the "classical heritage" and the precise way it was meant to have been assimilated and developed. Moisey Ginzburg, consistently tried to defend his statement that the use of the functionalist method is not in contradiction with the new formulation of the architectural task, i.e. with socialist realism. If we turn to the principles of Greek and Classical architectural theory (in this chapter I will refer to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*),¹⁰ then what we find is that the controversies existing between classical theory and the modernist architectural movement are not as pronounced as one may otherwise expect.

Nevertheless, whether weighed down by its own inner contradictions or due to external political forces, these ideological debates, known as the 'creative discussion', started after Stalin's decree of 1932 on the dissolution

⁹ I need to stipulate that I do not aim to evaluate the reasons for the stylistic changes after the Decree by Politbureau CK VKP(b) – (Central Committee of Military Committee of Bolshevik Party), enacted on April 23, 1932 about the "Reconstruction of literature and artistic organisations." This decree changed the official architectural style of Russia, stating that only features of Classical Heritage should be applied to architectural designs. In my research, I extract formulas concerning the use of means of artistic expression, but I do not analyse the level of fairness, forcing, insincerity, etc. of statements and expressions delivered by those participating in the discussions at the time. For these matters, please, see the monograph by Dmitry Khmelnskiy *Zodchiy Stalin [Architect Stalin]*. (Moscow: NLO, 2007).

¹⁰ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*. 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

of artistic organisations. After the decree, the situation changed rapidly. Constructivism became one of the trends that was buried while its creators were still alive. At that time, it was already a mature method that developed its own unique architectural system of bright formal individuality, but which by the 1930s had become heavily criticised.

In the early 1930s the ideologues of constructivism still tried to defend their positions, promising to adapt the functionalist method to the requirements of socialist realism (e.g. Moisey Ginzburg, Ivan Matza).¹¹ Among the decisive signs of constructivism's 'defeat' was the rigidity and monosemantic nature of its architectural expression. Its energy, principal ideology, and definiteness of formal elements reflected a well determined concept of an ideological and artistic *Weltanschauung*. The 'creative' discussion of the 1930s, however, interrupted the development of the language of constructivism. At the same time, a closer reading of published texts, which critique, accuse, and defend constructivism from various perspectives, enables me as a contemporary researcher to further distinguish and identify its formal and aesthetic features.

Between the 1940s and 1950s constructivism was not studied, while the architecture of the twenties was not related to notions of 'art' and the 'artistic'. Since it was not possible to completely exclude the heritage of the 1920s from the history of Soviet architecture, there was an ideologically censored view to the architectural avant-garde in historiography from that period, which fully depended on the 'ruling' architectural theory that was contemporary with its researcher.

During the 1960s and 1980s, there was a revival of interest in the architecture of constructivism. The term "constructivism", was used by researchers not only to designate some objects built during the years of the first five-year plans, but it started being deployed in order to identify architecture as an artistic trend.

¹¹ See Moisey Ginzburg's articles in the *Arkhitektura SSSR [Architecture of the USSR]* during the beginning of the 1930s, such as e.g. *Tvorcheskiye Puti Sovetskoy Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Naslediya [Creative Ways of Soviet Architecture and the Problem of Architectural Heritage]*. In: *Tvorcheskaya Diskussiya Soyuzu Sovetskikh Arhitektorov [The Creative Discussion of the Union of Soviet Architects]*. In: *Arkhitektura SSSR [The Architecture of the USSR]*. 1934 (3–4), p.12. or Ivan Matza's writings, e.g. *Kakaya Arkhitektura Nam Nuzhna? [What Architecture do we Need?]* In: *Tvorcheskaya Tribuna [Creative Tribune]*. In: *Arkhitektura SSSR [The Architecture of the USSR]*. 1940 (8), pp. 57–60.

It was also during this period that Khan-Mahgometov and Ikonninkov, the founders of the historiography of Soviet architecture, developed a new conceptual understanding of constructivism. Even though their works are being re-published today, methodologically their works belong to the last decades of the Soviet regime.

In post-Soviet historiography, the spectre of some important questions surrounding the problems of the history of constructivist architecture have been raised. Yet a return to some of these questions has primarily been taken up from either a social or political, as opposed to an artistic, perspective (e.g. *Culture Two* by Vladimir Paperny,¹² *Zodchiy Stalin [Architect Stalin]* by Dmitry Khmelnitsky, *Totalitarian Art* by Igor Golomstok,¹³ *The Total Art of Stalinism* by Boris Groys,¹⁴ and others¹⁵). Although some researchers – such as, for example, Ivan Sablin and Grigory Revzin – have in their writings turned to an artistic analysis of constructivist buildings,¹⁶ for the most part, constructivists' works are not generally considered as art-objects in Russian historiography.

By tracing the birth, development, and failure of constructivism in Russia, as well as of the history of its theoretical reception, it becomes possible to offer a more comprehensive understanding of constructivist theory itself and of its influence on the architecture of the twentieth century as such. This understanding will, in turn, helps to analyse the processes of living space production and mass housing construction both in contemporary Russia and Western Europe.

¹² Paperny, Vladimir. *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*. Trans. John Hill and Roann Barris. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹³ Golomstok, Igor. *Totalitarian Art: In the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*. (New York: Overlook Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Groys, Boris. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ See the bibliography list.

¹⁶ See Ivan Sablin's articles for the leading Russian architectural online portal *archi.ru* Link: https://archi.ru/press/journalist_present.html?id=2668; Grigory Revzin's articles for the *archi.ru* are available here: https://archi.ru/press/journalist_present.html?id=3

1.1. Constructivist theory and aesthetics as articulated by its creators. The Relation of constructivism to the classical architectural theory of Antiquity: the inner contradictions of its method that led to its failure

1.1.1. The Vitruvian Triad as a source for modernism

When speaking about the fundamentals of the theory of Constructivism, one can apply to it the classical Vitruvius triad of *Firmitas*, *Utilitas*, and *Venustas*.¹⁷ Not that this should come as a surprise; constructivists searched for the universal architectural *working* method, applicable anywhere in the world regardless of temporal concepts of politics, regimes, fashions, individual commissions, financial situations, urban or rural environments, etc. Moisey Ginzburg, the leading theorist of constructivism who formulated its major principles, called architectural practice *zhisnestrojeniye* – “life-building”.¹⁸

Social reality as well as nature are taken as a material for work; hence a practical attitude towards materials and towards the materiality of both life and reality pervade their aesthetic sensibility. At the moment when constructivism was crystallising both as an architectural theory and practice, it did so more as a social than an artistic phenomenon; constructivism sought to address and resolve practical problems. The purpose of the new architectural method was to organise human life in the most effective way possible; and thus all three elements of the Vitruvian triad – “strength”, “utility”, and “beauty” – were unintentionally given careful consideration. Modern technology and its achievements became the new nature for constructivism and a principal resource for its architectural working method as well as for the theoretical grounds of the *life-building* concept. The modernists’ faith in the potentiality of machines and in the achievements of technological progress to improve and perfect the world was similar to the Vitruvian perception that machines are scientifically improved and perfected nature. As Vitruvius states, new technics and mechanisms as the products of technological progress originate from the universal cosmic laws of nature:

¹⁷ Here I refer to the following edition: Vitruvius. *On Architecture*. (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

¹⁸ The term “zhiznestroeniye” was coined by Moisey Ginzburg. In 1927 he writes: “...today’s explanation of the term “architecture” is possible only in functional architecture, in constructivism, which is rising in front of the architect; first of all the task of the life-building, organisation of forms of the new life”. (Moisey Ginzburg, “Konstruktivizm kak Metod Laboratornoy i Pedagogicheskoy Raboti.” [“Constructivism as a Method of Laboratory and Pedagogical Work”] In: *Sovetskaya Arkhitektura*, 1927 (6), p.160.

All mechanisms owe their origins to nature and are made following the guidance and instruction of the rotation of the universe. First of all let us consider and examine the system comprising the sun, the moon and the Five Planets; if they had not revolved in accordance with the laws of mechanics we would not have had regular periods of light or the ripening of fruit. When, therefore, our ancestors had understood the nature of these phenomena, they selected examples from nature, and by copying them, were inspired by such divine exemplars to perfect versions useful for their way of life. To make them more readily useful, they made some systems in the form of machines with rotating mechanisms and others in the form of instruments: and so with study, technical skills and gradual improvement in scientific knowledge, they gradually perfected the things which they had realised were practically useful.¹⁹

In 1924 Ginzburg summarised the first results of his theoretical work in a book entitled *Stil' i Epokha* [*The Style and Epoch*]. It is precisely here where the groundwork for a constructivist aesthetics is laid. The *machine* – which became the major engine of the art production itself – was elevated to the position of an object of aesthetic comprehension. It was the *Machine* that moved life processes, that set the rhythm to the new art, and gave intensity to the architectural image:

The machine [...] that changed our psyche and aesthetics is the greatest factor to have influenced in an essential way our understanding of the form.²⁰

For Ginzburg it was less the aestheticised image of the machine that outlined the grounds of architecture, but rather its very organisation, which, being “clear and precise to the extreme,”²¹ created a “concreteness of the formal language,”²² which was able to save art from “the huge danger”²³ that threatened it – “abstractiveness.”²⁴

To constructivists, the image of the machine was a rationalised formula of a creative process for the new production of space; a purified materialisation of the natural laws of mechanics that organise the world. The machine was for modernists not the image of humanity’s estrangement

¹⁹ Vitruvius. *On Architecture*, p. 279.

²⁰ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha*, p. 84.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.93.

²² *Ibid.*, p.96.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

from nature, but rather its harmonisation and rationalisation by human genius, the ability of which was not only the discovery of natural laws of nature but the harnessing of them for the benefit and improvement of humanity. This approach towards the scientific mechanisation of nature and the rational use of its potential through harnessing the powers of technological progress, materialising into functional living spaces, was similar to the Vitruvian approach and understanding of the architect's task, as formulated by Robert Tavernor in his introduction to the edition used for the present chapter:

Indeed, Vitruvius goes on to advocate the study and imitation of nature as one of the most important pursuits for an architect. For nature leads to beauty, which is fundamental to the practice of architecture once durability and utility have been achieved in a building. These three conditions – a famous triad at the root of architectural design – of durability (*firmitas*), utility (*utilitas*), and beauty (*venustas*), were to be applied through rigorous laws learnt from nature: every aspect of an architectural endeavor was to be harmonised according to such natural principles, which were truly rational according to Vitruvius.²⁵

In a way, the theoretical insight of the newly invented architecture ran counter to its materialised objects. Constructivists were blamed by the apologists of socialist realism and by others praised for something they were otherwise trying to escape: abstractiveness.

Ginsburg stood up for the *strength* and *utility*, for the rationality and concreteness of an architectural language that could catch up to the unique pulse of time and re-envision life as a factory plant, in which no abstract or unnecessary details would distract or detract from the effective production of everything, from the production of goods and values to life itself. Ginzburg thus introduced the industrial factory into the sphere of artistically valuable architectural objects. It is easy to imagine Vitruvius and him standing together, in awe of the operating war machines:

Indeed, a contemporary industrial factory condenses in itself all the features of new life that are the most characteristic and full of potential in an aesthetic sense. Here all that is required to produce the necessary power of a creative impulse, a picture of modernity, which is the brightest and the most different from the past: endless silhouettes of intensely functioning muscles of thousands of hands and legs; a deafening noise of the organised monster-

²⁵ Tavernor, Robert. "Introduction" in: Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, p. xviii.

machines; a rhythmical run of the sheaves that unite everything and everybody by their movements; the streams of light through the elastic cover of glass and metal; and the collective creation of values that are being disgorged by this creative forge. Can there be a picture that more vividly reflects the effective light of modernity?²⁶

As for the second component of the triad, *utility*, it is woven into the very ground of the constructivist method. Securing the means to reach *utilitas* was fundamental for the theorists and practitioners of constructivism. None of the components of architectural practice were unimportant; rather, the components should be carefully selected to reflect the idea of a given architectural object. In order to introduce a truly functional method, constructivists tried to purify and clarify the reasons for including each object – whether this were at the level of a single building or a metropolis.

The *beauty* of the realised idea of a building, pure in its enacted function, is the third element of the ‘triad’. In his article published in the SA Magazine in 1927,²⁷ Nickolay Tchuzhak, who continued developing Ginsburg’s theory of life-building, emphasised that it was necessary to purify art, to return it to its primordiality. For Tchuzhak, art was to be understood “only as a maximum-lively art, born by “life... for life.”²⁸ He calls not for the rejection of formal investigations, but instead speaks in defense of a “maximal materialisation of art”. The extraction of the beautiful out of its own utility in a thing would make it possible for a socially-useful thing (i.e. the architectural object) to satisfy the whole range of human’s needs, including man’s aesthetic needs, without having to necessarily dismiss either the utilitarian or aesthetic qualities of a thing.²⁹

The result of this investigation was the discovery of a formula that would allow art to be constructed in its most beautiful and pure state, deprived of any abstractiveness and unnecessary. This formula, however, was far removed from the reified set of rules that would be mechanically reproduced by practitioners and opposed finally to another (or, in fact, to the same) order system, which constructivists were deconstructing. Constructivism aimed at developing methods instead of reproducing ready-made recipes.

²⁶ Ginsburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha*, p. 84.

²⁷ Tchuzhak, Nickolay. “Iskusstvo Byta. Stat'ya Vmesto Otveta: Otveti na Anketu SA” [“The Art of Byt. An Article Instead of an Answer: Replies to the SA Questionnaire”]. In: SA (1), p. 21.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Through following the process by which an object's original function could be materialised, constructivists developed new types of buildings. These types could either perform the same function that their 'archetypes' developed in the previous 'canonical' epochs or they could take on totally new functions, – by representing the building's function and purpose in a completely different way.

The viewer, whose eyes were familiar with the classical order of architecture, and who recognised a building that, for example, performed the function of a theatre according to her experience of seeing theatres and visiting them, could no longer observe the same qualities of a 'normal' 'classical' theatre in the new type of building that had now been designed for theatrical performances and other shows. Planning, the size, the position, the décor of the facades – that is, distinctive features of the classical order of architecture, such as columns, pillars, etc. – were either different or entirely absent. All the same, the viewer could still read that architectural object as a theatre, at least on the level of a suggestion or a guess, because the function itself, purified from the canons and connotations of previous ages, was materialised into a new type of building, into the "Palace of Culture", which came to replace the 'obsolete' classical 'theatre' (fig.1–2.).

The search for architectural primordality had led constructivists to the development of *standards*, according to which a standard would be understood as the best sample of a thing, but not its mechanical and schematic reproduction (which would be a stencil). Another constructivist, Alexander Pasternak, offers the following definition of the standard, almost citing Vitruvius in different terms:

The standard is logics, analysis, economy [*oikonomia*], scientific research, mathematics, the sense of invention [*invention*]: it is the highest achievement in the laboratory of knowledge and mind, research and creativity.³⁰

An architect should thus work within the *encyclopedia of knowledge*, trying to get as close as possible to *sollertia* – a universal skill of the world's comprehension – in order to reach the apogee of architectural creativity, namely the creation of the *standard*, or the *sample*. The sample here does not mean the imitation and copying of an original, as was the case in previous 'stylish' epochs. Rather, the sample is an algorithm for reaching the best incarnation

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³⁰ Pasternak, Alexander. "Puti k Standartu" ["The Ways to Standard"]. In: SA, 1927 (2), p. 54.

of the thing, i.e. the materialisation of what is a socially-significant, useful (and equally a beautiful) idea of the object.

It is then obvious that in their longing for the definition of real architecture, constructivists were more or less consciously going back (or forward?) to the encyclopedic form of knowledge as well as to the myth of the origin and the original as organising principles.

Constructivists sought to introduce a new functionalist architecture, just as it was in its earliest beginnings – before sculpture, painting, and music appeared. In Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, one can find citations that reflect the objectives of constructivism:

[...] the task of art consists in giving shape to what is objective in itself, i.e. the physical world of nature, the external environment of the spirit, and so to build into what has no inner life of its own a meaning and form which remain external to it because this meaning and form are not imminent in the objective world itself.³¹

The return to the *primitive hut*, so widely discussed by classical theorists since the Enlightenment up to the nineteenth century, was realised in the practice of constructivism.³² The simplicity of the regular geometrical shape and an understanding of the form-originating laws were among the basics of constructivist practice. In his book *Ritm v Arkhitekture [Rhythm in Architecture]*,³³ Ginzburg identifies the extreme simplicity of basic laws of formation of architectural masses:

These are almost always the laws of formations of a regular geometric form, clear in its mathematic essence, distinct in its rhythm.³⁴

The type of materials used by constructivists was highly important, as of any component of architectural practice. Reinforced concrete was placed at the apex of the hierarchy as a symbol of the new industrial age of tech-

³¹ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p.631.

³² The idea of an original primitive rustic hut as a philosophical and scientific rational basis for architecture was formulated by Marc-Antoine Laugier in his *Essay on Architecture*, published in English in 1755 (London: T. Osbourne and Shipton). In 1977 this essay was published in Los Angeles by Hennessey & Ingalls with an introduction by Wolfgang and Anni Herrmann.

³³ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Ritm v Arkhitekture [Rhythm in Architecture]*. (Moscow: Sredi Kollektionerov, 1923).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

nologies, it was also considered a material that would allow for the development of standards. As for ‘natural’ materials such as wood and stone, neither were controversial for the functionalist method. Considering the harsh economic reality with which the constructivists had to deal, in constructivist practice *any* materials could be used, including the use of garbage, which was painted over to imitate reinforced concrete.

Constructivists considered the form, which was perceived as the shaped function of an object, as superior to the material itself. When Hegel reflected on the origins of architecture and the question of its original materials (wood and stone), he still assumed, as Sven-Olov Wallenstein notes, “that the form does not arise from the movement of the material itself, instead it is something which is merely *sought for*.”³⁵

In an effort to re-begin the history of architecture, constructivists needed a starting point – a “*zero point* of symbolisation”, as Wallenstein speaks of it in connection with Hegel’s “independent architecture”.³⁶ The constructivists purified architectural practice and theory, stripping both back to Hegel’s independent proto-architecture. As a consequence, they unconsciously placed themselves in a position of having necessarily to work through all Hegelian modes again, though not sequentially (proceeding through the independent (symbolic), the classical and finally romantic forms – but simultaneously, within the short period of the 1920s. This invariably led to the contradictions within the modernist architectural movement and the splintering of the movement into different working groups and studios (i.e. constructivists, functionalists, suprematists, rationalists, etc.).

1.1.2. Independent and Symbolic architecture

In the present study I do not use Hegel’s terms of Independent (Symbolic), Classical, and Romantic architecture in a historical sense, as being representative of major periods of architecture’s general development. I apply these Hegelian terms in order to analyse the genesis of the new modernist building types and their relation to the grounds of classical architectural theory. The era of total functionalist dominance in architecture had lasted for just a little over a decade and all three Hegelian stages of architecture’s historical development had been represented within a condensed period

³⁵ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “Hegel and the Grounding of Architecture.” In: Andersen, Michael Asgaard; Oxvig, Henrik (eds.) *Paradoxes of Appearing: Essays on Art, Architecture and Philosophy*. (Baden: Lars Müller Publ., 2009), p. 62.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 64.

during the interwar break, developing simultaneously and yet under declaration of novelty and divorce from the entirety of the architectural tradition.

A huge part of the constructivists' architectural practice could be attributed to what Hegel refers to as *Independent* or *Symbolic* architecture (for which Ginzburg had argued). There thus could have been another constructivist manifesto published, taking as its point of departure Hegel's definition of Symbolic architecture:

The original interest [of art] depends on making the original objective insights and *universal* essential thoughts visible to themselves and to others ... in order to represent them into itself man catches at what is equally abstract, i.e. matter as such, at what has mass and weight.³⁷

Religion, which, according to Hegel, is what unifies men, serves as the “*primary purpose*”³⁸ for the construction of Symbolic architecture. He states:

[...] whole nations have been able to express their religion and their deepest needs no otherwise than by building, or at least in the main in some constructional way.³⁹

For the constructivists, religion was substituted by the ideology and the ideas of the total *reformation* of the world. Developing their theory and practice directly after the Bolshevik Revolution, they took the received reality in which they lived and with which they worked as rather symbolic.

The architects of the avant-garde tried to “grasp” the very moment of the worshipped contemporaneity in order to shape and give it an architectural form. Moisey Ginzburg believed that each epoch possessed a certain rhythm that was characteristic fits time and which was materialised formally in works of art. This rhythm forms the *style*, which inevitably undergoes a period of decline. Among the objectives of the new architecture, Ginzburg saw not the creation of another temporal rhythmic form, but the comprehension of rhythm itself under the defined goal: “to find those elements of form and the laws of their combinations that would reflect the rhythmic beating of our days.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 635.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 637.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 636.

⁴⁰ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Rhythm in Architecture*, p.116.

For the constructivists, the “*holy*” was the *idea of new life*, and the Revolution of 1917 had afforded the opportunity to realise it. The new “religion” needed the Symbol, it required God to be placed inside this central Symbolic Building, which would unite and unify all nations and peoples. God was found, and with it the brightest piece of Symbolic architecture appeared: Lenin’s Mausoleum by Alexey Shchusev (built between 1924–1930) (fig. 5.). Its shape is reminiscent of the Egyptian Pyramids and yet it was very “natural” to the constructivists that the Lenin’s Mausoleum would become the original *temple* of the new Soviet era.

It is difficult to describe the Tomb better than through Hegel, who defined Egyptian Mausoleums as paradigmatic for the Symbolic age in the history of architecture, but nonetheless whose definition could equally apply to Lenin’s Mausoleum:

[...] the Egyptian mausoleums form the earliest temples; the essential thing, the centre of worship is a person and objective individual who appears significant on his own account and expresses himself in distinction from his habitation which thus is constructed as a purely serviceable shell. And indeed it is not an actual man for whose needs a house or a palace is constructed, on the contrary, it is the dead, who have no needs, e.g. Kings and sacred animals, around whom enormous constructions are built as an enclosure.⁴¹

The major difference lies in the fact that Egyptian pyramids were not meant to be entered into or used again after the burial; passages, however, were created, but these were for the soul to wander about. In the specific case of Lenin’s Mausoleum – from the times when the body was placed there, it has served more as a temple, where a certain, almost religious ceremony, has been conducted (people in silence pass by). Even now, it remains one of the major attractions and tourist sites of Moscow, where for many the body of Lenin is neither less nor more than a mummy in the National Museum in Cairo.

The architecture of Lenin’s Mausoleum adheres to the requirements of Symbolic architecture, namely, as Hegel notes, the “mere enclosure and as inorganic nature” that “can be shaped only in a way external to itself, though the external form is not organic but abstract and mathematical.”⁴²

Further examples of Symbolic Architecture can also be found in Constructivist practice. The constructivists returned to the point at which the

⁴¹ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 651.

⁴² Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 654.

synthesis between painting and sculpture was already unnecessary, since it was the very structure of the building, its plan and its shape, that often produced the impression of a large-scale sculpture – I mean here those architectural projects that imitated Soviet Symbols or reproduced machines (almost Gods), again some sort of Independent architecture that could be said to border on sculpture (fig. 7.).

In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel speaks of the same imitation of nature that can otherwise be found in constructivism, the only difference being that within the aesthetics of constructivism nature itself has already been modified. Industry, machines, and modernity were taken, speaking in Lefebvre's terms, as the new *Cosmos*:⁴³ a natural or physical space, “as source and as resource”⁴⁴ for re-appropriation into the new habitable environment. This new industrial material thus became the datum with which to actively work and appropriate. Subsequent to constructivism, the constructivist symbolic buildings were the targets of the same formal act of re-appropriation, just as the columns of the classical architectural order had been, as noted by Hegel:

[...] imitation is not true to nature; on the contrary; the plants-form⁴⁵ are distorted architecturally, brought nearer to the circle, the straight line, and what is mathematically regular.⁴⁶

1.1.3. Classical architecture

The next object of analysis, defined by Hegel as Classical Architecture, also fits into constructivist theory. The *general character* of Classical architecture, according to Hegel, exhibits the following features:⁴⁷ a subservience to a specific end as well as a building's fitness for its purpose (the house being the fundamental type).⁴⁸ These points (and other parallels could be drawn too) would serve as postulates for the ‘new’ architectural theory, and thus as indicative features of all modes of functionalism.

⁴³ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Constructivists would read “plants” as “factories” here.

⁴⁶ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 658.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 661–662.

⁴⁸ We could recall *Zhilische* by Moisey Ginsburg, and the huge influence that Le Corbusier's ‘machines for living’ had on Russian constructivists, up to and including the central role that the notion of home had for the Swedish mode of functionalism.

When compared with the architecture of Antiquity, constructivism seems more proximal to Greek than to Roman architecture. Hegel admits that “Roman architecture, to speak generally, had a totally different range and character from the Greek.”⁴⁹ As if directly following Hegel’s description, the following era of Stalin’s Empire Style appealed to the Roman Architecture: “[...] whereas the Romans are skilful in mechanics of building, and although their buildings are richer and more magnificent, they have less nobility and grace.”⁵⁰

What Hegel writes about the difference between the Greeks and the Romans applies equally to the antithesis between the architecture of constructivism and socialist realism:

[...] the Greeks devoted the splendor and beauty of art only to public buildings; their private houses remained insignificant. Whereas in the case of the Romans, not only was there an enlarged range of public buildings where the purposiveness of their construction was allied with grandiose magnificence... but architecture was also directed to the requirements of private life.⁵¹

The residential areas designed in the era of Soviet ‘classicism’, especially those built for the officers of different ‘departments’ (e.g. one of the “Seven Sisters”), are much more grandiose than the ‘dwellings’ constructed during the 1920s (fig. 8). The latter were really meant to serve the purpose of providing people with living conditions. Later, constructivists were censured for having built match boxes for people, as well as blaming constructivist housing for lacking all aesthetic value. Ivan Sablin, one of the most prominent Russian historian of architecture, notes:

Avant-garde in its “classical” forms can be imagined as movement to the first principles of art. And in this sense any building – is actually a box, and architects of the 1920-s simply realised the reduction of the (living) house as archetype to such forms, which purity up to the present has been attractive only to the few, majority does not understand it at all.⁵²

⁴⁹ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 682.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 683.

⁵² Sablin, Ivan. “Mastera Konstruktivisma v Leningrade” [“Masters of Constructivism in Leningrad”]. In: Isachenko, Valery (ed.) *Arkhitektori Sankt-Peterburga. XX vek. [Architects of St. Petersburg. 20th century]*. (St. Petersburg: Neva, 2005), p. 25.

1.1.4. Romantic architecture

We can now turn to the *General Character of Romantic Architecture*, the last of the types of architecture to be introduced by Hegel.⁵³ Romantic architecture represents, for Hegel, the synthesis between aesthetic autonomy and a unity with its architectural function.⁵⁴

While constructivist architecture may be the least ‘romantic’ in derivation, nonetheless romantic features – at least as these come to be defined by Hegel, reveal themselves in many works by masters of the avant-garde. It is this retention of romantic motifs that, on the one hand, allows one to speak of the contradictions internal to the constructivist architectural movement, but on the other hand shows the wideness of the functionalist method’s applicability.

What, though, could be romantic about an architectural movement that struggled against abstractiveness and tried to expose any construction to its bare nudity, purifying forms to their “natural” regularity? Constructivists worshipped pragmatism and rationalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, they identified themselves as revolutionaries, politically and methodologically. Wanting to be heard, representatives of constructivism aspired to the highest possible levels of expressiveness, of which the declarative character of both their architectural practice, in general, and theoretical manifestoes, in particular, are clear illustrations.

Yet, constructivists set goals that took them beyond the reformation of contemporary reality; they dreamt about the same type of architecture that Hegel described as Romantic, one that “has and displays a definite purpose; but in its grandeur and sublime peace it is lifted above anything purely utilitarian into an infinity in itself.”⁵⁵

We can find all these features, for example, in the projects by Konstantin Melnikov, Iliya Golosov, and Ivan Leonidov (fig. 1–2.). In striving to create a universal method based on “natural” principles of architecture, the masters of constructivism bequeathed to us an amazingly diverse heritage.

There are nonetheless limits with respect to how far the parallel between constructivism and Hegel’s interpretation of Romantic architecture can be pursued. For one thing, the idea of losing everything “in the greatness of the whole”⁵⁶ was alien to the ‘mainstreamers’ of the functionalist movement.

⁵³ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 684.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 685.

⁵⁶ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 685.

Constructivists would not sacrifice the “strict difference between load and support,”⁵⁷ the effect of which would lead to the abstraction of the form and undermine the original construction. Instead, all the features that Hegel attributes to the Romantic architecture were desired by the subsequent “Socialist realists”, and their attempts to master the “classical heritage.”

Finally, it was the Classical Roman architecture, which was taken as exemplary of the grandiose and unconditionally beautiful architecture of the so-called Stalin’s neo-classicism, and which served to represent and promote the new political ideology. Still, many of the buildings constructed during the reign of Stalin were Gothic (Romantic), rather than indicative of Classical (Roman) architecture.

The masters of the new style of socialist realism had to follow particular directives and instructions on their way to the *sublimity* of the Roman Empire; yet in reality, it turned out that they were unconsciously creating Gothic architecture with Classical decoration. Such were the explicit contradictions in all major architectural objects of the time.

These contradictions found their most acute and empyrean expression in the most grandiose, unrealised and unrealisable project of the Palace of Soviets (not only in the one by Boris Iofan, which was approved, but in the majority of projects introduced for the contest) (fig. 6.). Its immense size, wit the masses striving upwards, and with the exteriority of the form having autonomy from its interior – here one can find once more the description (or the recipe) for the Palace of Soviets in Hegel’s *Lectures*. It was to be a Palace of Soviets (similar to a cathedral in the original period of Romantic Architecture) where, as Hegel puts it, “there is a room for an entire community.”⁵⁸

For here the whole community of the city and its neighborhood is to assemble not round the building but inside it.⁵⁹

No wonder that the ‘commissioner’ was dissatisfied with its appearance for quite a long time, since the proportions of Classical architecture, which many had endeavoured to stretch to the gargantuan size of the Palace of Soviets could not possibly represent the sort of *sublimity* the architects were striving to produce.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 688.

⁵⁸ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 692.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Hegel noted that “on the whole, classical architecture preserves a wise proportion in the adornment of its buildings.”⁶⁰ Trying to operate with features of classical architecture, Soviet architects constantly faced the fact that they were dealing with something they did not really want. Much less attention was given in the projects to the Palace’s interior, which was another reason for the commissioner’s dissatisfaction. Draughtsmen followed the principles of classical architecture, where, as Hegel defines it, “the external form is the chief thing and, owing to the colonnades, remains independent of the construction of the interior.”⁶¹ At the same time the task was not to provide public space for the processions and immolations, but to produce “an enclosure for the spirit [...] to make spiritual convictions shine through the shape and arrangement of the building”⁶² and thus, as it turns out, to “determine them both in its interior and exterior.”⁶³ In this formulation of the goal, the basic grounds for the materialisation of, using Louis Althusser’s concept,⁶⁴ a new ideological state apparatus were outlined, targeting visual translation of the newly articulated principles of an emerging totalitarian state through its major architectural symbol.

Experiments with the utopian project of the Palace of Soviets were thus efforts to give material form to Soviet architecture as a new ideological state apparatus. The Palace was to become the highest standard of an architecturalised ISA that would translate the ideology of the new ruling class of the Soviets and propagate it globally. It was to become the new Church and the new School, which, according to Althusser, were traditional ISAs.

It could only have been intuitive that Boris Iofan realised that his project belonged to Romantic architecture, as if to follow Hegelian definition:

[...] in romantic architecture the interior of the building not only acquires a more essential importance because the whole thing is meant to be an enclosure only, but the interior glints also through the shape of the exterior and determines its form and arrangement in detail.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 687.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ On the use of Althusser’s theory of ISAs in the present thesis see the “Introduction” chapter. More on the concept of ideology in Althusser, and on ISA in particular see in: Althusser, Louis. *On ideology*. (London: Verso, 2008), p. 15–22.

⁶⁵ Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, p. 687.

And yet Iofan tried to stay loyal to “Antiquity”, and as a result, the huge monster cake with a bridal figure of Lenin on top turned out to be too shockingly sublime; the gigantic construction was never built in its “firm structure and immutable form.”⁶⁶

Confusion and uncertainty among theorists of socialist realism regarding how to comprehend the classical heritage resulted in them erring on the side of caution, choosing the stencils of Antique Roman architecture. Difficulties with how to define socialist realism can also be explained by the neurotic fear of not wishing to annoy Stalin, whose personal taste, so writes Dmitry Khmelnitsky, was the only objective means in the development of a new aesthetic system:⁶⁷ “Stalin’s style had been formed along with the settling of Stalin’s tastes. Now other logics can be discovered in this process.”⁶⁸

As for the declared universality of the functionalist method, the trouble was that when its theoretical vocabulary was translated into architectural objects, the results were often too radical and loud to be listened to. By the end, constructivists invented a new language in order to express ideas from classical antiquity. As Wallenstein has noted in his article “The Grounding of Architecture”, constructivism can thus be looked upon as one of the brightest modern attempts to redefine those categories first introduced by Vitruvius and then summarised by Hegel.⁶⁹ And as it turned out, for Russian constructivists Hegel’s philosophy constituted more a threshold than a closure.

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⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Khmenlitsky, Dmitry. *Zodchiy Stalin*, p. 161.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 203.

⁶⁹ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “Hegel and the Grounding of Architecture”, p.77.

1.2. “The Creative Discussion” of the 1930s. The end of constructivism

*The change of the official style
in 1932 was and remains
a stumbling block for all Soviet and
post-Soviet research
on Soviet architectural history.*

Dmitry Khmel'nitsky⁷⁰

After the decree of 1932, the already disgraced constructivism was still being discussed on the pages of the country's main architectural edition – *Arkhitektura SSSR [The Architecture of the USSR]*.

With every issue the critique of the formal qualities of constructivism had become increasingly severe. Yet the major theoretical problem discussed on the pages of *Arkhitektura SSSR* was to work out how architecture should be developed within the new framework of socialist realism. When revisiting these discussions, certain nodal themes clearly show themselves, not only surrounding the very term “socialist realism in architecture”, but also the problem surrounding the best way to understand the classical heritage (i.e. discussions concerning innovation and heritage in architecture). Throughout these discussions, evaluations of the now abandoned constructivism were revised, with vociferous critiques being directed at its formal qualities as well as the means of its artistic expression.

As for the writings of the ideologues of constructivism, these were still appearing in *The Architecture of the USSR* during the 1930s. Moisey Ginzburg, for example, continued publishing his theoretical views developed during the previous decade, doing so more or less openly and emphatically. It is also significant that his very constructivist monograph, *Zhilische [Dwelling]*, was published in 1934,⁷¹ already after the ‘creative discussion’ had come to an end and once the term constructivism was reduced to merely a chain of negative associations.

Despite the hostile socio-political environment in which the protagonists of modernist architecture were forced to live, Moisey Ginzburg was unrepentant in his views. He insisted that the application of the functionalist

⁷⁰ Khmel'nitsky, Dmitry. Novje Versii Sovetskoy “Arkhitekturnoy Istorii” [“New versions of Soviet architectural history”]. In: *Twenty-Two*. 2000 (116). Electronic publication: https://archi.ru/files/publications/articles/hmel_versii.htm Accessed on 12.07.2018 through archi.ru

⁷¹ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Zhilische*. (Moscow: Gosstroyizdat, 1934)

method did not contradict the newly formulated architectural task, i.e. socialist realism.

Much intense discussion gravitated around how the classical architectural heritage could be mastered. This in turn raised questions about the term “socialist realism” – with respect to both its definition as well as its methods. The “creative discussion” offered to architects was, as noted by Dmitry Khmel'nitsky, just “the first in a long row of upcoming educational activities that were awaiting them.”⁷² None of it, though, had resulted in a clearer understanding or definition of the socialist realism term, which could encompass, in fact, any meanings and any stylistic features. As mentioned earlier, and perhaps most important of all, the emptiness of the word was, first of all, to satisfy Stalin. Its nebulous character meant that it was an ideal candidate for a new operating and manageable ISA. As Khmel'nitsky claims:

The term “sotzrealism”⁷³ was also made up personally by Stalin, but, certainly, not as a certain artistic method. Stalin only needed a term, which was deprived of independent meaning, and which could be filled with any content and be associated, depending on the situation, with any artistic trend.⁷⁴

Constructivism was swept from the roadside to give way to something, which it was not, namely, to socialist realism. Avant-garde architects were now accused of formalism. In spite of all that, reflections on the theory and practice of functionalism had not completely lost relevance during the 1930s. This is important not because the formal language of constructivism was rejected, but rather because it was not readable and not quite understandable within the new socio-political environment.

The 1930s' critique of constructivism is interesting for me here, since it affords the opportunity to structure and identify the formal means of constructivist architecture as well as to outline the elements of its artistic expression. Presently, I do not set a goal to review the history of that discussion in detail, neither to analyse the entire arsenal of accusative epithets and invectives used against constructivism. Nonetheless, I am certainly aware of the political context surrounding the discussions, which were carried out under the goals of establishing control over architectural production in the country and defining the visual norms of representation of Soviet architecture, now to be understood, in Althusserian terms, as a new ISA. Dmitry Khmel'nitsky, in

⁷² Khmel'nitsky, Dmitry. *Zodchiy Stalin*, p. 114.

⁷³ The abbreviated Russian spelling of ‘socialist realism’.

⁷⁴ Khmel'nitsky, Dmitry. *Zodchiy Stalin*, p. 108.

turn, gives a straightforward definition of these goals, which put architecture (immediately following literature) under the total control of state power, now fully concentrated in the hands of Stalin:

The creative discussion was to resolve two problems – to check the architectural elite’s loyalty and to provide architects with samples of imitation. The reports by the participants solved only the first task. The second one was to be solved by the manifest row that accompanied the publications.⁷⁵

In trying to understand what kind of architecture should be introduced from now on, the theoreticians of the 1930s happened to come to different, sometimes even opposite, conclusions. No agreement on what kind of heritage was to be mastered had been reached. The only thing that was clear is that the methods and means of constructivism were no longer acceptable. Just as it had happened to literary organisations, in order to establish general control over all forms of artistic production in the country, the liberalism of Avant-Garde’s artistic expressions was to be terminated through the public proclamation of a new course being taken towards socialist realism, as Khmelnitsky concludes:

Sotzrealism was first of all made up as a means to tame writers. However, it turned out to be a universal trick, applicable to all spheres of culture – exactly due to the total absence of concrete content.⁷⁶

This is why the search for the new means of new architecture were mostly concentrated around an opposition to, and denial of, the testaments of constructivism. This was also relevant to the means of constructivist artistic expression. The architecture of constructivism was often mentioned as an example of what should not be done in order to avoid annoying mistakes. Such mistakes were principally about the shortcomings of formal means of expression as well as critiques of constructivist aesthetics.

In the 1920s, while holding strong positions, constructivists could explain away most of the critical comments through an unwillingness and inability by their critics to reach a deep enough insight into their theory. In 1928, a constructivist architect Iosif Gurevitch, reviewed the major criticisms targeting the avant-garde⁷⁷ that were published on the pages of main-

⁷⁵ Khmenlitsky, Dmitry. *Zodchiy Stalin*, p. 121.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁷ Gurevitch, Iosif. “The Critique of Constructivism.” In: SA. 1928 (1), pp.1–17.

stream magazines, such as *Sovetskoye Iskusstvo* [*The Soviet Art*] and *Krasnaya Nov'* [*The Red New*],⁷⁸ where constructivism was accused of “artistic nihilism” as well as negating the “aesthetic moment” in architecture (criticisms that would be repeated after the 1932 decree). Gurevitch replies to these accusations in the following way:

[...] to deny the presence of an “aesthetic moment” in architecture is to [...] reduce the whole work of the architect to the rudest and most rudimentary interpretation of the utilitarian and constructive purpose, i.e. to ignore all elements of architecture (plane, volume, space, time, movement, colour, texture) and factors of perception and cognition that are produced by works of architecture in the process of becoming a social thing and that are themselves the elements by which, when operated successfully, an architect reaches the highest qualification or “aesthetic” feature of utilitarian and constructive becoming.

It is the presence of all these conditions that constitutes difficulties surrounding objectification, the problems of architectural quality and qualification, the solutions to which constructivism has never denied and does not deny now [...] ⁷⁹

Architectural periodicals from the 1930s provide the most convenient source for tracing the evolution of the critique of constructivism. The best example is *Arkhitektura SSSR* where the degree of critical attitude towards constructivism intensifies from issue to issue, reaching its extreme point in 1936, when an article by its chief editor, Karo Alabyan, was published: “Protiv Formalizma, Uproschchestva, Eklektiki” [“Against Formalism, Simplification, Eclectics.”]⁸⁰ The general pathos of Alabyan’s article was not limited to diverse accusations towards and censorings of functionalist sympathisers, none of whom were spared public rebuke. Besides personal and general critique of constructivism, Alabyan sought to explicate the basic principles of socialist realism (“our way – is the way of socialist realism”)⁸¹ by focusing on all that was redundant and wrong (from the constructivist method itself to the ‘blind’ imitation of classical architecture).

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⁷⁸ In fact, Gurevitch is responding to a critique made by Shalavin and Lamtsov on the pages of the 8th issue of the *Krasnaya Nov'* magazine, 1927.

⁷⁹ Gurevitch, Iosif. “The Critique of Constructivism.” SA. 1928 (1), pp.1–17. (the citation is spread over the pages of the magazine)

⁸⁰ Alabyan, Karo. “Protiv Formalizma, Uproschchestva, Eklektiki” [“Against Formalism, Simplification, Eclectics.”] In: *Arkhitektura SSSR*. 1936 (4), pp. 1–6.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.1.

Constructivism and formalism were both accused of an absence of truthfulness, of neglecting nature and humans, as well as of ignoring “the question of the national forms in architecture.”⁸² One might agree with Alabyan that constructivist architecture undoubtedly possesses a certain degree of external “abstractness,” which may incline one towards this kind of interpretation. While the architecture was certainly created with a consideration of man’s needs and demands, the traditional notion of “coziness” was an irrelevance. In organising nothing less than a new way of living, with the use of artistic means, constructivist architecture aimed at constructing and reconstructing a man of the past into a man of the future, not by brightening and decorating his living space. Constructivists believed that a profound transformation in living conditions would be effectuated through a change of living itself. As Vladimir Paperny notes, within the *Culture One*, to which he refers the 1920s,⁸³ it was believed that any deviant behavior – regardless of whether it was caused by sickness, ideological false consciousness or criminality – could be automatically improved through changing one’s immediate living conditions and surrounding circumstances.⁸⁴

This architecture was *for* man, but not *about* man. In this sense, it did really lack ‘humanism’ (which, for constructivists, was a bourgeois concession anyway).

In the next issue of the *Arkhitektura SSSR*, the former functionalist architects Lasar Rempel and Tibor Weiner write: “Formalism is not simply trickery (though among formalists there are tricksters as well), since formalism represents a certain system of views of the world.”⁸⁵

That system, according to Rempel and Weiner, spoke of an arbitrariness and “extreme subjectivism” surrounding the aesthetic mind,⁸⁶ and of the victory of the form and rhythms of machines over the human spirit. The machine, which interpenetrated all spheres of life, absorbed architecture itself: “It prepared the ground for abstractively geometric, mathematical, formally discreet solutions;”⁸⁷ it “broke all canons of architectonics;”⁸⁸ and in

⁸² Ibid, p.2. Similar critique was addressed to the Swedish functionalism since the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930.

⁸³ Paperny, Vladimir. *Kultura Dva*. (Moscow: NLO, 2006).

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 189.

⁸⁵ Rempel, Lazar’ & Weiner, Tibor. “O Teoreticheskikh Kornnyakh Formalizma v Arkhitekture.” [“On Theoretical Roots of Formalism in Architecture.”] In: *Arkhitektura of SSSR*. 1936 (5), p. 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.12

⁸⁸ Ibid.

the hands of formalists it turned into the means of “the complete destruction of art as a thinking in images,” becoming “key in an objectless form-making.”⁸⁹

True, constructivists praised technique in their creations; they did not work within the frames of a certain aesthetical system, but through their creative works they were building a new system of ethical and aesthetic values. If, however, in previous epochs, novel methods of creativity were extracted from the potential of architecture as a synthetic art, then constructivism adopted an entirely different approach: it perceived architecture as a substantiated and materialised space. That is why the elements of “arts” and their synthesis were not important to constructivists. They did not prohibit the usage of any elements of artistic practice. The point, though, was that the very idea of materialised space possessed more potentiality for constructivists than a method that synthesised the means of painting and sculpture.

In the aforementioned article by Karo Alabyan, Alabyan declares that the “real fight against formalism”⁹⁰ was not won; “in our midst,” he goes on to report, “we still have extreme formalists,”⁹¹ referring first of all to such architects as Melnikov and Leonidov. The architectural concept of Melnikov, as Alabyan interprets it, “testifies to only one thing: the desire of Melnikov to work in a way to impress everybody”⁹² and that “the architecture by Melnikov is built on sharp sensations, on effects that strike the eyes.”⁹³

This claim is legitimate and relevant not only to the architecture by Melnikov, but these “sharp sensations” and “effects striking the eyes” were unconditional means of affection for constructivist architecture.

It was through the emotionally sharpened geometrical forms and volumes, which were brought to an extremity in their expressiveness, that the search for new aesthetic means was conducted. In the first programmatic works of constructivism the results of these investigations were to be visible and sensible. New architecture was to surprise, impress, even shock, just as reality itself was impressing and shocking. In this creative fervour, in this joyful gaze cast over the materialisation and embodiment of the very idea of new life, the architect’s care for a single human seemed unimportant

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Alabyan, Karo. “Protiv Formalizma, Uproschenchestva, Eklektiki,” p. 2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

before the care of all humanity. Hence there is something seemingly justifiable about Alabyan's regret that "it feels that the architect did not consider the needs of a man, and so forgot about a man."⁹⁴

Alabyan also diagnosed another "sickness" of constructivism, but one that ran counter to the previously mentioned criticism. Alabyan directs attention to a "simplification" that leads to boredom and weak "emotional saturation" in many "standard" works of constructivism.⁹⁵ The core of the sickness he saw was rooted in the architects' unwillingness to synthesise arts, to make festive and joyful architecture 'for a man'. Constructivists, in turn, explained emotional moderation and the rational use of compositional and rhythmic features of their architecture by the expediency that comes from every concrete architectural task.

Despite the turn towards socialist realism and the public overtures for a new classicism, constructivists still had the opportunity to defend their positions rather openly during the first half of the 1930s.

In 1933, the "creative discussion" was organised at the Union of Soviet Architects while the participants' reports were published in *Arkhitektura SSSR*.⁹⁶ The discussions were headed by the architect David Arkin, and reports were given by architects embracing a variety of creative approaches: Arkin, Nessesis, Ginzburg, Vesnin, Fomin, Balikhin, Burov, Matza, and Alabyan.

Arkin recognised the main achievements of constructivism in creating "new architectural types, new types of buildings, that were neither known to the architecture of the past nor were they present in the architectural inventory of the contemporary West."⁹⁷ At the same time it was in this 'creative discussion', where the first general set of accusations of constructivism was articulated to begin traveling around pages of numerous articles and reports.

Arkin goes on to enumerate the following sins of constructivism, which were about the following issues:

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⁹⁴ Ibid, p.3.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.4.

⁹⁶ "Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija." ["The Creative ways of architecture and the problem of architectural heritage."] In: *Tvorcheskaya Diskussija Soyuzu Sovetskikh Arkhitektorov [The Creative discussion between the Union of Soviet Architects.]* In: *Arkhitektura SSSR*. 1933 (3–4), pp. 4–25.

⁹⁷ Arkin, David. "Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija." ["Creative Ways of Architecture and a Problem of the Architectural Heritage"]. In: *Tvorcheskaya Diskussija Soyuzu Sovetskikh Arkhitektorov [The Creative discussion between the Union of Soviet Architects.]* In: *Arkhitektura SSSR*. 1933 (3–4), p.4.

1) about the low artistic culture of the majority of our architectural production, about ignorance by architects and architectural organisations to the artistic content of their work, about a break between projecting on paper and the realisation of the project in its construction, finally, about a gap that exists between architecture and the adjacent spatial arts.

2) about the abundance of projects and their constructions that are of “low quality, stamped and sometimes deprived of any architectural face [...] This architectural primitivism in the forms of the so-called “match-box houses” that penetrated our construction in huge doses only partially obliges its existence to the falsely understood requirements for cheapness and simplicity. There are no doubts that a great role was played by the very certain architectural principle that dictated a projector to reject all elements of architectural expressiveness and reduce the architectural task to the sum of “pure functional” conditionality.

This artistic nihilism that translated from a publically disseminated theory about the “negation of art” to the language of architecture, leads straight towards the “houses-boxes”, finding its allies in the paper abstractions of formalism.”⁹⁸

According to Arkin, one of the reasons for such delusion was their refusal to creatively re-work the heritage of architecture. Additionally, he suspected the outside influence on Soviet architects by works of Western colleagues generally, and by Le Corbusier, in particular: “Corbusier aims to bring to his architectural work not only the elements of rationalisation in a technical sense, but to “read out” the new style, the new aesthetic content from modern technique, from its laws.”⁹⁹

From here the Soviet constructivists make another step to the “aesthetisation of machines, outside the forms of which the architect does not see any other source for the creation of an architectural image.”¹⁰⁰ This step gives birth to the new “dogmatism of reinforced concrete,”¹⁰¹ since it deprives an architect of his right to creatively comprehend the potential that the new technology and new materials possess. The creative credo of the constructivist movement turns out to be reduced to the statement that “whatever functions well, looks good.”¹⁰² This dictum, according to Arkin,

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⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Arkin, David. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

completely excludes architecture “from the range of phenomena of artistic culture.”¹⁰³

Arkin thus deprived constructivists of the main thing – of creative will, by which an architect not only models images of machinery from reinforced concrete, while enlarging them to the size of a building, but formulates a new social and artistic reality, a new life concept, the core moments of which were noted by its critics.

As an example of a constructivist work, in which all the sins of constructivism could apparently be traced, Arkin took an apartment house of Narkomfin in Moscow, built by the architects Ginsburg and Milinis. Arkin noticed that reinforced concrete “stopped being the means by which the architect could realise one or another architectural theme, but in fact it became the main regulator of the whole composition that defined all architectural forms of the building.”¹⁰⁴ This happened, according to Arkin, due to a creative impotence on the part of the architects themselves, who were unable “to master artistically contemporary techniques,”¹⁰⁵ leading to the proclamation of “its form to be the ‘ready-made’ aesthetic value.”¹⁰⁶

As noted above, the artistic mastery of techniques and machinery was one of the most important questions in constructivist theory. The functionalist method recognised the artistic potential pregnant in the machinery itself, as a result of the creative and scientific achievements of human genius that could be harnessed to improve humans’ lives. For the proponents of the assimilation of the classical heritage, “artistic mastery of machinery” became a stumbling block in creative discussions regarding the style of socialist realism. Here, the main question could be formulated as: “what to do with techniques in architecture?”

Responses divided from the necessity to hide techniques behind the architectural order to their active use in decorated forms. Such formulations inevitably led to a misunderstanding of techniques, which were seen by constructivists as the embodiment of human genius. Critics, such as Arkin, saw such an understanding as marking “[...] the self-limiting of architecture; locking it in tight cages by formal means that were dictated by contemporary techniques without any efforts to create a new architectural unity on the basis of such technique.”¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

As a consequence, critics such as Arkin, who were unwilling to see the artistic potential in constructivist techniques, referred instead to some nebulous notion of cultural heritage without having any clear understanding of how to approach it.

In his report for the “creative discussion”, Moisey Ginzburg claimed that it was necessary to overcome the “miserable confusion of most architects”,¹⁰⁸ which soon emerged after the public directives against the fundamentals of functionalism and the instruction to transit immediately to mastering the classical heritage. According to Ginzburg, it was necessary not only to study the methods of the past, but in order “to understand and acquire the architectural culture of the past”¹⁰⁹ it was important “to understand the mechanics of the genesis of an artistic image” that in fact were the basis for the functionalist method in the first place. This means that the constructivist method need not contradict the course by which Soviet architecture had developed, a course that is now oriented towards an understanding of a newly acquired architectural experience. Indeed, functionalism is a universal tool that an architect can use under any social conditions. The construction of a new architectural practice, according to Ginzburg, demands that the following method be employed – a methodological procedure that, in fact, is not contradictory to functionalism, as these words written some ten years earlier would testify:

[...] a method that could [...] set correct relations between the three origins of architecture – science, technique, and artistic mastery [...] To find the correct interrelation between the elements of knowledge and science, to learn to hammer out an artistic image on their base, to find a synthesis of what previous epochs disintegrated, to equip for the realisation of an epoch’s social commission – this is the task of colossal importance that is entrusted to us.¹¹⁰

As for the question of heritage, Ginzburg informs his readers that it is a topic already addressed in his book *Stil’ i Epokha [Style and Epoch]*, published in 1924:

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¹⁰⁸ Ginzburg, Moisey. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p.12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Ginzburg, Moisey. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 14.

It is not a certain single epoch, not a certain style that becomes our heritage, but the quintessence of the entire architectural past of humanity. We are equally close to the clarity of spatial solutions of the Greco-Italian system, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the desire to use hidden dynamic forces that are discovered on point of the tension existing between gothic and baroque.¹¹¹

The famous constructivist architect, Alexander Vesnin, also insisted that no contradiction existed between affirming the functionalist method and the attempt to found a new epoch. Thus, he reflects on the fact that: “the reporter sees the essence of a new architecture from the fact that it is functional, on the one side, and formal, on the other.”¹¹²

According to Vesnin, the major conclusion that should be drawn from the study of architectural history is that architecture is, in fact, “the organisation of living processes.”¹¹³ Hence form is the “space that is organised in material and that concretises a given content.”¹¹⁴ Vesnin concludes:

[...] it is not the eclectic use of the old means that can help us, but the disquisition of new forms that is connected to new content. Thus, it is not correct to keep such a careless attitude towards constructivism and functionalism. The fight against eclectics, the disquisition of new forms and new content – this is the task.¹¹⁵

The architect Ivan Fomin, who was never a constructivist in any full sense, ended up siding with the likes of Alabyan and Arkin in his report, adding that constructivists created buildings not satisfying the aesthetic demands of the masses:

[...] the extreme simplicity of style, the absence of rotund forms, this primitivism and asceticism, none of this reaches the masses. Houses-boxes or houses-cases, as they are called within professional circles, are not appreciated.¹¹⁶

This ignorance towards public opinion was stressed by Alabyan as well:

¹¹¹ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha*, p. 144.

¹¹² Vesnin, Alexander. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Fomin, Ivan. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 15.

The functionalists, comrade Ginzburg in particular, reduce the complexity of social phenomena, which lay at the heart of the architectural commission, to the sum of elementary biological functions. Architects see their commissioner – the “consumer” – very often as still a very primitive creature.¹¹⁷

Ivan Matza, a former functionalist, did not recognise constructivists' achievements in the search for an architectural image (“and that is the main thing”, – he added¹¹⁸). Yet he stated that thanks to constructivism, “an architect needs not limit himself to the solution of a façade.”¹¹⁹

We learned to view architecture as the architecture of volume and space and not to mix the problems of architecture with the problems of painting. In this business constructivists more or less gave something, they were not only the “scavengers.”¹²⁰

Thus the so-called “creative discussion”, which was recorded on the pages of *Arkhitektura SSSR*, and which was directed against both the ideology and the methods of constructivism, returned to the basic theoretical statements of the functionalist method, introducing different readings of its aesthetic qualities.

Matza summarised the discussion of the 1930s in his article “Kakaya Arkhitektura Nam Nuzhna?” [“What kind of architecture do we need?”], published in 1940:

I think that everybody calmed down regarding the difference between order and ‘non-order’ architectures, and that the main questions pertaining to order architecture were resolved by Vitruvius, Alberti, Vignola, Palladio, and that ‘non-order’ architecture deserves attention only in the study of the whims of architectural history.¹²¹

It was in this way that the abyss between constructivism and socialist realism was instituted.

The opposition between these trends remained undisclosed during the entire decade of the 1930s, placing the question of tradition and innovation

¹¹⁷ Alabyan, Karo. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Matza, Ivan. “Tvorcheskije Puti Arkhitekturi i Problema Arkhitekturnogo Nasledija,” p. 21.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Matza, Ivan. “Kakaya Arkhitektura Nam Nuzhna?” [“What architecture do we need?”] In: *Tvorcheskaya Tribuna / Creative tribune*. In: *Arkhitektura SSSR*. 1940 (8), p. 60.

at the top of the agenda. In his article “Palitra Arkhitekatora” [“The Palette of an Architect”],¹²² Ivan Leonidov blamed those who wanted to master the classical heritage exactly in the same way that they had sought to censure constructivism, namely by accusing their opponents of creative insolvency. A superficial attitude towards the possibilities of modern industry and new materials had inevitably permitted architects embrace eclecticism and façade building. According to Leonidov, this outcome was “not an original art of architecture, but something like an “architectural appliqué” that masks the squalor of tastes and the creative powerlessness of the masters.”¹²³

These discussions made it clear that a return to the classical order of architecture through copying the samples from the past was impossible, as it was impossible to overcome the heritage of constructivism, which penetrated into the very essentials of contemporary architectural thinking. The 1930s were not satisfied with the straightforwardness of constructivists’ statements (which resulted in the calls to ‘enrich’ architecture, to soften, and calm down its tone). One of the most popular solutions in practice (by the order as well) became a decorated form of functionalism, that is, an architect’s play with the methodology of functionalism which was virtuously applied to an understanding of the classical heritage.

It was already in the 1930s when it became obvious that constructivism was a style with its own pure system of artistic and aesthetic values, with the well-formed arsenal of means of artistic expressiveness that were readable and available for appreciation or rejection.

In the post-war years, and up to the end of Stalin’s regime, the question of the aesthetic language of constructivism was not raised at all. The course of the development of Soviet architecture had been set, and there was no more need to discuss the aesthetic features of modernist architecture. Constructivism simply disappeared from the pages of periodical issues and published editions.

¹²² Leonidov, Ivan (1934). “Palitra Arkhitekatora” [“The Palette of an Architect”]. In: *Arkhitektura SSSR*. 1934 (7), p. 33.

¹²³ *Ibid.*



Bundesarchiv Bild 102-13138
Foto: o. Ang. / Februar 1932

Fig. 1. Bolshoy Theatre in Moscow. Arch. Catterino Cavos, 1856.



Fig.2. Palace of Culture named after Gorky in St. Petersburg. Arch. Alexander Gegello, 1925–27.



Fig. 3. Rusakov Workers' Club in Moscow. Arch. Konstantin Melnikov, 1929



Fig. 4. Zuev Workers' Club in Moscow. Arch. Ilya Golosov, 1927–29



Fig. 5. Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow. Arch. Alexander Shchusev, 1924–30

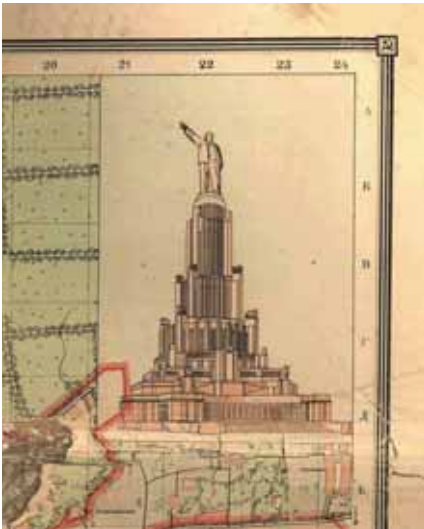


Fig. 6. Depiction of the project for the Palace of Soviets by Boris Iofan on the plan of Moscow, 1940.



Fig. 7. Factory-kitchen named after Maslennikov in Samara. Arch. Ekaterina Maksimova, 1932.



Fig. 8. The main building of Moscow State University. Arch. Lev Rudnev, 1949–53.

CHAPTER II

The Russian Mode of Functionalism: A New Optics for the Space of the 1920s

Walter Benjamin had stayed in Moscow in the fall and winter of 1926–27. This time spent in the city was described in both his *Moscow Diary*¹ and the “Moscow” essay.² In his chapter “The Withering of Private Life”, published in the book *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia*,³ Evgenii Bershtein argues that: “The *Moscow Diary* documents the translation of Soviet cultural experience into the language of Western theoretical thought.”⁴

It is known that the trip to Moscow was for personal reasons, firstly on account of his amorous involvement with the Latvian communist, Asja Lacis, but also because of the overall depressing conditions of his life. As Bershtein summarises:

During the years preceding his trip to Moscow, Benjamin became profoundly estranged from the institutions of cultural life in Weimar Germany. In 1925 his plan to secure a position at Frankfurt University fell through, and with it his hope of ending his total and humiliating dependence on his bourgeois family. The death of his father and a new strain in relations with his wife contributed to Benjamin’s personal crisis of 1926. He sensed the need for a drastic change in his life and viewed the trip to the Soviet Union as a reconnaissance mission; he looked for the opportunity to establish radically new conditions of existence.⁵

¹ Benjamin, Walter. *Moscow Diary*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press Publ., 1986)

² Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow.” In: Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 22–46.

³ Kiaer, Christina; Naiman, Eric (eds.). *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia. Taking the Revolution inside*. (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁴ Bershtein, Evgenii. “The Withering of Private Life,” p. 218.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Following Jacques Derrida's Moscow lectures⁶ and Gerhard Richter's study of Benjamin's autobiographic texts, such as the *Moscow Diary*, the *Berlin Chronicle* (1932), and the *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (1932–1938),⁷ Bershtein understands Benjamin's *Moscow Diary* as a grounding text for the genre of the "leftist intellectual's trip to Soviet Russia", so popular in the twenties and thirties,⁸ and which "advances a particular philosophy that construes the body as a subject of history."⁹

In this chapter I refer mostly to the "Moscow" essay, a text devoted entirely to Benjamin's impressions of Moscow as an urban and spatial phenomenon. I shall provide here a close textual interpretation with the intent of reflecting on how the urban space of Moscow served as the very ground on which a new Soviet reality was to be constructed, and where Benjamin intended to observe the Bolshevik Revolution in action.

I should clarify that in the current chapter I neither set a goal to analyse Benjamin's records of his experiences of living in Moscow nor do I seek to provide a substantial textual analysis of his writings *in toto*. The object of analysis here is rather the living space of an early Soviet city in all its spatial and transformative complexity. The transformations that Benjamin described during his time in Moscow, were characteristic not only of the new Soviet capital, but can be said to apply to many other Russian cities too. Moreover, these transformations can, to a lesser degree, be extended to the two other countries (i.e. Germany and Sweden) selected for the purposes of the present study. Russia, Germany, and Sweden are traceable as three distinct areas, from out of which three distinct modes of European functionalism can be said to have taken root. Together, then, these three countries constitute the grounds for functionalist expression in European modernity. The Benjaminian texts to which I refer in the current chapter thus set the tone for the first part of this study. But, more besides: the examination of Benjamin's *Moscow* diary and the "Moscow" essay will serve as departure points for my further reflections on the nature of the Russian mode of functionalism and its comparison with its German and Swedish variants.

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⁶ See: Derrida, Jacques; Ryklin, Mikhail. *Zhak Derrida v Moskve: Dekonstruksiya Puteshestviya [Jacques Derrida in Moscow: deconstruction of the journey]*. (Moscow: RIK "Kultura", 1993).

⁷ Richter, Gerhard. *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

⁸ Bershtein, Evgenii. "The Withering of Private Life," p. 219.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 217.

The *Moscow* diary introduces the city and its fragmentary moments in the making of history, each revealing the city's urbanity as well as capturing ongoing transformations within this urban body. The fragmentary patchwork form of writing characteristic of Benjamin transforms our sensibility towards Moscow: the "historical object" is rendered as a "figural fragment", as Jaeho Kang notes in his article "The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (*Kulturkritik*)".¹⁰ Kang elaborates in the following way:

[...] immanent criticism coincides with Benjamin's particular understanding of history as a fragmented image. It illuminates the theoretical ground of fragmentary individuality, existing as a work of art free from the whole system of judgement. [...] A seemingly fragmented, unrelated individual minute is one waiting to constitute a constellation. Benjamin's critique presents fragmented objects in a figurative and imagistic constellation, whereby objects separated in the past become authentic historical truth.¹¹

Benjamin's stay in Moscow coincided at precisely a time when the aesthetics of constructivism was being materialised in some prominent architectural works within the city, and where experiments with the transformation of living spaces were being realised by the most famous architects of the time.

But, to Benjamin's disappointment, he had not found Revolution in Moscow. As Bershtein notes:

From the point of view of his political biography, the Moscow sojourn was important as an unsuccessful attempt to enter into the reality of revolution-in-construction.¹²

Benjamin had observed a city going through profound change at a high level of speed and intensity. He did not describe the total reorganisation of space either in terms of the new functionalist architecture, which was being constructed during his stay, or by noticing the demolition of old buildings, which referred back to the ruined Russian Empire. Instead, Benjamin

¹⁰ Kang, Jaeho. "The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (*Kulturkritik*)". In: *Constellations*. 18 (1). (Oxford – Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 75.

¹¹ Kang, Jaeho. "The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (*Kulturkritik*)". In: *Constellations*. 18 (1). (Oxford – Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 75.

¹² Bershtein, Evgenii. "The Withering of Private Life." p. 217.

turned to other features and spatial dimensions that were not directly related either to architecture or to construction. Yet, as Bershtein claims, citing Susan Buck-Morss, the journey itself, and the texts that resulted therefrom, paved the ground for what would become Benjamin's most "architectural" work:¹³

Moscow was one of the sites in which Benjamin's unfinished but still formidable and influential "Arcades Project" had its origin.¹⁴

In the "Moscow" essay, Benjamin describes the reformation of the city-space of Moscow, which was initiated by functionalism and supported by the new regime. Though, as it turned out, they possessed rather different goals, both state policy and constructivist practice opened up the space for the new Russian capital to be subject to further appropriations, using the terms by Lefebvre.

A closer reading of Benjamin's impressions during his stay in Moscow will afford the possibility of properly articulating and comprehending the most radical mode of functionalism in its Russian version. By interpreting Benjamin's reflections during his living in Moscow, an understanding of 'modernity', with respect to its transformations and its translations into a material living space through the application of functionalist aesthetics (without any direct reference to its architectural circumstances), can be reached.

In the previous chapter, an account of the formation, articulation, and critique of the theory of the Russian architectural Avant-Garde was introduced. This was presented in the form of a short analytical overview that defined and outlined distinguishing features of architectural modernism, the characteristics of which were not only specific to the Russian mode, but, to a lesser and greater degree, to the whole aesthetics of functionalism. The application of this aesthetics to the production of living spaces could be traced through Benjamin's observations and reflections on the urban space of Moscow.

To offer an interpretation of the "Moscow" essay by Benjamin with the purpose of grasping the ongoing transformations within the living space of the city of his time, as well as with the ambition of drawing some conclusions on the nature of the Russian mode of functionalism, is certainly

¹³ Here Bershtein refers to: Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Bershtein, Evgenii. "The Withering of Private Life," p. 217.

one of many ways to reflect on the urban space of a city within a chosen historical period. One could claim it a questionable methodology, if to consider Benjamin's essay, which is based on a diary and thus reads as it does like a memoir, an inappropriate object for systematic academic research. Yet I find this approach highly relevant for the immediate purposes of this study, which are to identify, outline, distinguish, and highlight those features that contributed to the formation of living spaces, the arrangement of which were significantly different from what had been produced in previous ages, and which moreover would trace the direction for the development and production of living spaces further into the twentieth century. The emotional, the sensible, and the tactile nature of these components that would define these new spaces, and that were captured by Benjamin during his short stay in Moscow, allow for a different optics and approach to an understanding of that space, as well for a deeper appreciation of the transformations occurring within the modernist movement in later periods, both in Russia and in Western Europe.

It seems striking that Benjamin ignored the impact of modernist architecture in the changes that were taking place around him at the time. He did not make reference to Russian constructivism as featured in the new architecture of Moscow, nor did he note the large-scale experiments being undertaken by the German functionalists in Berlin. In the absence of any opinion or judgment on concrete examples of modernist architecture in Russia and Germany, Benjamin managed nonetheless to offer both detailed analyses and forensic critiques of modernity and modernist cultural production. Even though he failed to find in Soviet reality the conjunction of the political, the artistic, and the intellectual in the process of constructing a new mode of post-revolutionary living, he introduced what Maria Gough calls "the summary exposition or informative report"¹⁵ of the modernist space within the transformative urban space of Moscow, revealing its nature and predicting its future, even if the overall polemical tone of his critique "is rather mute."¹⁶ In her article *Paris, "Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde,"*¹⁷ Gough outlines Benjamin's major objectives and expectations from the trip, which turned out to be utopian, but which at that time were shared by both European and Russian avant-gardists:

¹⁵ Gough, Maria. "Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde." In: *October*. 2002 (101), p. 71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gough, Maria. *Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde*. In: *October*. 2002 (101), P.53–83.

Like many of his Western European counterparts obsessed by the crisis of the intellectual under capital, Benjamin often looks toward (or projects) the Soviet Union as a place where the ancient rift between poet and polis had been achieved. His long-standing interest in Soviet cultural production is manifest in numerous essays and reviews published in the wake of his 1926–27 sojourn in Moscow, itself richly documented in *Moscow Diary*.¹⁸

These set objectives and deceived expectations were common to various thinkers of the time, who, at different temporal points throughout the modernist era and from different perspectives, addressed modernity: from Giedion's efforts to overcome a historical split between thought and feeling¹⁹ to Lefebvre's elaboration on the concepts of alienation and a rehabilitation of the 'total man' through the means of both political and spiritual revolution of the everyday. These claims were attuned to the literary aesthetics of the time, as Michel Trebitsch notes with respect to the polemics between Lefebvre and Sartre in the *Action* magazine:²⁰

In a way both were after the same quarry: Lefebvre's pre-war themes of the 'total man' and his dialectic of the conceived and the lived were echoed by Sartre's definition of existence as the reconciliation between thinking and living.²¹

A closer reading of the "Moscow" essay enables a deeper understanding of the aesthetics of Russian constructivism, of its origin, its development, and its end. The genius' ability to 'grasp the concrete' allowed Benjamin to draw the picture of Moscow and of the new Soviet state from numerous perspectives and dimensions. Among those that are taken as the elements of a closer textual analysis in the present chapter are the dimensions of space, time (tempo and rhythm), and motion.

So as to delimit the scope of the current chapter, I have put to one side some other aspects that Benjamin considers, such as touch, sound, texture, colour, smell, and temperature ("intoxicating warmth"). These qualities are no less important for the complete comprehension of the urban space of Moscow, as they are for the spatiality of any other town.

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¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁹ Read more in *Part I, Chapter III* of the present thesis. *German Mode of Functionalism*.

²⁰ See *Action*, 1944 (17) and 1945 (40).

²¹ Trebitsch, Michel. "Preface." In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. (London-New York, 1991), p. xi.

Another of Benjamin's famous essay, "Experience and Poverty",²² is of significance here as a further example of Benjamin's profound comprehension and analysis of modernity and its architectural space. Here Benjamin uses a concept of aura, which is highly important when approaching modernist architecture and modernity. While he does not explicitly use the term "aura" in his essay on Moscow, his descriptions of his stay in the city carry within themselves an "auratic" quality.

"Experience and Poverty" was written within the architectural space of Ibiza where the buildings, pure in expressing their function, existed in indifference to any qualities of time and history that left no traces on their white walls. In his article "Walter Benjamin. Narration and Memory," Carlos Ruano Diaz suggests a source of inspiration for Benjamin's concept of aura:

It is possible that Benjamin was inspired by the landscapes and buildings of the island of Ibiza in coming up with his concept of *aura*. In this now revealed landscape, the house becomes for Benjamin the true object of contemplation and admiration. Devoid of style and architecture, a vernacular craft product, the white house manifests itself as the legacy of an atavistic knowledge that integrates the stone wall in a stony path, the porch and the olive tree, and in this sense the image is both figure and ground at once because there is no organic difference between nature and the house.²³

By employing terms from Lefebvre, one can thus say that the 'natural' space of an island suffered the least from an appropriation by humans in order to become the absolute space of the city. In his *Critique of Everyday Life* Lefebvre refers to rural festivals inherited from the eras of primitive societies that are still a reminder of the lost unity of a man with his living space. The living space here is understood as the entity of a physical domestic environment and of everyday traditional social practices that alienate man neither from nature nor from his commune. As Michel Trebitsch concludes on the historical nature of Lefebvre's understanding of *alienation*:

[...] he defines traditional everyday life in a general way as based on non-separation, on the absence of differentiation in the cosmic order which

²² Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty." In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 731–736.

²³ Diaz, Carlos Ruano. "Walter Benjamin. Narration and Memory". For the: *Walter Benjamin, A PORTBOU*. <http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/>. Link: http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/sites/all/files/ruano_eng.pdf. P. 2. Accessed on: 28.07.2018.

formerly bound man and nature together. Thus *alienation* appears as a *historical* process of down-grading, of loss of this ancient 'human plenitude,' by virtue of a dual movement of separation and abstraction: on the one hand, an increasing abstraction of human actions stripped of their living substance in favour of signs and symbols. Alienation thus leads to the impoverishment, to the 'despoliation' of everyday life [...] ²⁴

In Ibiza Benjamin finds architectural forms that are the most organic and the least traceable in their cultural and historical development. Forced to contemplate on the white walls of his exile, he writes a text that deprives modernist architecture of any illusions its creators might have possessed, giving rise to new forms of barbarism. This new barbarism embodies a man who is alienated both from his individual past and his collective historic experience as well as from his present, and where only the clouds are recognisable. For Lefebvre, the conditions of modernity in its bourgeois form similarly divide the individual from his self, which leads to the fragmentation of the totality of living and thus the replacement of relations between humans with economic relations between men as economic units and commodified objects. Again, as Michel Trebitsch concludes:

Modernity is the movement towards the new, the deployment of technology and rationality (which Lefebvre calls 'modernism'), but it is also the absence of any real transformation of social relations, and leads from the human towards the inhuman, towards barbarity. ²⁵

Benjamin predicts and explains the destiny of modernism and of inhabitants of the living space that it produces who should have grown to the new barbarians of modernity, to the 'mickey-mouses' that possess super-human abilities to survive it on one hand, and who are complete barbarians in regard to their former cultural and social background on the other. Diaz notes that in "Experience and Poverty", as well as in "The Storyteller" (1936) Benjamin warns that "negation and destruction of the mechanisms, which allow us to receive the legacy of the memory (and experience) of those who have gone before us, leads to a new form of barbarism." ²⁶

²⁴ Trebitsch, Michel. *Preface*. In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. (London-New York, 1991), p. xxv.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

²⁶ Diaz, Carlos Ruano. "Walter Benjamin. Narration and Memory". For the *Walter Benjamin, A PORTBOU*. <http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/>. Link: http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/sites/all/files/ruano_eng.pdf. P. 1–2. Accessed on: 28.07.2018.

The inhabitants of the new Soviet reality need to be divorced from both their historical past and their personal experience in order to adjust to the new environment that was produced for them as their new living space. The space of Soviet Constructivism was imposed on people as a ready-made absolute space, to which residents would have to adjust by becoming the new barbarians; divorced from their past and impoverished of their ability to communicate, they were to be born anew into a constructivist reality, depriving them of their legacy of memory and experience.

The Bolshevik state had put huge efforts into cleansing and purifying the old urban residential areas of all references to the defeated era. Using Lefebvre's terms, it meant the site had been returned to natural space, now ready for new appropriations.

The 1920s were a period of clearance, of going back to basics, to the zero of form, to the literal application of the suprematistic formula of Malevich's *Black Square*, introduced a decade earlier. The urban spaces of Soviet cities were literally being turned back into their natural physical state, so as not to possess any traces of their Imperialistic past. Architectural objects from previous eras were destroyed as the social products of Tsarist Russia. Lefebvre claims that "(Social) space is the (social) product,"²⁷ and Bolsheviks, when destroying churches and royal palaces, cleared the space of products that resembled the relics of a defeated ideology; new ideas would supplant the old, and would arise from out of the production of new social spaces. Lefebvre criticised this flat understanding of social space, arguing for its complex nature that includes both physical as well as temporal, social, and psychological dimensions:

[...] a social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, and that it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality.²⁸

Yet, such a flat perception of space was characteristic of the Bolsheviks. This strategy of re-appropriating space from the defeated Empire as part of the preparations for the new production of space in post-Revolutionary Russia were sung by comrades as part of the Internationale:

We will destroy this world of violence

²⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, p. 26.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 27.

Down to the foundations, and then
 We will build our new world.
 He who was nothing will become everything!²⁹

The ground was prepared for the re-appropriation of space through the complete destruction of architectural objects, but the new barbarians that headed the Soviet state started its “absolutisation” in a way that had led to the opposite direction from the one that was pointed by constructivists.

Both the “Moscow” essay and the “Experience and Poverty” help us to understand the future destiny of functionalism in Germany and constructivism in Russia, revealing the cause of the latter’s failure. A closer reading of the “Experience and Poverty” allows us to account for the fact that one of the main reasons for the failure of constructivism in Soviet Russia owed as much to the lack or complete absence of aura, as to the dismissal of the style by the emerging hegemon of socialist realism. It is moreover ironic and sad to note how it is only now, as constructivism continues to dilapidate decades after its legitimisation, that it acquires an aura, which hangs over its un-picturesque ruins.

A close reading of the suggested texts by Benjamin helps not only in the search for a definition of a living space, but also for discovering its roots in Benjamin’s own time, the era of functionalism in Europe. The “Moscow” essay is devoted to the concrete city, while the “Experience and Poverty” does not refer to any particular urban space or architectural examples, except for the architectural experiments in Scheerbart’s fiction that inspired the practice of Loos and Corbusier.³⁰

The critical approach of an ‘attentive viewer’ that Benjamin applies to Moscow can serve as a tool to understand any city’s urban space. Benjamin sees Berlin anew after seeing Moscow. In the current study, Leningrad is chosen as an exemplary city for an analysis of those living spaces that resulted from applying the method of Russian constructivism to the construction of mass housing. However, the close reading of Benjamin’s essay on Moscow is key also to understanding the nature of modernism in different parts of Russia. The ambiguity of avant-garde practice can be clearly observed through opposing Leningrad to Moscow. When juxtaposing these two cities, I draw upon Katerina Clark’s *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural*

²⁹ This is a literal translation of the Russian adaptation of the *Internationale* lyrics by Arkady Kots (1902) Full text available here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Internationale. Accessed on: 13.07.2018.

³⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty”, p. 733.

Revolution.³¹ Clark analyses the transformations (symbolic, epistemological, and metaphysical) that urban spaces within the former capital underwent.

The structure of this chapter follows the sequence of abstracts in Benjamin's essay on Moscow. Since the disposition of Benjamin's text is close to that of a diary, there is no beginning or end, neither an introduction nor a conclusion. This means that it is possible for any part of the "Moscow" essay to be read in any order. As a consequence, the present chapter will follow the fragments as they are arranged by Benjamin, offset by my own longer remarks on issues that pertain directly to Russian constructivism and to the formation of the living space in Russia during the 1920s.

The previous chapter defines the major terms of constructivist theory by analysing the formation of its aesthetics through a study of the published works by its founders. It also traces the critique of the functionalist method and of its architectural practice in the following period, when socialist realism had established itself as the dominant force. The current chapter reveals, then, those spatial transformations that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, in the form of new state directives and supported by the artistic avant-garde; profound transformations that were witnessed and experienced first-hand by one of the era's extraordinary thinkers: Walter Benjamin.

2.1. Walter Benjamin: the new optics for Moscow

Moscow and Berlin, both of which Benjamin refers to in the "Moscow" essay, were perfect cases for comparison in the 1920s. They were capitals of countries that had been experiencing the most dramatic changes, incomparable to those in other European states. Benjamin came to Moscow to search for the Revolution but had not found it. Avant-garde art, which was to be a major component in the founding of a new society, had long been dismissed. Benjamin describes Moscow as if he knew it before and lives through the impenetrable jungle of its streets, daring to let their brilliance strike his eyes.

What he wins from his experience is "a new optics" – "the most undoubted gain from a stay in Russia."³² Through a careful description of what he sees in Moscow, Benjamin judges Berlin to be a deeply European city:

³¹ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*. (Cambridge, Mass. – London: Harvard University Press, 1995)

³² Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow", p. 22.

“However little you know Russia, what you learn is to observe and judge Europe with the conscious knowledge of what is going on in Russia.”³³

The political history of the twentieth century is shot through with a permanent resistance to any conscious understanding of its former experience. It is in that divorce with the past, as well as an unwillingness to face history, which is as strong today as it was in Benjamin’s time, when the poverty of experience fully revealed itself.

For most people, an estrangement from the experiences of WWI was unintentional if not unconscious; either way it was a matter of survival. People did not become “richer but poorer in communicable experience.”³⁴ The strings of communication through which experience had been transmitted for ages were torn, and Benjamin was wandering through the sinewy streets of frazzled-out Moscow. Revolution had been replaced with the digging for power, while the boldness and experimentalism of the avant-garde was replaced with the primitive narration of the New Economic Policy (NEP).³⁵

The loss of the art of story-telling provoked by the muteness of communicable experience and the grimness of everyday life were revealed in the forms, the materials (glass, reinforced concrete, iron) as well as the contents that were most characteristic of the modernist architecture of that time.

The architecture of the Russian avant-garde was not a child of the Bolshevik Revolution, just as German functionalism was not the offspring of the Weimar Republic. They were born before the first world war and would have changed the face of Europe regardless of the dramatic political events that consumed these countries. The avant-garde was different in nature and origin from Communism and Nazism, and thus was abandoned in both countries as alien to these ideologies, once they had assumed power.

How would European functionalism have fared if neither the War nor the Revolution had taken place? The Russian avant-garde welcomed the Revolution with great enthusiasm; it was stylised by the Revolution, sharpened and matured through the harsh realities of the 1920s; it tried to divorce its aesthetics from the culture of previous ages, and declared loyalty to the ever-changing present.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty”, p.731.

³⁵ NEP – The New Economic Policy was a temporary policy, initiated by Lenin in 1921, which allowed the market economy and other features of capitalism into the country under the careful control of the state.

Post-Revolutionary architecture in Russia is the most immediate architecture; it requires not contemplation, but the immediate experience of its space, forms, and rhythms. The inhumanly intensified mobility of life demanded an immensely mobile form of architecture and dynamic production of living space. Benjamin notes the “unconditional readiness for mobilisation”³⁶ of the Moscovites. Everything moves and changes, everything and everybody are involved in the transience of practices and meanings. This mobility and the intensity of life, as Benjamin identifies, possesses the nature of a laboratory experimentation “to the point of exhaustion”, where “no organism, no organisation, can escape this process:”³⁷ employees in their factories, offices in buildings, pieces of furniture in apartments are rearranged, transferred, and shoved about.”³⁸

The *remonte* – what Russians call a never-ending process of repairing and refurbishment of their living spaces, is, for Benjamin, not only a feature of life in Moscow, but in whole of Russia.³⁹ There is a Russian ironic saying that *remonte* can’t be finished, it can be only interrupted.

Collectivisation, mobility and transition, as it was discussed by Benjamin, captures all spheres of life: “There is no knowledge or faculty that is not somehow appropriated by collective life and made to serve it.”⁴⁰

Living itself stopped being a constant of the everyday routine. There is no “everyday” anymore; every day is a different temporal unit of an overwhelming and shocking experience of a dehumanised and dehumanising new life, to be interpreted as modern. As Beatriz Colomina notes regarding Benjamin’s definition of *Erfahrung* and its connection to danger: “Shock is what characterises modern experience (*Erfahrung*). And the word *Erfahrung* is etymologically linked with danger.”⁴¹

The collectivisation of life, following the Marxist critique of individualism, should have included masses of people into political processes, making proletarians active agents of social life-building. It ought to have culminated in the overcoming of the lived experiences of alienation created under capitalism that treats the working class only as a means for production and for surplus value. And yet, as Lefebvre writes, in his “Foreword” to the second edition of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, forms of socialist collectivism,

³⁶ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 29.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 28–29.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 29.

⁴¹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 72.

which developed within communist countries, could have also produced alienation, albeit of a different kind:

In particular it had to be possible to ask the question: ‘Is alienation disappearing in socialist society? In the USSR or the countries which are constructing socialism, are there not contradictions indicative of new – or renewed – forms of economic, ideological and political alienation?’⁴²

Shortly after the Revolution, citizens were turned into migrants, and their living space on all levels from a city to an apartment, was transformed into a camp. People were alienated from their traditional backgrounds, detached from their home lands, and divorced with their past. Moscow had been experiencing changes not only to its façades through radical architectural reconstructions, but to its content as well – through the rapid replacement of its population. Living in the capital’s new space meant camping; as Benjamin acknowledges: “indoors one only camps.”⁴³ The temporality of present conditions of existence and the tense feeling of expecting the future made them extract all they possessed from the constitution of Mickey Mouse – an image of a character that Benjamin refers to in “Experience and Poverty” as to the greatest barbarian of modernity, whose body allows for endless transformations, while dealing with everyday life.⁴⁴

2.2. The Radicalism of the Russian mode of functionalism

2.2.1. Moscow: the invisible Revolution and absent Avant-garde

When Benjamin visited Moscow in the late 1920s, the Constructivist era of architecture was still ongoing. It is thus of interest to note Benjamin’s observation that “constructivists, suprematists, abstractionists who under War Communism placed their graphic propaganda at the service of the Revolution have long since have been dismissed”.⁴⁵

Benjamin refers to the years of War Communism as to a blossoming period of the Soviet avant-garde, while he sees it as already fallen into dis-

⁴² Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 5.

⁴³ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 30.

⁴⁴ For further comments on Benjamin’s interpretation of the Mickey Mouse’s image read in my article: Seits, Irina. “Mickey Mouse – the Perfect Tenant of an Early Soviet City”. In: *Baltic Worlds*. 2017, 10 (3), pp. 53–62.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 39.

repair by 1927. Officially, the abandonment of the avant-garde would wait till five years later.⁴⁶

Benjamin came to Soviet Russia in order to observe the Bolshevik Revolution in its everyday guise, to bear witness to the transformations that everyday life was undergoing as a consequence of the Revolution; to comprehend the Revolution in its materialised state. In his “Moscow” essay, Benjamin introduces a critique of Moscow’s space during its post-revolutionary transition as a critique of the revolution itself. This approach was also suggested by Lefebvre, who took the critique of the everyday as the first step towards its radical transformation – i.e. towards a revolution of the everyday. As Michel Trebitsch notes:

‘Man must be everyday, or he will not be at all’: in the first pages of *Critique of Everyday Life* Lefebvre uses this aphorism to show that from its starting point in everyday life the *critique* of everyday life can lead to the *revolution* of everyday life. ‘Everyday man’ is the man of praxis, and praxis alone will enable him to free himself from alienation and attain the concrete totality of the ‘total man’ [...].⁴⁷

Benjamin came to Moscow to search for the Revolution, but had not found it. He had not even noticed traces of the avant-garde in the Soviet capital. Yet, the year 1927 was the period when the most prominent works of architectural functionalism were being constructed in Moscow, such as the Izvestia Newspaper Building⁴⁸, the Planetarium⁴⁹, the Zuev Club⁵⁰, the Rusakov Club by the architect Melnikov and his studio-house,⁵¹ the Tsentrosoyuz building by Le Corbusier,⁵² and many others (fig. 1–3).

⁴⁶Another interesting point noted by Benjamin, but something that has passed the historians of the avant-garde by, is any reference to the era of the War (Military) Communism as a specific period within the history of Russian art. Though the term of constructivism was not in use during the period of War Communism (until 1922), this period generated its own highly intensive and expressive artistic language, which later developed into what we traditionally understand under the label, “Russian Constructivism.” The study of the art of the War Communism era is something that has at least been articulated as an issue (Mikhail Evseyev), the fact remains is that systematic research is required in order for War Communist art to constitute a separate period in Russian art history.

⁴⁷Trebitsch, Michel. “Preface.” In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, pp. xix–xx.

⁴⁸Arch. Gersh Barkhin, 1925–1927.

⁴⁹Arch. Barsch, Sinyavsky, Zundblat, 1927–29.

⁵⁰Arch. Iliya Golosov, 1927–29.

⁵¹Arch. Konstantin Melnikov, 1927–29.

⁵²Arch. Le Corbusier and Paul Jeanneret, 1928–1930

Here a reason for Benjamin's ignorance may be offered: these famous pieces of Russian modernism did not turn Moscow into the city of modernist architecture, as Bruno Taut's and Martin Wagner's *siedlungen* had turned Berlin into the functionalist capital of Europe. Moscow was not the city of Revolution and could not serve as the proper ground for the revolutionary architecture of the avant-garde due to the extreme multiplicity and diversity of its cultural, urban, and historical layers. The city could not be the materialisation of the revolution, for it was too difficult to return Moscow to a natural physical state, speaking in Lefebvre's terms; in the end, the Bolshevik Revolution itself had not happened there. Moscow became the city of power, not of the Revolution. It did not allow avant-garde experimentalists to define its urban landscape. Moscow carries monuments of modernist architecture, but they are single islands, sites disconnected from the city's absolute urban space. For the most part, Moscow was shaped by the architecture of ancient churches and socialist realism. Thus the established social space of Moscow was not conducive to the revolutionary transformations sought by the avant-garde. Borrowing here Lefebvre's 'conceptual triad' of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, one can say that the avant-garde wanted to raise up urban spaces to the level of a *representational space* of the revolution.⁵³

Even today there are no monuments of the avant-garde that stand as symbols of Moscow. One can imagine Melnikov's house and the workers' clubs by Rusakov and Golosov located anywhere, not necessarily in Moscow. This detachment from the concrete site, independent from and even ignorant towards the specific landscape of Moscow, was a feature of functionalist architecture of all modes, a feature that highlighted the uni-

⁵³ Here is the definition of Lefebvre's triad, presented in his *Production of Space*. See also the *Introduction* to the present thesis.

1. *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.
2. *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
3. *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).

versality of its method and its unlimited applicability to any site (whether this be physical, ideological, or symbolic). The constructivist buildings of Moscow thus did not produce and reproduce new social spaces, they were the contradictory inserts into existing social spaces, which translated the reproduction of different social relations and means of social reproduction. Most people who are familiar with images of Russia will name Moscow if shown pictures of the Kremlin or St. Basil's cathedral (fig. 4.), which possess a "specific level of performance," and which are tied "to the relations of production"⁵⁴ characteristic of their own modes of spatial reproduction. And yet how many would name Moscow if given one of the gems of constructivist architecture? There is hardly any avant-garde construction that can be said to symbolise Moscow and that can reach a "guaranteed level of *competence*" of which Lefebvre speaks.⁵⁵

On the contrary, it is the "Seven Sisters" that are taken as representative of Moscow. Alongside the Kremlin and St. Basil's Cathedral, it is these constructions that are recognised as Moscow's brand images. Thus, the architecture of Stalin's neo-classicism is more characteristic of the portrait of Moscow than the dom-kommunas and workers' clubs designed by the constructivists.

During the early 1930s, as totalitarianism was exercising its grip and the new state ideology of socialist realism was being proselytised, Moscow, as the new centre of political and ideological power, had become subject to colonisation, with its city centre to be entirely reconstructed. The avant-gardist research and experimentalism of the 1920s ended, and constructivists lost the competition to make functionalist architecture the new Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) to socialist realism. Stalinism required that its ideology be materialised in architectural forms. As such, architecture itself became an alternative to both the ISAs of the Church and the School that Althusser famously discussed in his work of ideology.⁵⁶ In her book *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, Katerina Clark identifies the space of Moscow during the 1930s as a "kind of hyperspace that had transcended time and was hence of a different order of reality from that of familiar parts."⁵⁷ This space was to become an urbanistic model for the new ISA, according to which architecture would embody the new state of politics and the new state of mind. Clark continues:

⁵⁴ Lefebvre, Henri. *The production of space*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Althusser, Louis. *On Ideology*.

⁵⁷ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 302.

Architecture is in some senses the most concrete and material of all art forms, but at the same time – as architectonics – one of the most abstract. It functioned in Stalinist culture much like the icon in Russian Orthodox culture in that it had simultaneous existence in two orders of reality, both sacred and profane. Like Alice’s looking glass, it reflected an image and was also a portal.⁵⁸

Appropriations of the multi-layered Moscow space were possible only through the complete destruction of its old urban landscape, since there was no empty or available space in Moscow for the effective incorporation of the new ideology. The problem for the constructivists was that they never possessed such ideological and political power in order to clear Moscow to the ground and thus inscribe their ideology upon the surface of the new capital. While their proposed reforms were declared by themselves as radical, their aesthetics was not totalitarian; they lacked both the resources and the will necessary for extensive spatial reforms to be realised. These reconstructions would, however, be undertaken during the Stalinist regime, albeit in a different form. Stalinism managed to shape the new capital in the image of its own ideology. As Clark writes, on the modelling of the new capital of Soviets:

[...] during the 1920s, and particularly with the industrialization and collectivization during the Plan, they had built the “foundation” of the new society; and now it was time to erect the “socialist building” (*zdaniye*). As Party leaders expanded on this new model, however, they concluded that it was time to rebuild Moscow as the “model” for the new socialist cities of the country, and as a model for proletarians and Communists throughout the world who would be inspired to follow it. [...]

In the rhetoric surrounding these new proposals, actual building and practical considerations are conflated with ideological models. Drawing on the fact that Marx and Engels had used terms from construction for their primary model for society – base / superstructure – Party rhetoric used the building of Moscow as the central figure for, and legitimation of, the increasing “bolshevisation” (colonisation) and centralisation (or some would say “totalitarianisation”) of the country.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 298.

Clark argues that it was only after “the centre of Moscow was remade and aggrandised” that “the city finally became the symbol for the nation.”⁶⁰ Stalin’s neo-classism was converted into the model city for all socialist towns.

2.2.2. Lenin’s Mausoleum as the tomb of avant-garde and timeless architecture

Since it was built during the avant-garde period by Alexander Shchusev,⁶¹ one could be forgiven for thinking that Lenin’s mausoleum, is one of the most prominent and symbolic constructivist buildings in the whole of Moscow. The point though is a little different: the mausoleum itself stands for the memory of all Soviet ideology, rather than for modernist aesthetics. The construction is inseparable from both the Red Square and the Kremlin wall behind it. As discussed in the previous chapter, the mausoleum represents not a piece of constructivist architecture (it is hardly ever referred to as a work of constructivism), but a Soviet temple, a sacral building, whose avant-gardist traces are not manifested in the temple itself, that is, the “temple for the God of the Soviets.”⁶²

In this sense, the Mausoleum is representative of the very social space that was searched for at that time. The completion of the Mausoleum can be taken as an indication of the effective materialisation of the new ideology. It also symbolised the establishment of contemporary architecture as the new ISA (‘ideological state apparatus’) of the Soviet state. This symbolisation and mystification of architecture was alien to modernist aesthetics. Here *mystification* should be understood in Lefebvre’s sense, i.e. the process by which something becomes alienated and abstracted from reality.⁶³ The abstract forms of Lenin’s tomb do not embody its function.

Paradoxically, Lenin’s mausoleum had become a high moment in socialist realism, even before the concept itself was articulated. It had become both socialist realism’s cradle and its tomb.

The Red Square in Moscow, with Lenin’s mausoleum as its womb, represents the social space of Moscow in its complete and final (‘absolute’) form. So monolithic is the tomb that it is, even today, impossible to move either Lenin’s body or the Mausoleum from the country’s main square. It is

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⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 299.

⁶¹ 1929–1930.

⁶² See *Part I, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

⁶³ See: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*.

a unique example of how a social space is produced at once – that is, a social space fixed as a moment – rather than as a process. As Lefebvre argues:

It is not the work of a moment for a society to generate (produce) an appropriated social space in which it can achieve a form by means of self-presentation and self-representation – a social space to which that society is not identical, and which indeed is its tomb as well as its cradle. This act of creation is, in fact, a *process*. For it to occur, it is necessary (and this necessity is precisely what must be explained) for a society’s practical capabilities and sovereign powers to have at their disposal special places: religious and political sites.⁶⁴

The Mausoleum became both a religious and a political site at the disposal of the new sovereign power of the Soviets. It reveals the intensity and the extent of the spatial transformations that were characteristic of the country: that mobilisation and intensity of living, noted by Benjamin, which outlined the radicalism of the Russian mode of functionalism, and that was to change the country’s living spaces for the decades ahead.

The architecture of the Mausoleum is no more avant-garde than the Egyptian pyramids, which are pure and elementary in their forms, and which merge entirely with their function: the tomb of Pharaoh’s body.⁶⁵

The architect Shchusev found that the only acceptable form for the tomb is that it be beyond time and style; it should preserve grandeur and sanctity, both with respect to the space itself as well as to its content, namely Lenin’s body. The forms of the Mausoleum are timeless.

Lenin’s mausoleum, a tomb in its forms as well as a monument in its function, is what another modernist thinker and builder Adolf Loos – an inspiring figure for Walter Benjamin – defines as unquestionable architecture.⁶⁶ As Beatriz Colomina comments, in her book *Privacy and Publicity*:

As collective beings, for Loos, we can make architecture only in the tomb and in the monument. Only in these two forms can an experience take place “that includes ritual elements”, an experience secluded from crisis, because they evoke a world outside time and therefore beyond reason.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, p. 34.

⁶⁵ See *Part I, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

⁶⁶ Wang, Wilfried & Safran, Yehuda (eds. trans.). *The Architecture of Adolf Loos: An Arts Council Exhibition*. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987), p. 108.

⁶⁷ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 69.

During his stay in Moscow, Benjamin comments that Lenin's name "grows and grows" after his death;⁶⁸ the cult of Lenin has become an icon:

One finds shops in which it can be bought in all sizes, poses, and materials. It stands as a bust in the Lenin niches, as a bronze statue or a relief in the larger clubs, as a life-size portrait in offices, as a small photo in the kitchens, washrooms, and storage rooms.⁶⁹

The image of Lenin's thus replaced Orthodox icons, while his body found rest within the new church of the Soviets. The Mausoleum was to be a building that would never look outdated. It had to be shorn of any architectural "fashion" or "style" that would in time be abandoned. It should have been disconnected from all traces of contemporaneity, delivering itself into eternity. The architect Shchusev had built nearly forty Christian churches before the revolution;⁷⁰ later he adjusted his practice to the aesthetics of the avant-garde and designed some of the most illustrative examples of constructivism (fig. 5.).⁷¹ After the prohibition of the avant-garde he became a successful architect of socialist realism (fig. 7.).⁷² Shchusev had the sense and skill to design a piece of sacral architecture that would be impossible to remove from Red Square, even in the event of a change of regime.

Lenin's mausoleum is hardly a work of the avant-garde, despite the clarity and the simplicity of its forms. It is precisely on point of fact of the architect's attempt to extricate the tomb from its immediate spatial and temporal embeddedness that he broke with the precepts of the avant-garde. Shchusev managed to overcome the opposition between space and history, mentioned by Benjamin in his remarks surrounding the image of Lenin: "[...] in the optics of history – opposite in this to space – movement into the distance means enlargement."⁷³

The tomb gives architectural form to the memory of Lenin; it is the petrified image of the memory of him, which, along with his name, has expanded.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow," p. 45.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ E.g. Sergiy Radonezhsky Church at the Kulikovo Field, 1902–1917.

⁷¹ E.g. Building of Narkomzem in Moscow, 1928–1933.

⁷² E.g. NKVD quarter in Lubyanka, 1940–1947.

⁷³ Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow", p. 45.

⁷⁴ When Benjamin was in Moscow, it was still a temporary tomb built in wood. In 1929 the granite building was started.

2.2.3. The immediacy of space

One of the major features of the Russian mode of functionalism is the immediacy of its architecture as well as its connection to its own historical contemporaneity and chronology. High speed and an intensity of living, as Benjamin noted (“For each citizen in Moscow the days are full to the brim”⁷⁵), was characteristic of the art of the Russian avant-garde as well. Construction had to be undertaken quickly, followed by intensive and short discussions of projects in architecture journals (e.g. *Sovremennaya Arhitektura*) as well as in mass media editions. The building materials were cheap and of low quality, and thus constructions were inevitably only meant to have a short-term existence. Of importance to the constructivists was to impress themselves upon the “here and now”; they did not labour for eternity, they cared instead for the immediate realisation of their projects.

This sense of immediacy surrounding the transformation of Soviet living spaces was steeped in the specific use of time to which Benjamin in his “Moscow” essay refers as “Asiatic”: “A feeling for the value of time, notwithstanding all “rationalisation”, is not met with even in the capital of Russia [...] The real unit of time is the *seichas*. This means at once.”⁷⁶

The gap between, on the one hand, the demand for immediate action and its realisation, on the other, could be endless, as was the case with Revolution itself. The Revolution was always the starting point but it was never completed. The same applies to constructivist architecture: on paper, it was brimming with vitality, seeking to shape communist society; its brilliant pieces dropped into the urban space of Russian cities as the promises of a redeemed future that was coming *seichas* – at once. This unachievable *seichas* is a process of transiting from one point (in time or space) to another. The notion of *seichas* has never possessed much credibility in Russia, and yet it is widely used in everyday talks, more as a hope that someday the promises of the future will miraculously transform itself into the present reality.

An internal contradiction of the functionalist working method, as well as the whole of constructivist aesthetics, generally speaking, is that the commitment to the immediacy of architectural experience was to comply with notions surrounding the development of reproducible standards as the basis for constructivist architectural practice. The goal to produce an algorithm that would lead to the creation of a reproducible standard, understood as

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, pp. 31–32.

the ideal form by which function could be architecturally materialised, was placed at the centre of the constructivist method.⁷⁷ Not that this was an invention of constructivists, but rather a declaration of their devotion to the technological progress and technological means of art production that had penetrated the very creative process from the end of the nineteenth century. Benjamin, in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” had summarised the idea of reproducibility, which was inscribed on the very aesthetics of functionalism:

Around 1900, technological reproduction not only had reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art, profoundly modifying their effect, but it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.⁷⁸

The functionalist method consciously sacrificed the authenticity of its produced works and eliminated any possibility for the aura to emerge. As Benjamin continues, “in even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place.”⁷⁹

On the other hand, the immediacy of constructivist architecture and the subjectivity of its expression had led to the creation of original ‘masterpieces’ – authentic works of constructivist architecture that cannot be reproduced. Again, as Benjamin writes: “the whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological – and, of course, not only technological – reproducibility.”⁸⁰

Those architectural forms that were built in Moscow by Melnikov, Golosov, the Vesnin brothers, Ladovsky, Ginzburg, Nickolaev, and others developed an aura that was transmitted through their uniqueness as well as by a certain historical distance that separated them from the era in which they were created. These works, due to their uniqueness, are unreproducible and hence are not objects for either standardisation or mechanical reproduction. Their aura had developed in connection with the magical origin of art and therefore these art objects could not be standardised in the precise way that constructivists had intended with their conception of a “standard”. The existence of an aura thus prevents one of the major goals of

⁷⁷ See *Part I, Chapter 1* of the present thesis.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, pp. 221–222.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

avant-garde architecture from being achieved, namely the mechanical industrial reproducibility of a high architectural standard. These unique architectural pieces belong to aesthetics, not to industrial art, and as such do not comply with the concept of life-building, as Sven-Olov Wallenstein outlines in his essay “Benjamin and the Technology of Reproduction”⁸¹

In the most famous passages, dedicated to the concept of aura, the mimetic and magical origin of art is a dimension that underlies and is preserved in aesthetic art, but is finally overcome in the age of mechanical reproducibility. The “unique phenomenon of distance” (with respect to the object’s physical support as well as to the concerns of everyday life) disappears in reproduction, which emphasizes the “exhibition value” and makes the work suitable for mass consumption. Transcendence and mystery loosen their grip on us as the works take on a utilitarian value in the shaping of a communal life.⁸²

Constructivists were designing sketches of the new living space that were to acquire sustainability later, but that needed to be materialised on the ground *now*. The nature of the 1920s, of the Avant-garde era, was hallmarked by mobility, immediacy, intensity, and expressiveness, forming the nature of the Russian mode of functionalism. The storm of its liberated energy that was blowing from the eye of the revolution should have been irresistible. And yet Moscow resisted the avant-garde and, according to Benjamin’s observations, dismissed it even earlier than the Stalin decree of 1932.

2.3. Leningrad as appropriate space for constructivism. The choice of a standpoint

I have chosen St. Petersburg (Leningrad) as a representative of the Russian mode of functionalism along with Moscow. While it is not the only possible choice, I argue that the contemporary urban space of this city remains the most convenient for the main objective of my present research, which is to reflect on the history of the formation of contemporary living spaces and to analyse the contribution of the functionalist method to mass housing production in the twentieth century. St. Petersburg preserves its original urban plan; going through its districts is like turning the pages of a text book on architecture that presents its history in chronological order. Each decade of

⁸¹ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. *Nihilism, Art, Technology*. (Stockholm: AXL Books, 2011), p. 34.

⁸² *Ibid.*

the three centuries of St. Petersburg's existence are carefully outlined on its urban landscape, including the period of the 1920s. Modernist housing estates are organically incorporated into its urban organism, and even though they remain mostly in a dilapidated and neglected state, their study allows for a systematic analysis of the Russian mode of functionalism in both its theory and practice, in contradistinction to those islands of modernism in Moscow that possess no relation to the surrounding urban space. Returning to Lefebvre, it can be said that in Leningrad the instruments for the production and reproduction of the means of social and living space were developed and practiced; and the space of the constructivists' working districts had been appropriated into the new social space, which, as Lefebvre states, "remains the space of society, of social life."⁸³

The constructivist experiment failed in Moscow, even if in the form of some beautiful examples the artistic movement left a trace on its urban body. Contemporary St. Petersburg, on the other hand, does not possess a huge sample of modernist architecture. All the same, it has preserved whole districts that resemble the ideology of constructivism and shows how functionalism might have developed and gone on to affect general city planning, were it not for the terminal interruptions of the 1930s.

Why, then, had Leningrad become a more sustainable ground for modernist architecture than Moscow? At the very beginning of his essay on Moscow, Benjamin advises an intelligent European visitor in Moscow to choose his standpoint in advance, since it is "the only real guarantee of a correct understanding"⁸⁴ of what he is going to see. Moscow does not allow for deciding on the basis of facts; as Benjamin claims, there is no basis in facts when it comes to the exploration of its spatial phenomenon.⁸⁵ Geographically located in Europe, Moscow is yet different from any other European city; it remains strange to the European eye.

From whatever point one stands, the urban character of Moscow cannot be comprehended. Hence Benjamin's suggestion that the point from where one stands and observes the city should be chosen in advance. It opens up to a certain stereotype that guides the visitor as she makes her way around the town. The stereotype itself will most likely be broken, but through that break a more comprehensive understanding will emerge. Moscow, as Benjamin suggests, reveals itself only in connection to the previous urban

⁸³ Lefebvre, Henri, *The production of space*, p. 35.

⁸⁴ Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow", p. 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

experiences of its observer. It does not require breaking with former experience, rather it attracts it as a contradictory surface, against which the contemporary city reveals itself. It is about the truthfulness and the objectivity of reality that is being observed and that can only be grasped by way of an analytical comparison to experiences acquired from different urban spaces and other realities.

In the “Moscow” essay Berlin serves as a background urban space. It constitutes the point of comparison through which Benjamin comprehends the Russian capital. The physical presence of the city is crucial for Benjamin to understand the place. But no less important is the point from where the viewer arrives. It is a moment of illumination, when expectations either are met or destroyed. Through the destruction and confirmation of expectations, which are themselves built around stereotypes, the objective and the concrete can finally be grasped.

Both before and after its Stalinist colonisation, an experience of comprehending and contemplating other cities is required for Moscow itself to be understandable. Experience thus becomes a point of departure for understanding its urban space. Here I wish to contend that St. Petersburg is different in this respect. It is a town that has broken with its own experience and history several times – e.g. during the Revolutions of 1917 and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when citizens voted for the original name to be returned to Leningrad. In his book *Kultura Dva*⁸⁶ Vladimir Paperny notes that the era of Peter the Great (the founder of St. Petersburg), had begun with an intensive break with the past.⁸⁷ Moreover, the very act of founding St. Petersburg in 1703, which became a new capital almost immediately, marks a divorce with the multi-century traditions and experiences of the Moscow state.

St. Petersburg does not require a standpoint, since it is a complete model of itself as of a new Russian capital and as of a new ISA. In St. Petersburg one can decide on the basis of facts, because its very organisation is designed in such a way that it translates a certain interpretation of facts and a particular ideology immediately to its viewers. St. Petersburg became a grandiose ISA of the new Russian Empire. Wherever visitors came from, whatever their background, St. Petersburg will be seen in the same way. The objectivity of its space is purposely arranged for a certain pre-defined comprehension.

⁸⁶ Paperny, Vladimir. *Kultura Dva*. (Moscow: NLO, 2006)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Whatever standpoint one takes, St. Petersburg reveals its structure, politics, and ideology, opening up its objectified space to a viewer. The city was an object from the start. Its architecture was to manifest a certain political, ideological and cultural structure: a model of a future desired society, a promise of a certain way of being, an architecturalised ISA at the service of its founder, who was literally building his Empire as a “window to the West.”

Katerina Clark highlights the ideological clarity and straightforwardness of St. Petersburg, of its sober urban landscape, in contrast to an emotional and chaotic Moscow, the nature of which makes the incarnation of any new ideology into its sprawling and sinewy structures nearly impossible:

Petersburg was originally conceived as a seat of power, and also as a city of science and culture. As such, with its statues and grid of broad avenues and canals, it was deliberately contrasted with obscurantist, medieval Moscow, a city of narrow, winding lanes and onion domes. In other words, it was built in the image of a new belief system. Petersburg, as anti-Moscow, was always considered more secular and cosmopolitan.⁸⁸

St. Petersburg was built as an architectural model of a certain (imperialistic) ideology, which was both avant-garde and radical for Russia of that time. It has always been the city of political order and ideology, and so a new ideology would have only needed to be inscribed into a new blank page of its history.

St. Petersburg was built by the will of Peter I on nearly natural space: on the empty marshes, scarcely spoilt by fishing villages and Swedish fortresses that in any case possessed no relation to any ideological mission and thus were easily replaceable. Imperialistic ideology prospered under perfect conditions, thereby making the production of an absolute social space possible. Lefebvre writes: “What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?”⁸⁹

St. Petersburg does not open itself up for a variety of interpretations to be offered about its urban space, unlike the subjective Moscow. St. Petersburg is a city, whose standpoints are prepared for residents and visitors in advance. Its space is absolute and complete (fig. 7.).

Even though St. Petersburg had lost its status as a political centre, as Clark argues, its spatial ideology won over Moscow in both an architectural

⁸⁸ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, pp. 6–7.

⁸⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, p. 44.

and urbanistic sense. Clark claims that Moscow would later be turned into St. Petersburg – spatially and urbanistically – with the former’s urban landscape being ironed out, straightened and brushed; forced to conform to the strictures of Stalinist ideology with the same imperialistic instruments that had once been applied to St. Petersburg under the command of Peter I:

Petersburg had played, and would continue to play in manifold ways, a major role in the formation of Stalinist culture. As Moscow was rebuilt it was turned in a Petersburgian city; it was “clad in granite” (as Pushkin⁹⁰ had described Petersburg in *The Bronze Horseman*), its waterways were “tamed” and it was given monumental buildings together with those other features so sought after by the Preservationists of the 1910s – clear spaces, grand vistas, and imposing facades (...). Thus in that old battle between Moscow and Petersburg, two cities whose characteristic street formations stood for radically opposed world views, Petersburg had won. But it might be also said that “straightening out” crooked lanes (the iconic Moscow streets) was a standard gesture of modernisation (...); that and building broad streets (better for troops to march up) were also standard moves of imperial or militaristic powers.⁹¹

A visitor’s experience of St. Petersburg is not without conditions. A newcomer does not decide on the basis of visual facts, but she takes them as ready and well-articulated architectural statements which explicitly resemble an Imperialistic ideology. Its streets and avenues have never been allowed to sprawl randomly outwards, as is the case in Moscow or any other small medieval town; they were never stretched as in those old capitals that preserve the scars of regime change, revolution, and waves of successive fashions, for example Paris or Moscow. With respect to historical background, Moscow is a multi-layered city, while St. Petersburg, on the other hand, is flat and thin.

Moscow hides and heals its urban wounds under the snow – and when this no longer helps, it incinerates them in great fires. The city then revives again, melting its history in a mixture of fresh snow and dirt from running sleighs. No space is left for a grand style to become the representative for an entire era. No matter how high the Stalinist “sisters” raise their spires, there will always be cathedral domes shining from behind, in spite of Stalin’s best efforts to render them to rubble.

⁹⁰ Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) – one of the most respected, influential, and most read Russian poets, often referred to by Russians as ‘our everything’.

⁹¹ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 300.

In contrast St. Petersburg welcomes the arrival of new epochs to its shores. The socialism of the 1920s is marked by the avant-garde *zhilmassivs* built along the outskirts of worker's living quarters. Their forms are less radical than those of Moscow's *dom-kommunas*, but they have proved over time to be more vital.

After dismissing functionalism, Stalin did not take the battle to the imperialistic city centre of Leningrad; instead he devised an exit from the city towards the new capital of Moscow in neo-classical 'Stalin' style. The Moskovsky prospect was to become the new artery of the socialist city, the architecture of which was to resemble the new ideology. In Leningrad, the symbolic site of power moved from the Winter Palace of the Romanovs⁹² to the "Palace of the Soviets" (fig. 8–9.).⁹³ Not that the latter was either a replacement or a succession of one materialised ideology on the ruins of the former. They co-existed in the same city while being physically distant from one another. There is no competition between the two buildings, since there is no way to draw immediate comparisons between these symbols of two sovereign powers – they are located at different parts of the city.

St. Petersburg (at that time – Leningrad) managed to preserve its city centre physically. Borrowing an expression from Clark, it can be said that "the locus of value was shifted from the centre to the periphery."⁹⁴ The co-existence of these two ideological centres was debated and yet finally legitimised by regarding the old Imperialistic area as a museum artifact of anthropological and historical value, rather than of cultural and ideological significance, as well as by shifting the new ideological centre to the outskirts:

Soviet rhetoric began to insist that there were two Petersburgs, the old Petersburg, which must be destroyed completely, that is, monumental St. Petersburg as oppressive Imperial capital, and the new Petersburg as an industrial city and hothouse of the new culture. But the two were also said to have separate locations. As Shklovsky remarked at the time: "Peter(sburg) is creeping to its periphery and has become like a bagel-city (actually *bublik*) with a beautiful but dead centre."⁹⁵

No competition or resistance existed between the ages and ideologies comprising St. Petersburg urban space. This was owing not only to the evident

⁹² Arch. Francesco-Bartolomeo Rastrelli, 1754–1762.

⁹³ Arch. Noy Trotsky, Yakov Lukin, Modest Shepilevsky, 1936–41.

⁹⁴ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 265.

⁹⁵ Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 265.

aesthetical loss of one to another resulting from a mere comparison of their facades, but also to the fact that the very sense of competition had been eliminated. It is pure historical chronology that matters here: as one page ends a new leaf is turned, while the (chrono)logical sequence of the pages is never interrupted. St. Petersburg is designed as a set of theatrical stage decorations for historical events, with one changing another. It is a staged city, very attractive for shooting fiction and documentary films. St. Petersburg is not fragmented into the small cuts, like Moscow, but rather it is divided into a serialised historical film, where the avant-garde is given its own short episode.

2.4. The barrackisation of the living space

2.4.1 From mobilisation to barrackisation

Benjamin allegorises life in Moscow with living in an army camp. The allegory captures the nature of the transformations that the city's urban space underwent, as well as identifies both the temporal quality and the material base of the Russian mode of functionalism. Camping is meant to be temporary; it gives rise to a mode of existence that is in constant anticipation of and readiness for further transitions and displacements into other territories as well as into new states of living. As Benjamin remarks, a new institutionalised and empowered resident of the country ("Bolshevik, the Russian Communist"⁹⁶) exists in "this unconditional readiness for mobilisation" that distinguishes him from his "Western comrade."⁹⁷ His living is outlined not by the material space that he inhabits, but by the revolutionised ideological spaces that are constituted of dematerialising powers, which push him to commit to further actions towards the reformation, deconstruction, and destruction of existing material spaces in order to devalue and purge them from any reference and connection to pre-revolutionary reality. Here Benjamin notes: "The material basis of his existence is so slender that he is prepared, year in, year out, to decamp. He would not otherwise be a match for this life."⁹⁸

It is life itself, the surrounding space that sets a reformative power over man, forcing him to adjust in order that his way of living conforms to a model of life. Benjamin's observations of everyday life in Moscow were then

⁹⁶ Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow", p. 29.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

leveled at the political and ideological transformations taking place in the whole of Soviet society. As Evgenii Bershtein notes: “In the diary that he kept in Moscow [...] his observations about private life are inseparable from those about political processes.”⁹⁹

Camping as a new ideology of living, as Benjamin notes, crucially affected the material living space of the city, turning homes into camps through processes of collectivisation that were realised through such programs as e.g. *uplotneniye* (*tightening*). Below I continue with the introduction of my concept of *barrackisation* of the living space that had come as an inevitable result of substituting living with camping.¹⁰⁰

Camps are traditionally made of military barracks; whose original function is to provide army with shelter during military campaigns. The barracks prove, however, to be the most sustainable type of dwelling in all times. The type of barrack, according to which rooms are arranged along corridors, is still to this day dominant in public spaces: from hospitals and hotels to prisons; from concentration and refugee camps to military dorms. The barrack is originally a temporary construction, which is assembled in the shortest time with the least expense. The distinct temporality of a barrack is its main feature, it presumes that its residents will reside there only temporarily. In hotels, hospitals, and, in most cases in prisons, residents intend, or at least, hope to stay for a short period of time, not forever.

Henri Lefebvre refers to the Nazi concentration camps as the most radical type of residential settlements, which are controlled with complete precision. Lefebvre calls this precise mode of control as “*scientific barbarity*”, and he defines it in the following way: “The absurd and the rational coexist; absurdity of detail, of appearance, conceals and reveals overall rationality. This rationality is rigid, cruel, inhuman. It is *scientific barbarity!*”¹⁰¹

Lefebvre describes Nazi concentration camps as an absurdly rational organisation of physical spaces and everyday routines that were designed to eliminate the very illusion of possibility of any uncontrolled or random action, feeling or thought; it was the ultimate and the most extreme example of everyday life’s organisation by humans. Yet, he argues, modern post-Nazi living spaces still possess features that were at the basis of the Nazi camps,

⁹⁹ Bershtein, Evgenii. “The Withering of Private Life,” p. 220.

¹⁰⁰ Read more on ‘barrackisation’ in my article: Seits, Irina. “From the garden city to the red village: Howard’s Utopia as the Ground for Mass Housing in Soviet Russia”. In: Monteiro, Maria do Rosario., Ming Kong, Mario S. M., Neto, Maria Joao Pereira. (eds.) *Utopia (s) – Worlds and Frontiers of the Imaginary*. (London: CRC Press, 2016), pp. 99–104.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 243. Original cursive.

thus demonstrating the possibility of a transformation of human thought and human rationality into an unbelievably inhumane reality:

That the concentration camps had other meanings – that they satisfied Hitlerian sadism, that they collected millions of potential hostages, etc. – is doubtless true. But the dominant, essential meaning seems to be this: if Fascism represents the most extreme and paroxysmal form of a modern housing estate, or of an industrial town.

There are many intermediary stages between our towns and concentration camps: miners' villages, temporary housing on construction sites, villages of immigration workers... Nevertheless, the link is clear.

And it is in the experience of the darkest tragedy – in the seemingly exceptional, at the pinnacle of absurdity, in the pathetic antagonism between man and a still-inhuman Reason – that the very essence of *our* everyday lives, of the most mundane of everyday lives, stands revealed. Will they understand, those who have never been able to see what is all around them? Will the cruel light of the concentration camps at last enable them to understand what towns and 'modern' life really are? And will they be able to understand that the *possibilities* of man and Reason can be transformed into the most monstrous of realities?¹⁰²

Certainly, in the 1920s the horror of concentration camps was yet to come, but the barrackisation of the living space as a means of control over population through its declared rationalisation had already begun in the Soviet state.

With time, the barracks had become permanent constructions. In our own present, they are no more intended for demolition or relocation after their temporary residents have left them, as was once the case when camps and field hospitals were taken down or transferred to another place together with their occupants, for example, military or wounded soldiers. In many cases today, the barracks are permanent constructions accommodating different groups of people for an unspecified period of stay, such as hotels, hospitals, schools, office buildings, prisons, refugee camps, etc.

A barrack as a temporal temporary construction has also become a strategic type of housing widely built by states in times of crisis – whether this be a war conflict, a natural catastrophe, or a revolution: the old neglected barracks that remain from previous disasters are renovated and the new

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 245–246.

barracks are constructed so as to place as many people as possible within the shortest timeframe.

The construction of modern light module barracks and smaller individual units, which can be easily assembled and transferred, has constantly grown with the rise of international conflicts.¹⁰³ Indeed, the future demand for temporary housing of all types is, so to say, ‘promising’. Unlike traditional nomads, who usually built, even if small but separate, single-family units (tents, yurts, and wigwams), migrants, soldiers, and refugees stay in barracks that assume a collective and communal way of living. The barrack is a European invention of modernity. Today, eastern nomadic living spaces and types of individual dwelling attract closer attention and investigation from various organisations and companies around the world.

The Revolution of 1917 in Russia resulted not only in huge emigration from the country, but in the unseen migration within the new Soviet state as well. People were not only forced to leave their regions and move to other parts of the former empire, at the same time mass displacement happened within towns, villages, and districts of cities, and even more localised, within the same houses and apartments.

All types of living space that existed in Russia before the Revolution were, on a systematic scale, converted into barracks. The old workers’ barracks were re-inhabited to full capacity and private apartments were turned into communal flats (*kommunalkas*), which retained the spatial organisation of the barracks. Bigger apartments were re-planned inside so as to create a “corridor system” with rooms that were multiplied by additional walls and placed along narrow passages. Early-century condominiums along with former public buildings such as theatres, hospitals, and different institutions from schools to administrative offices were turned into multi-storey barracks to accommodate the new population driven into cities from the countryside.

The total barrackisation of space changed the life of citizens. They were not running their own households, nor were they any longer residing or living in their rooms. Living quarters lost their interiority, they were no more “the universe of the private individual” and “his etui”, as Benjamin characterised the homes of the bourgeoisie in his essay on Paris.¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰³ For example, Ikea invented types of flat box emergency housing that are smaller individual units.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin, Walter. “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”. In: *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 20.

Moscow, as Benjamin writes, “indoors one only camps.”¹⁰⁵ People were “camping”, which meant that they were temporarily settled in occasional spaces, unrecognisable in their function and form from the previous age. The old spaces were being re-appropriated for the purposes of constructing the new space of a total barrack that would envelop the entire country. *Camping* and *remonte* – these were the terms that Benjamin used to describe the new living practices in post-revolutionary Russia and that would define them for the decades to come. This profound transformation was strikingly obvious for Benjamin, who was after all an outsider and a European man, and who had learnt to see princely Berlin through the aperture of Moscow: “[...] for this new life weighs on no one more heavily than on the outsider observing from the distance.”¹⁰⁶

Barracks are a form of housing that organise living in a collective way. Bolshevism had not only abolished the right to private ownership, but as Benjamin remarks, it had “abolished private life.”¹⁰⁷ Private spaces were exposed to the streets, and public spaces were brought indoors: “through the hall one steps into a little town.”¹⁰⁸

Beatriz Colomina notes that “the intimate is not a space but a relationship between spaces.”¹⁰⁹ The barrackisation of dwelling perverted the relationship between the intimate and the public; the borders between inner and outer space were demolished: they were destroyed on both an ideological and practical level. There were no more “inside” or “outside”. As Benjamin observed, even those things that usually happened indoors in the most “indoor” furniture, such as beds, – i.e. sickness or dying, – were happening in the city in the beds set outside in the “vast open-air hospital called Moscow.”¹¹⁰

The space of a town or even of an army camp had penetrated dwellings, leaving no space for living in private, that is, for house-holding, understood in its traditional sense.

While staying at the hotel in Moscow and witnessing his friend Reich’s *byt* in the dormitory, Benjamin fully explored the sense of a barrack-like collective living. Bershtein describes Benjamin’s experience of these torn relations between spaces in the turned inside-out streets of Moscow that

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¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 28.

affected all spheres of living – from economic, political, and social activities to the family life of his difficult friends Asja Lacis and Bernhard Reich, as Evgenii Bershtein notes:

When he left his hotel, Benjamin was struck by a lack of private space and people’s physical proximity in Moscow streets. Limited in his capacity to interact verbally with the world around him, Benjamin focused on studying the universe of objects, which he saw as iterating the end of private life. In physical space, he registered the bare walls and sparse furnishings of the communal apartments (Reich shared rooms in dormitory, while Lacis resided in a sanatorium); in the space of sociality, he noted his friends’ total absorption in political work. He observed the collapse of the institution of traditional marriage – neither Lacis nor her companion Reich associated their relationship with owning property, nor did they claim rights to each other.¹¹¹

Benjamin witnessed Moscow transforming into a giant barrack, an open-air hospital, and a children’s room with orphan kids roaming around, being allowed to experience only a few minutes of indoor warmth from the shop that will soon shut its doors behind their backs.¹¹² Along the corridor of the streets of the ‘Moscow barrack,’ a market was organised with its walls made up with valenky and other goods hanging over windows and hand-made counters¹¹³ – a paradise for a foreign visitor. Benjamin’s experience of Moscow is not simply optical, akin to the gaze of a contemplator who gets easily disrupted in such places; it is tactile as well. Commenting on Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, Jaeho Kang notes: “Benjamin found the emancipatory potential of distraction not in the level of consciousness underpinned by optic contemplation, but in the tactile dimension embodied in habitual practice.”¹¹⁴

‘Rooms’ along the ‘corridors’ of Moscow were furnished with beds for beggars and the infirmed. Inside housing blocks, living cells were filled with cold; they provided their residents not with homes, but shelters without enclosure. There was no space for an individual family, since families were

¹¹¹ Bershtein, Evgenii. “The Withering of Private Life,” p. 220.

¹¹² See the passage on children beggars: Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 28.

¹¹³ See the passage on the street trade: Ibid, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ Kang, Jaeho. “The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (Kulturkritik)”. In: *Constellations*. 2011, 18(1). (Oxford – Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing). p. 86.

destroyed by the collective co-existence of strangers ‘camping’ in the same space.

The traditional living space was turned inside out, stretched, and twisted. A shop that had been turned into a restaurant and later, after *remonte*, into a living quarter, had changed the function of its space. A luxury English club, which had been converted into a museum, changed its meaning. A noble mansion, which was transformed into a communal apartment, changed the ideology of the life that had been running inside. Living space had its former features shifted and substituted. Replacement and change had turned the absolute space of Moscow, using Lefebvre terms, back into the state of a natural space and was being appropriated anew.

The reformation of living was closely connected to a collective feeling of expectation that detained everybody from living their lives, camping at the front of the line waiting for an imminent and brave new future. The milieu that was maturing as the dough in the pot was, as Benjamin noticed, “the only reliable educator,”¹¹⁵ providing its inhabitants with a frail hope for self-identification in this new living environment.

Both the state and the constructivists had the ambition and took the responsibility to bake an inhabitable reality out of the dough of the new milieu.

2.4.2. The barracks as the ground for new types of housing within the Russian mode of functionalism

Constructivists aestheticised the barracks, arguing for the return to an original hut, in which both form and function were shorn of all unnecessary layers (a point that was discussed earlier, in chapter one).¹¹⁶ The type of housing that resulted from the constructivists’ experimentation with form and function was *dom-kommuna*: a multi-storey barrack with small living cells placed along the corridor and meant mostly for sleeping.¹¹⁷ The collective and communal nature of living that the barrack made possible had been regulated and put in order through the separation of each living practice into special zones: eating was to be done in factory-kitchens, bathing in collective *banyas* (bath-houses), childcare was to be provided by nurseries and kindergartens, etc.

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¹¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow.” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 31.

¹¹⁶ See *Part I, Chapter I* of the present thesis

¹¹⁷ More on the *dom-kommunas* see in *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

Both the collective style of living and the spatial organisation of a barrack were preserved by constructivists in the newly constructed living estates. The theoreticians and architects of the architectural avant-garde avoided using the very terms “house” or “home”, since the new types of dwelling being explored during this period had little connection to what a traditional house and household had looked like as well as from how they had functioned before. Living in the *dom-kommuna* was a collective experience, and yet the functional zoning of these spaces was meant to prevent any chaotic mixing of living practices, which could result from such large numbers of co-habitants concentrated in quite confined areas; the presence of clear and distinct borders between zones that were dedicated to taking care of a particular necessary routine, left no space and time to avoid doing it. Ideas of collectivism and the demand for the communal nature of new milieu were in the air, and constructivists managed to catch the beat of those days through the total collectivisation of living. As Benjamin remarks: “[...] there is no knowledge or faculty that is not somehow appropriated by collective life and made to serve it.”¹¹⁸

There is always a feeling of the immediacy of presence during one’s time in a barrack or a camp. The permanence of living is substituted with the temporariness of a stay. The country was transiting from capitalistic forms of *byt* and ideology of being to the new socialist state and the *new byt*.¹¹⁹ The feeling of proximity to a future of realised possibilities as well as the very state of awaiting and the process of transition were all theorised by the avant-garde, and translated into a new aesthetics and moreover materialised into a new living space.

The new living space was built in such a way that it could easily be entered into, and inhabited with immediate effect. It was a transitional space, with no borders between interiors and exteriors. At the same time, it was fragmented into sections, out of which the whole was assembled. The expressive intersection of regular geometric forms in constructivist architecture is the subconscious presentation of the fragmented nature of the new spatial aesthetics. Construction here, as Benjamin writes, citing Giedion, “plays the role of the subconscious,”¹²⁰ since constructivists argued for the homogeneity of space, and not for its fragmentation. It was in 1928 when Benjamin became fascinated with Giedion’s *Building in France...*, which had become a source of

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 29.

¹¹⁹ For more on the concept of the ‘new byt’ see in *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

¹²⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century”. In: *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 16.

inspiration for his *Arcades Project*.¹²¹ However, it was already during his visit to Moscow a few years before, when Benjamin recorded the transformations that the urban space of the Soviet capital was undergoing, that the common features of modernity were revealed. Space was to be shaped in the most rational way, and its architectural forms should have provided man with the highest efficiency of its use.

Constructivists captured and reinterpreted the temporality and fragmentation of the new living of modernity. The types of buildings they were responsible for developing contained features that were characteristic of the period. *Dom-kommuna*, *obschezhitie* – these were the types of dwellings based on the transitional character of a barrack, which were meant not only to solve an extreme housing crisis, but to collectivise and communalise living spaces. People were constantly moving in and out of those constructions; this, as observed by Benjamin, was a period of mobilisation and mobility. This sense of mobility made possible the forging of new relations between a man and his living space as well as between old and new living spaces. The old architectural space could not be completely destroyed and physically replaced. But it could be re-conceptualised into collective, communal space and thus acquire a legacy befitting the new established concept of a socialist city (*sotzgorod*). The old yet still existing types of buildings were converted into houses with communal dwellings, while new architectural forms, such as communal housing (*dom-kommunas*), were to introduce and propagate the idea of a very new communal way of life, with transitional spaces that are capable of mobilising and moving people for further actions towards the country's global reformation. Hence the production of new living spaces, as well as inhabiting former non-living spaces:

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¹²¹ A famous episode is described by Detlif Mertins in his article "The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass". In: *Assemblage*, 1996 (29), pp.6–23:

"Consider a detail, or, more accurately, several related details, from Walter Benjamin's reading of modern architecture and its historical origins in the iron and glass constructions of nineteenth-century Parisian arcades, exhibition halls, and department stores. So "electrified" was Benjamin by his first glimpse into Sigfried Giedion's 1928 *Building in France: Building in Iron, Building in Concrete (Bauen in Frankreich: Bauen in Eisen. Bauen in Eisenbeton)* that he immediately put it down again until he "was more in touch with my own investigations"- referring in all probability to his well-known *Arcades Project*. But when he returned to Giedion's book shortly there-after, he began reading it backward. Furthermore, the last section, depicting the architectural history of reinforced concrete, so impressed him that before turning to the rest of the book, which concerned iron construction, he wrote Giedion an immensely complimentary letter and suggested that perhaps they might meet in Paris during the spring." (Mertins, 1996: 6).

these were the means by which the entire country's spatiality could be re-conceptualised, newly institutionalised and ritualised, on both an empirical and metaphysical level. In connection to the importance of ritualisation to this envisaging and institutionalisation of new spaces Katarina Clark writes:

Reforming domestic architecture was a major aspect of the ritualisation of space at this time. Architects and town planners were given a key role in transforming the country. Their stock agents of transformation were the "socialist town" (*sotsgorod*), which meant an entirely new town or workers' suburb designed to create a "healthy environment", not just in the literal sense of clean air and so forth, but principally in the sense that it maximally conduced to collective, socialist mores and work habits, and the "communal house" (*dom-kommuna*), which represented a sort of socialist town in miniature, realised within the confines of a gigantic apartment house for workers or a complex of residential and service buildings. [...] in approximately 1929–1930 the idea of totally transforming the Soviet city into a socialist town became a key concept of cultural policy.¹²²

The strict zoning of living space in those barrack-type constructions (e.g. *dom-kommunas*), did not allow tenants to choose the way they wanted to live. The same was true for the residents of the new estates of *zhilmassivs*, many of whom were workers from the large industrial plants.¹²³ The inhabitants of either *dom-kommunas* and *zhilamssives* could make their living neither without support from outside nor without an internal infrastructure that provided a new system of living with sustainable functioning.

In his essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1935), Benjamin speaks of the process by which dwelling places for the private individual became diametrically opposed to places of work.¹²⁴ Russian constructivists aimed to overcome this opposition. Not that this was achieved through a merging of living and working spaces; workers could not provide for themselves entirely through their labor, in contrast to peasants who could by working on their lands. While there no longer existed an opposition between working and living spaces, there was nonetheless a horizontal separation of one from the other. Benjamin writes that in the European cities of the bourgeoisie, man must leave his "cockpit" in order to enter his

¹²² Clark, Katarina. *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 250.

¹²³ For more information on *zhilmassives*, please read *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

¹²⁴ Benjamin, Walter. "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century." In: *The Arcades Project*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 19.

place of work – that is, his office, where he earns his money in order to live well in his home. The way he organised his private living was, however, his own business. A worker in a Soviet city left his living cell to enter his working place, but he did not use the remuneration for his labor to develop and improve his home, since he did not possess one. His living cell could never become “the plastic expression of the personality,” as Benjamin puts it.¹²⁵ There was no space for the development and improvement of a living cell in which a tenant was supposed to sleep; nor was there the possibility to mold the traces of his presence into any meaningful interior. The space of the living cell was already complete, and there was no proper *interiority*. In order to do things that the bourgeoisie would otherwise take for granted in their homes – e.g. eating, spending time with family, and enjoying company of close friends – a worker living in a *zhilmassiv* had to move into different assigned and complete spaces that were themselves neither interiors nor exteriors. In the reality of a socialist city, spaces were public: kitchen-factories, collective *banyas*, and workers’ clubs. A worker had no control over the organisation of those places that were indifferent to his presence. He could leave no trace of his living in any social spaces that, speaking in Lefebvre’s terms, were both absolute and complete.

Inhabitants of this new living space were supported by services of the district that were out of their control and that had not provided with possibility to choose an alternative public institution: factory kitchens were to be filled with food; palaces of culture with specific entertainment that did not consider inhabitants’ demands; schools with the staff and institutionalised educational programs; hospitals with doctors that provided with fixed range of medical services; and bath houses with hot water.

The newly developed forms of dwelling (e.g. those situated within the *zhilmassivs*) were not autonomous or semi-autonomous from the towns to which they were linked, as in the case of the experimental garden city concept developed by Ebenezer Howard.¹²⁶ An ideal garden city was to be designed that would as far as possible be independent from other neighboring towns. Everything that provided living was thus to be produced within an autonomous garden city. Connections to the traditional towns were established to supply the garden city only with what it could not produce itself. The garden city was a separate semi-rural and self-maintained

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

¹²⁶ On the garden city concept within Soviet housing policy making, see *Part II, Chapter III* of the present thesis.

unit that sought complete autonomy from the previous forms of urban spatial organisation. *Zhilmassivs*, in contrast, could function neither without a plant that formed the settlement nor without supply and control from a peer city.

The barracks could not be autarkic either, for they require a certain regulating organ, be it a military rule for army camps, a state immigration policy and support for refugees, or any other sanctioning organ that controls people's stay. In other words, somebody has to allow for a barrack to be built and maintained. Barracks stand on the lands that are either appointed to a certain institution (an industrial plant or a hospital), or they trace the forward march of an army or the route of fleeing refugees. The barracks are usually run by public or state institutions. Either way, they keep records of the appropriation or the loss of land.

The form of the barracks is the most conducive to social and political control, being well-adjusted to most human activities from war making to imprisoning, as noted by Swedish thinker Ellen Key in her *Beauty in the Home* (1899): "The factory, the army barracks, the hospital, the school, and the country estate – all are equally insufferably regimented and straight-lined, inside and out."¹²⁷

Constructivists did not intend to reproduce the barracks on an industrial scale purposely, but under both the ideological and economic conditions of the time it was inevitable. The state authorities demanded not only the mass production of housing, but also new means to control the population. At a certain moment, the avant-garde's investigations into new forms of living and state housing policy merged into the production of communal barrack-like spaces. The state was a grateful spectator of the constructivists' experiments with dwelling and their continued *barrackisation* of the country. Thus, the road taken by constructivists with the goal of creating the new liberating living space could lead only to a barrack, where people stayed awaiting a promised future. Expectation took the lives of several generations while the promised future failed to materialise.

¹²⁷ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home". In: Creagh Lucy, Kåberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), p. 41.

2.5. Mickey Mouse – the perfect tenant of an early Soviet city

2.5.1. The space for a new barbarism as a habitat of Mickey Mouse

The barrackisation of the living space contributed to the dehumanisation and humiliation of that very living space, thereby turning Soviet citizens into dwellers, whose everyday task was to survive through a constant readjustment to the changing conditions of their living space.

In my article “Mickey Mouse – the Perfect Tenant of an Early Soviet City”¹²⁸ I refer to the image of Mickey Mouse, introduced in both Benjamin’s “Experience and Poverty” essay and in a small fragment from Benjamin’s conversation with Gustav Glück and Kurt Weill,¹²⁹ as an allegorical object through which I seek to reconstruct the collective image of an early Soviet dweller, experiencing transformations to her living space through both the application of state housing policy and the implementation of the Russian mode of functionalism.

The experimental living spaces produced by constructivists and perverted by the state housing policy into the means of social control required a naked man committed to nothing but the present, divorced from his experience and his past. The result was a man deprived of his capacity and the background to communicate his demands for existence: a man still alienated, but who at least possessed no more illusions. An inhabitant of the newly suggested living space of the early Soviet reality was to be an over-experienced Mickey Mouse that had been already killed many times, torched and cheated, and who could only rely on clouds in the sky over his head. Here, it is worth noting that I have been placing a particular emphasis on the dystopian side of Mickey Mouse’s image. This is significant, because Benjamin’s appraisal is more dialectical in character, with even, we could say, a strong utopian inflection: “The existence of Mickey Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man. His life is full of miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology but make fun of them.”¹³⁰

Though there are only a few lines given to Mickey Mouse in Benjamin texts, they deliberately outline the image of the successful inhabitant of modernity. The desire for liberation from experience and tiredness become

¹²⁸ Seits, Irina. “Mickey Mouse – the Perfect Tenant of an Early Soviet City.” In: *Baltic Worlds*. 2017, 10 (3), pp. 53–62.

¹²⁹ Benjamin, Walter. “Mickey Mouse.” In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. 1927–1940. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 545.

¹³⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Mickey Mouse,” p. 545.

the hallmarks of modernity, and in the sleep that is the remedy for tiredness, the dream image of Mickey Mouse is born.

When it comes to analysing how living spaces in Soviet Russia were transformed in the first post-revolutionary decades, the image of Mickey Mouse, seen through the dystopian perspective as a “dehumanised” and hyper-realistic character, may serve as an allegory that reveals the nature of those transformations imposed upon the inhabitants of the new Soviet reality.

Specifically, the following passage from Benjamin’s “Experience and Poverty” essay is central to the allegorical reconstruction I am seeking to perform here:

Tiredness is followed by sleep, and then it is not uncommon for a dream to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day – a dream that shows us in its realised form the simple but magnificent existence for which the energy is lacking in reality. The existence of Mickey Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man. His life is full of miracles – miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology but make fun of them. For the most extraordinary thing about them is that they all appear, quite without any machinery, to have been improvised out of the body of Mickey Mouse, out of his supporters and persecutors, and out of the most ordinary pieces of furniture, as well as from trees, clouds and the sea. Nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort, have completely merged. And to people who have grown weary of the endless complications of everyday living and to whom the purpose of existence seems to have been reduced to the most distanced vanishing point on an endless horizon, it must come as a tremendous relief to find a way of life in which a car is no heavier than a straw hat and the fruit on the tree becomes round as quickly as a hot-air balloon. And now we need to step back and keep our distance.¹³¹

And in the “Mickey Mouse” fragment:

Property relations in Mickey Mouse cartoons: here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one arm, even one’s own body stolen.

The route taken by Mickey Mouse is more like that of a file in an office than that of a marathon runner.

In these films, mankind makes preparations to survive civilisation.

¹³¹ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty,” p. 735.

Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind.

These films disavow experience more radically than ever before. In such a world, it is not worthwhile to have experiences.

Similarity to fairy tales. Not since fairy tales have the most vital events been evoked more unsymbolically and more unatmospherically. There is an immeasurable gulf between them and Maeterlinck or Mary Wigman. All Mickey Mouse films are founded on the motif of leaving home in order to learn what fear is.

So the explanation of the huge popularity of these films is not mechanisation, nor their form; nor is it a misunderstanding. It is simply the fact that the public recognises its own life in them.¹³²

The Mickey Mouse films through which the public “recognises its own life” draw a simplified picture of reality.¹³³ The most attractive feature of Mickey Mouse is his ability to transform his body constantly in order to overcome fearful challenges that he faces from one episode to the next. I shall metaphorically suggest that in the Soviet reality the failure to adjust, “to be a match for this life” as Benjamin cites a Communist comrade in the “Moscow” essay,¹³⁴ or the inability to grow another arm in place of one that had been stolen, would mean death. The prewar decades in the early Soviet state can be said to be a cradle made for the birth of Mickey Mouse – a great barbarian of modernity.

Benjamin suggests that Mickey Mouse is administered as an anaesthetic for modern humans “to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day.”¹³⁵ Mickey possesses the wealth of endless and immortal transformations that can be achieved only once he has given himself over to un-reserved poverty, without an effort to escape it. What Mickey mouse accomplishes is a liberation from his ties to any material, temporal, and emotional possessions from both the past and the present. As Alexander Garcia Düttmann concludes in his article “Making Poverty Visible – Three Theses”:

Benjamin advocates a wealth that we can only take in if we “give ourselves without reserve” to poverty, if we transform poverty’s wall into a way (out)

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¹³² Benjamin, Walter. “Mickey Mouse,” p. 545.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 29.

¹³⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty,” p. 735.

as opposed to trying to escape poverty through fake abundance, something that would only serve to render the new misery eternal. The figure of “Mickey Mouse” supposedly embodies this wealth. It is the figure of poverty, the figure of an infinite plasticity *in concreto*, as if the infinite wealth of sensuous certainty – the truth of which, as is well known, dialectics wants to uncover in poverty – is not just wealth of fullness, but a wealth of unlimited reorganisations; and as if with that, poverty were no longer a matter of truth or knowledge.¹³⁶

Without venturing into a deeper comparative analysis of the characters’ genesis, it is nonetheless worthwhile mentioning that in his *Critique of Everyday Life* Henri Lefebvre refers to the character created by Charlie Chaplin, another positive barbarian of modernity, whose image mirrors Mickey Mouse. Lefebvre calls Chaplin’s character the *reverse image* of the proletariat,¹³⁷ and in a broader sense he depicts the alienated man of modernity. Lefebvre calls the *dramatis persona* of Chaplin the inevitable tramp of the bourgeois world, an image, which is at the same time consistent with the figure of the proletarian man in Marx’s philosophical writings:

The pure alienation of man and the human which is revealed as being more deeply human than the things it negates – negativity forced by its essence to destroy the society to which at one and the same time it belongs and does not belong.¹³⁸

The critique of reality presented in Chaplin’s films is, Lefebvre argues, realised through dishonouring this very alienation.¹³⁹ Chaplin’s personage reconciles the image of the total man with the reality he confronts by way of his critical and ironic attitude towards his surrounding world. The sense of reality is reversed through being represented as something extremely humanised, as a reality lived through by humans and represented in human terms. Lefebvre continues:

Here for the first time we encounter a complex problem, both aesthetic and ethical, that of the *reverse image*: an image of everyday reality, taken in its totality or as a fragment, reflecting that reality in all its depth *through* people,

¹³⁶ Düttmann, Alexander Garcia. “Making Poverty Visible – Three Theses.” In: *Parrhesia*, 2008 (4), p. 7. Online publication: http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia04/parrhesia04_duttman.pdf Accessed on 29.07.2018.

¹³⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 12. Original cursive.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

ideas and things that are apparently quite different from everyday experience, and therefore exceptional, deviant, abnormal.¹⁴⁰

By following Lefebvre's understanding of the reverse image, it is possible to consider Disney's Mickey Mouse as also introducing a reverse image of reality. Not that this point of convergence should belie the main difference between Chaplin and Mickey. For unlike Charlie Chaplin's character, Mickey Mouse does not fight with reality; there is no "victory over the tragic" of the everyday in the Disney cartoons; Mickey miraculously adjusts to any circumstances he encounters by exploiting his unlimited potential and the artificial immortality of his body. Charlie Chaplin, on the other hand, deals with reality by using a very limited number of instruments. According to Lefebvre's interpretation Chaplin's character "achieves universality by means of extremely precise elements: the hat, the walking stick and the trousers, all taken from London's petty bourgeoisie."¹⁴¹

Notwithstanding these differences, both are exemplary barbarians of modernity; they are expressions of their own time, dream characters who relentlessly begin anew and with limited resources. They both divorce themselves from their past experiences, they are ignorant of the material necessities of living and thus easily shake off any hardships they have encountered during previous episodes of their imaginary existence.

In Soviet Russia, liberation from material possessions as well as from the experience of the past was not only the means to escape from the established reality, they were also the political conditions arranged by the state. Originally suggested by Benjamin, the allegory of Mickey Mouse is relevant to a description of the Soviet living space and to its inhabitants. In the Russian case, it becomes at one and the time a more dystopian allegory as well as a more radical image of the new humanity born from struggle and dispossession. In Soviet society, the political project is melded together with the everyday; for Benjamin, "nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort, have completely merged."¹⁴²

Mickey's body does not belong to him, he is not born with it; he is drawn by artists who allow his joints to adjust and to respond to changes in an absurdist reality. Reality, in turn, is constantly changing, while the very existence of Mickey Mouse is limited and framed by each episode: he does not live his life, he performs his living only in the "here and now", precisely

¹⁴⁰ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty," p. 735.

while the episode is being aired. His existence is fully controlled by his creators; he is not in possession of his own body, and while Mickey identifies himself with his body, he knows that any of his appendages can be taken away and replaced. Benjamin notes that Mickey Mouse cartoons suggest unprecedented property relations: “[...] here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one’s own arm, even one’s own body, stolen.”¹⁴³

While the displacement and replacement of “human material” (as the avant-garde theoretician Boris Arvatov names it¹⁴⁴) occurs within the bounds of Soviet society, in the case of Mickey Mouse this endless process of migration and displacement is reduced to the migration of his organs and limbs, not only around his own body but also around the space of a cartoon episode in a defensive response to the shocks of his surrealist world.

As an essential part of realising the ideal living space, the avant-garde affirmed the educative and pedagogic practice of training ‘human material’ so that it be readily adjustable to changing environmental conditions. It was a matter of ensuring that the masses were led in a “desirable direction” towards the construction of a happy future, on the one side, and preventing enemies from destroying the possibility of realising such a future, on the other. As Boris Arvatov discusses in his book, *Art and Production*:

The problem of the proletarian’s initial upbringing is in preparing such human material, which would be capable, firstly, of further development in desired direction, under condition of maximum resistance to the hostile “reactions of environment”, and, secondly, would be maximally socialised. All these tasks can be resolved through the monistic upbringing of a man of class.¹⁴⁵

Maximal socialisation is reached neither through the exchange of goods and services nor through processes of the reproduction of the means of production, since private entrepreneurship and private ownership are abolished. It is achieved through collectivisation and standardisation of all aspects of life that would, in turn, help overcome what Lefebvre calls alienation and thus realise the figure of the ‘total man,’ which would result from the reconciliation of a reality fragmented through the era of capitalism. Collectivisation and standardisation were more or less characteristic of all

¹⁴³ Benjamin, Walter. “Mickey Mouse,” p. 545.

¹⁴⁴ Arvatov, Boris. *Iskusstvo i Proizvodstvo [Art and Production]*. (Moscow: Proletkult, 1926), p. 109.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

modernist societies living through avant-garde experimentalism, the most radical implementation of which was realised in Soviet Russia. Benjamin speaks of how the standardisation of an individual is an inevitable process within the contemporary world, through which individuals become subject to the reproduction of the system. As Jaeho Kang notes: “Benjamin shares with his contemporaries the perspective that in a modern society the individual is standardised and represented in terms of a functional entity that is constantly reproducible.”¹⁴⁶

In the Russian case, it was a political and economic will that standardised individuals, converting them into reproducible components of human material that could be moulded into the desired form.

In Soviet Russia, the state took control over the living environment of its residents, and later, through a system of repression both the body and life itself would be directly targeted as objects of control and surveillance. In the case of Mickey Mouse, the lack of control and ownership over his own body is compensated through his own immortality, that is, his ability to replace any stolen joint with the immediate growth of a new one. Any inflicted wound heals immediately on Mickey Mouse, leaving no scar. Immortality and adjustability were characteristics needed by the Soviet people to survive during the interwar period of the Soviet state. Since, however, most people lacked these superhuman attributes, many failed to make it through this episode of history.

Mickey Mouse does not age, since his body is disconnected from time and is fully reserved for the contemporaneity of his performance. Neither time nor experience leave any traces on his body, just as no traces are left on modernist glass buildings. Mickey Mouse thus serves as a fitting analogy for the modernist space of a West European glass house, embodying the model for a new positive form of barbarism. Here we can consider Carlo Ruano Diaz’s summary of Benjamin’s understanding of “barbarism”:

We have invented a new form of barbarism, a positive one: we want to start again, to eliminate all trace of the past, and the glass house is the emblem of this new experience. There is nothing in those houses to return our gaze or enable us to have an experience, in something close at hand, of the remote. Contrary to all mystery and also the whole idea of privacy, glass makes the

¹⁴⁶ Kang, Jaeho. “The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (Kulturkritik).”

interior exterior: it introduced that new form of ‘extimacy’, now far advanced among us today, with its as yet unforeseeable consequences.¹⁴⁷

Mickey is a model for the new man – or what Lefebvre would call the ‘total man’ – of modernity. At the same time the idea of the “new man” was itself a product of *zhiznestroyenie* (*life-building*), a concept surrounding the production of art that Benjamin himself reflected upon and was an advocate for in his lecture entitled “The Author as Producer.” In this text Benjamin draws on examples of works by Sergei Tretiakov, the LEF writer,¹⁴⁸ photographer, and critic. Tretiakov shared the vision of most constructivists that art should shape and form not only artistic but political processes as well. What was called for was the amalgamation of technology, art and politics, in short, all components of both life and the means of production into a single method and process of life-building. Through an implementation of the “life-building” concept, the Russian avant-garde closely associated the political processes of collectivisation of living with the standardisation of individuals into human material; as Bershtein writes, they set themselves the task of shaping the psyche of the new man:

According to Tretiakov, “the art worker” should become a “psycho-engineer, a psycho-constructor”, working on “a reorganisation of the human psyche with the goal of achieving the commune.”¹⁴⁹ Art should actively participate in “life-building” (*zhiznestroyenie*); this LEF term is reminiscent – not accidentally – of the Symbolists “life-creation” (*zhiznetvorchestvo*). While the Russian Symbolist embraced the idea of art that shapes life, Tretiakov envisioned art that helped restructure life according to political and economical postulates. The reorganisation of the psyche should be conducted in such a way that private interests (and thus private life) simply had no place in it.

[...] In Benjamin’s opinion, art in the extremely politicised conditions of contemporary society must take on a new function: the writer should not mirror life but transform it. The implementation of this task would inevitably lead to the transformation of artistic form.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Diaz, Carlo Ruano. “Walter Benjamin. Narration and Memory.” For the <http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/>. Link: http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/sites/all/files/ruano_eng.pdf. P. 4. Accessed on: 28.07.2018.

¹⁴⁸ LEF – *Levy Front Iskusstv [the Left Front of Arts]* – an Avant-garde artistic organisation that existed in various Soviet cities in the 1922–1929.

¹⁴⁹ Citation in Evgenii Bershtein (2006:223) from: Tretiakov, Sergei. “*Otkuda i Kuda?*” [*From where and to where?*] In: *LEF*, 1923 (1), pp. 197–198.

¹⁵⁰ Bershtein, Evgenii. “The Withering of Private Life,” p. 223.

Constructivist architects took responsibility for changing the psyche of individuals and for establishing new relationships between and within living spaces. They sought to achieve this through the development of new architectural forms and the designing of new types of buildings with the intention of providing “new man” with a new living environment. The goal of constructivism was not, however, to imprison the new man in a controlled space; rather, it was the opposite: to liberate him from oppressive and regressive spatial forms of the past providing him with the new “space of freedom,”¹⁵¹ as Sven-Olov Wallenstein demonstrates with the example of the invention of the “Workers Club” (which, as I argue, replaced both the former Church and the former School to become an integral brick in the construction of a new Ideological State Apparatus):

Rather than simply a way to eradicate individuality in a straightforward process or rationalisation, as it has been understood by many historians, a considerable amount of Constructivist fantasy was in fact geared towards a kind of restructuring of subjectivity, in a way that would provide it with a certain freedom, or even *design* a space of freedom, all of which engendered a particularly complex and fantasmatic relation to technology. A paradigm case of this is the Workers Club, designed by Rodchenko for the Russian Pavilion at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels* in Paris 1925. At first sight little more than a low-tech version of functionalist modernism, it can in fact be read as a strategy for highlighting a bodily dimension and encouraging an tactile and erotic investment in objects: rather than simply a *negation* of subjectivity, it was a strategy for *reshaping* it on the basis of a new assemblage of man and machine, perhaps as a way to introduce Nietzsche’s famous (although highly ambivalent) image of man as “the animal whose nature has not yet been fixed” (*das noch nicht festgestellte Tier*) into a distinctly Communist avant-garde project, or to create what was in other contexts other referred to as the “New Man”, whose glorious form could only appear from a new “point zero” of humanity and history.¹⁵²

The Soviet population had become a body for improvisations by state and avant-garde alike. If in the “Poverty and Experience” Benjamin suggests the image of the all-mighty Mickey as a dream solution for the “endless complications of everyday living”¹⁵³ that could bring comfort to the lives of exhausted dwellers of the western mode of modernity, then in the case of

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¹⁵¹ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. *Nihilism, Art, Technology*, p. 17.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Soviet reality, the superhuman abilities of Mickey were both the means and conditions for survival.

As I have been proposing, Mickey Mouse can be read allegorically in order to disclose certain features of the avant-gardist experiments and the state programs during the interwar soviet period. The allegory, though, is itself multilayered. First, the figure of Mickey Mouse can be used as a bitter allegory for the very formation of living space in Soviet Russia. Living spaces were not the possession of soviet inhabitants; their own bodies and lives were as easily substituted by the state as Mickey Mouse's limbs were replaceable by his designers. As I have also suggested, the image of Mickey Mouse can be drawn together with the collective image of the Soviet people, so that each stolen limb consists of the lives of numerous individuals. When singular humans are assembled in order to create the image of the collective, the invariable result is the dehumanisation of each individual existence participating within the form: what is lost are the human-like qualities, specific details; those beings who comprise the collective image become creatures of no particular species. They are simply "cogs" in the state machine.

Mickey does not look like a real mouse; while bearing some resemblance to that animal, all his body parts are stylised and simplified to such a degree that they form something else. One of the most famous "portraits" in cartoon industry is the shadowed image of Mickey, composed simply from three black circles (fig. 10.). This rendering of the cartoon figure is itself a rationalised formula of one of the most functional characters in the twentieth century.

It could be interesting to trace the historical development of Mickey Mouse, comparing his earliest characterisation with contemporary episodes. In the modern educational series, *The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, which has been on air since May 2006, Mickey and his company help little TV watchers solve simple tasks with assistance from so-called "mousestruments". Each time when the show begins, the entirety of Mickey's living space emerges from out of a clearing. Mickey appears on a track that comes from nowhere and he points to an open empty green plot bordered by trees (a natural space, using Lefebvre's terms). He invites the viewers to repeat the words of a spell that will make the club appear from nothing. From here begins an immediate appropriation of natural space, wherein all the available elements and parts appear, magically combining to construct the entire building.

It is remarkable that the construction elements of the club that function both as Mickey's house and his friends' playground represent his own disjointed body. All these 'architectural' parts are assembled around the lawn and appear together with inhabitants: Goofy, Minnie, and Donald Duck, etc. At the end of each episode, when Mickey says his farewells to the viewers, all the elements comprising his living space disappear along with him and his buddies; no traces of their presence remain. In the following episode everything starts again from scratch. Since no episodes are connected, they can be watched in any random order. The cartoon characters neither improve their skills nor do they learn from their past experiences. They are divorced from their past: when the club disappears, they vanish also. With the beginning of each new episode, the viewer encounters the characters as if for the first time, as pure barbarians. This 'barbaric' modernist nature of Mickey Mouse remains, we can say, an invariant trait of the character, uniting the cartoons that once fascinated Benjamin in the nineteen thirties to their present educational incarnation.

The atemporal figure of Mickey has neither to learn from experience nor does he need recourse to any kind of background. He receives new tools for dealing with different circumstances from "outside", that is, from the imagination of his designers. He is a unit, a vessel for endless speculations on his own existence. His body is an experimental material upon which all manner of modern miracles are performed; "miracles", as Benjamin writes, "that not only surpass the wonders of technology, but make fun of them."¹⁵⁴

The barbarian willing to start from scratch, to come from the point of nowhere: this was the viewpoint of constructivism. The Revolution tried to eradicate from the spaces of Soviet cities the traces of the past; the task was to clear the ground so that the new could be constructed. The inhabitant of this new reality was identified by Benjamin as the "naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present."¹⁵⁵

The end-point of the 'total man', to refer to Lefebvre's term once more, had returned to the very beginning of existence –to the state of a newborn baby, just as high modernist architecture would return to the zero of its form, as fixed, for example, in Malevich's *Black Square*. Benjamin saw this architecture of new barbarism, which kept no connection to the past and no

¹⁵⁴ Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty," p. 735.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 733.

traces of experience, embodied in the production of glass houses. Diaz notes:

According to Benjamin, in order to erase the trace of experience, modern architects were producing glass houses that pointed to a new ‘poverty’: that of starting from scratch, from a *tabula rasa*, and dispensing with experience, advice and tradition. Benjamin perceived in this a new- if silent – form of barbarism.¹⁵⁶

The return to basics allowed for both the normalisation and naturalisation of the new reality and ideology, which, once its physical, spatial, and temporal organisation had become capable of translating and propagating the newly established state ideology, were necessary conditions for architecture to operate as a new ISA.

In his cartoon life Mickey Mouse hardly ever judges anybody. He does not moralise and neither does his audience. His aim is not to improve reality, rather he adjusts to it. He is a hallmark and a role model of the age that possesses “a total absence of illusion” about itself “and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it.”¹⁵⁷

On recording his impressions from Moscow, Benjamin is struck by the city’s barbarism. One of the features of this new barbarism is the outpouring of people along the streets of Moscow streets, a point that Benjamin compares to the “princely solitude, princely desolation” that “hang over the streets of Berlin.”¹⁵⁸ After Moscow, Berlin seems to be a deserted city.¹⁵⁹ Barbarians, just like children, are hostile to solitude, they fear it. The old, experienced, and noble need solitude, whereas the young, strong, and inexperienced are in search for abundance and the fullness of living.

When young children, who are still “barbaric” since they possess poor life experiences, watch Mickey losing his arm and acquiring another with almost immediate effect, they take the situation as a normal case; what they do not see is the very fact that an impossibility exists therein, because they lack either the knowledge or the experience of the possible consequences of such accidents. They perceive what they see from a standpoint in which everything is possible, while the poverty of their experience normalises

¹⁵⁶ Diaz, Carlos Ruano. “Walter Benjamin. Narration and Memory.” For the <http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/>. Link: http://www.walterbenjaminportbou.cat/sites/all/files/ruano_eng.pdf. P. 4. Accessed on: 28.07.2018.

¹⁵⁷ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty,” p. 733.

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 23.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

whatever they see. Every object is equal to itself, to its meaning and shape, and any way it acts and functions becomes acceptable.

Benjamin sees that “in Moscow goods burst everywhere from the houses,”¹⁶⁰ they are sold in the streets, carried along by the pedestrians, they lie in the snow. In the beginning, Russian constructivism supported and praised that fullness. The streets were decorated with propagandist posters that covered the ads of the defeated Empire; the facades of the churches were hidden behind huge portraits of Lenin and Stalin. The old was covered with the new, removing traces of its princely past to the barbaric abundance of the present.

As the snow covered the streets of Moscow, the explosion of new poverty covered over the luxury of a disappearing imperial city: Revolution replaced princesses passing along the streets in fancy equipages with peasant women standing along the roads, selling toys and fruit; sleighs replaced coaches; the visible wealth of the aristocracy was replaced with the business of poverty, of cheap trade, and the symbols of babbitttry sticking out of windows.

Revealing the peasant origin of its new population, Benjamin calls Moscow a “gigantic village.”¹⁶¹ He meticulously describes the childhood nick-nacks sold in the streets, such as toys and fruit, and he is fascinated by the naïve colourfulness of cheap trade. The city seems, from Benjamin’s viewpoint, to be returning to its pre-urban “childhood state”: “the instant you arrive, the childhood stage begins.”¹⁶² One should learn to walk anew to proceed through the streets, to learn to see Moscow in order to comprehend its colours that “converge prismatically here, at the centre of Russian power.”¹⁶³ As it was pointed out before, Benjamin claims that one has to come without the intention of deciding on the basis of facts since in Moscow there is no basis in the facts to begin with.¹⁶⁴ If one is not a child (which is equal to being a barbarian), one has to choose one’s standpoint in advance or, alternatively, one has to divorce oneself from the storehouse of previous experiences and learn to live – walk, see, hear, grasp – anew.

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¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 33.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.22.

2.5.2. Mickey, the Migrant

Mickey Mouse becomes an ideal product satisfying the demands of modern man for leisure, whose “essential characteristics,” according to Lefebvre, are “liberation and pleasure.”¹⁶⁵ The principal aim of this type of leisure is to offer modern man a break from everyday life; what one increasingly looks for, precisely, is leisure time that “might offer *distraction, entertainment and repose*, and which *might compensate* for the difficulties of everyday life.”¹⁶⁶

The approach to leisure as a break and a repose from everyday routines outlines one of the ultimate differences between Russian functionalism, on the one hand, and the German and Swedish modes, on the other. In the Soviet State, leisure was never to become a break from everyday reality; rather, it was to be a part of the reformatory, and most importantly, educative routine. This type of leisure was the one propagated by Lefebvre, as well as by the Russian constructivists: leisure was not to become a commodified need of modern man, but rather an organic part of his life that would not break with the everyday, but instead would reconcile its pleasant and most challenging aspects.

Yet in reality, the Soviet state commandeered pleasure as another potential instrument for exercising political and social control over the people, substituting entertainment and other sorts of leisure with propagandistic collective activities. These activities, such as demonstrations, gatherings, performances in collective houses, etc. were necessarily collective and tended towards mass spectacles. They were de-individualising acts that left no space for an individual’s personal development outside of the commune. Both leisure and everyday life were taken, then, under complete control of the state.

It is for this reason that the dystopian elements of Mickey Mouse are foregrounded. I treat him as an allegory and a model for the dehumanised and displaced Soviet man, who must concentrate all his physical, emotional, and intellectual abilities to survive this episode of Russian history, or *vice versa* to completely turn off these capacities and float along with the wind of history.

In order to survive in this fraught reality, man needed to resurrect every time, to find a new arm in the place where arms don’t grow and to learn to see with the eyes that never look back. Another option was to unlearn to see, just like the inhabitants from Sergei Eisenstein’s *Glass House*, who

¹⁶⁵ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

trained ignorance in order to survive in a building, which walls were entirely transparent.¹⁶⁷

In the early Soviet state there was an army of mickey-mouses who were driven from the countryside to the cities in order to participate in industrialisation. They became an experimental material for the improvement, reformation, and transformation of reality. The main feature that was common to them all, and through which they developed the necessary qualities of Mickey Mouse, was mobility.

The experimental avant-garde spaces in Russia were to be inhabited by migrants. The majority of those migrating to urban areas were people who had previously been displaced from their original living spaces. They could have arrived from far away or equally they may have migrated from within the same region, city or even apartment, such as, for example, when through the program of *uplotnenie* (*tightening*), an apartment was converted into a communal flat. From however far or from whatever place people had migrated, the fact remains that they had already parted with their previous lives.

New living arrangements forced people to move all the time and in all directions. Living became episodic: a series of unrelated and self-contained phases, where with each and every episode's end both dwelling places and living activities disappeared together. For instance, a person was moved from a village to a town; his profession was changed from a farmer to a worker; the working space of a farmer's field was replaced with a factory floor; his living space of a hut was replaced with a room in *kommunalka*; his family was substituted with random neighbors. He realised that any interruption in the sequence of transformations of his living situation was only temporary and that at any moment it could continue with anything from imprisonment to the career of a communist leader.

The production of this new socialist living space was accompanied by the constant migration of its inhabitants, reaching the desirable loss of traditional living spaces, connections and practices. For residents it resulted in

¹⁶⁷ *The Glass House* is an unfinished project by Sergei Eisenstein, on which he had been working since the late 1920s. Its main idea was to represent modern Western (American) society through a dystopian allegory of living in a modernist house made of pure glass, where tenants, who were not physically blind, had unlearned to see in order not to notice the horrors and dramas of the everyday that were happening next door. For more on Eisenstein's project with respect to the notion of the new man of modernity, please see *Part II* of the present thesis.

the necessity to adapt and begin anew “and with few resources,”¹⁶⁸ as Benjamin puts it, since they had to adjust to reality where everything was different – from a sleeping place to a job.

There is no gain in experience by constantly moving, but there is a loss. A peasant, who moved from a hut in his village to the third floor of a factory dormitory, realised that his whole life experience of farming was useless in his new existence. The only skill that could be improved through this transitional living was the Mickey Mouse ability to adjust and to survive under the duress of a constant change of circumstances, with the full mobilisation of one’s body and mind. That skill though, even if developed to perfection, could not be transferred to the next generation, because of the uniqueness of the very circumstances that gave rise to the necessary development of the skill in the first place.

The reality, through which that skill developed, was so miraculously absurd, that it could not be repeated again in the same state and, if it were repeated then it would at least require different “mousestruments” to harness the possibility. The generation of the 1920s and 30s was an object for experimentation placed on the laboratory table of the new state apparatus. Soviet society had divorced itself not only from its past, but also from its future. Continual movement was the only way to survive; the one who stayed still was swept away by the wind of history.

Gradually a former peasant, who soon becomes a former worker and later a new soldier or a prisoner, transforms into a mickey mouse whose previous professional experience has little practical value in current circumstances. Moreover, the very break with experience and an ability to forget gives man the necessary skill to survive as well as the energy to overcome the “endless complications of everyday living”¹⁶⁹ on his way to reaching the perfected and adaptable form of Mickey, even though the purpose of his existence, as Benjamin puts it “seems to have been reduced to the most distant vanishing point on an endless horizon.”¹⁷⁰

Mickey Mouse does not learn from experience, and yet when the need arises, he discovers the enormity of his bodily and intellectual potential. His body is the synthesis of all possible skills and experiences that he had gained in the past and all that he may acquire in the future. He is a bottomless vessel, in which any skill can be evoked at any given moment.

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¹⁶⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty.” In: *Selected Writings*, p. 735.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Mickey Mouse is a great barbarian of modernity, prepared to fit perfectly into any episode of history, which, according to Benjamin's concept of history, "contains *everything*, both the entire past and the virtual realisation of the utopian final goal of history."¹⁷¹

Considering the specificity of the historical period, the privation of experience that appears to benefit Mickey Mouse could hardly have been felt by the Soviet citizens encountering acute material property. The Disney Mickey Mouse is a more fortunate character, since unlike his Soviet and European prototypes, he lives through episodes with no fixed location that are aired outside particular politics, times, and spaces, while the 1920s and 1930s in Soviet Russia remain one of the most dramatic and unfortunate periods of experimentation on humans in Europe.

2.5.3. The Russian mode of functionalism: playing barbarians

Constructivists simulated barbarians. At the beginning the bright, bold, simple colours, and primitive forms that flooded Moscow's streets were intensified by the avant-garde to the point of kitschy extreme. Constructivists voluntarily declared a clean break with experience and a readiness to start from scratch. As Valdimir Paperny points out in *Kultura Dva*, the new culture of the avant-garde is separated from the previous era by a clearly defined new beginning, that is, the Revolution.¹⁷² The main slogan of Moisey Ginzburg, a leading theoretician of constructivism, was to catch the beat of the present, to seize the immediacy of existence in its furious rhythm. There was no history and no past, only the now and the future.

Yet the tastes of the constructivists, educated at the best art schools and engineering colleges, with their respectable family backgrounds and high professionalism, could not so easily be expunged. Constructivists were intellectuals and, as Benjamin argues in "The Author as Producer" with respect to a writer of *Activism* and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, intellectuals stand in solidarity with the proletariat in attitudes alone and not as producers.¹⁷³ Thus the architectural results of constructivism in Russia were alien to the proletarian masses, while, on the other hand, the state authorities neglected constructivist aesthetics, abusing the constructive part of the functionalist

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¹⁷¹ Citation in: Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 101.

¹⁷² Paperny, Vladimir. *Kultura Dva*, p. 41.

¹⁷³ Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." In: *Selected Writings*. Vol. 2. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.772.

method in order to develop mass housing products that were distant from the initial intentions of the constructivists.

This equal estrangement from the masses and the ruling authorities meant that Russian constructivism was vulnerable to being named as part of the “bourgeois left intelligentsia”, to which Benjamin accounted for both himself as well as members of German literary-political movements.¹⁷⁴ During the period of Socialist realism’s dominance, accusations of “formalism” and “the experimentation with abstract fantasies” acquired the menacing tone of bourgeois treachery, which by the mid-thirties was a serious threat both to the professional and literal existence of artists. It is ironic that “The Author as Producer” was written in 1934, when constructivism had already lost the “creative discussion” in Stalinised Russia and when functionalism had already been dismissed in Germany.

Many of the representatives of constructivism had not broken with the bourgeois class, neither in terms of their sensibility nor in their means of production. Here, what Benjamin wrote about the adherents to “New Objectivity” seems relevant to the Russian constructivists too:

[...] whatever poses they like, they can do nothing about the fact that even the proletarianisation of the intellectual hardly ever makes him a proletarian. Why? Because the bourgeois class has endowed him with a means of production – in the form of his education – which, on the grounds of educational privilege, creates a bond of solidarity which attaches him to his class, and still more attaches his class to him.¹⁷⁵

In his *Critique of Everyday Life* Lefebvre draws out a similar point; in order for bourgeois man to declassify himself and become a true translator of proletarian needs into everyday life, he must not only know and understand proletarian needs and demands, he needs also to humanise himself and his life practices¹⁷⁶ and integrate himself into this very new state of everyday being. The problem is that, in reality, this is hardly ever achieved:

Attempts to escape from the bourgeois condition are not particularly rare; on the other hand, the failure of such attempts is virtually inevitable, precisely because it is not so much a question of *supersession* but of a complete

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¹⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 772–773.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “The Author as Producer”, p. 780.

¹⁷⁶ Sigfried Giedion propagated a similar idea of humanising modernity as a means to reconcile the split between thought and feeling, between reason and everyday being. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

break. (Among intellectuals, this notion of supersession is frequently false and harmful: when they *supersede themselves as petty-bourgeois or bourgeois intellectuals*, they are often merely continuing in the same direction and following their own inclinations in the belief that they are ‘superseding themselves’. So far from gaining a new consciousness, they are merely making the old one worse. There is nothing more unbearable than the intellectual who believes himself to be free and human, while in his very action, gesture, word and thought he shows that he has never stepped beyond bourgeois consciousness.) [...]. His consciousness depends upon his real life, his everyday life. The ‘meaning’ of a life is not to be found in anything other than that life itself. It is within it, and there is nothing beyond that.¹⁷⁷

Benjamin similarly argues that authors who had a bourgeois upbringing could be no more than allies with the proletariat; more besides, they could not themselves become the proletariat, even if they were to betray their class origins:

The solidarity of the specialist with the proletariat – herein lies the beginning of this clarification – can only be a mediated one. Proponents of Activism and of the New Objectivity could gesticulate as they pleased, but they could not do away with the fact that even the proletarianisation of an intellectual hardly ever makes a proletarian.¹⁷⁸

Benjamin takes functionalist practice to be counter-revolutionary, since the principal struggle is revealed as that between capitalism and mind, when in actual fact “revolutionary struggle is not between capitalism and spirit; it is between capitalism and the proletariat.”¹⁷⁹

Constructivism’s ambition was to translate avant-garde aesthetics, realised through means of industrial art production, to the masses, under the faith of the reforming potential of the produced milieu. Noting on the functionalist’s idea of the reforming potential of the living space, Katerina Clark refers to the concept of so-called “social condensers.” These were spatial incubators arranged for the sake of the modernisation of the Soviet people under the impact of living spaces produced by constructivists such as Moisey Ginzburg:¹⁸⁰

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¹⁷⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, pp. 144–145.

¹⁷⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “The Author as Producer”, p. 780.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ See: Ginzburg, Moisey. *Konstruktivism kak Metod Laboratornoy I Pedagogicheskoy Raboti* [“Constructivism as Method of Laboratory and Pedagogical Work.”]. In: *SA*, 1927 (6), pp. 160–166.

The theory of the social condenser rests on the assumption that architecture can influence the psychological development of the masses by functioning as an active force for social change. The constructivists believed that by placing workers and their families in an environment in which the majority of social and domestic functions (human interaction, political activities, self-improvement, study, entertainment, cooking, housework, child-care and so on had been communalised, in an environment where the layout of the building itself was designed to encourage collective human interaction these very same families would shortly be transformed into model Soviet citizens steeped in the new socialist way of life.¹⁸¹

The propagation of modernist revolutionary aesthetics through the very production of space was meant to link the producers – i.e. the avant-garde artists of bourgeois descent – and those for whom this space was produced, i.e. the proletarian masses. Artistic and architectural practice thus intended to translate the high ideas of world reformation through the industrial production of space for the old-formatted dwellers. As Clark concludes:

As the Russian intelligentsia went into the Revolution, they hoped to function as Hermes figures who might mediate between the language of a higher truth and that of the imperfect world around them. Many were particularly attracted by the possibility that they might act as the great demystifiers. Now, however, their role was closer to that of the comprador. [...]

By the 1930s, the typical Soviet intellectual had become a comprador in that his task was to mediate between the language of high culture, which he spoke “natively”, and that of his masters, the language of ideology and power. At first, he might speak the latter imperfectly, but in time the successful comprador passed more and more for a member of the elite group. He could enjoy many of its privileges (cream cakes), but only as long as his linguistic skills proved useful.¹⁸²

The creation of communal space was neither the main goal of constructivist architecture nor was it the final model of an ideal society. Rather, it was a transitional state of society for a transitional type of man, and it was recorded in the works by constructivists. This transitional type of space was to provide temporary solutions for the urgent needs of the day, on the one side, and yet, on the other side, with its very new way of organising everyday life it saw itself as preparing the way towards the fully liberated living of

¹⁸¹ Clark, Katerina. *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 250.

¹⁸² Clark, Katerina. *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, pp. 304–305.

the future. Communal spaces were not the ultimate goal, but rather a temporary necessity: and not only a practical and constructive necessity, but educative and ideological too. Lefebvre, in turn, supported this line, claiming that “the shift from necessity to freedom and from alienation to fulfilment requires a lengthy period of transition” and that the type of “transitional man cannot be avoided.”¹⁸³

The main constructivist question surrounded both the direction and the final destination of that transition. It was clear for constructivists that they had to march forward towards the future, yet in practice this movement could mean regressing back as opposed to advancing forwards.

Constructivists replaced the solidity and intimacy of living with the collectivism of existence. By promoting a return to the original hut, they were not hankering for the intimate dwelling of a hermit, but a peasant hut – a single space for a big family. Solidity was not discussed as an important factor for any of the projects and types of dwelling proposed by the Russian constructivists, from *dom-kommunas* to *zhilmassivs*, nor was there an awareness of solidity in the propagation of communal flats housed in the former private mansions by the state.

These features of the transitional living space were not characteristic only of radically socialised societies, realised through an application of the most intensive mode of functionalism. In her book *Architecture and Modernity*,¹⁸⁴ Hilde Heynen defines the main features of the new Western European living space that replace the “security and seclusion”¹⁸⁵ of traditional homes with “openness and transparency.”¹⁸⁶ Benjamin sees modernist living space as reduced “for the living by hotel rooms, for the dead by crematoria.”¹⁸⁷ Living space shrank when compared to the bourgeois era; giving the dweller no possibility to leave traces of her presence in the home. Neither time nor experience can be imprinted onto a living space made of glass. And yet the very impossibility to inscribe the fact of one’s existence carries within it a revolutionary potential, thereby revealing the power of the new barbarism to clear space for “public openness, transparency, and permeability as conditions of everyday life.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 65.

¹⁸⁴ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Citation from the *Das Passagenwerk*. In: Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁸ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p.119.

During his stay in Moscow Benjamin had not perceived the surrounding environment as revolutionary, neither did he mention any of the avant-garde buildings that were in the process of being constructed. To be staying in Moscow in the late 1920s without mentioning constructivism was as strange as neglecting the works of the German functionalists in his homeland. Hilde Heynen remarks:

As far as I know, there is not a word in his work about *Das Neue Frankfurt* or the activities of Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut in Berlin. Nor does Benjamin discuss the work of Hannes Meyer, the architect who went furthest along the road that he pointed to in "*Erfahrung and Armut*."¹⁸⁹

Heynen concludes that Benjamin's idea "about the role of architecture as the prototype of a new sort of art reception was therefore not verified against the practice of his contemporaries."¹⁹⁰

The question, then, is why was that practice neglected? Was it not satisfactory for Benjamin to verify his own pronouncements, and thus was he unwilling to take contemporary architectural practice as a background for his critique? Here Benjamin strikes an ambiguous figure. On the one hand Benjamin sees the revolutionary potential of the new barbaric architecture of sober glass, and yet on the other hand, he mourns the passing of the nineteenth century's womb-like dwellings.

If we return to the "Moscow" essay and recall that by 1927 Benjamin had already dismissed the avant-garde from the streets of the leading communist city, then there might be less ambivalence surrounding his attitude towards the architectural practice of his contemporaries. As I have repeated throughout this chapter, Benjamin found no Revolution in the Russian capital, but only its 'snatches' in the goods hanging out to the streets over the windows, which could be read as a premonition about the petty destiny of socialist revolutions around Europe: "You need to know Russia to understand what is going on in Europe."¹⁹¹

Moscow served as a lesson of what might have happened if Europe if it went a similar way. Benjamin described Moscow as "a corporation of the dying."¹⁹² He regarded the city as in a transitional state from life to death, from revolution to non-revolution: in a state of a *failing* revolution. After

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 117.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Benjamin, Walter. "Moscow", p. 22.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 27.

dismissing both the Revolution and the avant-garde from the streets of Moscow, Benjamin had become ignorant of those architectural sites of constructivist practice that could have given hope to both ‘the Revolution’ and modernity. On the other hand, and as discussed earlier, these architectural islands of modernism did not define the urban space of the Soviet capital, and thus were non-visible and unsupportive of the idea of an avant-garde aesthetics and its material forms that sought to visualise modernity and to artistically sustain the revolution.

The space of a “vast open-air hospital called Moscow”¹⁹³ was in a state of transition between two prominent dwelling types of modernity: the hotel and crematoria. Its muted inhabitants were de-classed residents of the future – beggars, whose silent howling was directed towards citizens of those lands that were not affected by revolution. There were also the foreigners who could not speak Russian; who came from lands that had not yet lost their living space to modernity, and who still enjoyed life in cockpits, instead of transiting into the future; lying on the beds under the sky, where only the clouds were recognisable.

When Benjamin departed the city of unfortunate provisions, he already could have turned his face, like an angel of history, towards the past that had already happened in Russia, where the Revolution and the avant-garde had already been dismissed, even before other revolutions and avant-gardes had established themselves elsewhere. In this way, Benjamin’s mourning for bygone bourgeois homes and his neglect of contemporary architecture may look less ambivalent.

Returning now to the practicing constructivists, it is interesting to reflect on whether their work was a sincere clearing of the way towards a new barbarism or whether it was just a game, an academic experiment. The failure to defend their aesthetics and working methods in front of their critics and other hostile ‘political forces’ was caused in large part by the failure to simulate the break with their own experience and background, both social and architectural, that was too precious to reject.

Benjamin outlines the total absence of illusion among the greatest minds of his time, yet the constructivists do not appear to relinquish illusion. Their unyielding commitment to their age did not contradict the utopian nature of their aesthetics.

Later accusations of formalism that placed a curse on constructivism were basically accusing the avant-garde of living in illusion. The charge of “formal-

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

ism” was declaratively fought by constructivists themselves. They claimed that an architectural form could not exist in any other state but as a pure materialisation of the function. The abstract play with forms was criticised heavily by constructivists as both senseless and useless.¹⁹⁴ The constructivists argued for nothing short of liberation, for the improvement and the rationalisation of living spaces. Their rhetoric was similar to Giedion’s manifestoes in *Befreites Wohnen*. However, once it was deprived of its illusions through perversion by state housing policy, their actual work ended up contributing to the impoverishment of the Soviet dwellers’ living experience.

2.6. Avant-garde vs. the state: revising the past through renaming the grounds

2.6.1. Maps and brands

In the modern cartoon series, Mickey’s Clubhouse magically appears on the open ground – the area is unnamed, and thus it carries no reference to any previous owner. One of the difficulties that constructivism faced in Moscow was the absence of any open “unnamed land” which, using Lefebvre’s terminology, could be appropriated for the materialisation of a new ideology and aesthetics. At the very beginning of his stay in the Soviet capital, Benjamin notices: “For every step you take here is on named ground.”¹⁹⁵

Every tread of land refers to its possessor. To name land is the first and basic means of appropriating space. Each pioneer, who reaches a new unknown land, first bestows upon it a name in order to lay claim over it. Natural space acquires its status as man’s property through the name. Once land is named, it is no longer a random site of nature; it is transformed into a social object and acquires shape through its newly assigned borders.

Borders constitute the edges of an area of land within which a certain name has authority. Land wars are wars for the right to call the same physical (natural) space by a certain desired name. Indeed, it is the name that changes geographical borders; a local population, specific features of the landscape, and architectural constructions may remain or disappear, however they do not interfere with a land’s appropriation. Any political map shows nothing else but bordered spaces validated through their names.

¹⁹⁴ Please see Chapter I on the theory of constructivism.

¹⁹⁵ Benjamin, Walter, “Moscow”, p. 22.

Only the names are changed on political maps, as oceans and continents preserve the consistency of a land's presence.

The young Soviet state was obsessed with maps, a point commented upon by Benjamin. While the map of the Soviet Union was still being formed, and the appropriation of space of the defeated empire was still under way. The borders on the map indicated the spread of the Revolution and, thus, of all that is good and right. Vladimir Paperny notes that the Soviet borders gradually acquired the meaning of the frontier of Good and Evil, where the good designated all that belonged to the worker-peasant and Evil designated the world of the bourgeoisie.¹⁹⁶

The inscription of new names to the body of newly colonised spaces was a necessary and symbolic action, as Benjamin writes: “[...] the map is almost as close to becoming the centre of the new Russian iconic cult as Lenin's portrait.”¹⁹⁷

As well as the image of Lenin and the picture of the redrawn geopolitical map serving to document the legacy of the new state, these artefacts also became the first brands of Soviet power. The course of Lenin's life, which was routed on the map, had literally shaped the country. His name expanded to the borders of Russia; it appropriated the space of the new state, just as the image of Christ Pantocrator in the dome of an Orthodox cathedral appropriates and shapes the space of a church.

The new brands were commercially distributed in every corner of Moscow; they contributed to the process of the symbolic re-establishment of the state and the colonisation of its capital. They propagated the new name of the country and of its new God, as Benjamin records:

On it [the map] Lenin's life resembles a campaign of colonial conquest across Europe. Russia is beginning to take shape for the man of the people. On the street, in the snow, lie maps of the SFSR, piled up by street vendors who offer them for sale.¹⁹⁸

The name of Soviet Russia, outlined on the new maps, occupied a sizeable part of the Eurasian continent and, as noted by Benjamin, it sent a worrying message to the other names of Europe. It also forced Europe to inscribe the name of the new Soviet state upon their own maps, and thus giving legitimacy to its existence:

¹⁹⁶ Paperny, Vladimir. *Kultura Dva*, p. 78.

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 37.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36

They [the Russians] want to measure, compare, and perhaps enjoy that intoxication with grandeur which is induced by the mere sight of Russia; citizens can only be urgently advised to look at their country on the map of neighbouring states, to study Germany on a map of Poland, France, or even Denmark; but all Europeans ought to see, on a map of Russia, their little land as a frayed, nervous territory far out to the west.¹⁹⁹

Re-shaping through the act of re-naming was met with resistance in Moscow. This was not resistance from parties in opposition – after all, “only the most loyal opposition” could exist.²⁰⁰ Neither was it a sense of hostility driven by natives of territorialised lands, since substantial parts of them either had passed away or had since been displaced. No, it seemed instead that the urban space itself performed a sort of resistance on its own account.

Vladimir Paperny, in turn, suggests distinguishing between different cultures of names as offered through the semiotic concept developed by Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky in their work *Mif – Imya – Kultura* [*Myth – Name – Culture*],²⁰¹ and which defines cultures that are oriented towards mythological thinking and tend towards abstract notions. Paperny suggests that the avant-garde era of the first post-revolutionary decade (which he calls *culture one*),²⁰² is oriented towards abstract notions, possessing a negative attitude towards personal names and their preservation, and in their place propagating egalitarian values of collectivism and de-personalisation as major grounds for its horizontal structure. Yet, *culture two*, which Paperny understands as superseding the Stalinist era, returns to a mythologising and personified attitude concerning names and thus is hostile to abstract notions.²⁰³

Both cultures, Paperny argues, widely practised renaming, especially with respect to geographical and toponymical names. While *culture one* substituted personal names with meaningful notions (e.g. Alexandrovskaya Square turned to the Square of Struggle), *culture two* returned to the worshipping of sacred names, for example, the universal application of Stalin’s

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁰¹ Lotman, Yuri; Uspensky, Boris. “Mif – Imya – Kultura” [*Myth – Name – Culture*]. In: *Trudi po Znakovim Sistemam* [*The Works on Sign Systems*]. Tartu, 1973 (6), pp. 282–303.

²⁰² Due to the limited scope of the work, I will not go into further detail surrounding Paperny’s concept of “culture one” versus “culture two”, which he develops in his book *Kultura Dva*, and which is also available in English translation (see bibliography list).

²⁰³ Paperny, Valdimir. *Kultura Dva*, pp. 180–181.

name to all possible fields – from naming cities and theatres to children’s personal names (for example, the girl’s name *Stalina*.)²⁰⁴

Re-naming had begun in the Russian capital even before the Bolshevik Revolution. The capital was a different city then, and World War I was another disaster that prepared the ground for both the February and October Revolutions. After the war broke out, St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, had its name changed through a literal translation from German into Russian: from *Sankt-Peterburg* to *Petrograd*. The name, St. Petersburg, had been placed under suspension in 1914, and throughout the next decade when some of the most dramatic events took place in a city called *Petrograd*.

Recalling the name of each famous town evokes images of its most prominent architectural ensembles and natural landscapes. It may cause thinking to connect the name to the political regime of that country, conjuring up memories of personalities that resided or were born there, or even certain events that had occurred there. The name of a city refers to its physical and political location, to the picture of its natural and urban landscape, as well as to its most renowned historical and cultural background.

2.6.2. St. Petersburg – Leningrad – Petrograd: The reformatory potential of renaming and rebranding for the production of new living spaces

The history of the name of the city that is called St. Petersburg today is quite striking. Usually cities are renamed after seismic political transformations, i.e., after the gain or loss of independence, the overthrowing of a political regime or a change in official religion. During the twentieth century the Soviet Union engaged in a systematic undertaking of renaming everything that could possibly be changed, with the purpose of erasing the traces of the past and divorcing people from their previous experiences.

Petrograd is the unique name of a city, which existed for only a period of ten years. However, this decade was to contain within it some of the most decisive events in Russian history during the twentieth century – with the exception, of course, of WWII, but which the city had survived through under the different name of “*Leningrad*”. *Petrograd* thus refers to a parti-

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 182. More on Paperny’s concept of the use of toponymical and personal names can be read in his chapter “*Ponyatije – Imya*” [“Notion – Name”]. in: *Kultura Dva*, pp. 180–189.

cular historical period, during which time there was the WWI, the February and October Revolutions, War Communism and a Civil war. It was also during this period that the city had its original name removed. Moreover, under the name of Petrograd, it lost the country of which it had been the capital, and instead acquired the status of being the capital of the new Russian Republic. This status it would quickly lose also to Moscow in 1918. Petrograd is the name, then, that signifies what we can refer to as a concrete chronological 'offcut,' a concentrated period of time which contains within it a sequence of events leading up to its further renaming as "Leningrad."

The name of Leningrad is symbolic. It symbolises and commemorates a concrete man; it concentrates all references that the city name possesses around his personality. The name of Leningrad acts as a monument, as the memorial site of both Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution that happened on its soil. Yet, the twentieth century would add a further symbolic tie to the name of Leningrad. The Siege through which the city survived during the years of the Great Patriotic War²⁰⁵ is remembered as *the Siege of Leningrad*, precisely. Not only was Leningrad the only city to go through such a devastating blockade, but significantly "the Siege of Leningrad" can have no reference to any other name by which that city had become defined.

From the perspectives of both history and ideology, a change in the town's name shifts the accent with respect to what that urban space resembles. The very history of changes in the city's name is representative of the city's own history, and this includes also its existing name, which, in its own way, reflects the prevailing ideology. Names of large cities often become sustainable brands, inasmuch that they gain independence from the immediate and contemporary urban spaces they represent. The city name does not stand for their physical sites, but for an image of their uniqueness, power, and beauty, or for an image of comfort and quality of life within the borders of a nation, where the names of particular cities and regions are meant to promote a certain way of living to other spaces. The same relationship between the city name and its urban space also applies to negative brand names of towns that evoke references, for example, to poverty, crime, violence, and war.

The stereotypical perception of certain qualities being characteristic features of a particular town are commodified and distributed in different social, commercial, political, and cultural areas, especially when it comes to the commodification of a notion of "style" (e.g. New York style, London

²⁰⁵ General reference to the World War II in Russia.

style, Parisian-, Milano-style, etc.). Within the Russian stereotypical perception of cities as brands, St. Petersburg is often referred to as the “cultural capital of Russia” and the city of “intelligentsia.” It is a different question of how much reference to reality the perception of the city as ‘brand’ possesses, but as any brand, it represents ties to its generally known background, as well as to sustainable stereotypes that the very notion of that brand immediately evokes. These ties refer to a certain experiencing of that city as well as to the reputation the city has acquired over time.

A brand represents certain stereotypical general knowledge about the subject it is standing in for. A brand is the reputation of a name. Not every name is a brand, but every brand is a name. And it is in the space between the name and the brand where an experience that earns a reputation rests.

2.6.3. Names, brands and abbreviations

When a new thing receives a name, it cannot become a brand immediately; it lacks any temporal distance of age and the quality of a lasting experience, through which a certain reputation is acquired. That is why, when Benjamin comes to Moscow, he finds no brands but only the “banal clarity” of the naïve narrative ads: “The grand, showy logo is alien to commerce. The city, so inventive in abbreviations of all kinds, does not yet possess the simplest – brand names.”²⁰⁶

After the obstruction of brands of the past and after the systematic divorce with experience, the young Soviet state could literally not afford new brands, since there was no background formed against which a brand could emerge. What the abandoned avant-garde was producing in its early years was not brands, but, as Benjamin puts it, the “graphic propaganda at the service of Revolution.”²⁰⁷ This graphics possessed specific revolutionary stylistics that became inappropriate under the circumstances that outlined the first failure of the Revolution, namely the approval of NEP. The new economic policy had restored certain connections with the bourgeois capitalistic era, and by the time of Benjamin’s visit to Moscow, the political propaganda of constructivism had already been replaced with the traditional narration of commercial ads.

The clarity and primitivism of narration had also reflected the act of naming associated with the newly appropriated spaces of Moscow. Branding was to come later. It is only in the last decades that the Russian

²⁰⁶ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow,” p. 39.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

avant-garde has become a brand. The same is true for the visual naivety of the Soviet commercials and the growing nostalgia for the wrapper of the Soviet past, which has itself recently become part of the instantiable process of branding.

The early Soviet names had yet to fully compensate for their inability to be used as promotional brands. The secret was simple: names were replaced with abbreviations. Indeed, the abbreviation genuinely stands for the major form of expression in the early years of the Soviet state and serves as a “brand” feature of the Russian mode of functionalism. Benjamin calls Soviet abbreviations “the collective form of expression.”²⁰⁸ Since abbreviations consist of several words they thus literally function as the means for collective expression. As a combination of the first letters of each word it forms a new word, which at the same time becomes a unique name of a subject. Numerous abbreviations that were used to name objects in the new Soviet environment had built up a vocabulary for the new ‘barbarian’ language.

Vladimir Paperny explains this predilection for abbreviations by the avant-garde of the 1920s in the following way: personal names are substituted for symbolic notions, and yet these notions and proper names (mostly revolutionary terminology, achievements of technological progress, as well as the names of communist leaders that symbolise the revolution) are converted into the very grammatical constructions of personal or toponymic names.²⁰⁹ It is for this reason that Paperny refers to the 1920s avant-garde as indicative of what he calls *culture two*.

Common words from the Russian language were often contradictory to radical modernist notions and thus were inappropriate elements for the constitution of a new barbaric power due to their reference to the past. The new institutions, classes, and relationships between the people and its surroundings had to be divorced from the structures and the names of the defeated Russian Empire. For this reason, abbreviation did not even function as a code. The main task of Soviet abbreviated names was not to give a key to how to decipher them, but to serve as a basis and a ground for future brands – that is, names which could act on their own account, independently from the subject they are supposed to indicate.

The country was called by an abbreviation too: the USSR. The new name that sounded through abbreviation was not a simple shortening of the four longer words. Rather, its ‘dehumanised’ nature made possible the produc-

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 40.

²⁰⁹ Paperny, Vladimir. *Kultura Dva*, p. 183.

tion of more meanings than any traditional country's name would. The abbreviation is thus more abstract and universal in its use than a name. It is less personal and less human'; it is more suitable for the further concentration of power, and thus conducive for the establishment of a totalitarian state. The abbreviation used for the naming of the country does not refer to the particular, stable and non-shifting borders; it can accept any territory and welcome any space under its capital letters.

In the twentieth century most of the world's super-powers accepted or continued using abbreviations instead of traditional "geographic" names: the USSR, the USA, the UK, the FRG, the GDR, the DPRK, etc. Abbreviations cover geographical names, include them, but they expand beyond them and always leave gaps for the colonisation of new territories.

Abbreviations can also be divorce from experience or at least help to devalue experience through the de-personification of the name. They force people to speak a new language. In "Experience and Poverty" Benjamin recalls Scheerbart's "creatures" that "talk in a completely new language."²¹⁰ This language is deprived of "humanlikeness – a principle of humanism."²¹¹ "[...] what is crucial about this language is its arbitrary, constructed nature, in contrast to organic language."²¹²

Benjamin illustrates the feature of this inorganic language through examples of Scheerbart's characters' personal names and then immediately refers to the real 'dehumanised' names that Soviet Russians like to give their children.²¹³ Many of those names were abbreviations as well – a double dehumanisation (Benjamin takes as an example a boy's name *Aviakhim*, which means "aviation and chemistry").²¹⁴ There was a good variety of other abbreviated names given to children at that time, for instance: *Vilen*, *Vil*, *Vladlen* – were numerous abbreviations from the name of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin; *Les* – "Lenin and Stalin"; *Ledat* – Lev Davidovich Trotsky. Those names referred to the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution. But large number of names also commemorated core events and changes in all aspects of Soviet life from the heroism of the revolutionary years to great economic, social, and cultural reforms: *Gertrude* ("Geroi Truda" ["Hero of Labor"]); *Dazsdraperma* (*Da Szdravstvujet Pervoje Maja!* – Hail to May 1st); *Kid* ("Communist Ideal"); *Dazdrasmygda* ("Da Zdravstvujet Smychka Mezhdz

²¹⁰ Benjamin, Walter. "Experience and Poverty," p. 733.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Gorodom i Derevnej” – Abbreviated hail to the *smychka* the program directed towards the merge of village and town), a poetic Raitiya that meant “Regional Typography”, and others. As Benjamin noted, there was “no technical renovation of language, but its mobilisation in the service of struggle or work – at any rate, of changing reality instead of describing it.”²¹⁵

Both the language and passionate renaming of everything with the extensive use of abbreviations pursued the same goal of spatial re-appropriation and reality-reconstruction, principles propagated by the functionalist methodology of avant-gardist architecture. These were the distinguishing features of the Russian mode of functionalism and, as Katerina Clark notes, its instruments of self-colonisation: “During the 1930s, the Soviet Union established itself as a nation. In this process, it confronted a paradox. On the one hand, it was already a relatively old and long-established nation. But, on the other, the country had in some senses colonised itself; the Bolsheviks had formed a colony out of Russia.”²¹⁶

2.7. The end of illusion

Benjamin does not draw any conclusions from his stay in Moscow. He leaves his reader with an image of Lenin sitting at the table: “his gaze is turned, certainly, to the far horizon; but the tireless care of his heart, to the moment.”²¹⁷

Here Benjamin ends with a definition of living in his age that will become one of the hallmarks of his later text, “Experience and Poverty”: “A total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it.”²¹⁸

Benjamin concludes the “Moscow” essay with a portrait of Lenin that “speaks perhaps more intensely and directly: Lenin at a table, bent over a copy of Pravda.”²¹⁹ The image speaks directly to his complete sense of disillusionment, concern, and yet an unyielding commitment to the age in which he, along with the entire revolutionary avant-garde, was caught up before his death.

Staying in Moscow three years after Lenin’s death, Benjamin finds neither the revolution nor the avant-garde. The moment of commitment

²¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty”, p. 733.

²¹⁶ Clark, Katerina. *Petersburg. Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 297.

²¹⁷ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, pp.45–46.

²¹⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty,” p. 733.

²¹⁹ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, pp.45–46.

has passed, it had been overtaken by the sight of everyone in the Soviet capital digging for power “from early till late.”²²⁰ This grieving for the lost Revolution – something that could have become a historical solution for the whole of modernity – is expressed in later modernist works, including Giedion’s *Mechanisation Takes Command* (1948),²²¹ to which reference will be made in the next chapter, and Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday life*, which was also written a few years after the end of WWII. Michel Trebitsch summarises Lefebvre’s acknowledgement that the revolution had failed as a confession surrounding the impossibility of the philosophical reformation of modernity in its everyday state through the presentation of the *Critique of Everyday Life*. In this sense, Lefebvre was still a devoted modernist thinker – similar to both Benjamin and Giedion:

For Henri Lefebvre modernity and the everyday are historical categories, and if they cannot be dated precisely, at least they can be located at a moment of fundamental historical trauma: the failure of revolution, which was completed, at the very moment of the world crisis, by the advent of Stalinism and Fascism. With this failure of the world revolution, the moment of philosophy’s ‘realisation’ was gone, and it was modernity which, *in its own way*, was to complete the tasks that the revolution had been unable to bring to fruition; it was modernity that took on the responsibility of ‘transforming the world’ and ‘changing life.’²²²

While staying in Moscow at the dawn of the Stalinist era, Benjamin feels the mourning for lost hopes among the makers of Revolution. The death of Lenin marked the end of the era of possibilities: “For Bolsheviks, mourning for Lenin means also mourning for Communism.”²²³

Benjamin provisionally presented economic reasons for the failure of communism already during the time of NEP, still years before the system had acquired its totalitarian forms, seeing NEP as the only way of postponing the system’s collapse. Benjamin expressed not disappointment with what he had seen; rather as he ‘grasped the concrete,’ he reached a more precise understanding of the enormity of the crisis taking hold of the project of modernity in both Russia and Europe.

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²²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

²²¹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*. (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

²²² Trebitsch, Michel. “Preface” In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 27.

²²³ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 45.

Not that Benjamin explicitly discusses modernity, as a philosophical and epistemological category in his “Moscow” essay; although it would become an important theme for critical exploration later in “Experience and Poverty.” But while in Moscow, Benjamin had not put any critique to the Russian avant-garde, not even mentioning constructivist architecture. This said, his reflections on his time in Moscow stand as a documentation of that very reality in which the Revolution was transforming the everyday through the functionalist method that had never succeeded in Moscow.

Benjamin observes the changes of and within the urban space of Moscow. Moreover, through Moscow he sees the entire space of Europe. Three major spatial dimensions are approached by Benjamin in his “Moscow” essay: the urban space, time, and motion.

The main transformation affecting the spatiality of Moscow was achieved through the demolition of the borders between inner and outer spaces, between interior and exterior – a characteristic feature of the Russian mode of functionalism. As Benjamin notes, “Bolshevism has abolished private life,”²²⁴ which disconnected living space from its traditional material frames. It turned the living space inside out: “through the hall door, one steps into a little town,”²²⁵ while the outer space of Moscow is turned into a vast open-air hospital. During Benjamin’s stay, Moscow – along with the rest of the country – was undergoing a systematic process of the collectivisation and communalisation of its spaces. Yet, the process did not lead to the classless and open society. On the contrary, it led to its total dehumanisation; Benjamin identified Communist Russia as “not only a class but also a caste state:”²²⁶ “[...] the social status of a citizen is determined not only by the visible exterior of his existence – his clothes or living place – but exclusively by his relations to the party.”²²⁷

These relations outlined some permeable borders through and within the space of everyday existence. They were transparent and yet hard, just like the sober glass praised by functionalists.

Those borders formed isolated islands that were inhabited by members of the party, in whose favour the state was being adjusted. The Bolshevik party constituted the dominion in which power was both gathered and concentrated. In Benjamin’s presence, the party demonstratively retreated

²²⁴ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 30.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

²²⁷ Ibid.

itself from money, leaving it to the NEP men;²²⁸ but this retreat was only to be temporary. Benjamin recognised that the new economic policy, which Soviet Russia had already accepted, was fatal to the very core of its existence: “Should the European correlation of power and money penetrate Russia, too, then perhaps not the country, perhaps not even the party, but Communism in Russia would be lost.”²²⁹

Benjamin’s premonition inevitably came true during the Perestroika of the 1980s; yet in the 1930s it was the concentration of power and money in the hands of the party apparatchiks, and the slide into a totalitarian system, that managed to defer the collapse of the regime for several decades.

Russian constructivists followed the same route. If during the 1920s the mass production of glass was possible in the country, then it would have been used on a much larger scale. The ribbon windows, which became brand symbols of the functionalist method, were very often imitated on facades. This imitation, which demonstrated the lack of available resources for building a new reality, bitterly symbolised the imminence of its failure.

Constructivists possessed an unlimited commitment to their age, and yet they lived in illusion. They left oases of architecturalised illusions in Moscow, but did not manage to reform its urban space.

Leningrad was, on the other hand, more hospitable for the aesthetics of the avant-garde, preserving whole islands in which the models for new living spaces could be observed; something that will be demonstrated in the following chapters of this study.

The Revolution and the avant-garde were once allies, and yet both proved to have a transient existence. Neither an ideal model of society nor an ideal organisation of space was realised. The meeting of political and aesthetic revolution was a global experiment that had turned the country into a huge laboratory table. An intensification of transformations, of the re-appropriation of spaces, as well as the immediacy of these very processes, were characteristic for the period and can be said to have become organic features of the Russian mode of functionalism. New space was not only being produced; it was first of all being discovered from within the old milieu. As Benjamin notes with respect to the new reality, its intentions and practices “often have no site of their own, being held in corners of noisy editorial rooms, or at cleared table in a canteen.”²³⁰

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²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

²³⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “Moscow”, p. 31.

From within the old, there was the quest to find a new space. The old had to be first purged and cleared. The natural space of Moscow, colonised after the victory of the Bolsheviks, was being appropriated anew; the revolutionary ideology penetrated and reformed the space through “a kind of natural selection and a struggle for existence among these events.”²³¹

While the Russian avant-garde had developed along with the Bolshevik revolution, the former was not the outcome of the latter. The avant-garde was rather charged with an intensity and a radicalism of real revolutionary transformations, which had formed and shaped the country during the 1920s. The mobilisation of all forces directed towards the reformation of the old and the production of new living spaces contributed to both an intensified methodology and an artistic language that defined Russian constructivism. All means of expression – from the stylised abbreviations to the formal architectural ones – were subject to these intensifications. The intensity, immediacy, and radicalism of these transformations, affecting the space of Soviet cities, impacted greatly on the methodology of the Russian mode of functionalism. They were perceivable not only through the artistic sensations and architectural experiments of the constructivists; but they were propagated also through an entirely new way of being, which included transformations in all spheres of life (from politics to everyday living practices). Significantly, the propagation of the new ideology depended on its architectural materialisations, and here functionalism, both methodologically and aesthetically, was well positioned to respond to the call to constitute and form a new living space for the new social order.

Even though the present chapter draws on observations by an ‘outsider’, it is, in fact, a chapter that studies and analyses the aesthetics of European modernism as such. Here, closer attention has been given to the most concentrated and intensified mode of functionalism. Since the Russian instantiation will turn out to be the most radical of the three I am examining, what a study of Russian functionalism affords is a sharpening of those features of functionalism that are common to all of its modes; what it allows for is to establish the primary articulation of these features. This concentrated Russian mode reveals the nature of European modernism as a whole and thereby forms a background against which the diversity and the variety of modes in operation can be further explored. This is to say, then, that the features of the Russian mode of functionalism analysed here are not unique and specific only for the case of Russia; they constitute the nature of

²³¹ Ibid.

European modernism *as such*, which developed with the use of similar aesthetic terms and working methods, but all the while within different socio-political conditions. When visiting Russia, Benjamin had not travelled to a different planet or an isolated space, he had come to see the Revolution and the modernist reconstruction of reality; and it was in Russia at that time where this reconstruction was being realised in the most extensive and intense way. Benjamin had not come to explore any sort of Russian 'national' modernism as a unique experiment in a far eastern land, he had come to reflect on European modernism *as such*. My intention to articulate the features of European functionalism based on Russian material under the guidance of documentation from a western European thinker hence explains the seeming misbalance between the size of the following chapters.

While Benjamin may have 'ignored' both Russian and European functionalism, a close reading of his writings on Moscow disclose a set of reflections sensitive to questions of a spatial character. Benjamin 'grasped the concrete': a moment of enormous effort to transform the contemporary environment into a paradisiacal living space; this had been the goal of modernist architecture and yet it was an ideal never realised.



Fig. 1. The building of the “Izvestiya” newspaper in Moscow. Arch. Gersh Barkhin, 1925–27



Fig. 2. The House of architect Melnikov in Moscow. Arch. Konstantin Melnikov, 1927–29



Fig. 3. The Tsentrosoyuz Building in Moscow. Arch. Le Corbusier and Paul Jeanneret, 1928–30

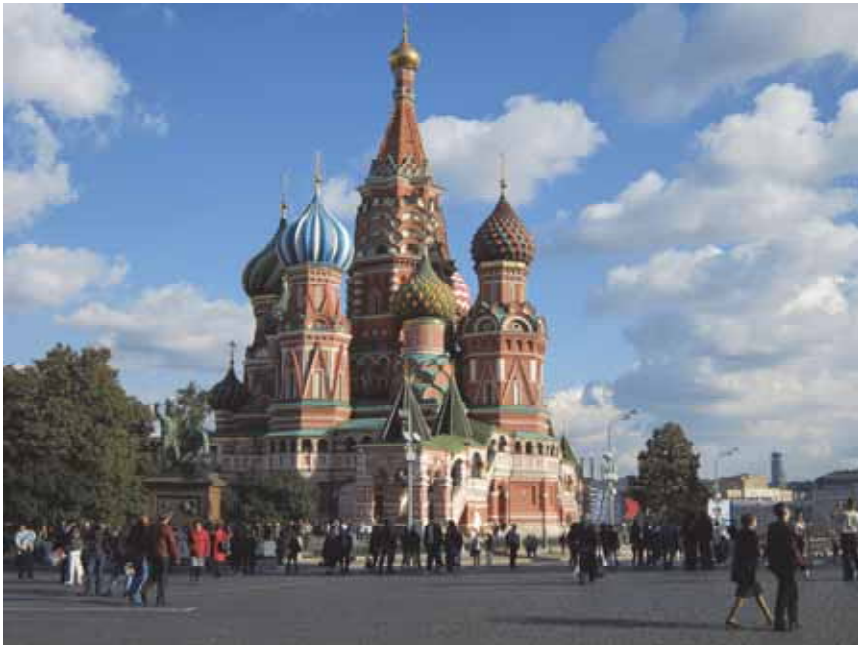


Fig. 4. St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. Arch. Postnik and Barma (?), 1555–61



Fig. 5. Building of Narkomzem in Moscow, Arch. Alexey Shchusev, 1928–33



Fig. 6. NKVD Quarter in Lubyanka, Moscow. Arch. Alexey Shchusev, 1940–47



Fig. 7. Contemporary view of St. Petersburg, the Spit of Basil's Island.



Fig. 8. Palace Square in St. Petersburg.



Fig. 9. Moscow Square in St. Petersburg.

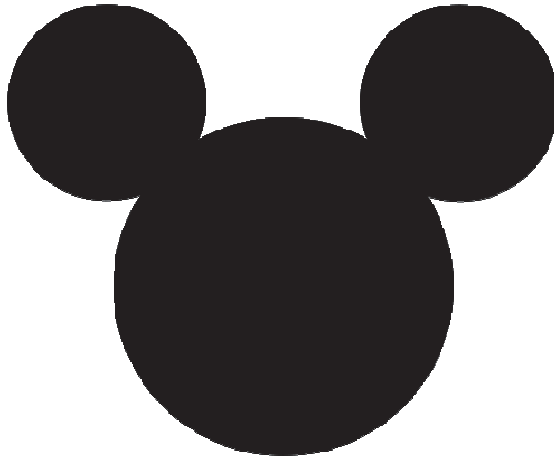


Fig. 10. The silhouette of Mickey Mouse's Head.

CHAPTER III

The German Mode of Functionalism

In this chapter, a second and more moderate mode of functionalism, which first developed in Germany, will be studied. Here I will provide close readings and analyses of texts written by the Czech-born Swiss historian and apologist for the West-European avant-garde – Sigfried Giedion. Heading the CIAM for decades,¹ Giedion worked as an architect, publicist, and architectural historian. For the present purposes, his work will be approached on the basis of his articulation of an aesthetics of modernism, which I will take as representative of the German mode of functionalism.

Giedion was working not only on the history of architecture and mechanisation, but he was writing a history of the present to which he was himself a witness and of which his own aesthetics was an active agent. As Hilde Heynen outlines in her chapter on Giedion from *Architecture and Modernity*:

[...] the author of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) can be considered the ghostwriter of the modern movement. As secretary to CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) he was involved with modern architecture on a personal level, knowing all the protagonists and interacting with them on regular basis. It was partly due to his work that the movement was seen as a whole, because in his writings he brought its different tendencies together under the banner of the new space-time concept.²

In the present chapter I turn to Giedion's major texts: *Building in France*, *Building in Ferro-concrete* (1928);³ *Space, Time and Architecture*. The

¹ On the history of CIAM see: Mumford, Eric. *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism – 1928–1960*. (Cambridge MA – London: MIT Press, 2000).

² Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), p. 4.

³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*. (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art, 1995).

Growth of a New Tradition (first edition 1940),⁴ and to Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History (1948). These texts will be treated in order to extract the aesthetic grounds of modernist theory as introduced and articulated by the author. Besides providing readings of these core texts by Sigfried Giedion, a further aim for this chapter is to elucidate the most significant differences in epistemology between the Russian and German modes of functionalism.

It was in the unique period of the 1920s when architectural theory unprecedentedly reached the level not only of professional, historical, and aesthetic importance, but of social and political significance too. The major theoreticians and first historians of the avant-garde were also its major practitioners, for example, Moisey Ginzburg, Aleksey Gan, and El Lissitsky in Russia; Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier in Western Europe; the *Acceptera* authors in Sweden. They all shared the same tasks of building modernist theory into the reality of their own time, as well as producing the sources of inspiration, investigation, and critique for the future.

In the current part of the thesis I will present an ‘external’ critique of modernism, doing so mostly through the study of the aforementioned texts by Giedion. This critical operation will afford the possibility of offering a more specific analysis of the three major modes of functionalism discussed in this thesis.

My aim here is to provide a comparative analysis of three modes of functionalism with the aim of defining both the differences and the points of commonality existing within modernism. I understand modernism as a European trend developing in parallel with the political and social dramas gripping the entire continent. This means that this continental movement should not be separated into isolatable national “units”, as if, for example, there developed different modernisms in the socialist and capitalist countries of Europe, doing so in complete isolation from one another.

At the same time, to establish the common grounds of European modernism requires an analysis of diversity and ambivalence, as well as a consideration of the contradictions that exist within modernist methods and aesthetics; these points of diversity, ambivalence, and contradiction are intensified by the unique political and social events taking place in different

⁴ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition, Fifth Revised and Enlarged Edition (Charles Eliot Norton Lectures for 1938–1939)*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

countries at the time. This analysis developed here is comprised of three parts: not only are close readings of theoretical texts provided, time will also be set aside to reflect over architectural practices and projects, as well as accounting for their reception. In this chapter I will bring Sigfried Giedion into an intellectual dialogue with Moisey Ginzburg. This dialogue never in reality took place: on particular one occasion when they might have met, Ginzburg had not received his visa on time to participate at the first CIAM Congress of 1928. In his theoretical works Giedion never referred to the Soviet constructivists, nor had he incorporated the Russian architectural avant-garde into his history of modernist architecture.

Yet, both leaders of the Soviet and the West-European avant-garde had been theorising within the bounds of a modernist aesthetics, applying the same functionalist method to their architectural practices. Here it is interesting not only to compare their writings and aesthetic definitions of the avant-garde, but also to reflect on both the degrees of separation and points of unity locatable within their evaluations of the very nature of modernism. This will allow the origins of these differences (i.e. historical, political, etc.) to reveal themselves as well as make possible a comprehension of the aesthetic and constructive developments in both socialist Russia and capitalist Western Europe in terms of a modernity they shared.

In the previous chapter I explored and discussed the major distinguishing features of the Russian mode of functionalism, while following themes offered and introduced by Benjamin in his “Moscow” essay. His own documentation of Moscow contains categories that can be said to identify those transformations affecting urban spaces in both Soviet and West European cities (e.g. in Benjamin’s home town of Berlin). Among those themes were mobility and the transitional character of the newly produced living space; a hostile attitude towards the past as revealed in the destruction of monuments, sites, and the whole architectural types of bygone eras and the renaming, reshaping, and reconstruction of all spheres of everyday life. Furthermore, technological progress contributed significantly to a sense that man was increasingly divorced from experience. This sense of estrangement had intensified in Europe by the tragic events of the World War I, but which was in turn radicalised in Russia by the Bolshevik Revolution, the abolition of private ownership, and the total collectivisation and dehumanisation of the Soviet people, which had, as I argue, resulted in the barrackisation of living spaces.⁵

⁵ See *Part I, Chapter II* of the present thesis.

In the present chapter I will continue reflecting on similar epistemological categories that outline the nature of modernism. I shall follow Giedion's thoughts as they are expounded in a variety of his texts from different periods. This will hopefully give both an internal and external perspective regarding his critique of modernity. Among the themes to which I will be referring are: definitions surrounding the functionalist method as a life-building strategy as well as the evolving attitudes towards and evaluations of technological progress.

In order to articulate the features of the German mode of functionalism, for which Giedion's texts are used as a representative case, I place his reflections next to the modernist arguments advanced by Ginzburg in his writings from the same period as well setting Gideon's claims against the conclusions reached in the previous chapters.

In 1928 Sigfried Giedion publishes *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*. It becomes a powerful manifesto for the functionalist architectural method, in particular, as well as to the whole aesthetics of modernism, in general. According to Giedion, one of the most fascinating achievements of the age was the full acknowledgement of architecture's connection to reality. New technologies and materials combined with a new vision of reality as well as a heightened sense of awareness of the social goals of architecture; this combination of factors allowed architecture to catch – as Moisey Ginzburg would say – “the beat of the days”, and to turn the process of construction into a process of *life-building* (what constructivists called *zhiznestroeniye*). Giedion would write something similar in his manifesto:

LIFE! To grasp life as a totality, to allow no divisions is among the most important concerns of the age.⁶

Just like the Russian constructivists, Giedion took life, construction, and art to be inseparable; their entwinement formed the “flesh of the age.”⁷ It is precisely here where we can locate the architecture of Le Corbusier and those who were to follow.

Ever since his early writings, Giedion sought to develop a new conceptualisation of space that would form the grounds for modern architecture. This new conception rejected any perspective-based perception, suggesting instead a new way of envisioning space in which the various spatial dimen-

⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 87.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

sions of movement, elevation, mobility, the immediacy of its experience, and the interplay between volumes, materials, and perspectives would be involved. The most revolutionary component of Giedion's new space concept is the category of time, which, as Heynen notes, "proclaims and affirms time as a fourth dimension in a way that was quite unprecedented."⁸

The experience suggested by this architecture has a space-time character: it is not determined by the static qualities of a fixed space but an uninterrupted play of simultaneous experiences of varying (spatial) character – experiences that, traditionally speaking, could only be perceived one after the other. The typical features of modern architecture, then, are simultaneity, dynamism, transparency, and many-sidedness; it is a play of interpenetration and a suggestive flexibility.⁹

The development of new spatial relations between and within spaces as well as the development of the new space-time concept required not only the mobilisation of the entire means of production and the merging of all spheres of human activity in order to materialise the new way of living. Giedion's space-time concept in this regard was being articulated within the avant-garde discourse of *life-building*, since, as outlined by Detlef Mertins, it "aligned with modern science and modern art and [was] realised through new technology."¹⁰

The new space of modernity was to extend beyond the borders of architecture as both a professional field of construction and a traditional art. It was to embrace not only the production of physical spaces, but practices, emotions, social relationships – that is, all spheres of human activity that were simultaneously under the same process, making man an active producer of the new space, as well as its critical observer, and its satisfied inhabitant.

This approach was similar to the one introduced by Henri Lefebvre through the concept of a "total man." Developed in the *Critique of Everyday Life*, the notion of the "total man" aimed at overcoming the fragmentation of man's everyday existence, leading to his alienation not only from society but from his self. The wholeness of life, which through its very constitution tends towards the reconciliation of its own ambivalence, will open up the space for contemporary man to transform into a humanised man – an image of man

⁸ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 40.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mertins, Detlef. *Modernity Unbound*. (London: AA Publications, 2011), p. 6.

who is not torn from and by his living space and social practices, but who lives and experiences them as in harmony with himself. As Lefebvre summarises, “man’s unity with himself, in particular the unity of the individual and the social, is an essential aspect of the definition of the total man.”¹¹

In his book *Modernity Unbound* Detlef Mertins outlines both the universality and comprehensiveness of Giedion’s principles of the space-time concept, which suggests a totally different level of competence for architecture and a new role for its observer and resident:

Giedion treated space-time, like perspective before it, as a structuring condition or informing principle that defined the consciousness of the era and regulated not only art but also architecture, gardens and cities – the entire spatial world of humanity. In contrast to the limited representational and experimental possibilities of perspective, he presented it as an expanded optical and spatial realm, one of excited emotions, greater freedom and enhanced participation by the observer.

[...] Giedion considered the viewer as actively re-experiencing the formation of buildings and spaces, albeit in cognitive rather than strictly material terms. The expansion of experience made possible by the fluidity and openness of this condition was seen as exemplary of modernity.¹²

This description of architecture’s role as the constructor of the new reality was an invariant feature of all modes of functionalism, and in this regard, Giedion, who, as noted by David Deriu, “fervently advocated an architecture without boundaries and beyond style,”¹³ assigned an exclusive role to architecture in unison with Russian and West-European avant-gardists. Giedion stresses the importance of modernist architecture in materialising a reality that would be transformative for the whole humanity, as Deriu concludes in his article, “Montage and Modern Architecture: Giedion’s Implicit Manifesto”:

Giedion’s forward-looking claim was an attempt to uncover the hidden essence of modern architecture and bring it to a higher state of public consciousness.¹⁴

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¹¹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 73. Original cursive.

¹² Mertins, Detlef. *Modernity Unbound*, p. 49.

¹³ Deriu, David. “Montage and Modern Architecture: Giedion’s Implicit Manifesto.” In: *Architectural Theory Review*. 2007, 12 (1), p. 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 40.

Giedion traces the beginning of the new age from the point at which the new concept of architecture originates; that is, to 1830, and to the “moment of the transformation from handwork to industrial production.”¹⁵ He argues that the necessary conditions making possible the new architecture of the 1920s were formed through an evolutionary process of architectural development, thereby confirms his conviction “that modern architecture was a single unified historical phenomenon.” According to Detlef Mertins this meant that “having begun by challenging pre-existing codes, it succumbed to its own codification.”¹⁶

The articulation of a new concept of architecture emerged from the rational structures of nineteenth-century utilitarianism (e.g. bridges, train stations, factories, etc.), where technological progress received its material incarnation. Here, Mertins continues:

Conflating metaphors of organic growth and subconscious impulses, Giedion held that the new forms of iron construction – and the new forms of life (mass society) that emerged with them – began as kernels struggling within the old, gradually to assume their own identity. [...] This natural progression was, in his portrayal, hindered by the persistence of transition among architects, until the twentieth century, when they finally took up the task of bringing what had emerged in the dark subconscious of industrial labour into the clarity of a self-conscious architectural system, distinguished by a new kind of spatial experience.¹⁷

Unlike the Russian constructivists, who were more negative towards architectural history and its traditions, Giedion does not claim to have broken with the history and the past, instead he calls to “confront the past without prejudice”, for as he writes, “we have no fear that it may yet crush or confuse us.”¹⁸

In writing the history of architecture and technology throughout the centuries, Giedion-the-historian never conceived of the new architecture as a revolutionary clash with all previous experience. The dialectical nature of the nineteenth century, with the growing resistance to the rationalisation and purification of architectural forms through, on the one hand, their industrial and utilitarian use and the still persistent devotion to the reproduction of stylised façades on the other, had eventually led to the succession

¹⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁸ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 87.

of technological forms over the 'façade building' through an evolutionary process of *Durchdringung* (*interpenetration*). Sven-Olov Wallenstein summarises this as follows:

Tracing the development of glass and iron constructions through the 19th century, Giedion wants to locate a "constructive subconsciousness" that surfaces in the discussions on style and tectonics, and in the dialectic of core-form (technology) and art-form (aesthetic surface), which eventually was ushered into modern architecture in the breakthroughs of architects like Auguste Perret and Tony Garnier, and achieved a first state of perfection in Le Corbusier. This subconscious can now become a rational construction, Giedion claims, and for him this also implies that the oppositions that structured nineteenth-century architecture, both in theory and in practice, now may enter into a new fusion, or a state of mutual "interpenetration" (*Durchdringung*). This interpenetration points both to an integration of architectural forms (volumes, floors, interior and exterior, etc.), and to a transformed social sensibility at large, within which a "common task" that unites previously separated professions and social classes begin to emerge."¹⁹

Through Giedion's historical representation of the evolutionary origin of modernist architecture, the German mode of functionalism accepted gifts of technological progress from passed eras, promising to continue their development, harnessing them for working methods and pressing them into service as tools. Certainly, the future was the main concern for both the historians and architects of the German mode of functionalism. However, in contrast to the Russian constructivists, who acknowledged only the present and the future, West-European functionalists regarded the past as material for analysing the development process; what Giedion called the "tradition" could be methodologically useful. According to Giedion, the new architecture was not born in the twentieth century; it had been nurtured throughout the whole nineteenth century, hidden, and poorly articulated:

If we extract from that century those elements that live within us and are alive we see with surprise that we have forgotten our own particular development – if you will, our TRADITION.

Brushing away the decades of accumulated dust atop the journals, we notice that the questions that concern us today have persisted in unsettled discussion for more than a century.

¹⁹ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. *Nihilism, Art, Technology*. (Stockholm: AXL Books, 2011), p. 19.

We see at the same time, indeed with greater assurance, that the architecture we now describe as “new” is legitimate part of an entire century of development.²⁰

The attitude towards tradition and history as an evolutionary process was different to the expounded aesthetics of Russian constructivists. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 highlighted and stressed the radical discontinuity with the past and the need to divorce itself from former experiences and traditions. The novelty of the constructivist method was the invention of a new age to be celebrated here and now. Russian constructivists were not extracting a new method from the old traditions; they believed it was only from breaking with the entire architectural tradition that both a new aesthetics and a new working method could be developed.

Giedion never declared war on the architectural order, since he believed the order system had vanished with age and the demands of the new century would inevitably purify architecture from unnecessary decoration. In contrast, the Russian constructivists declared the order in architecture as the main enemy of functionalism, and it was a fight that should be actively embraced. For constructivism, the moment of the appearance of the new architecture was the moment of the break with the thousands year-old tradition of building. It was neither revealed nor extracted from under the dust and rubble of the nineteenth century, which for Giedion was worth studying, precisely for the reason to unveil and comprehend all necessary conditions for architecture that he called “new” in captions. The past is not the enemy for Giedion, rather (and as he writes) “[...] we do not fear the past. Past, present and future are for us an indivisible process.”²¹

The past is hence a storehouse containing all the necessary materials that should be studied and extracted for the use at present and in the future.

Instead of overcoming its connections to the past, Giedion suggests a translation of the obscure findings and achievements of the nineteenth century’s architecture, which he calls “subconscious,”²² into a comprehensible working method. The contemporaneity of modernist aesthetics is, according to Giedion, prepared by the entire existence of the past and is born out of it; this is valid for the formation of contemporary architecture too, since through its own interpenetration it follows the same laws as life processes do: “[...] construction still boasts the old pathos; underneath,

²⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 86.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

concealed behind facades, the basis of our present existence is taking shape.”²³

Hilde Heynen suggests that for Giedion the *Durchdringung* is “an essential characteristic of the new architecture,”²⁴ which makes it vital and sustainable in the life-building process due to “its capacity to interrelate different aspects of space with one another.”²⁵ This interpenetration involves not only spatial and purely architectural dimensions, but, as Heynen notes, “all kinds of metaphorical meanings associated with the word.”²⁶ She concludes that it leads to the elimination of architecture as a ‘traditional’ art field:²⁷

[...] a mutual relation is created between the new concept of space and a social reality that is also characterised by interpenetration in many areas. Due to Giedion’s rhetorical strategy, it becomes clear that *Durchdringung* stands for a weakening of hierarchical models on all levels – social as well as architectural. [...]

He suggests implicitly that architecture no longer has anything to do with objects: if it is to survive at all it must become part of a broader domain in which it is not so much objects as spatial relations and ratios that are of central importance.²⁸

This idea that tradition and the past are both the sources and the pre-conditions for modern architecture is one of the major differences between the modes of Russian and West European avant-garde aesthetics. This immediately introduces a bi-furcation in modernist architecture, between which the path offered by Giedion as the grounding theoretician of West-European (German) mode of functionalism is at variance with “the logic of the avant-garde, which was first of all one of negation and destruction.”²⁹

The Russian mode of functionalism declared the impotence and uselessness of the past before the demands of the present and future. The strict dividing line drawn by the Bolshevik Revolution and the creative power the

²³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 87.

²⁴ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 33.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁷ It should be noted that in his later writings, including *Mechanisation Takes Command*, Giedion restores the legacy of architecture as a classical art discipline.

²⁸ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 35.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

Russian constructivists possessed in proselytising their aesthetics in the immediate years after the Revolution, intensified the Russian mode.

In *Building in France* Giedion continues his polemics with the nineteenth century; since this period is not merely a source for instruments of the “new” architecture. The power of tradition that it embodies does not only generate the new. As a counter power – it holds back from the appropriation of the possibilities of the new age and of the very gifts that the industrial revolution prepared for the next era. The conservatism and inertia of the old cannot be easily replaced with a celebration of the future, as Giedion warns:

Inheritance is a part of us. It should not be neglected. Yet it ends bitterly if it assumes priority over emerging life, if it violates it. This is the case in the nineteenth century. Indeed, in the long run, such usurpation is only mock rule; subliminally, life compels form, but there emerges an oppressive atmosphere that time and again demands upheaval.³⁰

While Moisey Ginzburg had been developing the aesthetic theory of Russian functionalism, Sigfried Giedion had laid some of the most important grounds for the West-European (German) mode. West-European functionalism originated in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century; Russia was, culturally, economically, and politically a part of Europe. The split to national and geographic “functionalisms” did not begin until after the break of World War I; it reached its peak with the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Yet, the 1920s were a time when the avant-garde still perceived itself as a universal international method, while the liberating power of the Russian Revolution was praised and supported by many leftist European and American avant-garde thinkers. It was only by the 1930s – after the Nazis seized power in Germany, and Stalin turned his back on the avant-garde in Russia that the division took its ultimate form.

In 1928, when *Building in France* was published, Giedion saw the space of functionalist avant-garde Europe as inclusive of the new Soviet state’s territory. As a practicing architect, engineer, and a historian at the same time, Giedion reflected on the necessary universality of the functionalist approach, assuming that architects, and for that matter, any other practitioners, should be conscious about theoretical and philosophical aspects of their own practice; such aspects were no less important than the actual construction practice (an argument advanced by Henri Lefebvre in his

³⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 99.

Critique of Everyday Life). Referring to Le Corbusier as one of the greatest figures of the avant-garde, Giedion compares him to Vladimir Lenin in one and same paragraph:

Corbusier has exercised as much influence on our time as a theoretician (his impact in Latin America is similar to here) as he has by his buildings. For an age in which even the artist is allowed to make use of ratio, it is understandable that one can be at once both a populariser- and a creative individual, just as in politics – for instance, Lenin – one can be a journalist, theoretician, and state leader at the same time.³¹

For Giedion, Russian constructivism had remained a part of general European modernist discourse until the mid-1930s. The Soviet Union of the first post-revolutionary decade was seen by German modernists as a laboratory; an exemplary land in which the most radical modernist experiments could be realised. This made the young Soviet state an attractive place for many functionalists to come in search for both architectural practice and in intellectual exchange.³² Yet, even here, Russian constructivism was reflected upon as constituting a different mode of modernism, though there can hardly be found any detailed argument about what that difference amounted to.

For instance, Adolf Behne, in his book *The Modern Functional Building* (1926),³³ mentions several times that there is a difference between western and eastern types of functionalism, but at the same time he does not give any explanation of the origins of this difference, as if it were self-evident. For example, Behne never seeks to account for the difference in the modes of functionalism by drawing attention to the fact that Germany and Soviet Russia had contrasting political regimes. One way in which he seeks to draw out the difference is with respect to the level of intensity of these modes. At one point in his argument, Behne talks about how movement is incorporated into the nature of the functionalist method; taking inspiration in the machine, functionalist architecture turns into an ever-operating tool of the life-building process. He further states:

To be fully consistent the functionalist would make a building into a pure tool. He would necessarily arrive at a negation of form, as he could only

³¹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, pp. 186–187.

³² See my remarks about the international exchange between German and Soviet avant-gardists in *Part II, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

³³ Behne, Adolf. *Modern Functional Building*. (Santa Monica: Getty, Oxford UP, 1996)

completely achieve his ideal of absolute adaptation to the events in a space by means of movement.³⁴

Admitting that the desire for movement is integrated into the very method of functionalism, Behne notes, that in German architectural practice, it is “movement that of course can only be apparent, a surrogate of movement”.³⁵ Yet, he notes that in Russia there are literal attempts “to turn actual movement (change of place) into an architectural device,” referring to “the most radical and earliest attempt” of Tatlin’s model for the Monument to the Third International designed in 1919–1920 (fig. 1).³⁶

A further example is the opposition pair of the individual vs the collective. Here Behne notes that German modernist architects were “individualistically minded functionalists,”³⁷ distinguishing them not only from Russian constructivists, whose “dynamism is collectively oriented,”³⁸ but from other Western modernists, e.g. French, as well:

It is a feature common to the East and West that, in contrast to individualist Germany, they proceed from the collective. But the collective is fundamentally different here and there: France has a structurally articulated society; Russian is dominated by the masses.³⁹

For Behne, the differences in modes of Western and Eastern functionalism as well as the architectural means of their articulations – such as different approaches to floor plans, organisation of interior-exterior relations, general dynamics and forms of the buildings, etc. – originate from these differences in understanding the tensions between an individual and society, on the one side, and an individual and nature, on the other, of the public and the private, of a body’s relation to its surrounding space and its role within it, of the architectural means of expressing movement, etc. All the same it should be remembered that these aforementioned references to the Russian

³⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

³⁵ Behne, Adolf. *Modern Functional Building*, p. 125.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 126. Tatlin’s Tower was to be over 400 metres high and would consist of moving elements. At the bottom there would be a cube designating a venue for public events, which would rotate over the span of a year. Above the cube a pyramid would accommodate a housing executive and would make a full turn in a month. On top of the pyramid a glass cylinder would host a huge information centre, turning around its axis in 24 hours. At the tower’s apex there was to be a hemisphere with a radio centre placed inside.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

mode of functionalism were pointed out by Behne during the 1920s, from ‘within’ the era of modernism itself, of which both Russia and Germany were an integral part.

In his later works published after Soviet Union’s Stalinisation, Giedion makes no reference and gives no credit to Russian constructivism. Through hundreds of pages written on the history of European and American architecture and technology, he mentions neither its practitioners nor its theoreticians (apart from those who immigrated from Russia, such as, for example, Kandinsky and Malevich). For Giedion, Finland that borders with the Soviet Union, becomes “a borderland of our civilisation.”⁴⁰

Still, the functionalist method and its aesthetics originated and developed in a Europe that was not yet divided by World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, and in spite of all the turbulence, functionalism endured far into the twentieth century, surviving even after it had been abandoned in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. By the 1930s Sweden became the main heir of functionalism after having welcomed an exiled orphan to its land. Swedish functionalism acquired its most organic and humanised forms, later turning it into an attractive commercial product on the global markets of housing and design, of which the IKEA company would represent the most famous example.

While the founding theoretical and aesthetic principles of functionalism applied across its three modes, these particular variants became increasingly insular, trapped as they were within national borders after the dramatic political events of the first half of the twentieth century. One of the major theoretical differences, as noted above, concerned how Russian constructivists and their West European (German) counterparts related to the past, to tradition, and to heritage as well as to the means of dealing with them.

Common theoretical grounds remained significant, even though the interpretation of functionalism remained at its most intensive and radical within the Russian mode. This high level of intensity could be explained by the unstrained freedom to declare and promote avant-garde aesthetics as well as the complete absence of market and private commissioners, whose tastes and wallets could otherwise control popularity, quality, and the content of what parts of avant-garde ideology and aesthetics were distributed. The art of the avant-garde that supported and propagated the Revolution was much louder and more visible in Soviet cities (e.g. in the forms of

⁴⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 504.

published manifestoes, posters, monuments, and graphic designs than it was in Germany). On the other hand, larger social projects, such as the construction of mass housing estates almost immediately faced economic insolvency from the new Soviet state, while the country was embroiled in a civil war. This meant a rise in the number of new barracks rather than *dom-kommunas* with automatised “byt” and workers’ villages that initially were to become Soviet garden cities, but which in reality possessed neither the advantages of countryside living, nor the virtues of city comfort.⁴¹

Yet, at the level of investigating the theoretical basis of functionalism – both in Russia and Germany, as well as in the rest of Europe – the same features can be identified, not only methodologically and aesthetically but also with respect to the realisation of the production of new living spaces by means of space-time architecture: a life-building process requiring the mobilisation and merging of all spheres of human activity. All of these fundamentals were addressed by Giedion already in his *Building in France*, though they would be criticised in his later works.

In the sections below, an overview of the main grounds of both the functionalist method and its aesthetics, as articulated by Giedion through his study and analysis of architectural practice in Europe, will be provided. The explication of these grounding principles is significant since they determined further technological and aesthetical developments contributing to the production of new living space.

3.1. Industry, mechanisation, and the illusion of progress

Core to the functionalist method is a fascination with industrial achievements and an unlimited faith placed in the gifts of the technological advances of the age.

Already in *Building in France* Giedion claims for industrial production the leading societal role. He cites Henri de Saint-Simon, who understood that the central insight of the nineteenth century was that “the whole of society rests upon industry.”⁴² Industry forms and shapes the future of society “as construction anticipates the future expression of building.”⁴³ This was not always the case. Indeed, “the anonymous process of production and

⁴¹ See Chapter I, Part II.

⁴² Citation in: Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 88.

⁴³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 88.

the interconnected procedures that industry offers only now fully take hold of and reshape our nature.”⁴⁴

Two decades later Giedion writes a monograph on the history of mechanisation, describing how the rise of machines impacted on the way states, societies, and everyday life were formed: “*Mechanisation takes command*” (1948), as the title of Giedion’s book announces. Another important argument lays in the subtitle of the text: “*a contribution to anonymous history*”, which implies how the nature of transformations in life-building depends not on political will or individual genius, but it is a collective and evolutionary process of human development driven by the inevitable growth of political power and influence of technology on people’s lives. In the foreword to the *Mechanisation Takes Command*, Giedion underlines the objectives of his study:

At the origin of the inquiry stood the desire to understand the effects of mechanisation upon the human being; to discern how far mechanisation corresponds with and to what extent it contradicts the unalterable laws of the human being.⁴⁵

Giedion recognises that the human psyche is determined by certain unchangeable natural laws; the mind only adjusts and reacts to changing conditions, out of which mechanisation becomes the most powerful factor, causing conflicts to ensue between thought and feeling, as well as rational and irrational stances on human nature. Mechanisation affects life in the most radical ways. It is an anonymous process that cannot be easily reversed by any piece of political legislation or any will. The main task that Giedion sees in the study of mechanisation’s anonymous history is to understand that process as “continually shaping and reshaping the patterns of life.”⁴⁶

In his book *Critique of Everyday Life*, written in the same decade as Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*, Henri Lefebvre also highlights the dialectical and ambivalent character of technological progress that penetrates everyday life, causing “*uneven development* which characterises every

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⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation takes command. A contribution to anonymous history*, p. v.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. vi.

aspect of our era”⁴⁷ and “provoking new structural conflicts within the concrete life of society.”⁴⁸

Lefebvre, like Giedion, admits that “the optimistic idea of ‘Progress’ lacks flexibility and dialectical understanding.”⁴⁹ The problem is that for a long time talk of progress has been ongoing and uncritically accepted as a “spontaneous, objective” phenomenon: “like a process of nature” that “has not been guided by a Reason.”⁵⁰ This has led to the technological improvement and increased material efficiency of everyday life, on the one hand, but, on the other, to its further alienation. Thus, Lefebvre concludes that “human life has progressed: material progress, ‘moral’ progress – but that is only part of the truth. The deprivation, the alienation of life is its other aspect.”⁵¹

Giedion continues that even though mechanisation is the result and the consequence of human intellectual activity, it becomes an independent agent for which its ways of functioning and affecting humanity require analysis:

Mechanisation is an agent, like water, fire, light. It is blind and without direction of its own. It must be canalised. Like the powers of nature, mechanisation depends on man’s capacity to make use of it and to protect himself against its inherent perils. Because mechanisation sprang entirely from the mind of man, it is more dangerous to him. Being less easily controlled than natural forces, mechanisation reacts on the senses and on the mind of its creator.⁵²

The problem of controlling the processes of mechanisation is one of the most urgent for Giedion; it “demands an unprecedented superiority over the instruments of production.” Mechanisation should be “subordinated to human needs.”⁵³

The unleashing of this process ultimately alters relationships between the human body and its living space, securing and deepening the split between thought and feeling. Mechanisation “is no longer a replacement of the human hand by the machine, but an intervention into the substance of

⁴⁷ Henri, Lefebvre. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 714.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

organic as well as of inorganic nature” that intervenes directly into organic substance,⁵⁴ affecting the whole of that being:

Here the demand for production delves into the springs of life, controls generation and procreation, influences growth, alters structure and species. Death, generation, birth, habitat undergo rationalisation, as in the later phases of the assembly line. The host of unknowns that these processes involve makes uneasiness hard to dispel. Organic substance or inorganic, it is experimentation with the very roots of being.⁵⁵

Giedion finished work on his main book shortly after the Second World War had ended. By the year of publication, in 1948, nuclear bombs had already destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the full inhumanity of the Nazi concentration camps had been revealed. Giedion would thus later admit that humanity had failed to take control of the process of mechanisation and did not make use of the possibilities offered by technological progress:

Never has mankind possessed so many instruments for abolishing slavery. But the promises of a better life have not been kept. All we have to show so far is a rather disquieting inability to organise the world, or even to organise ourselves. Future generations will perhaps designate this period as one of mechanised barbarism, the most repulsive barbarism of all.⁵⁶

Lefebvre expresses a similar concern when speaking of the ‘*scientific barbarity*’⁵⁷ of the Nazi concentration camps, which serve as an example of the ultimate end of absurdity that rationality and reason had reached, once they descended into uncontrolled mechanisation, and once the utter dehumanisation of all aspects of human existence was realised in the name of the progress.⁵⁸

The failure of progress to secure a sustainable world order and to at least support the sustainability of human existence is due to the direction of its very driving force, namely its unwavering gaze onto the future. Giedion

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⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 44.

⁵⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 715.

⁵⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 243.

⁵⁸ See “What is Possible”, the final section of the first volume of Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life*, pp. 228–252.

remarks that processes of mechanisation can be best observed in the United States, where “the new methods of production were first applied, and where mechanisation is inextricably woven into the pattern of thought and customs,”⁵⁹ concluding that in modernity, “we never look backward. We look forward.”⁶⁰

Giedion sees that in this turning away from the past and towards an eternal striving for the future, history is itself killed, and with “the discarding of time, both past and future” happens.⁶¹ It is in that separation with both past and experience from which the new barbarism, first articulated by Benjamin – himself a fascinated reader of Giedion’s *Building in France* – enters the stage. Giedion calls it the “*mechanised barbarism, the most repulsive barbarism of all.*”⁶² The impoverishment of experience fully revealed itself after the First World War; as Benjamin wrote, it “descended on mankind with this tremendous development of technology.”⁶³ But, it was the Second World War that pushed the implications of this process to the outer reaches of its limits.

As a historian, Giedion was concerned with the attitude of the modernist age, to which “only the present-day matters” towards the history and the past: “Later periods will not understand these acts of destruction, this murder of history.”⁶⁴

Disagreement with history and divorce from the past was one of the most controversial principles undergirding the aesthetics of Russian constructivism. If Giedion, one of the major ideologues of West-European functionalism, never negated history, then Moisey Ginzburg, a leading theoretician of its Russian mode, was forced to come to terms with history when defending the methodology of constructivism during the ‘creative discussion’ from the early 1930s.⁶⁵ When a strategy of ‘heritage appropriation’ was adopted by emerging representatives of Socialist realism under the directive by Stalin, Ginzburg claimed that the universality of the func-

⁵⁹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History.*, p. v.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 715. Original cursive.

⁶³ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty”, p. 732.

⁶⁴ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History.*, p. vi.

⁶⁵ See *Part I, Chapter I* of the present study for a review of the ‘creative discussion’ that took place in Russia during the early thirties between the constructivism of the avant-garde and the proponents of Socialist realism.

tionalist method could aesthetically and constructively comprehend the mastery of heritage. He would not however see functionalism as an evolutionary product of previous ages (as is the case with Giedion), but rather as a revolutionary invention of a present, born from the artistic act of liberating the creative idea from its ties to history, ages, and styles.

3.2. Dealing with history and age

Giedion begins *Mechanisation Takes Command* by defining history as “a magical mirror.”⁶⁶ Contemporaneity is itself the reflection in that mirror; material objects should provide an interpretation of the collected experiences of the past in a way that is most suitable for the present and remains in the service of humanity. In *Space, Time and Architecture*, his iconic work first published in 1940, Giedion defines any contemporary architecture “worthy of the name” as recognising its main task to be “the interpretation of a way of life valid for our period.”⁶⁷

Giedion believes that functionalism, symptomatic of its own time, develops into a new tradition, becoming a worthy interpretation of the demands of its own time as “many signs show that this is in the doing.”⁶⁸ Giedion thus accepts an emerging new architectural tradition as part of a longer historical evolutionary process, originating from the subconscious debris of the technological development from the last decades of the nineteenth century. This had fused both artistic and industrial means in the production of space, a point taken up by Wallenstein:

The radical interpenetration of space proposed by Giedion, welding together motifs from a discussion underway since the final third of the 19th century, and heralding the fusion of organic and the technological in terms of a new consciousness of “construction”, may be read like a prism from which later developments will emerge as so many refractions.⁶⁹

According to Giedion, the rational architecture of the utilitarian objects of nineteenth century had normalised the wide and open use of new materials, such as glass, iron, and concrete. All of these prepared the ground for the

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⁶⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation takes command. A contribution to anonymous history*, p.2.

⁶⁷ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. xxxiii.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. *Nihilism, Art, Technology*, p. 19.

revolutionary emergence of modern architecture as well as for its application on an industrial scale.

This linear historical development of modernist architecture as a new tradition could not be accepted by the Russian constructivists, who praised the end of history and argued against the development of any new architectural tradition, which in turn would inevitably create a new style – which meant a set of certain norms, methods, and forms that could be visually and structurally identified not only with the produced architectural reality, but also with a certain historical period. Any style inevitably reaches a point of decline. Constructivists, on the other hand, argued not only for the timelessness of their method, but for the existence and development outside of chronology and outside of history. In other words, one of the main concerns of Russian constructivists was to make the periodisation of the new architectural method impossible in both formalistic and constructive ways, while for Giedion, any architecture, including modernism, was an “index to a period”, as architecture “is so bound up with the life of a period as a whole.”⁷⁰

Giedion does not mean, of course, that architecture only remains a reflection of its age; after all, architecture extends its existence beyond those specific historical conditions that shaped it; it is an “independent organism,” which possesses “its own character and its own continuing life,” and whose influence “may continue after its original environment has altered or disappeared.”⁷¹

The reference and allegoric comparison to the organic world of animals is characteristic of the German mode of functionalism, in contradistinction to the Russian mode that opposed nature to the world of machines as the main source for the new architecture.

When, for example, architectural historian Adolf Behne, who was working on *The Modern Functional Building* at the same period speaks about the standardisation of the means by which the new living space is produced or the problem of movement and spatial interpenetration within modernist constructions, he does not only acknowledge the potential of modern industrial methods. Throughout his writings Behne often refers to nature as the source of examples for the existence of mechanical and standardised principles of the spatial organisation of “masses”, such as with the mass tenement of the honeycomb.⁷²

⁷⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷² Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*. (Santa Monica: Getty, Oxford UP, 1996), p. 124.

The German mode of functionalism treats physical space as a living organism that does not exist independently from the human bodies that inhabit it, but as if they were its inseparable parts. Adolf Behne outlines the high anthropomorphism of German functionalism; such an outcome is dialectically reached through the declared dehumanisation and mechanisation of the living space, which, in reality, as Behne states, leads to the humanisation and anthropomorphism of the architecture.⁷³ Developed by modernists, this method opened up for new ambiguous relationships between the individual, on the one hand, and society and nature, on the other. According to Behne, the individual exists in perennial tension within and between the two poles of the natural and social worlds:

The human being stands between nature and society. He opts for human community and thus places himself in a certain state of tension with nature. He opts for nature and is in a certain state of tension with society.

Expressed differently, the human being bases his actions and work either on the fact of the awareness of human community and his membership in it, or on a feeling of unity with nature. As a creator he works from the whole to the individual or from the individual to the whole!⁷⁴

Both Lefebvre and Giedion argue for the reconciliation of “the whole” of a ‘total man’ through the reconciliation of his living spaces and everyday living practices with himself. According to Lefebvre, humanity can fully develop only once all members of the human species obtain the wholeness of their being in all its forms: material, intellectual, social, and spiritual:

Human advance and progress only take their sense (in other words both their *meaning* and their *direction*) from the notion of the *total man*. Every moment of history, every stage accomplished through history, constitutes a whole; so does every partial activity, every power which has been achieved practically; every *moment* also contains its grain of human reality which will appear more and more clearly during the subsequent process of development.⁷⁵

Even if it inclined towards a certain individualism, the German mode of functionalism approached the wholeness of being by forging, even if in a problematic way, significant relations with history and the past. Unlike

⁷³ Ibid., p. 128.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Henri, Lefebvre. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 67–68.

Ginzburg, “tradition” and “style” were for Giedion never taboo, rather they remain natural components of any epoch, within which architecture is created; they give visualisation to an interpretation of reality transformed into architectural objects. Not that “tradition” and “style” are the only components that make architecture possible:

Architecture is not exclusively an affair of styles and forms, nor is it completely determined by sociological or economic conditions. It has life of its own, grows or dwindles, finds new potentialities and forgets them again.⁷⁶

The Russian avant-garde was equally hostile towards the notion of style; indeed, in the Russian context, the question of “style” was highly politicised. An architectural style was understood no less than as the visual manifestation of a defeated political ideology; in direct opposition, the avant-garde subscribed to an ideology of the styleless, which the liberatory power of the Revolution would unleash. A war was declared on all traditional architectural forms, primarily, war was waged on the order system that signified the defeated ideology of Imperialism. The purity of liberated architecture, shorn of all fads and fashions, would be in a synergetic relation with the purity of the Revolution’s own liberating powers. The war waged in architectural circles was thus not only formalist, but political, and ideological as well. Though existing in the western aesthetics of modernism, the extent of the repudiation of “style” was nowhere as fervent as in the Russian mode of functionalism. In *Space, Time and Architecture*, Giedion suggests retreating from all notions of style that circulated in and around the nineteenth century; any such meanings “open the door to a formalistic approach.”⁷⁷ The functionalist method, on the other hand, “is an approach to the life that slumbers unconsciously within all of us.”⁷⁸

Giedion leaves architectural space to adjust to the changing reality, to develop its material existence as well as to secure its legitimacy in the future. With this more tolerant attitude towards time and tradition lays another difference between the aesthetics of Russian and Western functionalism: history is a continuous flow for Giedion. While architecture does not necessarily tie to the period of its construction, it nonetheless belongs as much to the past as it does to the future. As a result, Giedion sees no significant conflict between contemporary architecture and the architecture of previous

⁷⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.

epochs; there is no need to murder history through the destruction of monuments of bygone epochs and defeated political regimes. While Giedion's approach is evolutionary, the constructivists are revolutionary. Both approaches praise modernist architecture as being the quintessential achievement of their own contemporaneity. Where Giedion differs from the Russian constructivists is that the culmination of modernist architecture results from centuries of evolutionary developments. Hilde Heynen explains:

His outlook is based on the assumption that a single vast evolutionary pattern underlies the history of architecture and that this evolution develops more or less in a linear fashion, culminating in twentieth-century modern architecture, which is presented by Giedion as "a new tradition."⁷⁹

For Russian constructivists, the new forms and aesthetics of architecture should not only be the most appropriate interpretation of contemporary reality as materialised through the most advanced technologies, but they should also index the success of these new aesthetics and forms over and above historical and traditional examples. The façades of old architectural styles must be overcome in contemporary architecture. The form and structure through which constructivist architecture translates its aesthetics and ideology should not only be constructive for both the present and the future, but at the same time they should be destructive of the past. When in the 1930s the Soviet state returned to a glorification of the Roman classical style in architecture, Russian constructivism, with its purported "universal" method, could not bridge the gap with history that it had itself instituted.

I would like to suggest that one of the principal reasons for the failure of the Russian avant-garde was owing to Russian constructivism's understanding of history as simply that which is necessarily *the past* and thus should be entirely overcome and negated. The negation of the past and the necessity to break with history is a trope that is repeated during the whole twentieth century in Russia, and still abides today. It remains one of the most dramatic consequences of the Bolshevik Revolution, apart from the tragic consequences for the Soviet people. For even today the Russian state does not allow its citizens either to come to an agreement with their history or to produce ideology that is not entitled for the inevitable obliteration in the future. Negation is what ties Russian avant-garde aesthetics to its own

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⁷⁹ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 29.

period of the 1920s, thereby making it an index for that *historical* period – the very thing against which the avant-garde initially fought so vociferously.

3.3. Collectivism

In an attempt to refrain from using the notion of style, Giedion offers the alternative term of *collective design*. Already in *Building in France*, he claims that the architecture of the nineteenth century was characterised by either “a bad conscience or with uncertainty.”⁸⁰ In either case, it had led to an eclectic architectural language. The nineteenth century was a period when styles dictated devotion to surfaces, producing “nothing but empty shells”:

Again and again one tries to find “style” without realising that these formalistic experiments were condemned to failure from the start. Surface frills. The age of delimited styles based on handicraft ended decisively at the moment when the notion of an isolated architecture became untenable.⁸¹

Yet, both the process of industrialisation and the rapidly growing mechanisation of life had formed in the nineteenth century what Giedion calls a “strange interpenetration of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies.”⁸² The boundaries of the architectural field were greatly extended from the production of buildings and complexes to the production of space that was no longer outlined and limited by walls and fences and that transformed into a sort of moving and changing process enacted through collective efforts. Giedion notes that by the 1920s it was hard to define what belongs to architecture; he thus asks, “where does it begin, where does it end?”⁸³

The traditional field of architecture, which together with sculpture and painting had been held in an isolated position, now overlapped with other fields that participated in the construction of city infrastructures as well as in the organisation of city dwellers’ everyday lives. The avant-garde thus broke with the long held assumptions surrounding the organisation of living spaces, a move that is summed up by Hilde Heynen: the hope was “that architecture might no longer limit itself to the design of representative buildings but should develop instead into a more comprehensive discipline

⁸⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 99.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

that is focusing upon the whole environment.”⁸⁴ Heynen goes on to add that “herewith Giedion formulates as a goal for architecture its breaking out of the limits imposed upon it by tradition and by its functioning as an institution.”⁸⁵

Giedion declares that the dominance of surface over the production of space had been overcome, giving way to a “fluid transition of things.”⁸⁶

We are beginning to transform the surface of the earth. We thrust beneath, above, and over the surface. Architecture is only a part of this process, even if a special one. Hence there is no “style”, no proper building style. Collective design.⁸⁷

Both Western and Russian functionalism shared this understanding of architecture as the main organiser and producer of space.

For his part, Adolf Behne declares architecture’s revolutionary “return to purpose”, stating that throughout the centuries of architectural practice “formal considerations outweighed considerations of purpose.”⁸⁸ In *The Modern Functional Building* he explicates three stages of modernist architecture development: the first declares a turn from constructing a façade to building a house (“*No Longer a Façade, but a House*”);⁸⁹ this is followed by a second stage that shifts from the purpose of building a house to organising space (“*No Longer a House but Shaped Space*”);⁹⁰ and finally a third stage in which the life-building concept as the central methodological and aesthetic claim of modernism is introduced— “*No Longer Shaped Space but Designed Reality*.”⁹¹

While specifically proposed by Behne, this evolutionary model of modernism, according to which the production of living space is transformed from façade building into the organisation of reality applies more generally to the development of *all* modes of functionalist aesthetics. Functionalist principles were implemented through the industrial means of architectural production and by means of collective design, which changed both the architectural organisation of space and the architectural relations

⁸⁴ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 37.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 90.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 117.

comprising this newly produced space for, on the one hand, the humans inhabiting it and, on the other, for the society this architecture helps to shape.

While Russian constructivists did not use the term “collective design”, what they clearly recognised was the necessity and the value of collective practice in the construction of new architecture. Collectivism within the Russian mode of functionalism did not necessarily mean the joint labour of many architects working together – not even the collaboration between specialists from various fields. Instead, what it promoted was the collective use of achievements in all spheres of knowledge, art, and first of all technology, in order to produce new spaces through the use of the new means of architecture – what in Russia was called *zhisnestroyenie*, and Giedion referred to as “collective design.”

Through the demolition of stylistic and material “arbitrary boundaries,”⁹² Giedion called for the liberation of architecture from the isolationism of the nineteenth century. He advises to “seek connection and interpretation.”⁹³ Here Giedion essentially describes the same methodology that was propagated by the Russian constructivists: the use of material and social reality to produce an object that reveals its original function. Construction should be an interpretation of reality that considers the whole complexity of conditions forming it.

The abolition of the formalist approach leads to an elimination of the dominance of forms. As a consequence, both order and décor become secondary considerations, for fear of obscuring the openness of a building’s design. Giedion writes that “in the general disposition of plans and in the design of constructional systems arising from these new situations is to be found the new expression as a whole; the details will then follow.”⁹⁴

At the core of the functionalist method – in all of its modes – rests an understanding of building construction as of the organisation of life and the production of a new living space. Functionalism is thus irreducible to the development of a certain type of building that performs a specific kind of function. However, the difference between Russian and Western approaches to this new method of *life-building* lay in the following: while Russian constructivists considered it a tool that made possible a divorcing from previous ages of architectural heritage, Giedion on the other hand believed

⁹² Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 90.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

that he was witness in his own time of the evolution of architectural practice merging entirely with technological progress, and finally reaching the point “where building falls in line with the general life process.”⁹⁵

Both this new architectural method and the new aesthetics demanded a collective effort to achieve the necessary breakthrough that would make new ways of producing space possible. In Russia, collective effort *per se* became synonymous with revolution, while in Western Europe it was to be undertaken by virtue of the fact that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the time had come for a change in architectural paradigm – reality itself was demanding this paradigm shift.

In his later works, Giedion revised the reformatory potential of progress – this was discussed earlier. After the end of World War II, modernist thinkers such as Giedion and Lefebvre were united in their disappointment regarding the inadequacies of the Revolution as a transformative tool of reality. Their disappointment made them turn to modernity as a resource on its own account, of which socialist revolutions remained decisive, and yet historical parts.

Yet, in his early manifesto, Giedion sees the nineteenth century as at one and the same time the period of crisis of traditional means and methods of ‘styled’ architecture as well as the cradle within which the functionalist method was being nurtured. The beginning of the 1900s would mark, precisely, the ripening of time and the emergence of functionalism from its long period of incubation:

In the nineteenth century the struggle between the functional architecture of rationalism and academicism always ended with the academy winning. The particular time was simply not yet ripe, either in its means or in its knowledge, to prevail. It cannot be denied: the past proved itself to be stronger. Only today can the past be finally put aside, for a new way of living (*Lebensform*) demands a breakthrough. This new way of living is to a large degree equivalent to the expression anticipated by, and latent within, the constructions of the nineteenth century.⁹⁶

The method was prepared and nurtured during the nineteenth century. Through decades of struggle against formalism, but with support from technology, the functionalist methodology could be practiced with the complex use and consideration of all possible means of producing and organising

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⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

spaces that are free from any limiting norms and styles. More this work ought to be undertaken collectively; to borrow a formulation of Giedion's, "without a collective will there can be no architecture."⁹⁷

3.4. New materials for life-building

The demands of the time and of collective design could, according to Giedion, only be realised through the effective use of technological achievements. Foremost among them, the possibility of the standardisation of production was stressed by both Russian and West-European modernists. Indeed, this argument is a central plank of Giedion's analysis surrounding how the new tradition of modernist architecture emerged. A point noted by Hilde Heynen:

Giedion defends the thesis that the most important contributions of the nineteenth century lay in the domain of iron and glass structures and in working with concrete. These technologies formed as it were the "subconscious" of architecture, which first became manifest in the twentieth century due to the New Building.⁹⁸

The utilitarian approach to the organisation of space that the functionalist method retains, required not only the mastering of new materials such as reinforced concrete and iron, but demanded a reconsideration of existing utilitarian and purely functional types of construction, such as factories and warehouses as well as various machines. Moisey Ginzburg, in his book of 1924, *Stil' i Epokha [The Style and Epoch]*, praises the machine as fuelling contemporary art,⁹⁹ while Behne welcomes the arrival of the era of machine aesthetics, with which "every attentive observer senses a close connection", and which, he admits, is "completely new in the history of architecture."¹⁰⁰ Yet, those buildings traditionally left outside of the field of architecture as art, and whose role in the formation of the aesthetics of the urban space was far from being recognised, became an important source of inspiration, and functioned as the 'raw material' for the aesthetics of modernist space production. Giedion declares that "we must concern ourselves with this raw material: with grey buildings, market halls, warehouses, exhibitions.

⁹⁷ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 199.

⁹⁸ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 30.

⁹⁹ See *Part I, Chapter I* of the present thesis.

¹⁰⁰ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 99.

However unimportant they may appear to be for the aesthetic titillation: in them lies the kernel!”¹⁰¹

Even while revealing the history of disillusionment about technological progress, Giedion’s *Mechanisation Takes Command* is an elaborate study of how mechanisation and standardisation became, as Mirjana Lozanovska puts it, “integral to modernisation.”¹⁰² The history of everyday objects and practices as well as the very organisation of life, which is altered and transformed by mechanisation, provides an understanding of the functionalist working method, alongside its aesthetic. Modernist method and aesthetic includes both the architectural practice that builds and organises living space and those components that remain outside of the professional field of architecture and rest at the periphery of its visibility as an artistic field. Lozanovska proposes that

Mechanisation therefore gives a picture of the splits in the subject of architecture from outside of architecture. *Mechanisation* also presents a structural value of the mirror-stage in discourse in that it brings to the foreground buried and repressed material within the discipline.¹⁰³

This split was already proclaimed by Giedion in his 1928 manifesto, *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*. There he confirms and re-affirms the importance of utilitarian constructions as well as the use of new materials in the production of living space. Furthermore, he extols the overall orientation of the functionalist method with respect to the needs of the population; for Giedion, this meant establishing a new “HOUSING FORM.”¹⁰⁴ Architecture takes a leading role in advancing a new housing form, one that is in fact “emerging before the social structure is ready for it.”¹⁰⁵

The production of living space in a form of a new dwelling is conceptualised by Giedion in his manifesto *Befreites Wohnen* (1929). In this text he summarises the major achievements of his own contemporaneity in regard to modern housing construction and its major organisational prin-

¹⁰¹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 99.

¹⁰² Lozanovska, Mirjana. “Thought and Feeling in Giedion’s *Mechanisation Takes Command*.” In: Brown, Alexandra & Leach, Andrew (eds.). *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 30, Open*. 2013 (2), p. 881.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 101. (capitalisation in the original)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

principles.¹⁰⁶ Among these major principles are the liberation of the living space from high production costs and hence high rent, as well as from all the weight of traditional house-building, which turns a home into a fortress isolated from outer physical, urban, and social spaces.

These liberating principles undergirding the new dwelling construction and the means by which the new *Befreites Wohnen* is to be produced are summarised by Hilde Heynen in the following way:

[The proposal for a new housing form] is feasible, according to Giedion, when building is organised on an industrial basis, so that building costs and rents are reduced. Houses should not look like fortresses; rather, they should allow for a life that requires plenty of light and wants everything to be spacious and flexible. Houses should be open; they should reflect the contemporary mentality that perceives all aspects of life as interpenetrating: “Today we need a house, that corresponds in its entire structure to our bodily feeling as it is influenced and liberated through sports, gymnastics, and a sensuous way of life: light, transparent, movable. Consequentially, this open house also signifies a reflection of the contemporary mental condition: there are no longer separate affairs, all domains interpenetrate”¹⁰⁷.

[...] Openness, lightness, and flexibility are associated here with other slogan words of the New Building: rationality, functionality, industry, experiment, *Existenzminimum*.¹⁰⁸

The overarching principles of the *Befreites Wohnen* are articulated through the three German words that appear on the cover: *LICHT*, *LUFT*, *OEFFNUNG*. They are, as André Tavares describes, “loosely arranged over an image of a couple enjoying the sun on the terrace of a modern house”, “musically mixing the ideas of air, light, and openness.”¹⁰⁹ The bookcover is a visualised manifesto of its conceptual content that is advertised through its pages by means of images of the liberated living spaces, which are placed in opposition to the ‘prison-like’ interiors of the past and juxtaposed with declarative and educational text. The book design is introduced in a rather conventional avant-garde manner, which, again, following André Tavares, “is visually and technically derivative because it makes reference to German

¹⁰⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Befreites Wohnen*. (Zürich – Leipzig: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1929)

¹⁰⁷ Citation translated by Heynen from: Giedion, Sigfried. *Befreites Wohnen*. (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1985), p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, pp. 36–37.

¹⁰⁹ Tavares, André. *The Anatomy of the Architectural Book*. (Zurich – Canadian Centre for Architecture: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), p. 63.

and Soviet models that had already been exploited much more skilfully by others.”¹¹⁰

Air and light here become not only the components of the new living space, but its building material. A category of the movement is highlighted by Giedion in his manifesto as a necessary means to the organisation of a home space.¹¹¹

The *Befreites Wohnen* manifesto is not a revolutionary invention of entirely new principles for the production of the living space, but rather a summary of actual modernist achievements in mass housing construction, the aim of which is to improve the life of the many.

The liberation of domesticity from all ‘imprisoning’ ties to traditional routines of everyday living through the use of modernist technological and aesthetical achievements was tantalisingly close to becoming an eye-opening reality for the masses. A random couple depicted on the *Befreites Wohnen*’s cover is meant to indicate that *any* couple could and should have the possibility of living in this liberated space. The cover image demonstrates that a border between the home’s interior and exterior should blur: camera captures a light glass screen that separates a room full of sunshine from a terrace – an outer space that a couple can enjoy without *leaving* their home space. This image depicts the new aesthetics of the living space, which has been propagated by functionalists in various parts of the world, as Behne writes:

[...] with the turn of the century came a victorious breakthrough: appreciation of light, conciseness, and clarity. It opened people’s eyes to the beauty of things suited to their purpose. Defying expectations, sensibilities refused to find beauty in the superfluous and willingly followed the logic of the functional.¹¹²

The use of glass, metal and ferro-concrete allows for not only the realisation of this new aesthetics but for the development of new relationships between inner and outer spaces, where, as Giedion claims, “the will requires a strong interpenetration and interrelationship of all parts and connection to the outside.”¹¹³ The solidity of walled boundaries is demolished, allowing for open plans, for the flow of light and air as well as for a new understanding

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¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Befreites Wohnen*. (Zürich – Leipzig: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1929), p. 5.

¹¹² Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 88.

¹¹³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 177.

of spatial organisation itself. Precisely, all of this is what Giedion suggests as the grounding principles for a “new housing form” in his first manifesto, *Building in France*:

Our inner attitude today demands of the house:

Greatest possible overcoming of gravity. Light proportions. Openness, free flow of air: things that were first indicated in an abstract way by the constructional designs of the past century.¹¹⁴

In *Befreites Wohnen*, – his next manifesto, Giedion further articulates the demands for a new mass-produced living space:

WE WANT TO BE LIBERATED FROM:

the house with eternal value
 the house with expensive rent
 the house with thick walls
 the house as the monument
 the house with high costs to enslave us
 the house that exploits women as cheap labour.

INSTEAD WE NEED:

the cheap house
 the open house
 the house that makes our life easier.¹¹⁵

The boundaries between inner and outer spaces are eternally shifting, allowing, as David Deriu writes, for “a fluid transition between interior and exterior, rendering the opposition between space and plasticity obsolete.”¹¹⁶ Giedion claims that this achievement is only possible through the use of new materials and the constructions that they allow to assemble. Here Deriu notes:

For Giedion, the joining of structural elements made of iron and concrete was the necessary precondition to attain the relational qualities of *neues bauen*. The assemblage of connective parts and the combination of modular units were inextricably bound up with modern construction techniques. As

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

¹¹⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Befreites Wohnen*. (Zürich – Leipzig: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1929), p. 5. Translation is taken from the “book (design) stories” project at [wiedler.ch: http://wiedler.ch/felix/books/story/95](http://wiedler.ch/felix/books/story/95) Accessed on 01.10.2018.

¹¹⁶ Deriu, David. “Montage and Modern Architecture: Giedion’s Implicit Manifesto,” p. 44.

a consequence, the dynamic sense of space engendered by airy buildings had major implications for the experience of architecture.¹¹⁷

In his description of the first apartment building in Paris – 25 bis rue Franklin, built in 1903, – Giedion highlights the main breakthroughs achieved with the use of ferro concrete. The use of this new material introduced a totally different monumentality to the house as well as demonstrating a new relationship of its structure to the space that is organised by it.¹¹⁸ Among those achievements comes, first of all, the shattering of the façade, as it is “hollowed out, recedes in depth, springs forward again... The whole façade is in movement.”¹¹⁹ The roof that “already carries the rudiments of a garden”, the iron constructions of the base “that touch the ground only at points”, the ground floor itself with the opened shop windows that reveal its lightness to the streets – eliminate the massive monumentality of a nineteenth century building.¹²⁰

Giedion affirms the ways in which the new principles of construction and the materials, which had first been used for industrial building during the nineteenth century, interpenetrate one another in the field of modern housing construction. He argues for their enormous liberating and reforming potential for the domestic sphere, which, in turn, should be integrated into an all-embracing living space as a professionally and efficiently produced habitat of a modern man. Detlef Mertins calls these reflections on practice – similar to those of Auguste Perret, Tony Garnier, and Le Corbusier the production of the “privileged medium for materialising new forms of life during the first decades of the twentieth century.”¹²¹ Such ideas altered at their very core the production of living space and dwelling.¹²²

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¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 44–45.

¹¹⁸ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p.154.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Mertins, Detlef. *Modernity Unbound*, p. 89.

¹²² As Mertins writes: “According to Giedion, where the earlier generation had successfully addressed the importance of utilitarian buildings, it was the task of the current generation, among whom he recognised Le Corbusier as leader, ‘to take the problem of dwelling form individual dilettantism and pseudo-handicraft production into the realm of industrial standardisation through the most precise comprehension of living functions’. Beginning with the proposition that the house must be thoroughly bathed in air, Giedion portrays Le Corbusier’s distinctive achievement as having reinterpreted spare concrete construction into a new form of dwelling, an ‘eternally open house’ – his concrete ‘Dom-ino’ skeleton – whose generalisable applicability he had demonstrated in his housing estate in Pessac-Boardeauz, France, of 1924–27.” (Mertins, 2011: 89–90).

The gifts of the long evolution of technological progress could finally be reaped in the twentieth century: the new materials of glass and metal became the prophets of the future architecture, along with ferro-concrete, which, according to Giedion, “attempts to break up the rigid relationship of support and load.”¹²³ Moreover, the re-discovered aesthetical potential of the machine, which secures the *utilitas* as the basic ground of the functionalist method, was a core instrument of the modernist architecture. Besides these materials, “light”, “air”, “openness”, and “movement” became ultimately necessary non-material components in constructing new living spaces that would be liberated from the darkness, stuffed air, and isolation. In this regard, the appropriation of living spaces and the development of a new aesthetics constituted a single indivisible process in all parts of Europe before it was interrupted with almost synchronicity in both Germany and Russia. Even though institutionalised functionalism immigrated to the United States during the 1930s, its method and aesthetics lived on in Europe in its Swedish mode.

3.5. The split between thought and feeling

In *Space, Time and Architecture* as well as in *Mechanisation Takes Command* Giedion approaches the question concerning the rational and irrational, itself relevant to the problem of constructing the new living space. One of his main concerns is the growing rift between thought and feeling, a rupture that becomes increasingly pronounced as processes of mechanisation deepen and infiltrate into all spheres of life during the interwar period. As Lozanovska notes:

In contrast to ideas and of a new aesthetics, new technologies, new ideas about space and form that were used as frameworks for a history in the period between the wars, Giedion has considered the period between 1918 and 1939 as the time of full mechanisation.¹²⁴

A similar concern is expressed by Henri Lefebvre in his *Critique of Everyday Life*. Drawing on the theory of alienation, Lefebvre identifies experiences of estrangement that have their genesis in the economic and socio-political

¹²³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*. Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art, p. 200.

¹²⁴ Lozanovska, Mirjana. “Thought and Feeling in Giedion’s *Mechanisation takes command*, p. 886.

conditions denotative of developed bourgeois societies. As Michel Trebitsch comments, however, Lefebvre's understanding of alienation "is not only economic, it is the inability in all areas of life to grasp and to think the *other*."¹²⁵ The other in this case is the figure of the proletarian, who is deprived of the possibility of owning the products of his labour, disconnected from social and political life, and, finally, estranged to himself. The bourgeoisie is not immune from the effects of alienation either. Precisely, their alienation from the working class leads to a fragmentation of their own lives; cut adrift from the whole of society, the bourgeoisie is condemned to a partial and artificial form of existence.¹²⁶

To simply think the *other* from the perspective of the bourgeoisie is not sufficient to overcome this alienation, however. Lefebvre argues that such a thinking must be fully embodied: one must live as that other in order to understand the mechanisms that make possible a rehabilitation of the wholeness of existence ("There really is no substitute for participation!").¹²⁷ The restoration of the lost totality requires a total change of life in its everyday practice through the combination of political, economic, social, and cultural means, as Trebitsch notes:

This quest for totality, which was to lead Lefebvre from 'philosophical revolution' to Marxism, is none other than the quest for a theoretical method capable of reconciling thought and life, of changing life completely, of producing one's life as one creates a *work*.¹²⁸

Lefebvre claims, similarly, that technological progress alone will not do the job of reconciling the totality with the wholeness of living, since it does not affect the core of everyday life, which, as he notes, "still belongs to what Marxist theoreticians call 'the uncontrolled sector', and in which "the modern individual is 'deprived' not only of social reality and truth, but of power over himself."¹²⁹

Giedion states that the interwar period is remarkable because rapid technological progress sits side by side with the spiritual loss of the wholeness of living. This loss of the whole is experienced concretely affecting the

¹²⁵ Trebitsch, Michel. "Preface." In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. xvi. Original italics.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 237.

¹²⁸ Trebitsch, Michel. "Preface". In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. xx. Original italics.

¹²⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 248.

perception of routinised living practices. Giedion exemplifies this with the activity of bathing, which was previously connected to feelings of joy and pleasure. As Lozanovska comments, “[...] in *Mechanisation*, Giedion does not sense the spirit of the age, but the technologies, standardisations, automations that have turned, for example, the kitchen to the laboratory. “Wholeness” is no longer available in modern life.”¹³⁰

Giedion’s concern with feelings, affected detrimentally by a deepening of the processes of mechanisation that nonetheless constitute the main source for the production of new living spaces, highlights the difference between Russian and Western modes of functionalism.

Having written hundreds of pages on the history of mechanisation as well as on the history of architecture, Giedion is seeking to erect a bridge that can cross the rift between the rational and the irrational, between thought and feeling. He finds such a possibility in the potential of the “new architecture”, which Heynen describes in the following way:

In his conclusion Giedion emphasises the importance of organic and irrational elements in architecture, which in his view run the risk of being suppressed as a result of too great an emphasis on rationality. Architecture is faced with the task of achieving a balance between the rational and geometric on the one hand and the organic and irrational on the other – between the domain of thought and that of feeling.¹³¹

In a similar way, Behne refers to the organic origins of architecture, in an effort to find a balance between form, expression, and reason. He does this by selecting examples of rational organisation in organic living spaces, such as the use of regular forms in nature – for example, the honeycomb structure of bee tenements or, contrastively, the curvature of a snail’s shell that translates the idea of movement within the living space.¹³²

Realising that in his own contemporaneity, “means have outgrown man,”¹³³ Giedion also tries to find a balance, an equilibrium, that would not allow the mechanistic conception of the world completely suppress feeling. Giedion finds optimism in the very organisation of human organism that

¹³⁰ Lozanovska, Mirjana. “Thought and Feeling in Giedion’s *Mechanisation Takes Command*, p. 888.

¹³¹ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 40.

¹³² Adolf Behne. *The Modern Functional Building*, pp. 124–125.

¹³³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 716.

“can be regarded as a constant” and that resist any radical pressure since “it is by nature confined within narrow limits of tolerance:”

It can adapt itself to a variety of conditions and it is physically in a perpetual state of change; but the physical pattern has changed very little, as far as science can record.¹³⁴

Giedion proposes a solution to overcome the rift that requires a type of a man “who can restore the lost equilibrium between inner and outer reality [...] who can control his own existence by the process of balancing forces often regarded as irreconcilable: man in equipoise.”¹³⁵

Giedion debunks the illusions of both an uninterrupted process of mechanisation and of progress itself. Moreover, his own life along with the history of the present that he records leave little ground for optimism. Yet, by taking mechanisation and the development of a mechanistic conception of the world as an inevitable process, he refrains from “taking a stand for or against mechanisation.” He elaborates as follows: “we cannot simply approve or disapprove. One must discriminate between those spheres that are fit for mechanisation and those that are not; similar problems arise today in whatever sphere we touch.”¹³⁶

The core differences between the aesthetics of the Western and Russian avant-garde can be looked upon at this stage as being three-fold. They differ with respect to (i) how the effects of mechanisation are interpreted; (ii) the way in which the respective traditions understand the relation between the construction of living spaces and the human psyche, and (iii) the different ways in which the very matter of feeling is understood as crucial in evaluating and analysing the epoch and the functionalist method. If *Mechanisation...* was published after the end of War, the earlier *Space, Time and Architecture* also draws attention to the importance of feeling – a theme more or less absent in the theoretical treatises of the Russian constructivists.

Russian constructivists had not considered studying the actual impact that the functionalist method would have on the Soviet people’s psyche. The impact was already pre-constructed and presumed. Moreover, the projected impact was the goal, not the effect or the consequence. The difference, then, between these two approaches is that, in contradistinction to the Russian

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¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 719.

¹³⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 720.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

constructivists, Giedion sees in man an object of the changes that, through the means of mechanisation, are enforced on him, including newly produced living spaces.

In a similar vein, Lefebvre sees contemporary man as an object of totalisation. The reconciliation of his wholeness as well as the wholeness of his living environment is unachievable through the sole power and progress of thought – whether philosophical or technological:

[...] progress in the way life is organised cannot be limited to technical progress in external equipment, cannot be confined to an increase in the quantity of tools.

It will also be a qualitative progress: the individual will stop being a fiction, a myth of the bourgeois democracies an empty, negative form – a pleasant illusion for each human grain of sand. He will cease being ‘private’ by becoming at the same time more social, more human – and more individual. We have shown how the forward march of human reality was progressing according to a dialectical process: greater *objectification* (the human being becoming more social, and realising himself in a world of social, material, and human objects) and deeper *subjectivisation* (a more highly developed consciousness, reflecting on and conscious of power over all reality).¹³⁷

For Russian constructivism, on the other hand, man is a subject to both political and architectural changes, a building material that should be moulded into a human format that would fit into any environment affected by mechanisation and reformed through the means of the functionalist method.

This crucial difference in approach to man either as an *object* or as a *subject* might be accounted for in various ways, nonetheless I suggest that one of the main factors allowing for the conversion of man into something subject to an outer will was the abolishment of private property after the Bolshevik Revolution. In the new Soviet state, a mickey mouse type of property relationship took the place of bourgeois property rights; as Benjamin writes, under the Soviet system it became “possible to have one’s own arm, even one’s own body, stolen.”¹³⁸ Privacy was abolished along with the possessive ideology of individualism. The upshot was that man was literally turned from being an object into a subject. Russian constructivists accepted the utopian idea of subjectivised man; only later, in the future, will

¹³⁷ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 248.

¹³⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Mickey Mouse.” p. 545.

he realise his own objecthood, that is, when he is perfect enough to match it. This perspective corresponds in a way to Lefebvre's notion of the unavoidable transitional man.¹³⁹ Constructivists had already been dismissed from any area of public discourse by the time Giedion's *Mechanisation* was published. Nonetheless, Giedion belatedly explained a mistake that was present within the Russian avant-garde, namely the idea of progress as a constant and uninterrupted movement towards perfection:

The idea of progress supposes a final state of perfection. In the systems of Comte, Hegel and even Marx, the final state was either already reached or was soon to come. Finality implies an approaching state of static equilibrium. This contradicts what the scientists have shown to be the essence of the universe, motion and unending change.¹⁴⁰

Different approaches to human nature were initially implemented within these modes of functionalism. In the Russian mode, man was but the passive material on the laboratory table of Revolution, as Benjamin noted in his "Moscow" essay. On the other hand, within the aesthetics of Western functionalism, at least as articulated by Giedion, a man was an object towards whose individual needs the achievements of progress should be directed (in this case there was no rhetorical transformation within the evolution of his thought). In his *Mechanisation*, Giedion writes that "to control mechanisation demands an unprecedented superiority over the instrument of production. It requires that everything be subordinated to human needs."¹⁴¹

The subordination of functionalist methodology to the satisfaction of human needs, characteristic of the German mode of functionalism, differed from that of the Russian mode, which subordinated functionalist methodology to ideology.

As Giedion claims, there is a constancy to human needs, as is the case with the human organism itself. Thus, for Giedion, it is possible to develop a sustainable methodology that responds to the satisfaction of these needs. Ideology, on the other hand, is a changing substance, as history itself shows; it requires immediate and often radical means and reactions to meet its demands. From here originates this immense intensity of living in favour of the establishment and empowerment of the new ideology and new Ideo-

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¹³⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁰ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 717.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 714.

logical State Apparatuses that Benjamin had observed in Moscow, where life was laid bare on a laboratory table. The Russian avant-garde was experimenting with both living spaces and those humans inhabiting such spaces. Both were regarded as “materials” under the auspices of the new ideology, but where the actual materialisation of liberating spaces and liberated citizens was under permanent reconstruction. In the Weimar Republic, in contrast, the rights to private ownership, privacy, and individualism had not been dissolved. In this context, the avant-garde was meant to satisfy not only the new demands of modern society but also the emerging human needs that became the *objects* of life improvement.

The change of paradigm was tremendous in Russia; it stroked Benjamin’s eyes with its radicalism. The religious cults were now replaced with the iconography of Lenin; the *red* corners of houses, – which were once filled with icons witnessing evening prayers, and where *red [krasniy]* meant beautiful, which was equal to the truthful, – had been turned into *red* corners that were now populated with the busts of Lenin, where *red [krasniy]* now meant the colour of blood and the Bolshevik Revolution. The Russian avant-garde took on the roles of political revolutionaries and educators in proselytising the change of paradigm. Hence the radicalisation of its artistic language was one of the consequences of this politicisation of art.

The aesthetics of the Russian avant-garde remained within the field of the rational, and therefore did not consider the notion of feeling. Not that this means that constructivists neglected the whole sphere of the irrational incorporated into human body. One of the features of the Russian avant-garde was the high intensity and even radicalism of artistic expression that was predicated on eliciting an intensive emotional response from the viewer. The target of the Russian avant-garde’s expressive artistic language was not to influence those feelings that the viewer gazing at the object already had, but rather to provoke and create the “right” feelings the viewer most likely did not have before. It was not the rift between thought and feeling that the Russian avant-garde addressed. At stake was the idea of creating and producing a certain milieu that could mould the feelings and promote an ideology not only to reform subjects and spaces, but to ultimately reach an altogether new level of existence and society in which super humans would commune within a super state.

This intention was quite vividly described and criticised in the literary genre of dystopia that developed simultaneously with the articulation of the aesthetics of the Russian avant-garde as well as in response to it (for exam-

ple, Evgeniy Zamyatin's *We*).¹⁴² In the production of the new living space through the implementation of the functionalist method, the inhabitants of that space were considered as its inseparable component and as material that was subject to reformation.

The Russian mode implies the construction of feeling through the construction of living space. This would create a new harmonised man, whose rational apprehension of the world would reign over and above the irrational. The consequences of the implementation of such an ideology was described in Zamyatin's *We*, where all that belonged to the sphere of the irrational (e.g. feelings, emotions and the imagination – all “symptoms” of the soul), were considered a heavy sickness and were thus to be eliminated from the agenda of what it meant to organise a new life. This process of eradication was to be undertaken by any means necessary – including, for example, surgery on the part of the brain responsible for the imagination as the final destructive irrational agent within the human body.

The rational was a significant topic in the Western mode of functionalism too. Indeed, Giedion notes that education in his time is “directed toward intellectual specialisation,”¹⁴³ which deepens the split between thought and feeling, originating with the industrial revolutions in Europe during the nineteenth century. Yet, Giedion does not celebrate the victory of the intellect over irrational feelings; on the contrary, he sees reason as responsible for the social disorder of his time, which “was delivered to us as an inheritance from the Industrial Revolution,”¹⁴⁴ as well as the failure of governments to resolve the problem of intellectual specialisation with respect to the “difference of level between our methods of thinking and of feeling”¹⁴⁵ – a problem relevant not only to the masses, but to state policies as well.

The inability to comprehend an enormous flow of information and to give an analytically informed evaluation of events, is traced back by Giedion to an inadequate training of feelings, as well as to the long-lasting neglect of

¹⁴² The novel was written in the 1920s but until the mid-1980s it was never published in the USSR. It was first published in New York in 1924. Zamyatin was widely known in avant-garde circles as well as beyond, and his book was widely read in Russia, Western Europe and the US. When in the late 1920s extracts of *We* were translated into Russian and found themselves in Stalin's hands, it resulted in the persecution of the author and his exile.

¹⁴³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 878.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 879.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 878.

feeling as an active and worthy tool, through which the human establishes and regulates her relations with the world:

How can one explain the disorder in all spheres concerned with human relations? How explain disturbances involving the most elemental laws of human life? In addition to the many reasons always given for the present chaos, there is a fundamental one that is often forgotten: factual knowledge has not been reabsorbed and humanised by an equivalent level of feeling.¹⁴⁶

Giedion criticised the lack of trust in feeling; this scepticism towards sensibility was promoted through the nineteenth century and it became one of the basic negative moments in functionalism, leading to a situation in which “education of the emotions is neglected. Thinking is trained; feeling is left untrained.”¹⁴⁷ Lefebvre speaks of a lack of trust, which became a distinguishing feature of modernity, admitting that trust in life is necessary for a reconciliation of wholeness and claiming that “today trust in life is taking root in life and becoming a need”.¹⁴⁸

For Giedion, the feeling, “though it goes its own way, it forms an inseparable unity with the act of thinking.”¹⁴⁹ The suppression of the feeling that is organically incorporated into the human body is similar to the suppression of freedom, since “emotion is like liberty.”¹⁵⁰

The restoration of equilibrium between thought and feeling should be achieved through the education and training of feelings, doing so with the same level of care, attention and curiosity that is shown to one’s education and training in thought. In this context, as one of the most powerful educational and ideological sources of the period (indeed, as discussed previously, architecture can be understood as the literal materialisation of political ideology – what Althusser calls an Ideological State Apparatuses), architecture should be an active agent that trains feelings and bridges the split between feeling and thought.

According to Giedion, the architecture of the nineteenth century is the most obvious example that enacts and deepens that split:

Architectural façades of the last century were erected in many diverse shapes and styles, but these styles were not used as statements of conviction. They

¹⁴⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 879.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 878.

¹⁴⁸ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 878.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

functioned merely as curtains, disguising what was behind them. Similarly, mankind has today many diverse political systems. Most do not reveal – some even contradict – the continued urge toward the organic going on in the depth of the period. These political systems simply serve to disguise the fact that political power has become an end in itself.¹⁵¹

Functionalism, as an architectural method in all its modes, was a reaction to the impossibility of the nineteenth century's styles to translate any ideology and to convince consumers and inhabitants of produced spaces to become active agents in the construction and regulation of social order, and even to be simply the active participants of the space they inhabit. The result of neglecting the importance of training feelings and the impossibility to reach equilibrium between feeling and thought, "is the symbol of our period: the maladjusted man."¹⁵²

Giedion calls for educational means to reach this equilibrium, among which architecture plays a crucial role. Yet these educational means involve time; they are necessarily evolutionary as they assume that contemporary maladjusted men still possess their feelings, even though they remain at the moment in their degraded and suppressed state. Giedion relied on the convictional potential of the period, which possessed all the necessary means to promote feeling and to restore harmony. He admits that the present man's condition has a long historical anamnesis and that it will require time to educate and train the feeling to bring it up to a satisfactory state.

These approaches to man as an object (Giedion's aesthetics) and man as a subject (the epistemology of the Russian avant-garde) point towards two different ways of managing and developing rationalism. Giedion's critique of the neglect of feelings as a necessary condition for a sustainable social and political order is nonetheless presented from the standpoint of a rational thinker. Just like Lefebvre, he neither calls for an escape from the rationalism of the industrial and post-industrial ages, nor does he promote expressionism, mysticism or spiritualism as an artistic or working tool to heal the wounds left by the repression of feelings; nor, for that matter, does he support the claim for a return to craftsmanship in order to fight the psychological consequences of mechanisation, as was suggested by the German architect and designer Hans Poelzig in his *Address to the Werk-*

¹⁵¹ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 879.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 878.

bund in 1919 after he headed the organisation.¹⁵³ Yet the beneficiary of the bridging of thought and feeling in the Western mode of the avant-garde, as articulated by Giedion, is a man of the present, while in Russian mode – it is a man of the future. If within the German mode of functionalism, the construction of the living space should target the production of the milieu that would harmonise and rationalise the existence of contemporary man, then the Russian mode sees its main task in the production of space as the translation of a certain ideology of harmony, and within which man, when placed in that space, would form and develop the necessary feelings towards the constructed milieu.

3.6. Sigfried Giedion: humanising architecture

When Giedion refers to the styled façades of the nineteenth century buildings as concealing the chaotic, styleless, and disorganised space hidden behind them, he allegorises by speaking of political systems that thrive on the concentration and accumulation of political power, such power becomes an end in itself.

The German mode of functionalism had no chance to aspire to the lofty ambitions of becoming the main instrument in the international socialist revolution. Comparing to Russian avant-garde, it targeted more down-to-earth goals, developing its language through the fields of design, art, and architecture, aiming at developing solutions for the improvement of contemporary life.

Giedion never considered the break with the history as a necessary step on the way to the future. He was equally concerned with the impact of both the past on the present and of the present on the future. The future for him was not an eternal entity, it was a part of a natural life-cycle with an inevitable end. Hence the past and the present were as valuable as the future. The past, the present, and the future were inseparable parts of the whole:

¹⁵³ Through his call for a return to craftsmanship, Hans Poelzig objected to the dominant influence of industrialisation over creative, artistic practices. He wrote: “*By craftsmanship I mean something absolutely spiritual, a basic attitude of the mind, not technical perfection in some sector or other. What we should understand by craftsmanship, which is in fact absolutely identical with artistic work, is the will to dedicate great love and devotion to creating forms, a task during which no thought at all is given to the economic exploitation of the work, or perhaps in the very last instance only. That is the basic difference between this kind of work and all purely industrial activities.*” In: Mallgrave, Harry Francis; Contandriopoulos, Christina. eds. *Architectural Theory*. Vol. II, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 197–198.

History does not produce repetitive patterns. The life of a culture is limited in time just as is the life of an individual. Since this is true of all organic existence, everything depends on what is accomplished within the allotted span.¹⁵⁴

Tracing the growth of functionalism from the nineteenth century, Giedion admitted it was part of an evolutionary process of technological development as well as of human thought. When the new aesthetics and the new method acquired a material form and a visuality that could be already seen and read, it marked the point of becoming a new tradition. The very fact that modernism is just one of the new traditions did not frighten Giedion; yet for the Russian constructivists to accept that the new method had become a tradition would be to accept the failure of their whole aesthetics; for it is the nature of any tradition, as well as any style, to inevitably decline. For Giedion any method and any aesthetics was finite, while Russian constructivists aimed to develop the method which was universal, not only regarding spheres of its application, but universal in temporal meaning and thus infinite.

The Russian avant-garde intended to remove and eliminate all temporal components of architectural practice, so as to leave only those that always remain sustainable and that are not subject to decay, rejection, and decline. Those were the components of fashion, style, and even political and social symbolism, which was one of the reasons for the avant-garde's early political dismissal. Russian constructivism aimed to reach pure architecture, to develop the method that was not limited to or transformed by any links to tradition and style that were inevitably temporal. And it was to be done fast, here and now, since no past remained, while the present was immediately projected onto the future. Russian constructivism saw the source of the functionalist method in the present, while West European modernists – in the historical past.

Giedion did not need to rush into the future. In his manifesto book from 1928 he only had to declare that the ground for the new method, which was cultivated throughout the whole nineteenth century, was ready and ripe. There is no need to fight the past, because the past nurtures the present and links it with the future. As he writes, “every generation must carry both the

¹⁵⁴ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 722.

burden of the past and the responsibility for the future. The present is coming to be seen more and more as a mere link between yesterday and tomorrow.”¹⁵⁵

The crucial difference in the attitude towards the past and tradition between the Russian and German modes of functionalism did not contradict with their similar attitude towards the very nature of the present and even of the future (with the exception, of course, of the eternity of the future declared by the Russian avant-garde and its finiteness, considered within the concept of the Western mode, as developed by Giedion).

The present was defined by mechanisation and by the dominance of a machine as a technological and aesthetical idol. Both Ginzburg and Giedion, representing their modes of modernist aesthetics, admitted that machines have a crucial influence on people’s lives. Ginzburg, for example, noted that the machine “changed our psyche and aesthetics” and became “the greatest factor that influenced on our understanding of form.”¹⁵⁶ Giedion also admits that these changes allow “for the new way of SEEING” to “become form.”¹⁵⁷

The machine was the source for the production of a new form. But it was also a source of beauty for shaping living spaces – when “an equally obvious beauty will emerge from houses as from ships and airplanes,”¹⁵⁸ so writes Giedion. The image of the machine was thus the kernel of a functionalist aesthetics. Yet, the influence of the machine on the human psyche and on aesthetics was considered by Ginzburg as, first of all, an important factor of the new method formation. The impact that this method would have on the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the spaces produced through this method was pre-supposed and pre-constructed within the thinking of the Russian avant-garde. Through the application of a functionalist method in the production of space, man was a subject of constant alteration.

The Russian and the German modes of functionalism also interpreted the spirit of the collective and collectivism quite differently. While Giedion spoke of the application of collective design and of collective efforts towards the production of functionalist living spaces, he never rejected individualism as the natural part of the human psyche. The German mode did not consider the abolition of privacy, individualism, and private ownership. Rather, collectivism in the German mode was to be applied to the means of

¹⁵⁵ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 723.

¹⁵⁶ Ginzburg, Moisey. *Stil' i Epokha*, p. 84

¹⁵⁷ Giedion, Sigfried. *Building in France, Building in Ferro-concrete*, p. 184.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

production, giving man, if to put it in Behne's words, a role of a mediator of various relationships within the newly produced space.¹⁵⁹ Behne would claim that, within a functionalist outlook, "the deciding factor is the relationship with society!"¹⁶⁰

In the Russian mode, collectivism extended beyond the means of production to the very way of living. German architects had considered the collectivisation of everyday life to an extent, but within limits: collectivist initiatives had to be rational and convenient for the tenant. Collectivism in the German mode, then, was not meant to become the new order of social relations, as was the case in Russia; it was to remain a matter of comfort and efficiency. The architecture of the new building was, in the words of Behne, to resemble "its concrete form" as "a compromise between individual (function) and society (form)."¹⁶¹

Inheriting a dramatic history of collectivism and collectivisation to work with, Giedion the historian warns against the dogma of the collectivisation of life in his *Mechanisation Takes Command*:

We must discriminate between those domains reserved for individual life and those in which a collective life may be formed. We want neither extreme individualism nor overpowering collectivism: we must distinguish between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community. Today, both the life of the individual and the life of the community are frustrated and lack real shape and structure.

We must organise the world considered as a whole, and at the same time allow for the right of each region to develop its particular language, habits, customs.¹⁶²

During the period of their practice, both German and Russian modes considered the importance of the wholeness of reality, but here lies another difference between them: Russian constructivism saw the potential of sustaining the wholeness of the community through the elimination of individualism, making each member a constitutive part of the collective community; while Western functionalism tried to find a balance between collec-

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¹⁵⁹ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 112.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁶² Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 721.

tivism and individualism, reconciling what Lefebvre calls the totality of being, something which was partially reached only later in Sweden.

In the Russian mode of functionalism, the liberation and rationalisation of living space should have resulted in the liberation of the intellectual and the spiritual potential of a man. A man should be reformed by being adjusted to the reformed space and, moreover, by the means of that space. Architectural environment was to carry not only educational functions, but more radicalised reformatory and reconstructive ones that were to transform a man of the past into a man of the future. A man was a subject for change just as much as the space surrounding him.

For Giedion, who is considered here as representative of the German mode of functionalism, a man was an object of spatial transformations, and for the satisfaction of whose needs functionalist methods was to be applied.

According to Giedion, the machine and the whole process of mechanisation should consider the nature of the human psyche. The organic and biological potential of the machine should be studied and appropriated for application in the construction of new living spaces. Similar to Behne, Giedion talks about the “biological function of the house”, which is “more important for us than aesthetics and poetry.”¹⁶³ An inhabitant of space is its object, towards whose human needs all efforts are directed. What Lefebvre calls a “total man” should be the centre of the space, whereas the functionalist method concentrated fully on a man – on his biology, his psyche, and on his spirit that produces beauty, and that “becomes still more intensive, for it appears connected to our human functions.”¹⁶⁴

The Russian mode of functionalism was directed towards the machine and ideology, while the German mode – towards the total man and his living space.

The full mechanisation that was appraised in both cases in the 1920s was a matter of particular concern for Giedion – the survivor of repressions against functionalism in Europe. He admitted that it caused a rift between thought and feeling. One of the main problems of Giedion’s post-war aesthetics (that was still a functionalist aesthetics), shared by such thinkers as Lefebvre, was the problem of the control over processes of mechanisation as well as the problem of linking the spheres of the rational and irrational to

¹⁶³ Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanisation Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, p. 721.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

restore the wholeness of the broken man. In *Mechanisation Takes Command*, published after the end of the War, Giedion writes:

We must establish a new balance between the psychic spheres within the individual.

The relations between methods of thinking and of feeling is seriously impaired and even disrupted. The result is a split personality. Equipoise is lacking between the rational and the irrational; between the past – tradition – and the future – exploration of the unknown; between the temporal and eternal.¹⁶⁵

Here Giedion outlined the major contradictions within the functionalist method, and that led to the development of its various modes, not only under different political and social circumstances, but under the pressure of its own inner ambiguities.

As history showed, the most radical and intensive mode of functionalism perished in Russia, while the intensity of its formal language remains a fascinating and yet archived domain of art history. Characteristic of the shift towards the humanisation of living space characteristic of the German mode, which balanced between the radicalism and reforming potential of the functionalist method supported by technological progress, on the one side, and the humanistic perception of man as a centre of the universe, on the other, endured in Europe through its Swedish interpretation. Closing his most celebrated book – *Space, Time and Architecture* – Giedion reflects on the humanistic and emotional aspects that should be incorporated into the functionalist method and the whole man as the objective of all human activity:

...to humanise – that is, to reabsorb emotionally – what has been created by the spirit. All talk about organising and planning is in vain unless we first create again the whole man, unfractured in his methods of thinking and feeling.¹⁶⁶

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¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 721.

¹⁶⁶ Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, p. 880.

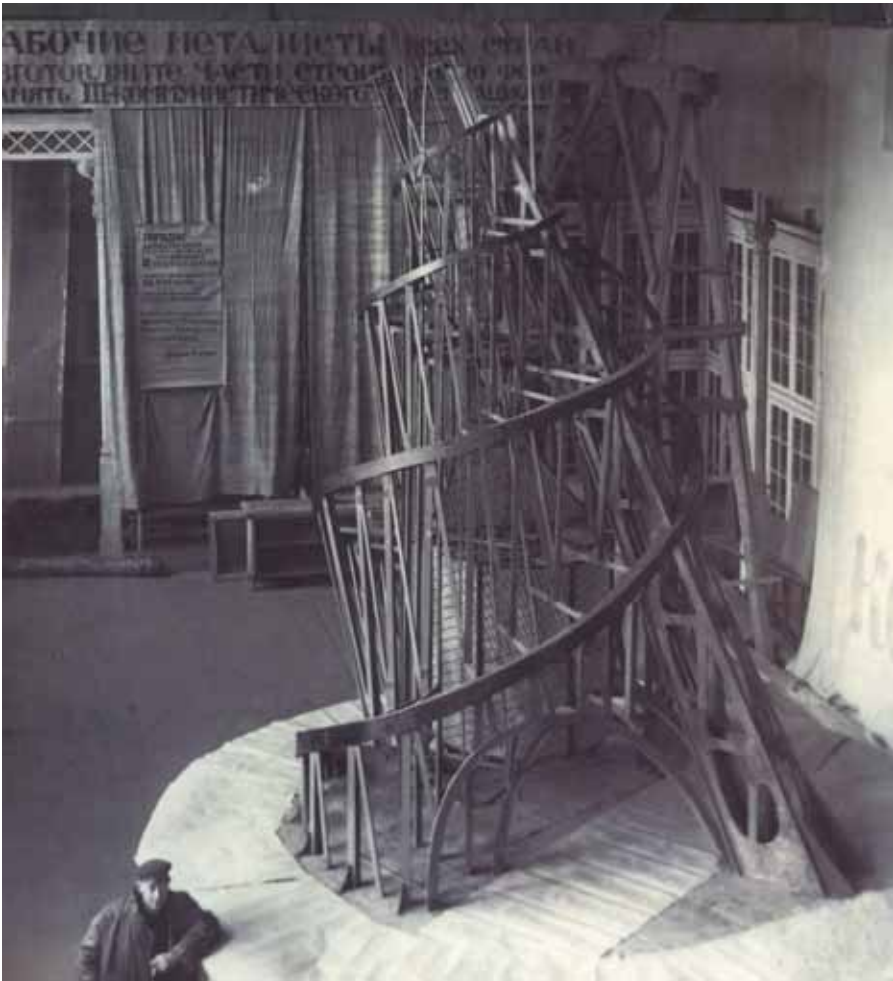


Fig. 1. Vladimir Tatlin by the Model for the Monument to the Third International (“Tatlin’s Tower”), designed in 1919–20.

The Swedish Mode of Functionalism

The Swedish Mode of functionalism articulated its aesthetics later than its Russian and German counterparts and was practiced on the Swedish scene as the method that had already undergone self-critique and revision surrounding its failures and achievements. The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 can be considered a milestone that established Swedish functionalism as a leading aesthetical player, and which, as a consequence, opened the kingdom's space to the full-scale transformations associated with the aesthetics of modernism. The functionalist aesthetics was drawn out and widely propagated through the famous manifesto *Acceptera* (1931).¹ The authors of *Acceptera* analysed and summarised the basic principles of European modernism and proclaimed that it was necessary to accept the fact that functionalism as the expression of modernity had already been circulating around the wider continent for a while and that it had become an equally unavoidable and inevitable part of their own contemporaneity.

In the introduction to the book, *Swedish Modernism. Architecture Consumption and the Welfare State*,² that brings together the collected essays on the history and genesis of Swedish modernism, and that will be taken here as an important theoretical source, – Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein comment on functionalism's late arrival onto the shores of Sweden:

[...] it may appear as a sheer coincidence, or perhaps a historical irony, that the first manifesto of Swedish modernism, *acceptera* (*accept*), was published at the precise moment when the European avant-garde, in Tafuri's analyses,³ began its irreversible decomposition.⁴

¹ First edition: Asplund, Gunnar; Gahn, Wolter; Markelius, Sven; Paulsson, Gregor; Sundahl, Eskil; Åhren, Uno. *Acceptera*. (Stockholm: Tidens förlag, 1931).

² Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010).

³ Here meant: Tafuri, Manfredo. *Progetto e utopia*. (Bari: Laterza, 1973).

⁴ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). "Introduction". In: *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p. 9.

This happens, they argue, due to the “contradictions between the promises of architectural form and the development of the capitalist metropolis,” which “became so explosive that they could no longer be concealed.”⁵ Yet the authors of *Swedish Modernism* argue that the manifesto is, on the one hand, already deeply rooted in the discussions taking place at the time within the circles of the European avant-garde, while, on the other “it displays a distinct and unusual emphasis on a new form of social engineering that not only attempts to adapt modernism to a Swedish context, but also to portray the theory itself as a specifically *Swedish* phenomenon.”⁶

The book *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* introduces a collection of a dozen analytical articles by various researchers, who reflect on the origins of Swedish modernist architecture and design as well as on the history of the development of the Swedish welfare state, which is recontextualised in light of the concept of aesthetic modernism. The key to understanding the grounds of Swedish modernism is, according to the authors, by analysing the nature of consumption and practices of consumption in Sweden, which had been developing since the late nineteenth century. In the introduction to the book the editors note:

Between the poles of architecture and the welfare state we have however here inserted a middle term, “consumption”, which may seem slightly out of synch with the other two. But in point of fact, through all of the different phases of the welfare state, architecture and consumption were central as operative strategies in the formation of what in Sweden has become known as the “people’s home” (“folkhemmet”). Consumption can be understood as a model of education, within which there needs to be produced a certain type of display culture, a controlled and circumscribed spectacle of the commodity, and a new form of desiring subject, whose responses and unconscious investments must become and integrated part of the system of production and consumption.⁷

The crucial source for the current chapter as well as for the whole concept of the three modes of functionalism that I propose in the current study is the book: *Modern Swedish Design. The Three Founding Texts*.⁸ It was pub-

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). “Introduction”. In: *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p. 9. (emphasis added)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Creagh, Lucy; Kåberg, Helen, Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008)

lished by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2008 and comprises of three grounding translated texts on Swedish modernism: *Beauty in the Home* by Ellen Key (1899); *Better Things for Everyday Life* by Gregor Paulsson (1919), and the *Acceptera* manifesto: a collective work by major Swedish modernist thinkers and architects Uno Åhren, Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, and Eskil Sundahl (1931). It was only as recent as 2008, when the key texts that lay at the core of understanding the origins of not only Swedish functionalism, but of the European modernism in general, were translated into English and thus became available to the non-Swedish global academic community as well as to the non-Swedish general reading audience. The texts are accompanied by original illustrations, and the idea behind the original books' designs is also provided. Analytical commentaries by professional researchers of the period open immediate access to the texts' content as well as situating them within discussions on modernism, a benefit even for those unfamiliar with Swedish architectural and design history.

The book advises tracing the path of the "Swedish way," a concept that was suggested during the first turbulent decades of the twentieth century. The Scandinavian model has proved itself to be resilient and durable in its capacity to endure in comparison to most other social models practiced since the end of the World War II and which, as well as many other European models of the last century, was based on the aesthetical and theoretical grounds of modernism.

In the general introduction the editors of *Modern Swedish Design* outline specific conditions, out of which Swedish modernism had developed:

Notwithstanding such international cross-pollination, Swedish modernism arose in a specific Swedish context. Unlike the developers of modern design in Germany, Great Britain, or the United States, Swedish proponents of modern design ideals were able to cultivate their principles in a climate of relative calm – Sweden experienced neither political revolution nor the full impact of the world wars that shockingly transformed other societies in the early twentieth century. Some of the differences between the development of modernism in Sweden and elsewhere can be accounted for by this comparatively placid history, but other factors – economic, political, and intellectual, as well as the long-term persistence of crafts traditions in Sweden – were equally formative.⁹

⁹ Creagh, Lucy; Käberg, Helen, Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 13.

A constellation of specific conditions – history, time, and place – enabled Swedish functionalism to strive and develop throughout the twentieth century and to directly influence on contemporary design and the aesthetics of contemporary living space. The nature of its genesis was not of a style imported from “outside”, from Germany or elsewhere (as if it were to speak of a “secondary nature”).

The source for the Swedish mode of functionalism was the same modernity that Sweden shared with the rest of the world, but the reality to which it applied was not the revolutionary event of the Russian mode, nor the recovery from the dramatic and dire consequences of the World War I, as was the case in its German instantiation. It was rather the very local, domestic reality that had not been shaken by the seismic and dislocatory events of the first decades of the twentieth century, even though they inevitably echoed in Sweden.

I have mentioned above that while dividing European functionalism into three modes, I consider the level of intensity of their aesthetical and architectural expression as the major dividing point, while their ‘national’ names should not be regarded as the frames that limit each mode to a specific geo-political territory. It should be remarked – and this can itself be taken as a point of differentiation between its modal expressions – that while both the Russian and German modes were exponents of the universalism and internationalism of the avant-garde, the Swedish mode had emphasised the *swedishness* of its method and aesthetic. Having developed under the pressure of the already established European heritage of functionalism, Swedish modernists experienced among their Swedish contemporaries a certain resistance towards the most radical expressions of modernist aesthetics as well as to its politicised ideology. As a direct consequence, what was sought was the famous “third” or “Swedish” way that could avoid the extremities of both the Russian and German modes.

The three modes that I suggest for this thesis are not the evolutionary stages of modernism demonstrating the birth, rise, and the fall of functionalist method and aesthetics. They are instead three different ways through which modernity expressed and revealed itself. The modes themselves introduce different ways through which modernism transformed society and our contemporary living space. Each of these modes had lived through its heyday and had experienced its share of failures, disappointments, and internal mutations. Yet, I contend that each of these modes was not an end in itself – and certainly not a dead end. For each had inspired

and nurtured contemporary design and impacted on the formation of the contemporary living space.

In the present chapter I continue articulating the aesthetic features of functionalism that were specific to its Swedish mode, on the one hand, and, on the other, to explicate those characteristics that can be said to be common to them all. The analysis here is built around several categories, articulated through a close reading of the abovementioned texts. Moreover, this analysis will open up for a comparison of these categories with similar ones that had either operated within, or were absent from, the Russian and German modes of functionalism. Among the significant differences to be located within the Swedish mode, and which thereby distinguishes from its counterparts, are the following themes and categories: needs, beauty, and truth; the notions of family and the home; the origins of the ‘Swedish Democratic Design’ trend; the problem of the ‘swedishness’ of Swedish modernism and its connection to the national past and local traditions.

The “swedishness” of Swedish functionalism was an issue that has been discussed from the time of the Stockholm Exhibition. One of the major critiques levelled at the exhibition at the time was precisely its lack of “Swedishness,” both with respect to the general aesthetics on show as well as the displayed objects. This was particularly odd since the exhibits had indeed been designed by the Swedish masters. In her essay “Building the Utopia of the Everyday,”¹⁰ Eva Rudberg brings up some examples of that critique, noting among other things that “it was said that the new furniture did not fit the Swedish homes,”¹¹ or, citing the conservative daily newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, that “the most awkward and also truest thing that can be said about the exhibition is that it is not Swedish.”¹²

Those responsible for articulating the central objectives of Swedish functionalism as part of the *Acceptera* manifesto had to defend themselves against such criticisms. This meant introducing both modernist aesthetics and the functionalist method as if they were a natural part of the Swedish cultural heritage, as an inevitable step in the development of Swedish urban planning and its building tradition. They refrained from calling themselves

¹⁰ Rudberg, Eva. *Building the Utopia of the Everyday*. In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State.*, pp. 152–159.

¹¹ Rudberg, Eva. *Building the Utopia of the Everyday*. In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State.*, p. 154.

¹² *Ibid.*

functionalists, and the terms ‘avant-garde’ and ‘modernism’ were conspicuously absent from the manifesto.

The manifesto had been written under close consideration of the already existing critique of functionalism in other countries, even though there are very few references to that critique. The German mode of functionalism, which seems to work as representative for its continental-European interpretation, is the main object of critique. Even though it is explicit that German functionalism had inspired the authors of *Acceptera*, in the manifesto it is introduced as an object of criticism in a form of ‘small talks’ with the ‘sceptics’. In the manifesto, this served purpose of countering those Swedish critics who had accused functionalism of being merely a fashion imported from Germany. For example, when “a gentleman,” who rejects contemporary architecture, exclaims: “Modern architecture – a German import!”¹³

In the current chapter the *Acceptera* manifesto is taken as the object for a close reading, in order to articulate the major features of the Swedish mode of functionalism, which over time had not only proved to be a sustainable working method, but had also transformed itself into a global trend: “Scandinavian design” – a sort of functionalism with distinct national Scandinavian features. Even though the genesis of Scandinavian design is not in focus in the present study, it is obvious that discussions surrounding modernist aesthetics during the 1930s played in Sweden a crucial role in the formation of Scandinavian design. From the 1950s onwards, it has developed into a widely recognisable and ‘in demand’ trend that has now been domesticated within the corporate identity and marketing policies of IKEA. IKEA has been successfully globalising and commercialising European functionalism since the mid-1950s. This particular development will be the topic of investigation in the final chapter of the second part of this thesis.

In the current study, though, I aim to articulate those aesthetic, methodological, and ideological aspects of European modernism that affected the contemporary living space and that are still in use in our everyday life today. Against this backdrop, the Swedish mode of functionalism is the most applicable of the three, since it placed the notion of the home and the specific resolution to the housing crisis at the core of its aesthetic and ideological program. The idea of transforming society by

¹³ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. eds.: Creagh, Lucy; Kåberg, Helen, Miller Lane, Barbara. (New York: MOMA, 2008), p. 317.

improving the living space, within which everyday life happens, places the person at the centre of modernist ideology in its Swedish mode. Here the person becomes not only an object of transformations, but the cause of these transformations, whose 'real' needs must first be ascertained, with the living space to be moulded and adjusted in accordance with these needs.

4.1. Needs, beauty, and truth

The category of human *needs* in the Swedish mode is closely linked to human *rights*, including the right to satisfy needs that stand outside of a purely rationalistic and society-oriented frame; such as pleasure, leisure, comfort, privacy and, finally, a sense of happiness. The Swedish mode not only considers the rights for these needs to be met, but gives them the central place in a system of Swedish modernist values.

Production, consumption, moderation, and the distribution of needs and desires had been systematically integrated into the methodology of improving everyday life within the Swedish mode of functionalism. Its strategy is here consistent with what Lefebvre suggested as the reconciliation of the wholeness of life and the elimination of a man's alienation from his way of living and from himself. According to Lefebvre, all societal spheres – economic, social, familial, political, and cultural – were not only to be available for occasional participation, but were to be fully incorporate into the continual everyday practices of a person, and through which the totality of living could be restored. He concludes:

To sum up, work, leisure, family life and private life make up a whole which we can call a 'global structure' or 'totality' on condition that we emphasize its historical, shifting, transitory nature. If we consider the critique of everyday life as an aspect of a concrete sociology we can envisage a vast enquiry which will look at professional life, family life and leisure activities in terms of their many-sided interactions. Our particular concern will be to extract what is living, new, positive – the worthwhile needs and fulfilments – from the negative elements: the alienations.¹⁴

The declared value of the practices of the everyday are outlined in the Swedish mode with a certain modesty. Nonetheless, they require not only recognition and a developed infrastructure, but at the state level care is necessary in order to effectively control the just production of needs and

¹⁴ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 42.

desires for its citizens. This operates through the rather unique and complicated relationships between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, as well as between the notion of individual autonomy and state control.

This ideology developed into the Swedish ‘secret of happiness’ known as the ‘third way’ or the ‘Swedish way.’ It is supposed to function as a compromise between, on the one hand, the Soviet and even German models, which were considered too radical, and, on the other, the unfettered capitalism of the rest of the Western world. This compromise was later ideologically packaged to a global community of admirers by way of the untranslatable term, *lagom*, which operates as much as a way to understand Swedish modernism’s elaborate critique and appropriation of the European avant-garde of the interwar period as it does, more generally, to disclose something about Sweden’s self-understanding rooted in local natural and cultural landscape.

As both an aesthetics and a working method, functionalism is made compatible with the traditional values and life styles that had been practiced in Sweden for centuries. The most rational and efficient use of limited natural resources in a climate that required the optimisation of living practices – these had always been essential considerations for Swedish inhabitants, – had historically defined the living routines and the architectural forms that shaped them. The fact that industrialisation and urbanisation had arrived relatively late to the shores of Sweden prevented any growth of excessiveness, thereby limiting the use and appearance of stylistic gimmicks in peoples’ homes. Thus, living in Sweden was rather functional even before European functionalism reached the Swedish territory and addressed its critique towards the life style of the bourgeoisie. That critique was readily accepted, since it was not at risk of contradicting the traditional ways of living in Sweden.

The critique of the nineteenth century style, with respect to both architecture and the social organisation of life, cohered more around what was true and what was false; what was right and what was wrong in Sweden at the time. The German mode of functionalism, as articulated by Giedion, had taken the nineteenth century as a source and resource for modernism. The nineteenth century had incubated the modernist promise until the conditions were ready for its actualisation in the twentieth century; the Russian avant-garde simply rejected the past, identifying the very transformative point of modernity through the event of Revolution. The Swedish mode, on the other hand, returned to the nineteenth century and to its

traditions as if it were a storage-house, where one could always borrow strategies, ideas, and practices, for the rational organisation of the living space.

Swedish modernism was not seen as anything revolutionary and threatening to the extant living practices, as was the case in Russia; it promised first of all incremental improvement and pragmatic adjustments, rather than radical change and *ex nihilo* creativity. This was perhaps owing to the fact that modernism in Sweden did not address the future, but rather the present. On point of fact of its *presentism* it did not need to prove its own legitimacy as was the case in Russia and, to a lesser extent, in Germany.

The basic viewpoint summarised and advanced in *Acceptera* was that society only needed to accept and to realise that, without knowing it, the Swedish people had been already living in conformity with the principles of modernism, and that functionalism was a natural pattern of Swedish lifestyle.

Ellen Key's *Beauty in the Home*¹⁵ reveals certain *organic* connections between Swedish modernism and everyday life in Sweden, where the local crafts and living practices offer great potential for the articulation of a new aesthetics. In the introduction to the English translation of this text, Barbara Miller Lane defines Key's philosophical stance as "strongly rationalist and positivist, yet based on a fundamental attachment to a rural way of life, and with an undercurrent of Romantic beliefs."¹⁶

Key's connection to the rural origin of the principle of rationalising everyday life resonates with Lefebvre's reference to rural festivals as markers of both the breaks with the everyday, on the one hand, and as the buckle that fastens its wholeness onto the existing 'global structure,' on the other.¹⁷

Ellen Key's *Beauty in the Home* is a theoretical and practical manual for the life-improvements achieved for a single family when undertaking specific reforms on their living space. The main means of improvement is the beauty that should invade every home. It is through beauty that the whole of society can be transformed. Barbara Miller Lane notes on the emphasis that Key puts on beauty's reforming potential:

¹⁵ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home." In: Creagh, Lucy, Käberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 32–57.

¹⁶ Miller Lane, Barbara. "Introduction". In: Creagh, Lucy, Käberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁷ Trebitsch, Michel. "Preface". In: Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. xxviii.

A great many of Key's works dealt with aesthetics – with the importance of the love of beauty in all realms of life... She foretells a new era, a “Third Empire” of reason, social justice, creativity, peace, and beauty.¹⁸

For Key beauty is one of the basic human needs, since “every human being possesses some form of longing for beauty.”¹⁹ It is a right of everyone to be surrounded by beauty that improves both her life and the life of society as a whole. She begins her text by stating the importance of satisfying human needs. Here she cites Carl August Ehrensvärd, a Swedish art theorist and architect of the eighteenth century: “*it is man's needs that set him in motion.*”²⁰

The satisfaction of basic human needs was highlighted as the main task of social, economic, and cultural development in Key's texts, and it was a point that was accepted by the ideologues of Swedish functionalism. She directly influenced Gregor Paulsson, as well as the *Acceptera* manifesto.

Key's writings greatly impacted on Paulsson's own theoretical work. In the *Better Things for Everyday Life*²¹ he continues a systematic study of the nature of taste and beauty. Reflecting on their relativity and emphasising the link “between them and the social and political character of the period in which they come into being,” Paulsson concludes that “*the tastes of different periods differ,*”²² which is similar to Giedion's understanding of how each style connects to its epoch, as outlined in his *Building in France*.²³

The problem, however, was how to define the essential needs. This question became central in the very articulation of artistic and constructive solutions to the improvement of the living space. Ellen Key reserved the power to determine real needs by means of the category of taste, which in turn should be educated and elevated to the level where a person is capable of seeing beauty in the joining together of form and function – itself a functionalist formula that was adopted by the European avant-garde during the 1920s. I do not mean to say here that the idea of beauty as the expres-

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¹⁸ Miller Lane, Barbara. “Introduction”. In: Creagh, Lucy, Kåberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Key, Ellen. “Beauty in the Home,” p. 33.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life”. In: Creagh, Lucy; Kåberg, Helen; Miller Lane, Barbara. (eds.) *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 72–125.

²² Ibid., p. 78.

²³ See more in chapter III of the present thesis.

sion of the object's function through its form was invented by Key,²⁴ only to stress that these ideas appeared simultaneously in different parts of Europe and that the aesthetic grounds articulated by Ellen Key at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as Paulsson's theoretical conclusions, only prove once again that the nature of Swedish functionalism cannot be regarded as having simply been 'imported' or as 'secondary' and 'accidental.' In some respects, it in fact possesses a much tighter affinity to the local national landscape than either the Russian or German mode.

When speaking of taste in *Beauty in the Home*, Key refers to the decisive role that taste plays in the organisation of the living space. The home is a starting point for the individual's personal development. It is not only the shelter where a family dwells, but it is the most important milieu that forms not only individuals, but society as such. According to Key, in the way homes are arranged, "personal taste must of course be the primary deciding factor."²⁵ And yet, as Paulsson notices later in his *Better things...* "in art the issue of taste is one of understanding,"²⁶ and this understanding requires training and development. The education of taste thus becomes the most important tool in the improvement of the organisation of the people's living space. Key notes that "unfortunately most people's taste is undeveloped. And that is why they satisfy their thirst for beauty – paradoxical though it may sound – in an ugly way."²⁷

In *Better Things for Everyday Life*, Gregor Paulsson also devotes whole chapters to reflections on the real meaning of taste and beauty in modern Swedish society, referring to local examples. In a clear and simple voice he advocates logical, literary, and emotional benefits that the industrial means of production promises for the betterment of everyday life. In his book, written in 1919, Paulsson convinces the reader to accept modernity and the implications that follow therefrom. In some ten years functionalism fully penetrates Swedish society, revealing its theoretical grounds as well as demonstrating its architectural and design solutions. These are concisely summarised in the *Acceptera* text, written in 1931, at which point in time the grounds of modernism and modernity had already and de-facto become a natural(ised) part of Swedish identity.

²⁴ Moreover, this idea does not contradict the Ancient Greek comprehension of the relation between the idea, utilitarian nature and the beauty of an object. See Chapter 1 of the present thesis. *The destiny of materialised theory*.

²⁵ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home," p. 35.

²⁶ Paulsson, Gregor. "Better Things for Everyday Life," p. 83.

²⁷ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home," p. 35.

Similar to Giedion, Paulsson demonstrates that taste, which plays a crucial role in the perception of beauty, alters with the course of time. The implication being, of course, that the beautiful, which is perceived as unquestionable at a certain period, is in fact the beauty of the age. Paulsson further adds how this makes “*modern beauty the taste of our era.*”²⁸

Changes from era to era consist of alterations in political, economic, and social conditions; they find expression, as in everything else, in changing tastes as well. *Thus the tastes of different periods differ.* But within the same period *on the whole*, as anyone can see from a visit to an applied arts or cultural museum, one and the same taste prevails.²⁹

Gregor Paulsson claims that the prevalence of a certain taste, which results through the development of a certain recognisable style, is defined to a large extent by the means of production. The greater the diversity of the means of production, the larger and broader the range of designs offered on the market. It is this that stimulates differentiation and complexity within the demands for beauty. Paulsson, though never explicitly calling himself a functionalist, argues for the unification of the means of production, both through and under the use of industrial mass production, which, if unified under the right modernist aesthetical principles, can lead to the elevation of taste through its unification with design. Paulsson concludes, then, with this suggestion, which, as he realised, was still a distant future in his own present of 1919. And yet that future was fast approaching: it acquired modernist forms in the design of objects and interiors displayed at the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, which initiated a critical discussion that soon received a form of theoretical study, and that claimed acceptance of modernist aesthetical principles on the pages of *Acceptera*:

In other words, tastes differ today because the principles of design are not uniform, because individuals have totally different demands of beauty. If it were once again possible to bring about the consistency of production, then taste would certainly become more uniform.

But with uniformity of taste there would also arise consistency of forms throughout society. This is the deeper significance of the proposition

BETTER THINGS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE.³⁰

²⁸ Paulsson, Gregor. *Better Things for Everyday Life*, p. 82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Those are the intellectuals, artists, art theoreticians, and architects, who are responsible for the elevation of taste to the level of comprehending what is truly beautiful. Education should thus be organised through the construction of new homes and new living environments, as well as through the production of the really beautiful things for the home that will help to give shape to the living space that provides the conditions and the milieu for a better life. At this point the education and the training of taste should be mandatory for those who distribute these objects through commercial chains as stated by Paulsson:

[...] the taste of the salesman's underlings and assistants needs to be trained, as does the taste of the traveling salesmen who link the manufacture and the retailer.³¹

Both Key and Paulsson argue for not only making the achievements of technological progress affordable to average families, but for disseminating an understanding of the very necessity to elevate taste and to build rational needs and demands to overcome what Lefebvre called the 'uneven development' of modern life.³²

Writing his *Critique of Everyday Life* already after World War II, Lefebvre still had to admit that in an average home it was either the poor taste of the owners that could be observed ("all is petty, disorganised,")³³ or the consequences of the choice in favour of modern gadgets at the expense of the overall improvement of the dwelling's conditions. He concludes:

Agreed, it is not unusual to find peasants owning electric cookers, but the houses they live in are still dilapidated; they manage to buy gadgets, but cannot afford to repair their houses, and even less to modernise their farms. In other words, the latter are given up for the sake of the former. In the same way quite a large number of working-class couples have a washing machine, a television set, or a car, but they have generally sacrificed something else for these gadgets (having a baby, for example). In this way problems of choosing what to buy – or problems associated with hire-purchase, etc. – are posed within working class families, and these problems modify everyday life. That relatively poor peasants, or workers, should buy television sets proves the existence of a new *social need*. The fact is remarkable. But it does not tell us the size or the extent of this need, nor the extent to which it is satisfied. Nor

³¹ Paulsson, Gregor. "Better Things for Everyday Life," p. 118.

³² Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

does it prove that this need has not been satisfied to the detriment of another.³⁴

Thus the addressed problems had remained similar since Ellen Key's manual, with Lefebvre accenting the social and economic factors of 'uneven development' that sustained low taste and inadequate choices. Key meanwhile emphasised the aesthetic aspects of how a living space might be improved through the categories of beauty and taste and their distribution and production through industrial means.

In Key's and Paulsson's writings, beauty is the purpose of the object elevated in its formal expression to the highest level of perfection. The fundamental law under which beauty operates is articulated by Key in the form of a manifestoed truth:

... this law is that each thing must serve the purpose for which it was made!³⁵

The beauty of things is to be found in their purposefulness, in their utilitarian nature: "utility is a prerequisite for beauty."³⁶ If any beautiful thing is at the same time utilitarian, it still should not mean that anything that is utilitarian is beautiful. By the same logic, what is often promoted as beautiful "does not guarantee utility." It is in the merging of utility and beauty, that is, when one serves the expression of the other, that *real* beauty and *real* style are born. For Ellen Key, style is the truthful beauty capable of satisfying real needs for which it was implemented. Whence its purposefulness. At the same time utility serves as a formal and aesthetical expression of the spirit and individuality that through the application of that style is able to satisfy her needs. Beauty, purpose, style, and taste are all the expressions for what is true.

When discussing the organisation of homes, Key states that "a room does not have a soul until someone's soul is revealed in it, until it shows us what that someone remembers and loves, and how this person lives and works every day."³⁷ If that does not happen, then these rooms "would lack style. For they would lack truth."³⁸ Paulsson continues that "truth also

³⁴ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 9.

³⁵ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home," p. 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

means fitness for purpose. The purpose of an object must find clear expression in its form.”³⁹

Several decades later, these sentiments would be appropriated by IKEA. The ideas that we can read in both Key and Paulsson serve as the intellectual resources by which its interior displays in the stores as well as its catalogues would be organised. IKEA would insert some used and non-IKEA produced items into their interiors, so as to add a personal touch to their arrangements (such as worn-out pieces of furniture, souvenirs, toys, books, photos, etc.). These little additions were to make the interiors reveal the “soul of its owner” and thus break the exclusively promotional and fake character of the showroom interior. Inserting everyday objects was a matter of adding some “truthfulness”. The same ideas can be read behind the “disorder” and visible traces of living practices on the pages of the catalogues of the last decade (e.g. the playing child, people cooking, celebrations, tooth brushing, studying, etc.).

For Paulsson, the purposefulness of an object consisted not only in its functionality, but in its social usefulness as well. As Helena Kåberg notes in the introduction to the English translation of *Better Things for Everyday Life*, “the new modern beauty was not to be seen as an aesthetic or economic end in itself.”⁴⁰

These definitions were similar to those provided by German functionalists. Adolf Behne, for instance, stressed the connection of the idea of originating form in functionalism to the social relations between humans and their living space, which was the organic and natural connection to be found in both the human and animal worlds:

Form is nothing more than the consequence of establishing a relationship between human beings. For isolated and unique figure in nature there is no problem of form. Individuals, even individuals in nature are free. The problem of form arises when an overview is demanded. Form is the prerequisite under which an overview becomes possible. Form is an eminently social matter. Anyone who recognises the right of society recognises the right of form.⁴¹

³⁹ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 85.

⁴⁰ Kåberg, Helena. “Introduction” to Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 60.

⁴¹ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 137.

These claims of form-origination and the beauty of the thing as deriving from its purpose – whether utilitarian, aesthetic, and social – were articulated by Key in 1899 and by Paulsson in 1919 in very functionalist terms, not that at the time the term was in use. A decade later, by the time *Acceptera* was published as a reaction to the criticisms levelled at the Stockholm Exhibition, the notion of functionalism had already undergone critical revision, in terms of both its methods and aesthetic. Indeed, it was as carefully and scarcely used on the pages of the manifesto as the words ‘art’, ‘beauty,’ and ‘home’ were in the treatises penned by the Russian constructivist.

For both Key and Paulsson, beauty is about truth. The expression of truth about a person within her living space is essential in satisfying her natural need both for beauty and for living in truth. The beauty of human individuality is expressed through the way their unique homes are organised, which in this sense should always be different, since they express and satisfy different needs, both spiritual and utilitarian:

A home must of course be arranged very differently depending on whether it is located in the north or the south, in town or in the country, and whether it is a winter residence or just a summer house. It must above all be different to the extent that it reflects the needs of the people who will live in that home. The great mistake with most buildings is that they do not express real needs or real purpose.⁴²

In stark contrast, the Russian mode of functionalism proposed the independence of a house from the physical landscape (natural space in Lefebvre’s terms), on the one side, and the immediate needs and individual preferences of taste, on the other.⁴³ In this respect they were inspired by Le Corbusier’s proposals of buildings detached from the sites that demonstrated the universality of functionalism’s methods and guaranteed their unconditioned applicability.

Thus, for Russian constructivism, a living house was to be considered an object that should disconnect a dweller from her experience and thus her past and to insert her in a rationalised living space, which was capable of the immanent possibility of reforming and educating the dweller.

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⁴² Key, Ellen. “Beauty in the Home,” p. 34.

⁴³ E.g. Le Corbusier’s project for a suburban district of Buenos Aires, which consisted of multiplied copies of the Villa Savoy and which specific landscape was unknown to the architect.

The German mode was more attentive to the differing but equally important values of both natural and social spaces, within which the new dwellings were to be incorporated. Even though a house was first of all to be considered a working tool for the organisation of living space, it was also a matter of considering the formal organisation of society from the standpoint of establishing the necessary and sustaining inter-relations between those who inhabit the space, which is organised without tearing tenants from their pre-existing social spaces. A house was not to be an expression of a dweller's individuality, but an expression of the *collective* individuality of a society. In its form and spatial organisation, the house was to reveal its purpose in the most appropriate form, and was to be pure and thus deprived of any unnecessary décor, as Behne would state:

If humanity were just a sum of individuals, it would probably be possible to see the house as a pure tool, as purely functional. Anyone who sees a form in humanity, a pattern articulated in time and space, approaches the house with formal requirements, in which case "formal" is not to be confused with "decorative."

If every building is part of a built whole, then it recognises from its aesthetics and formal requirements certain universally valid rules, rules that do not arise from its individual functional character [*Zweckcharakter*] but from the requirements of this whole. For here, in the social sphere after all, must lie the primeval elements of the aesthetic [...]⁴⁴

But in the Swedish mode, things are reasoned differently. If undertaken with the requisite levels of taste (achievable through education), an expression of individuality within the home can provide the home with rational beauty. In this case each home, even if built in a detached manner, would still contribute to the rational organisation of the living space of the whole community. One of the main problems as seen by Key and Paulsson is that most people, from dwellers to builders, do not know what their true needs are and it is owing to this that they require an educator to enhance their sense of taste so that they might better contribute to building beauty in their homes and around their communities – improving the life of the whole society. The first step in this direction is to ensure that those who have access to the production of homes and of things take a lead in elevating general standards of taste in the shorter time. But only collective efforts will ultimately be capable of eliminating all bad-taste things from the market,

⁴⁴ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 137.

leaving the general consumer with a choice among only beautiful products, the presence of which will help to educate her taste, as Ellen Key suggests:

Only when there is nothing ugly available for sale, when beautiful things are as inexpensive as ugly ones are now, can beauty for everyone be fully realised.⁴⁵

This idea indicated by Ellen Key – namely, that the taste of an average person can be elevated through the regulation of consumption – has passed through Swedish modernism like a red thread. On all levels, from policy makers to merchandisers, producers of living space were responsible for the formation of a market that would allow for the gradual reform of the living space, and would in turn, lead to an improvement in living standards.

Here is where the core difference between the more radical modes of functionalism and this one lay. In Russia it was also the producers of living spaces who took responsibility for reforming peoples' everyday lives. Yet in the Russian mode, the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the unrefined and non-educated dwellers was out of the question. The new living space was to be produced not to satisfy their existing needs, but on the contrary – to leave no space for those needs to sustain themselves; to eliminate them entirely by the production of the *newly* formed space. In this way, inhabitants had no alternative other than to adapt to the new progressive needs of the collective by adjusting to the demands of the newly produced environment. The overcoming of private property, which deprived people of the possibility of possession (whether the living space or the objects with which to furnish that living space), was a crucial condition for such space to emerge. It was the space that appropriated people, and not vice versa.

In the German mode, while the existence of some basic needs was recognised, it was the producers of the living space who took full responsibility to decide which needs to satisfy and which to leave unsated. They therefore offered a more didactic way of solving the housing problem.

The Swedish mode was to become a generally softer approach, where the public's needs were studied. The problem of overcoming the people's inability to critically realise what they need (even what they really want) with respect to their housing, was still acute in 1931 – thirty years after Ellen Key expressed her concerns, and when *Acceptera* had already critically sum-

⁴⁵ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home", p. 35.

marised the functionalist heritage of the preceding decade, concluding that “in fact only a few customers definitely know what they want.”⁴⁶

The diversity of recognised needs and desires in regard to optimal dwelling had only grown by the time of the publication of the *Acceptera* manifesto, while the question how to define ‘real’ needs and wants was as urgent as ever, requiring the careful analyses of the needs and the inevitable sacrifices and compromises on one’s desire, through which “a gain can be made:”

If therefore, we cannot satisfy all our justified desires in a dwelling, the natural thing is to determine what is primary, where no concessions can be made, and which demands may possibly be relinquished.⁴⁷

The right to be satisfied, not only in terms of needs but also desires, is asserted throughout the text of the manifesto.

Apart from the primary need for adequate shelter, i.e. a minimal living space and hygiene, *Acceptera* dedicates separate chapters for the needs and desires for leisure, recreation, entertainment, and comfort.⁴⁸

Nearly two decades later, Henri Lefebvre acknowledges leisure as “a remarkable example of a new social need with a *spontaneous* character, which social organisation, by offering it various means of satisfaction, has directed, sharpened, shifted and modified.”⁴⁹ Yet, Lefebvre is critical to the growing commodification and commercialisation of leisure, which in capitalist societies produces and sustains the break with everyday life.⁵⁰ The availability of hobbies and leisure activities on the market is compensation for “the endless complications of everyday living,” as articulated by Benjamin in *Experience and Poverty*.⁵¹ Lefebvre argues for the distribution of new types of entertainment (such as television and radio), technologies that have become available within the living spaces of individual homes, what he calls “cultural or cultivated leisure”⁵² as a source of pleasure that should rehabilitate the wholeness of being and reconnect a person with her

⁴⁶ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 249.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁸ See chapter “Rest and Recreation”, in *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, pp. 173–180 and 233–244.

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Benjamin, Walter. “Experience and Poverty”, p. 735.

⁵² Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 41.

everyday life, rather than provide her with a break and a commercialised set of possibilities to escape from the everyday:

[...] the ultimate characteristic of such cultivated leisure activities is that they lead us back towards the feeling of presence, towards nature and the life of the senses (or, as the experts would say, towards an audio-visual milieu revitalized by modern techniques).⁵³

The authors of *Acceptera* recognised these aforementioned needs as highly individual and as requiring a careful approach to their satisfaction. They claim, for example, that “comfort depends, after all, on having a home that suits me alone and nobody else” and that “your home should satisfy your needs.”⁵⁴ The satisfaction of individual needs through the methods of standardised industrial production proved to be one of the most challenging problems to resolve; this, as well as the equally vexing problems surrounding the ambiguous relationships between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, where representatives of the Swedish mode were involved in a constant balancing act between excessive collectivisation of the domestic sphere and a highly regulated market, on the one hand, and, on the other, satisfying the demand for privacy to the point of making certain living practices immune from the state or exempt from any public control whatsoever.

The definition of the true needs and the construction of desires was granted to the regulated market, where, as Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein argue, an “individual was to be made into a consumer.”⁵⁵ Since the market was already defined by standardised industrial products, the question was “how can one make people desire that which is standardised?”⁵⁶ The answer would be “through education and schooling,” on the one hand, and through the reconnection with tradition, on the other.⁵⁷ Mattsson and Wallenstein conclude that this type of consumption, specifically designed for the Swedish model, had two sides:

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 41–42.

⁵⁴ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, pp. 233–234.

⁵⁵ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). “Introduction”. In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁷ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). “Introduction”. In: *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p.22.

[...] on the one hand it was a force that destroys traditional values, uproots traditions, and renders symbolical values obsolete; on the other hand it must become a counter-force that allows for the re-functioning of traditional objects, for the production of a 'patchwork' history that can make the old and the new co-exist, and for the emergence of a "rational consumer" who will always, spontaneously, desire what he or she 'truly' needs.⁵⁸

The policy of producing the new consumer through the very process of consumption, reforming and reconstructing needs and desires in the process, would assume a less radical modernisation project for people and society. The "reasonable consumer", as Helena Mattsson called the targeted citizen of Swedish modernist ideology, became a role model for the dwellers of the age of *Acceptera*.⁵⁹ The newly produced desires "must become essential for the making of the new society."⁶⁰

The concept of the "reasonable consumer" would have been incomprehensible for the Russian mode of functionalism. The systematic nationalisation of all sectors of the economy eliminated the market as such, and the war against commercial consumption was declared on political, economic, as well as ideological levels. The accusations levelled at consumerism would be equal in intensity to the denunciations of counter-revolutionary activities. Socialist ideology was antagonistic towards the market economy; the state meanwhile took control of both the means and relations of production. As part of this consolidation of power by the state, the Russian functionalists were given the authority to organise the living space in the most optimal way and in compliance with communist ideology. The architects became the producers and the state was the consumer of the new living space, which included people as one of its inseparable and in-built elements. The trouble was that the 'new living space' that the Russian constructivists were responsible for producing was prefabricated for the purpose of being consumed by the state.

In the German mode, the market existed, yet not so much to serve the identification, regulation, and satisfaction of citizens' needs in order to regulate the construction of the living space and to optimise it through its production costs. In both the Russian and German modes, a dweller would

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁹ Mattsson, Helena. "Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and personalisation in Swedish functionalism." In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), pp. 74–99.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

not be able to take care of satisfying her needs and desires even if they were recognised as legitimate, since the decision-making with respect to housing was made without consultation with the tenant, considered as either commissioner or a client.⁶¹

This does not mean that in Sweden the production of living space relied on the undefined desires of a general consumer; already, in the 1930s, state and capital had forged an alliance. Yet, as Mattsson argues, “modern architecture did not lose its power to shape society in this process.” It was given a guiding role in creating environments to raise a “modern democratic citizen able to master his or her unconscious desire for commodities.”⁶²

Still, considering the conditions of the existing market, Swedish architects had to cope with similar economic challenges to their German counterparts, such as, for example, the low incomes of an average dweller and the overall low purchasing power of the mass population. David Kuchenbuch compares Germany’s and Sweden’s approaches to the definition of needs,⁶³ noting that many Swedish architects had to “commit themselves to a programme which was based on statistics concerning the income situation of Stockholm families rather than aesthetics.”⁶⁴

Helena Mattsson draws the following conclusion on Swedish consumption policy, as it developed out of functionalist ideology:

[...] in this way consumption becomes a utopia, freed from the individual struggle towards a personal status and instead an expression of the collective. And this utopian consumption would constitute a democratic platform for the “new citizen”, regulate production as well as labour market and in this way, create the new society.⁶⁵

⁶¹ It is valid for the German mass housing built for the workers, since the private housing market followed other regulations where the commissioner could have a decisive voice. In Russia, on the other hand, with the elimination of the right for private ownership, all citizens lost control over the formation and maintenance of their homes.

⁶² Mattsson, Helena. “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and personalisation in Swedish functionalism,” p. 76.

⁶³ Kuchenbuch, David. “Footprints in the Snow. Power, Knowledge, and subjectivity in German and Swedish Architectural Discourse on needs, 1920s to 1950s.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), pp. 160–169.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Mattsson, Helena. “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and personalisation in Swedish functionalism,” p. 86.

The question of human needs, and of their undoubted recognition as natural parts of what it is to be a human-being, together with the mastering of production and the managing of those needs, is an essential and distinctive feature of the Swedish mode of functionalism.

4.2. A dream family home

The housing question was one of the most urgent asked during the interwar period. The functionalist method emerged from the necessity to solve the housing crisis in the shortest possible time. Functionalism developed new types of housing, examples of which will be the object of analysis in the following chapters of the present thesis. Those types still lay at the heart of contemporary mass housing solutions.

Yet both the Russian and German modes argued for the radical transformation of the living space, and this, to a greater or lesser degree, assumed the transformation and, in the extreme case of the Russian mode, the dissolution of the traditional practices of housekeeping, in addition to the elimination of the family, in the traditional sense, with its absolute subsumption under the community.

Collectivisation and nationalisation were the outcomes of Socialist Revolution in Russia. These solutions were received with due circumspection by West-European modernists, who sought to avoid Bolshevism through a more careful and nuanced consideration of the private home as the domain for social stability. Mattsson and Wallenstein note how the sustainability of the home was a means of buttressing both individual and collective security under the threat of revolution:

The “home” was seen as the salvation from an impending Bolshevik revolution, and the dwelling became the place where a concrete politicising of architecture must take place.⁶⁶

Yet, the preservation of the notion of the traditional home and the vernacular family that fills its space as a direct reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution was by far not the most decisive. As the texts chosen for a closer textual reading here show, the concept of the home had been placed at the centre of Swedish modernism ever since “Key’s feminist manifesto” of

⁶⁶ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). “Introduction”. In: *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p. 17.

1899.⁶⁷ As Kenneth Frampton goes on to note, it marked the moment when the home was considered “the cradle of a new egalitarian culture.”⁶⁸ Ellen Key sees the reforming potential of the home, identifying it as that space which can transform not only the life of the family that inhabits it, but society as a whole. The *Beauty in the Home* may be an aesthetic manifesto, but it is a social treatise too. The home is proclaimed to be the very heart of Swedish society, with the family and the child as its centre, and it is presented as not only that site often under attack from social and economic exploitation by community and state, but as the site for improvement and progress, in both social and aesthetical ways. As a bearer of the home and family values the woman is represented as a designer and an artist, who provides for the family through ensuring the maintenance of the everyday at the same time as she infuses the home with a sense of beauty – a necessary condition for happiness.

An ideal Swedish home and the means by which it is reached are introduced in Key’s text with caring precision and illuminating argumentation about the definition of true beauty. For Ellen Key an ideal home with an ideal family does have real existence: it is the home of her friend, a famous artist Carl Larsson, who provided Key’s manual with illustrations from his family villa, as described by Barbara Miller Lane in “An Introduction to Ellen Key’s *Beauty in the Home*.”

In his paintings and books, Larsson depicted an ideal home, furnished with colourful, simple, and somewhat rustic-looking pieces designed by him and his wife, Karin, and decorated with textiles created by Karin, who was inspired by traditional crafts. Larsson peopled the dwelling with an idealized version of his own family (Karin and their eight children), leading an idealized life, plain and unpretentious, close to the soil and to local traditions. In Larsson’s home, children worked and played, the family put on theatricals, light flooded in. Perpetual sunlight seemed to illuminate the life of the home, and strong colours predominated. Key’s own emphases on colour and light are very similar to Larsson’s, and, as she writes in “Beauty in the Home”, she strongly approved of his depiction of family life.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Frampton, Kenneth. *The Untimely Timeliness of Swedish Modernism*. In: Creagh, Lucy; Käberg, Helena; Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts* (New York: MOMA, 2008), p. 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Miller Lane, Barbara. “An Introduction to Ellen Key’s ‘Beauty in the Home’.” In: Creagh, Lucy; Käberg, Helena; Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts* (New York: MOMA, 2008), p.19.

The secret of an ideal home, according to Key, is its simplicity, functionality and efficiency; the home is a universal tool, as Behne had put it, on the one hand, and a space for creative re-appropriations, on the other. All things that inhabit it should be utilitarian in their sense of being, fit for their purpose. At the same time, they should be beautiful, which means that their form and organisation should reveal their function and do not pretend to be anything else. The beauty of a thing lies in its modesty, without any excessive imitation of what it is not. It should make the life of its inhabitants easier and happier, thus it must please its owner and should not serve the purpose of impressing the house's guests. This advice addresses both the choice of any given utilitarian thing as well as the aesthetic issue of home decoration:

When selecting such art objects I must of course choose what I myself find beautiful, not what I know others find beautiful! For it is my own eyes, not the eyes of my friends that I should please.⁷⁰

Not only does *Beauty in the Home* give practical advice on how to choose beautiful furniture, wallpaper, colours, and décor for the home, it is also a treatise on how to learn to see the things, spaces, and practices that are beautiful and proper for the organisation of an individual home and for living in one; and to learn to see what is able to make the home's inhabitants happy, bringing joy to their everyday life. These are general questions, the concrete answers to which are not the propriety of the rich. As Key claims that "we should not believe that beauty is a joy reserved for the few:"

No, each and every one of us can pay homage to beauty through the care taken in our deportment, speech, person, and dress.⁷¹

Key's praising of the home opens up the space as one full of joy and play, as well as being a tool that still remains proximal to how Adolf Behne, a representative of the German mode of functionalism, would envisage it. Behne refers to the 'original hut' – to the ancient times when a home, serving the utilitarian purpose of providing shelter, had been at the same time treated as a toy: as a space for expressing something else but its pure purpose of protection from weather and threats from the outside world:

⁷⁰ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home," p. 53.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[...] when we study the earliest stages of human culture, we find that the instinctive joys of play cannot be separated from practical matters. Primitive man is not strictly utilitarian. He demonstrates his instinct for play even in his tools, which he makes smooth and beautiful beyond the demands of strict necessity, painting them or decorating them with ornaments.

The tool called “house” is no exception to this.

From the very beginning the house has been as much a toy as a tool. It is difficult to say how long a balance was maintained to this.

The play instinct led to interest in form. Without that instinct it would be impossible to understand why the tool called “house” must look good and be a certain shape. Thus our play instinct established certain laws of form, although they are subject to change from time to time.⁷²

Behne continues that over time, with the shift towards formal expressions of buildings through the use of excessive decorations within certain historical styles, this balance between form and function was destroyed. The era of modernism finally changed this attitude towards a house as a decorated construction, in which the organisation of space is subordinated to the décor. As Behne declares, the “functional architectural concepts replaced formal ones,” and “now every building became afunctional building, that is, it was tackled on the base of its types and function.”⁷³

The era of modernism, of which Behne was a proponent, and to which his 1926 manifesto *The Modern Functional Building* testifies, states that functionalism had already become an existing practice and that every house can afford to become a functional one. This same claim would some five years later be recorded by the Swedish functionalists in their own manifesto, *Acceptera*.

A further necessary condition for the functional home to accommodate beauty was the requirement of affordability. Again, this was already a central concern in Ellen Key’s *Beauty in the Home*. Half a century later it would become a founding principle of the IKEA’s business philosophy, which emphasises the idea of providing as many people as possible with “good products at low prices.”⁷⁴ Beautiful does not necessarily means being expensive or luxurious. In the *Acceptera* manifesto, itself profoundly marked by Key’s thoughts, specific paragraphs were dedicated to distin-

⁷² Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Citation taken from an interview with Ingvar Kamprad in Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*. (TITEL books AB for IKEA of Sweden AB, Litopat S.p.A., Italy, 2013), p. 13.

guishing between true notions of beauty and luxury. What it meant for something to be luxurious was reserved first of all to the category of quality and not exclusively to the cost and to the potential to impress:

For us luxury is the highest standard of quality and not magnificence.⁷⁵

Modesty, simplicity, and functionality are necessary conditions for beauty; beauty can be perceived by those who have good taste, which means the ability to see, appreciate, and to bring the beautiful into everyday life:

True taste, in the final analysis, is the refined taste that knows moderation and unity are the conditions for beauty as much in the home as in other areas of artistic creativity.⁷⁶

As it was noted before, Ellen Key is concerned with the necessity to educate individual taste and in this training the living space that surrounds people is very important, since it possesses potential for educative and reforming practices. Here she writes:

Personal taste is best developed by seeing beautiful art around you and learning to appreciate it.⁷⁷

The European avant-garde of the interwar period saw the constructed milieu in the transformation of individual's lives as well as of the whole society as decisive. Russian constructivists believed in the revolutionary ability of the newly constructed living space to harness the power of the collective and transfer it to a new social, ideological, and spiritual level. The belief that the transformations necessary to construct the new living space could be achieved without the will of, and consultation with, inhabitants of that space had, for sure, a decisive impact on the destiny of constructed functionalist spaces in its most radical Russian mode. In this sense, Ellen Key stood on the other end of the continuum. An advocate for both the enlightenment and the education of the dwellers, she reasoned that only through gradual and incremental improvement could transformations of existing living spaces be sustainable. Not that this means that the Russian avant-garde did not recognise the importance of the enlightenment and

⁷⁵ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 263. Original bold.

⁷⁶ Key, Ellen. "Beauty in the Home," p. 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

artistic education. Quite the contrary; reforms to the educational system followed directly after the October Revolution, making education, including professional artistic training, accessible to the masses.⁷⁸ Yet, in contrast to Ellen Key, their program was more didactical in their promotion of avant-Garde values and in the break they wanted to effectuate with both traditional and academic art.

Ellen Key offered some general and easy-to-follow advice for those who are not yet certain about the quality of their taste and their proficiency in selecting truly beautiful things for the home. Her principal suggestion was to choose what is simple, affordable, and functional:

For the simple homes discussed here, the most treasured beauty is that which is achieved with the least expense and the least possible loss of time.⁷⁹

In the 1980s this statement became an IKEA motto: “*For the Wise Rather than the Wealthy.*”⁸⁰ The company identified its target customer not as a rich consumer, but a reasonable one, who comes to a store expecting to find ready-made decisions for his home, immediately available at the least financial expense. What is important is that these decisions are not to be offered either on the basis of expense or functionality alone. Rather, it should possess a reference to fact that the designs themselves are both clear and understandable and not weighed down by extravagance. The aim of reaching the ideal of affordability resulted in the implementation of the DIY (‘do it yourself’) principle, self-service at the stores, flat boxes for packing and transportation as well as in the whole organisation of the company’s functioning under the goal of optimisation of all possible resources. According to the company’s policy, as outlined by Sara Kristoffersson in her book *Design by IKEA. A Cultural History*,⁸¹ “the aim is to squeeze prices so that even people with very limited means can afford to shop at IKEA: ‘Wasting resources is a mortal sin at IKEA.’”⁸² Yet Kristoffersson argues that

⁷⁸ More on the reforms of the artistic education in the Revolutionary Russia, see, e.g. in the article by Mikhail Evseyev, “Becoming Tools for Artistic Consciousness of the People. The Higher art school and independent art studios in Petrograd (1918–1921).” In: *Baltic Worlds*, 2017, vol. X:3. Special section: Russian Revolution in Art & Aesthetics, pp. 35–44.

⁷⁹ Key, Ellen. “Beauty in the Home,” p. 52.

⁸⁰ The slogan was created by Adman Leon Nordin in the 1980s for the re-opening of the store at Kungens Kurva near Stockholm (Bjarnestam, 2013:104).

⁸¹ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by IKEA. A Cultural History*. (London; New Dehli; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

this does not mean only that the company thrives simply to increase sales. By the time IKEA entered the stage, as Kristoffersson notes, “housing became a political issue with political solutions.”⁸³ Kristoffersson argues that *Beauty in the Home* by Ellen Key and *Better Things for Everyday Life* by Gregor Paulsson became theoretical grounds for the development of IKEA’s policy.⁸⁴

IKEA continued to conceptualise what was previously elaborated in texts by Key, Paulsson, and the authors of *Acceptera*, emphasising its Swedish national origin and becoming the most successful mass commercial export of the Swedish mode of functionalism. Sara Kristoffersson cites IKEA’s webpage from 2013, which outlines the direct line of descent from its present day business model back to Key’s aesthetics. The point that IKEA were trying to convey was that their designs are squarely rooted in the national Swedish character:

The political rhetoric thus embraced a particular style or ideal: clean, simple and fit for the purpose, as well as light and airy. Simply put, an ideal that was termed Swedish by IKEA too: ‘The Swedish’ approach to design is also the basis of the IKEA range, which to this day is developed in Sweden. The home furnishings are modern but not trendy, functional yet attractive, human-centered and child-friendly, and they represent the fresh, healthy Swedish lifestyle through their carefully chosen colours and materials.⁸⁵

IKEA turned the promotion of the Swedish modernist lifestyle into a product that is now available for sale all over the world. This complex approach to the construction of living space and its effective introduction to the dwellers who will reside there defines the functionalist approach and reflects the specific treatment of time within modernist aesthetics.

The development of a home was previously an enormously time-consuming process. It took years, even generations, for a home to acquire its individuality, its spirit, and even to properly function as a site for the satisfaction of its inhabitants’ primary needs. A house was often occupied by many generations of the same family, and was constantly altered and rebuilt to meet the dwellers’ changing circumstances, while the mobility of family members was usually very low. A sustainable house, a home in the traditional sense, requires “building-art”, which, *Acceptera* claims, is “more

⁸³ Ibid., p. 60.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 59–60.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

conservative than life,”⁸⁶ and results in a museum-like storage that keeps memories of ancestors and resists radical alterations: “for housing form has petrified while life has changed radically in important aspects.”⁸⁷

The functionalist approach, in all its modes, radically shook the relationship between home and tradition, as well as with the overall concept of time and the attitude towards tradition and the past. The apogee of modernity was recorded in the *Acceptera*, which, according to Lucy Creagh,⁸⁸ is “often referred to as “the manifesto of Swedish functionalism”, an appellation “that sets it into a long line of early twentieth-century avant-garde pronouncements on architecture, one of the major hallmarks of which is an antipathy to history and tradition.”⁸⁹

Yet, as Leigh argues, “despite these initial impressions, *Acceptera* lacks aggressive posturing and utopianism of many avant-garde manifestoes associated with early twentieth-century modernism, and its authors [...] were hardly radical interlopers on the Stockholm cultural scene.”⁹⁰

The authors of *Acceptera* were not so motivated to introduce and defend new relationships between tradition, history, and contemporary reality, since for the most part it appeared that they expounded upon the fact that those relationships had already and irreversibly impacted on contemporary society, and that there was no other choice but to accept them. The idea of the transformation of home, even though it had not reached the extreme of its complete dissolution, is inspired in the *Acceptera* manifesto by the radical modernist aesthetics. As Lucy Creagh notes on the sections devoted to home and contemporary housing solutions:

The simple message, repeated in various forms over the course of these chapters was “the nature of the home has changed.”⁹¹

Acceptera outlines the major changes that had already altered the nature of home by the time of the Stockholm Exhibition and the publication of the manifesto: these changes were generally owing to various factors and changes in living and working conditions; industrial production had drawn

⁸⁶ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 164.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Creagh, Lucy. “An Introduction to *Acceptera*.” In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. Creagh, Lucy; Käberg, Helena; Miller Lane, Barbara. (New York: MOMA, 2008), pp. 127–139.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

a huge number of the cities' population to work outside of the home, including women that started entering offices, thereby altogether changing the constitution of Swedish society. As the authors of *Acceptera* described, "nowadays here in Sweden workers in an office are completely classless."⁹² The home stopped being an ultimate place for work, now it could become a place "for rest and family life."⁹³

On one the hand, various types of entertainment, which previously were available only outside of dwellings, became affordable in the homes through the spread of radio and television. Concerts, lectures, TV programs (as *Acceptera* authors predicted), and dance parties do not require leaving home anymore. This leads to an increase in the home's social importance and in the amount of time spent with close family, or even in solitude. TV and radio, as suggested in *Acceptera*, offer "a counterweight to excessive collectivisation" as they address "individuals" and require them "to concentrate."⁹⁴

On the other hand, those social activities that became affordable to the general population (i.e. cinemas, restaurants, sport activities, and membership in various associations) still takes people out of their homes, shifting the custom of spending leisure time from the gatherings taking place around the table in the host's home to meeting at 'outside' institutions that are organised especially to take care of people's demands for entertainment. This again alters the way the home is used. "Food and drink is less important", – claim the *Acceptera* authors:⁹⁵

[...] we need no longer entertain in our homes; this is more easily arranged in restaurants, town halls, and assembly rooms, so that instead it is possible for our homes to fulfil their roles in our daily lives as places where we sleep, spend time with our families, and seek privacy.⁹⁶

The state's recognition of the importance of rest and recreation, the development of the entertainment industry, and the overall growth of living standards, leads to the consequence that "the relationship of the individual to the state has changed radically compared with the past."⁹⁷

⁹² *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 151.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

The Swedish mode of functionalism was one of the keystones of the construction of the welfare state, with its aim of balancing private and public, collective and individual, commercial and state-provisions, all of which was targeting what Lefebvre would call the rehabilitation of the totality of living.

The home and its organisation was once and for all reserved as a private sector in Swedish society. The development of a comprehensive social infrastructure did not intend to become an obligatory instrument of political and social control, as it was in Soviet Russia, but, possessing more commercial character, it was to give people the choice of how and where to satisfy their needs and fulfil their responsibilities. In regard to the home, as noted in *Acceptera*, “whatever the case, a dwelling should, as in the past, provide a place for gathering and a place for privacy.”⁹⁸

Following the common trend of the time, *Acceptera* authors supported to a large extent the collectivisation of Swedish society, but under the ultimate condition of preserving privacy and private ownership as one of its basic values.

The new organisation of living space required new forms of housing, such as the construction of settlements similar to German *siedlungen*, collective houses, and family hotels. A further demand was to improve communication between home, work place, and public institutions. The new production of living space could only be achieved through collective efforts and then “a more advance kind of human being, which will only evolve after some time, will be required.”⁹⁹

All three modes of functionalism admitted that the “transitional man cannot be avoided,” as Lefebvre writes.¹⁰⁰ However, each mode advanced different ways of evaluating and treating the figure of man in this transitory state. The Russian mode was least tolerant towards contemporary ‘transitional men’, while Swedish mode was driven by meeting his immediate needs and desires in the present moment.

The infrastructural conditions that were being shaped, as well as the new solutions for the production of living space that were being developed within the aesthetics and ideology of modernism had already started the process of the evolution of contemporary citizens to the “more advance

⁹⁸ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 199.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 65.

kind of humans.” The portrait of this new man was drawn on the pages of the manifesto:

Healthy individuals,¹⁰¹ with a feeling of physical freedom and an instinctive desire for cleanliness, are now returning from the gymnasiums, tennis clubs, swimming pools, and athletics grounds, from the meadows, forests, and lakes. It would be natural for them to insist on homes that embody hygiene, sunlight, fresh air, light and water.¹⁰²

The out-of-home activities are thus not counter-posed to those that take place inside the home. The living space should be homogenous in a sense that various aspects of peoples’ lives should not be set against each other and contrast much in terms of the quality of conditions, under which they are practiced. At all points of their everyday living, people possess the right to enjoy the same quality of standards, both with respect to surroundings and tools, that help them to go through their work days without making them face poor living conditions at their homes. These historical tendencies were the tentative signs of progress, of moving towards an overcoming of the ‘uneven development’ of society, as Lefebvre would note some two decades later. This complex approach to the living space as precisely a homogenous space – with all its aspects and parts treated as equally important and that should be equally well organised – was one of the major claims of functionalism in all its modes, and is among the achievements of functionalist practice – the fact that today, in contemporary European cities, we enjoy, to a higher or lower degree, – central heating, a clean and reliable water supply, extensive infrastructural support and public transportation networks.

In seeking to solve acute housing problems, the Swedish mode of functionalism was more flexible with respect to its dealings with the given reality. German functionalists first of all promoted the construction and development of new housing districts outside larger cities and in proximity to factories, so as to make them semi-autonomous from the old town centres; they would possess also infrastructure necessary for the proper functioning of the newly built communities. The concepts developed by

¹⁰¹ It is interesting to note that, even though admitting positive effects of growing collectivisation and mass production, the *Acceptera* authors operate with the notion of individuals and never use the term “masses” that was commonly used in Russian functionalist texts on housing at the time.

¹⁰² *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 179.

German Werkbund,¹⁰³ and the new type of housing produced in the form of *siedlungen*, were highly appreciated by Swedish modernists. In *Better Things for Everyday Life* Gregor Paulsson claims that the Werkbund concept should become “a guiding principle for all forces that sought to unite culture, economics, and production in this modern, fragmented society.”¹⁰⁴

According to Paulsson, decisive in the Werkbund concept is the category of quality in terms of how it relates “to the state and to public opinion and encouraging it through the fruitful cooperation of art, industry, handicraft, and trade.”¹⁰⁵

Together with other *Acceptera* authors, Gregor Paulsson credits German *siedlungen*¹⁰⁶ as the “most remarkable contribution of our age to the solution of housing problems, built in a modern and uncompromising manner.”¹⁰⁷ By giving an overview of the types of housing that developed in previous eras they appreciate those that have been generated by modernist methods, such as e.g. family hotels. Yet the ideal home for Swedish modernists is one that is owned by the dweller and that possesses as much resemblance to an individual villa as possible:

Owner-occupied homes in the suburbs must however in many respects be preferred to rented city apartments, and probably represent a more ideal solution to the housing problem.¹⁰⁸

One of the “more ideal” solutions suggested in *Acceptera* was a suburban row house – a certain compromise between a city apartment that benefits from its proximity to existing infrastructure, on the one hand, and, on the other, a country cottage that allows to build and enjoy closer connection to nature, where “lower building costs allow greater spaciousness and the openness around them makes it easier to arrange contact between the living room and outdoors.”

In its choice of an ideal type of housing, the Swedish mode was much closer to its German counterpart, within which the ideas of garden city

¹⁰³ *German Association of Craftsmen* established in 1907 as an association of architects, artists, designers and industrialists under the goal to develop and promote modernist architecture and industrial design. It prepared ground for the later organisation of the Bauhaus school.

¹⁰⁴ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Acceptera* refers to *siedlungen* built in Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁰⁷ *Acceptera* in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

theory, developed by Ebenezer Howard were elaborated into such concepts as e.g. “the growing house” by Martin Wagner that considered the extension of indoor living space to the outer terraces or balconies¹⁰⁹ and that spoke of dwellings as filled with air, light, and movement, as demonstrated at the 1927 *Die Wohnung* exhibition and summarised in Giedion’s *Befreites Wohnen*.

Yet, and as documented in *Acceptera*, this compromise between interior and exterior, met with considerable resistance from Swedish society.¹¹⁰ Arguing against radicalism in the transformation of the living space, *Acceptera* authors admit, that “we cannot force a development that we consider correct, but we can encourage it and indicate the conditions required.”¹¹¹ This less didactic approach differs from the Russian and German modes.

The Russian mode of functionalism did not see much value in the housing types of previous eras. A villa, even though it was not completely discharged as a housing type, was appointed to the far reaches of the future, once the transitional period was over. It was out of the question in contemporary social reality due to both ideological and economic reasons, such as the legal abolishment of private ownership and the declaration of collectivisation as a new state policy. The course was taken to destroy the home in its traditional meaning and to eliminate private corners within existing living spaces. Everyday practices were to be turned public to such an extent that the space, which was previously bordered by the walls of one’s home, would now only be used to separate the sleeping beds – beds that could themselves be also placed in the public spaces of shared bedrooms.

The German mode did not assume complete dissolution of the notion of the home. Nonetheless, it was still adamant that the home required significant transformation. The German approach was more practical and down-to-Earth than the Russian one, which resulted in the development of a whole new concept of living space production, and which was realised impressively in *siedlungen* built for the working-class. The main features of *siedlungen*’s space were the division and separation of different living practices between various infrastructural sectors of housing estates through the construction of public laundries, bathrooms, canteens, recreational areas,

¹⁰⁹ See *Chapter I* of the *Part II* of the present thesis.

¹¹⁰ *Acceptera*, in: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 217.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

and kindergartens on the territory of an estate. Yet the privacy of a home was preserved and accommodated even within tiny spaces of *siedlungens'* apartments, thereby giving tenants a choice of how to arrange the functioning of their households as well as the extent to which their living practices should be exposed to the public.

4.3. Home exhibitions for the modernised families

The Swedish mode had, on the one hand, reworked the outcomes of the two most radical modes, and, on the other hand, by the time of the *Acceptera* manifesto, it had already developed its own way of dealing with small living spaces – the contemporary reality for most Swedes living in larger cities. This approach matured and reached out to the public through the long tradition of home exhibitions, which introduced furniture, decoration, and ready-made interior designs for small apartments.

Among the most successful exhibitions to turn to the problem of a small home was the *Hemutställningen* – the Home Exhibition of 1917. At the time, the exhibition was highly credited by Gregor Paulsson in his detailed review in the *Better things for Everyday Life*. It was regarded as representative of modern solutions, and was the result of the work carried out by *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* work – the Swedish arts and crafts society, which supported the dissemination and circulation of the ideas and concepts associated with German Werkbund. As Paulsson outlines:

The idea of the exhibition was in principle to attempt to achieve for modern Swedish decorative art a definitive shift from the isolated production of individuals to the purposeful collective endeavours of a whole generation for a culture of form founded on a broad social basis.¹¹²

Many objects introduced at the exhibition were not crafted but manufactured and thus contributed, as Paulsson claims, to the “establishment of a democratic culture of taste.”¹¹³ This formulation was later transferred to the concept of *democratic design*. In 1995 IKEA displayed this slogan at the furniture fair in Milan,¹¹⁴ and since then it has been appropriated by the company and used as one of its major mottos.

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¹¹² Paulsson, Gregor. *Better Things for Everyday Life*, p. 97.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ See more on this in Bjarnestam, Eva *IKEA. Design & Identity*. TITEL Books AB for IKEA of Sweden AB, 2013, p. 146.

Another of IKEA's concepts lifted from the *Better Things for Everyday life* to a new and more ambitious level is what Sara Kristoffersson refers to as the company's "overall vision,"¹¹⁵ and which "is repeated like a mantra in IKEA's internal manuals:¹¹⁶

To create a better everyday life for the many people.¹¹⁷

Here IKEA stands as a descendent of Swedish modernism, which has long been accepted and recognised around the world and which, with the growth of the company on the global market, has become a successful commercial enterprise.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a significant event in the introduction of modernism to the Swedish arena was the Stockholm Exhibition of the 1930. Not only had over four million visitors attended, but it also made an impact on modern housing solutions, living space production, and design, surpassing even the *Die Wohnung* exhibition that had taken place in Stuttgart three years earlier. In her contribution to the *Modern Swedish Design* volume, Thordis Arrhenius states:¹¹⁸

The 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, perhaps more than any other public event in Sweden, has become associated with the transformative force of modernity. [...] it came to mark the establishment of 'funkis' as the new national architecture in Sweden under Social-Democratic rule.¹¹⁹

The Stockholm Exhibition became, as Arrhenius claims, "a persuasive tool for modern architecture, a strategy where the full-scale and direct experience of modern living spaces would be seen as fundamental in convincing the general audience of the need for a new programme for a housing."¹²⁰

The modernist home exhibitions in Germany and Sweden proved to be no less effective as 'propaganda' tools than the Revolution and the Bolshevik housing policy had been in Russia.

¹¹⁵ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, footnote # 9, p. 44.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Arrhenius, Thordis. "The Vernacular on Display. Skansen Open-Air museum in 1930s Stockholm." In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010). pp. 134–149.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Yet, as discussed earlier, the Swedish mode was not concerned with the abolition of the old forms of housing, as was the case in post-revolutionary Russia, which cultivated an idea of developing entirely new types of housing. Neither was it the case that the Swedish mode was preoccupied with the realisation of new modernist solutions on the empty green land sites outside of the large cities, as was the case in Germany (in fact this began in Sweden already after World War II); but first of all, the Swedish mode was concerned with searching for those effective strategies that could allow for the maintenance and improvement of current housing conditions in which many people already lived. This it achieved by applying all possible means in the 'here and now', and without making people wait for the future to come.

Home improvement as an ideological, cultural, and even national concept lays at the core of the Swedish mode of functionalism. The notion of a traditional family, according to the Swedish modernism, is accepted, but it cannot be treated as anything fixed, since it is a subject to evolution and change. As Yvonne Hirdman formulates, the modernists make claims about family policy:¹²¹ "the family had to be brought in line with the times."¹²²

If Ellen Key draws an idyllic picture of a good family in an ideal house, portraying Carl Larsson's family with outlined traditional roles of spouses and with children at its centre, then *Acceptera* already admits that the social changes that are being experienced by society have already affected traditional notion of family and the relations between its members. The *Acceptera* authors claim that the dissolution of traditional family relations should not be considered only in a negative light. Sven-Olov Wallenstein in his essay "A Family Affair. Swedish Modernism and the Administering of Life,"¹²³ summarizes the trajectory that the modernist family concept follows through the *Acceptera* text:

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¹²¹ Hirdman, Ivonne. "The Happy 30s. A Short Story of Social Engineering and Gender Order in Sweden." In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010). pp. 66–71.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹²³ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. "A Family Affair. Swedish Modernism and the Administering of Life." In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010). pp. 188–199.

[...] we can see how the first chapters develop a biopolitical theory of the family in great detail – a family which is under the threat of dissolving, and must be reconsidered and reconstructed if the body politic, from bottom to top, is to be restored into an organic and productive unity. But as we will see, this reassembling of the family must now obey a different logic that emphasises its openness and capacity for future transformations; it is no longer the hearth around which everything revolves, but an apparatus (bearing in mind the sense of the term *dispositif* in Foucault) that must be able to integrate new technical, scientific, and moral inventions, while still performing the task of connecting the individual to the larger social order, safeguarding against individual anomalies, and in this sense ensuring ‘security’ at a basic level.¹²⁴

In the Swedish mode of functionalism, the modification of a family along with an overall transformation of society was seen as an evolutionary and incremental process. The principle of life-building required the mobilisation of various educational and promotional campaigns, of which home exhibitions were an important part. The integration of modernist aesthetics and functionalist solutions into the existing environment and life styles is another feature that differentiates the Swedish mode from its German and Russian counterparts.

4.4. The Swedishness of the Swedish mode

Another important distinguishing feature of the Swedish mode of functionalism is its relation to its own ‘swedishness’. Both the Russian and German modes possess only a nominal affinity to the national or geographical component of their origin. About these two modes, specifically, it is more accurate to say that the “Russian” and the “German” refer to the socio-political transformations that gripped them, thus accounting for the radicalisation of their theoretical grounds and working methods. For the Russian mode the break with its past, its historical heritage, and, first of all, with its socio-political background was the grounding factor that outlined the means of its formal expression. The German mode – while developing in a highly international and multicultural environment, with various forces and international actors pulling in various directions – proved its universal character by successfully relocating to the United States once the Nazis had taken power. To put it otherwise: neither the Russian nor the German

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 193–194.

modes were concerned with national character as a means of aesthetic expression.

The Russian avant-garde initially supported the ideas of the World Revolution. Thus the Soviet state, which, from the beginning spoke of the internationalism of its constitution, was seen as a temporary political formation on the way to the global establishment of communism, eliminating all political and geographical borders.

The German mode developed through the theoretical and practical investigations of the masters, all of whom had various international backgrounds – a point that is very visible, for instance, in the composition of the CIAM congress or Bauhaus school,¹²⁵ as well as in the overall functionalist practice both in Germany and abroad.

Yet, for the Swedish mode, the reference and connection to local traditions and to Swedish national identity was crucial in establishing the legitimacy of modernism as well as transforming itself into national Swedish design.

An essential and ‘organic’ connection between modernist aesthetics and the Swedish national heritage, in the form of, for example, the local cultural landscape and traditional lifestyles, is emphasised in all the key texts that set the ground for the Swedish mode. In the first instance these arguments are introduced as part of a defensive strategy in supporting the legacy of modernism in Sweden and, in the second half of the century, in all Nordic countries.

Since Ellen Key advocated for modernist aesthetics to become a part of everyday life, the national Swedish heritage in all its complexity – from traditional life style to the crafts and architecture – had become the source of inspiration bridging modernism with local tradition. In her “Introduction to Ellen Key’s *Beauty in the Home*,” Barbara Miller Lane notes that in her writing, “Key came to see the traditional architecture and crafts of rural Sweden as potential models for a new kind of design.”¹²⁶ She greatly evaluated the aesthetic potential of her homeland, claiming that, as Miller

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¹²⁵ On CIAM see: Mumford, Eric. *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism – 1928–1960*. (Cambridge MA – London: MIT Press, 2000). On BAUHAUS organisation see: Gropius, Walter. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. (Massachusetts, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

¹²⁶ Miller Lane, Barbara. “Introduction to Ellen Key’s *Beauty in the Home*.” In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 20.

Lane puts it, “Sweden must begin to play a leading role in educating continental Europe and the rest of the world in a new aesthetic.”¹²⁷

Gregor Paulsson and the authors of *Acceptera* put less direct emphasis on the Swedishness of modernism, yet more general issues surrounding modernism’s connection to tradition, the past, and timeless values were immediately understandable to the Swedish people, who were being directly addressed and targeted throughout the texts.

The ‘third’ or ‘Swedish’ way, which became a role model for the non-communist welfare states after the end of the Second World War, developed as a reaction against both the socialist revolutions, on the one hand, and the overall restructuring of economic capitalistic models in post-World War I Europe, on the other. On the ideological level, the idea of the possibility of a unique Swedish way – as Mattsson and Wallenstein note – “worked to a large extent through the production of a set of ideological motifs centred on “Swedishness”, the spirit of collaboration between labour and capital, and a certain aloofness from the disarray of post-war Europe.”¹²⁸

The collaboration between various components of cultural, political, and economic life without them necessarily merging with and dissolving into each other, was offered in Sweden as a solution during the turbulence of the interwar decades.

Paulsson argues for the evolutionary, and not the revolutionary, means for life-building, possessing strong faith in the potential of art and education of artistic consciousness to directly improve society, claiming that “art organised in a new way will form part of this new society.”¹²⁹ The new way of producing art does not mean breaking with the past, tradition, the local character and the old means of production, such as handicraft. On the contrary, only their wise, delicate, and illuminating collaboration can make possible a way of implementing the collective design concept. Bauhaus also considered traditional handicrafts as sources for a new modernist collective design. And yet this was to be achieved without necessarily integrating their handmade nature, neither their local nor national heritage, into produced spaces and objects. Thus the German mode possessed a more practical attitude towards both tradition and the past. Without its direct negation, it

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²⁸ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “Introduction.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 8.

¹²⁹ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 122.

could appropriate those features of the past which might be useful for the production of the future.

Posing the question of a multiplicity of modernities and the specificity of the Swedish modernism note, Mattsson and Wallenstein:

... in its Swedish version, modernism was not portrayed to the same extent as a break with tradition, as was the case with European avant-garde, but rather, at least if we follow the arguments of *acceptera*, as a programme to re-connect traditional values to the contemporary development. The primary task of functionalism became to make the individual identity with the project of modernisation by creating an amalgamation of old and new, and kind of ‘patchwork history’ became the crucial way to achieve this.¹³⁰

This specific attitude towards national identity and the need to preserve connections to the local cultural landscape and traditions resulted in the two major conceptual outcomes of the Swedish mode of functionalism: (i) the concept of the Swedish democratic design and (ii) the concept of the Folkhemmet – “the People’s Home.”

4.5. Swedish democratic design

The basic principles of what will be later promoted as Swedish democratic design developed as the outcomes of the socio-economic conditions of the time, and were formed because of a high demand for low price and high quality products, which, in turn, as Paulsson notices in his *Better Things for Everyday Life* require both the rationalisation and standardisation of the production process.¹³¹ This in turn should result in the unification of the design and in the “creation of *new types*”¹³² that should not only satisfy a consumer’s needs but also to educate her taste and elevate her perception of beauty. The new types of objects of collective design, Paulsson believes, can “supersede the old ones in public taste,” since their form “have novelty value.”¹³³ The industrial production of design organised in this new way does not assume the elimination of the artistic process, but as Paulsson outlines, “these new forms, both rational and of new types, will certainly be

¹³⁰ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “Introduction.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 10.

¹³¹ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 89.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

created most easily through the cooperation of forward-looking and perceptive industrialists and good artists.”¹³⁴

For those operating with the field of contemporary home design, furniture, interior decoration, and the organisation of the living space, the idea that the form of the object should be necessarily connected to its function, as well as meeting certain standards of quality, is something taken as self-evident. Not that this was the case a hundred years ago, when European functionalists, such as Ginzburg in Russia, Behne in continental Europe, and Paulsson in Sweden (among others), had raised the question (as Paulsson articulates below):

In what way do form and quality belong to each other?¹³⁵

The inseparable connection of an object’s form to its function, quality, and price is an outcome of the functionalist aesthetics we have perhaps take for granted today. What today’s taken-for-granted attitude is predicated upon is that the ideologues and spokespersons of functionalism from all over the world made significant efforts to promote and market these principles to the widest possible audience. Ultimately, it is what gives a certain prophetic character to those theoretical works that were written during the first part of the twentieth century.

In this respect, IKEA has contributed the most to the promotion and strengthening of the links between function, quality, and price in the regular consumption of goods for everyday life and in the overall organisation of the contemporary living space. IKEA’s manifested devotion to the main principles of democratic design through the major elements of its business philosophy are deciphered by Ingvar Kamprad, in an interview to Eva Alte Bjarnestam for her book *IKEA. Design & Identity*:

We have three conditions that have to be met: Form, Function and Production Adaptation, FFP.¹³⁶

Kamprad always stresses that his goal is not merely the highest profit, but, as Sara Kristoffersson puts it, “the moral of the story is that Kamprad is struggling in a headwind to serve the people.”¹³⁷

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¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ingvar Kamprad’s interview to Eva Alte Bjarnestam in: *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 16.

¹³⁷ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 21.

A social component is organically interwoven into the fabric of the functionalist method and aesthetics, which is revealed in its formal simplicity and in the clear character of its forms. The industrial means of production and the required reproducibility of designs based on the creation of types secure the affordability of the products. Whence their democratic character. Unlike the more radical Russian mode, which called for the elimination of art, the Swedish mode, in the words by Paulsson, claimed that the production of the new design should be achieved “through uniting the labour of industry and art.”¹³⁸

4.6. *Folkhemmet* – the People’s Home

Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein note on the close connection of Swedish democratic design with an idea of *Folkhemmet*, which “has hampered the interpretation of the modern architecture in Sweden,”¹³⁹ and which has become the main feature of contemporary Swedish design on the global market.

The Swedish mode of functionalism promoted an idea that the state should be the home for all, where no one is neglected or forgotten, and yet where everyone possesses rather relative autonomy from the state. The people’s home should offer an efficient living space, where dwellers feel comfortable now, while building a stable ground for the future. The Swedish *Folkhemmet* policy took an idea of a rational and comfortable single-family home as a model for organisation of the whole society. The social reform agenda pursued by the state should have begun from the level of a single-family household, then extend to the neighbourhood, district, town, county, and up to the scale of the whole country. Modernisation of the Swedish family composition, which targeted autonomy between its members, and a highly emancipated life for women, required that the living space be reformed, and the public sector and infrastructure be greater integrated into the everyday living practices of the family. The reforms to the family, and its immediate living space, affected the organisation of neighbourhoods and, by extension, the whole city. Eva Rudberg, in her chapter “Building the Utopia of the Everyday” for the *Swedish Modernism* calls the main ambition of this “neighbourhood planning scheme” the

¹³⁸ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 107.

¹³⁹ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “Introduction.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 15.

connection of “the home with all of the facilities of the neighbourhood.”¹⁴⁰ The organisation of small neighbourhoods in such ways that in each one and at all levels an individual felt connected with her family members as well as with the larger community without giving up her individual private space, was the aspiration for the *Folkhemmet* concept. Through the construction of new city districts during the 1930s, it was aspiration that was slowly and incrementally emerging as a lived reality.

Once more a significant point of differentiation between the Swedish and the Russian modes comes to light. The Swedish mode departed from an individual and her needs, elevating the physical organisation of the living space from the space of an individual home to the level of the state construction. Contrarily, in the Russian mode, the point of departure was the state ideology that descended upon individuals and to which its citizens had to adjust.

Eva Rudberg sums up the main goal of the Swedish mode of functionalism in the endeavour to construct a ‘utopia of everyday life,’ by citing the words of one of its contemporaries:

The ambition to create a democratic society by neighbourhood planning should, however, not be overemphasized. The fundamental Swedish agenda was formulated by the director of Stockholm city planning department: “The functional and architectural reasons for neighbourhood planning are quite sufficient for us and our principals. Practical and active people are not trying to create some novel sort of human being. We will be fully satisfied if we can succeed in building so that people are pleased to live and work there.”¹⁴¹

The Swedish mode of functionalism developed later than its Russian and German counterparts. On the one hand, it articulated its methods and aesthetics in response to the more radical modes of Russian and German avant-garde, which, by the time Swedish functionalism entered onto the scene in Sweden, it had already been dismissed as a method and as an aesthetic. On the other hand, the Swedish mode is deeply rooted to the national landscape, preserving close connections to local traditions of the living space organisations. The aesthetic categories that were taken here as

¹⁴⁰ Rudberg, Eva. “Building the Utopia of the Everyday.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), pp. 156–157.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

the objects for analysis were common for a general aesthetics of European modernism, but within the Swedish mode they are articulated and practiced in a less radical way. As a result, all three modes of functionalism were reflected upon in this part of the thesis by a way of comparative analysis, and even though each operates with and within common aesthetical and methodological grounds of the life-building concept, they introduce different methods for reorganising and reconfiguring the old, and producing the new, living space.

PART II

The Three Modes of Functionalism in Practice: From Home Building to Life-Building



CHAPTER I

Existenzminimum and New *Byt* as the Main Tools for the New Life Building

In order to provide a clearer picture of the circulation of modernist ideas between Soviet Russia and Western Europe during the interwar period, including the concepts of *existenzminimum* and 'new *byt*', I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the international dialogue and cooperation that existed between Soviet architects and their Western colleagues. At this point in time the wall had not been erected that would later partition communist Russia from the rest of the world, thus making international collaboration especially difficult to realise. This pre-second world war international exchange of ideas shows that in the 1920s both Soviet and German modernists (and to the lesser extent their Scandinavian colleagues) shared, exchanged and re-appropriated the methodology and aesthetics of functionalism that made possible the further development of modernism. While common to all parts of Europe, modernist aesthetics, in general, and functionalism, in particular, operated differently within varying contextual frames. It is owing to this diversity in its instantiations that I speak of the three modes of functionalism (as detailed in the previous part of this thesis).

The analytical review of the concepts *existenzminimum* and 'new *byt*' open the empirical part of the thesis. Not only do they serve as theoretical grounds for modernist aesthetics, but they also function as normative and guiding principles that steered real architectural practice in Russia, Germany and Sweden. This resulted in the development of new types of buildings and residential estates, such as the *dom-kommunas*, communal apartments, *siedlungen*, and *zhilmassives*. A further consequence was that these very buildings became the objects and sites of ideological and political manipulation (for example, Soviet housing policy). In order to reflect on the genesis of these types of buildings and settlements, as well as on their interpretation within the three modes of functionalism, it is first important to understand the two concepts of *existenzminimum* and 'new *byt*' that

formed the ground for both theoretical and legislative guiding principle, which were implemented into mass housing construction of the time.

The IKEA business aesthetics analysed as a special case in the last chapter of the thesis is closely related to both the aesthetics of modernism and the functionalist method. In a way, the story of IKEA can be considered as a consequence and as a commercial response to the application of *existenzminimum* and ‘new *byt*,’ which had previously been accepted as defining constructive principles. Furthermore, this study will look upon the unique case of IKEA as offering the aesthetical critique to the ‘new *byt*’ attitude with respect to the production, use and distribution of material objects. At the same time IKEA’s range of products and solutions, produced through the past seventy-five years, and recorded through its annual catalogues, can be studied as a popular aesthetical critique to mass housing production initiated by the avant-garde. As the story of IKEA shows, this response and critique had, at the end, led to the objectification of modernist methodology in the production of living space. Still, IKEA sustains this critique through pushing the levers of consumerism – more or less consciously, it tests modernist aesthetics on its customers within the global market, e.g. under its marketing slogans that flirt with, on the one hand, the ideas of modern, light, easy, and rational forms of living, as articulated by Giedion in *Befreites Wohnen* and with, on the other, the ‘new *byt*’ principle of being liberated from one’s enslavement by the Thing in favour of ‘real’ life values. The solutions that IKEA offers for the optimisation of the living space are to a significant degree realised through the appropriation of the *existenzminimum* and ‘new *byt*’ concepts.

1.1. An international intellectual dialogue on the common grounds of modernism

The period of the 1920s is quite unique, since at that time, temporarily, the world was still open. Functionalism in its aesthetic and ideological diversity was in vogue, a movement embraced by different countries under different political regimes. As it was noted above, the cooperation between architects who promoted different views on the modern architecture and the construction of social reality through architecture made the language of functionalism arguably the most universal of all – at least this my contention.

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the interaction between German and Soviet architects was quite intensive. Besides the already well-documented ‘connections’ between German and Russian functionalists,

cooperation between Swedish and German modernists also existed, as well as between Russian and Swedish architects. For instance, the German celebrity Walter Gropius was a friend of Sven Markelius, and was invited twice to lecture in Stockholm – both in 1928 and 1931.¹ Sven Markelius had also spent some time in Germany, e.g. visiting *Die Wohnung* exhibition in 1927 together with Uno Åhren.² In 1928 Markelius participated in the second congress of CIAM, where the concept of *Existenzminimum* was introduced as an essential component of the functionalist method for the living space production. The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, in turn, attracted such masters and modernist critics as, for example, Sigfried Giedion.³

Official documentation of the connections between Soviet and Swedish functionalists is, however, much scarcer. At the same time, there are a few indications that an exchange of ideas and experiences did take place between Soviet and Swedish architects – e.g. the visit of Grigory Simonov, a Leningrad constructivist, responsible for the designing of the first Leningrad *zhilmassivs*, is said to have visited both Sweden and Germany,⁴ though no specific details of these trips have thus far been published.

The results of these points of contact and forms of cooperation are quite visible in the production of mass housing during the 1920s and 1930s in these three countries.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia became a huge source of inspiration for most modernist intellectuals, and whole delegations of first-class foreign avant-garde architects accepted invitations to lecture and practice in the new Soviet State, believing it was a land where the future would be shaped in new modernist forms for a new modernised people.

In *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*,⁵ Ross Wolfe introduces post-Revolution Russia as the promised land in the eyes of the world's avant-garde architects:

¹ For more on these connections see in: Seelow, Atli Magnus. "From the Continent to the North – German Influence on Modern Architecture in Sweden." In: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*. 2016, Vol. 85 (1), pp. 44–62.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴ Kirikov, Boris. *Arkhitektura Leningradskogo Avangarda*. (St. Petersburg: Kolo, 2008), p. 75.

⁵ Wolfe, Ross. *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/11/22/the-graveyard-of-utopia-soviet-urbanism-and-the-fate-of-the-international-avant-garde/>

Both at home and abroad, the most brilliant avant-garde minds of a generation gathered in Russia to put forth their proposals for the construction of a radically new society. Never before had the stakes seemed so high. For it was out of the blueprints for this new society that a potentially *international* architecture and urbanism could finally be born, the likes of which might then alter the face of the entire globe. And from this new built environment, it was believed, would emerge the outlines of the New Man, as both the outcome of the new social order and the archetype of an emancipated humanity. With such apparently broad and sweeping implications, it is therefore little wonder that its prospective realization might have then attracted the leading lights of modernist architecture, both within the Soviet Union and without.⁶

Due to special relations established between Soviet Russia and the Weimar Republic during the 1920s, most foreign architects practicing in Russia were of German origin. Walter Gropius, Peter Berens, Erich Mendelson, Ernst May (among a number of German architects who formed the so-called “May brigade”), Erich Mendelson, Hannes Meyer, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Bruno Taut, are among the most famous architects who either participated in architectural contests sponsored by the newly formed Soviet state, lectured in Russia, accepted commissions, or just travelled to the new promised land for work and to live.

Koos Bosma outlines the sheer scale of the German presence in the first post-Revolutionary decade in Russia:⁷

Because Germany and the USSR fostered special relations during the Weimar Republic, it is not surprising that a large number of German specialists worked in the Communist country. A Soviet report of 1928 listed about 80,000 foreigners, of which 20,000–30,000 worked in industry. About 10,000 of them were German: political expatriates, Communists, and shock workers, but also well-paid bourgeois technical experts.⁸

Among the non-German architects who contributed to the realisation of the socialist project in modernist forms were such celebrities as Le Corbusier, the Austrian architects and designers Margarete Schütte-Lihotsky (the

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bosma, Koos. “New socialist cities: foreign architects in the USSR 1920–1940.” In: *Planning Perspectives*, 2014, 29(3), pp. 30 1–328.

⁸ Ibid., p. 309.

author of the famous Frankfurt kitchen) and her husband Wilhelm Schütte, as well as the leading architect of the Dutch *De Stijl* group, Mart Stam.

In the first decade of its existence, the Soviet State welcomed the avant-garde into its inner revolutionary circle, encouraging artists to engage in the active destruction of the remains of the decaying old regime and in the creation of the new world from scratch. Despite the vicissitudes of the protracted civil war, economic collapse, and the social disasters that followed immediately after the early success of the October Revolution, many were attracted and felt inspired that they were to become the real builders and designers of a new reality. This coupled with the promise of unconstrained freedom for the architects in the production of the new living space, as well as the prospect of not having to work under the pressures of either the market or private commissioners. The abolition of private ownership and the establishment of a planned market economy with the total concentration of building regulation in hands of the state resulted in an unprecedented strengthening of the relationship between government and architects. The state entrusted the architectural transformation of the whole country to the avant-garde architects, opening up enormous opportunities for internationally renowned figures to realise their projects on a scale unachievable in their home lands. Ross Wolfes continues:

But by that same score, in a positive sense there had never been a planning project as ambitious as the Soviet centralized economy. It represented a moment of unprecedented opportunity for international modernists to build on the highest possible scale, the chance to realize their visions at the level of *totality*. For with the huge projected budgets set aside for new construction toward the end of the 1920s, the modernists saw an opening to implement their theories not just locally, but on a regional, national, and – should the flames of revolution fan to Europe – a potentially international scale. This mere fact alone should hint at the reason so many members of the architectural avant-garde, who so long dreamed of achieving an “international style” without boundaries, would be attracted to the Soviet cause. That the number of international representatives of the avant-garde swelled to such an unparalleled degree should come as no surprise, either, given the prospect of imminently realizing their most utopian dreams. In the midst of the collapse of the old order, as heralded by world war, pestilence (Spanish influenza), revolution, and a nearly universal depression, it appeared as if

the modernists were being granted their deepest wish – *of erecting a new society upon the ashes of that which had preceded it.*⁹

In the Russian history of architecture there was another period comparable to the scale of opportunities afforded to the leading international architects during 1920s and early 1930s. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Peter the Great declared that his ambition was to build the new Russian Empire with the hands of European architects, inviting the biggest international names to construct the new Russian capital – St. Petersburg – from scratch, and providing invited architects with unlimited financial resources and freedom for their projects to be fully materialised. Domenico Trezzini, Andreas Schlüter, Jean-Baptiste Le Blond, Giovanni Maria Fontana, Nicola Michetti – to name but a few – were those who had built the new capital to represent a totally new state ideology of a modern European Empire in a matter of two decades. Even the Swedish architect, Nicodemus Tessin, participated in preparing projects for the Russian court. The tradition to invite foreign architects continued well into the nineteenth century, leaving behind them a huge architectural heritage created by names such as Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, Carlo Rossi, James Cameron, Yuri Felten, and others.

Two centuries later and it was the turn of the European avant-gardists to come to Soviet Russia in order to contribute to an ideological mission of similar scope and intensity. Russia would provide the setting for the start of a global transformation, and it was to be carried out on squarely modernist terms. The Revolution had cleared the ground and installed the pre-conditions for realising the world's social transformation through architectural means. As Ross Wolfe outlines:

The Soviet Union alone had presented the modernists with the conditions necessary to realize their original vision. Only it possessed the centralized state-planning organs that could implement building on such a vast scale. Only it promised to overcome the clash of personal interests entailed by the “sacred cow” of private property. And only it had the sheer expanse of land

⁹ Wolfe, Ross. *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/11/22/the-graveyard-of-utopia-soviet-urbanism-and-the-fate-of-the-international-avant-garde/>

necessary to approximate the spatial infinity required by the modernists' international imagination.¹⁰

Shortly after arriving to the Soviet Union, international architects were exposed to the rift between the promise and the lived realities; what they had found when they first arrived was to become the “graveyard” of the modernist utopia. The reality was not conducive to the realisation of their vivid imaginations; most departed without having left any significant architectural mark on the functionalist transformation of the Soviet state.

Some of these modernist architects became socialists and sought ideological compliance between modernist architecture and socialism; others, like, for example, Ernst May and his Soviet colleague Moisey Ginsburg, stood first and foremost for the universalism and internationalism of the functionalist method, which did not depend on any temporary political or ideological conditions whatsoever, and which could be applicable and effective in any circumstances under the goal of reforming and improving reality. Koos Bosma notes on this matter:

The members of the May Brigade came to Moscow with the idea that it was precisely their specialization as architects which would be crucial. As an individual, May himself was apolitical, but he was obsessed with his professional concerns and convinces that he would be welcomed with open arms and would get all the support he wanted. His idealism made him blind to the difficulties that awaited him.¹¹

Disappointment and a litany of broken promises were the main outcomes of European functionalism's intervention in Communist Russia, where, soon enough, functionalism would itself be abandoned. This sobering experience was a sign indicating modernism's overall defeat in the face of further political and social changes in Europe, which severely limited the ideological, aesthetic, and existential significance of modernism as a tool to bring about qualitative change in Russia and Western Europe. Ross Wolfe notes:

The defeat of architectural modernism in Russia left the country a virtual graveyard of the utopian visions of unbuilt worlds that had once been built

¹⁰ Wolfe, Ross. *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/11/22/the-graveyard-of-utopia-soviet-urbanism-and-the-fate-of-the-international-avant-garde/>

¹¹ Bosma, Koos. “New socialist cities: foreign architects in the USSR 1920–1940,” p. 312.

upon it. It is only after one grasps the magnitude of the avant-garde's sense of loss in this theatre of world history that all the subsequent developments of modernist architecture in the twentieth century become intelligible. For here it becomes clear how an architect like Mies van der Rohe, who early in his career designed the Monument to the communist heroes Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in 1926, would curry favour with the Nazis in the 1930s, and then later become the man responsible for one of the swankiest monuments to high-Fordist capitalism, the Seagram's Building of 1958. And here one can see how Le Corbusier, embittered by the Soviet experience, would briefly flirt with Vichy fascism during the war before going on to co-design the United Nations Building in New York.¹²

The abandonment of functionalism in both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany did not mean its complete destruction. What the events of the 1930s reveal is rather functionalism's sliding from being the bearer of the new ideology of revolutionary heroism, which settled for nothing less than the entire transformation of the world, to a de-aestheticised, de-ideologised, and purely technical and utilitarian method for the construction of mass housing projects in Russia and Europe.¹³

1.2. *Existenzminimum* for life-building

In post-war Europe, (specifically for the purposes of this study, the countries of Germany, Sweden, and Soviet Russia), the housing question became one of the severest problems, the solution to which could not be further postponed. The success of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the founding of the Weimar Republic in 1918 in Germany allowed the leading proponents of avant-gardist ideas to profoundly reorganise the cities of the reformed states.

The consequences of military defeats, economic stagnation and inflation ensured the growth of the German Social-Democratic party, the result of which was an ambitious socially-oriented program encouraging the quick

¹² Wolfe, Ross. *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*.

¹³ More on the experience of foreign modernist architects in Soviet Union see in: Wolfe, R. *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/11/22/the-graveyard-of-utopia-soviet-urbanism-and-the-fate-of-the-international-avant-garde/>; Borngräber, Christian. "Foreign Architects in the USSR." In: *Architectural Association Quarterly*. 1979, Vol. 11 (1), London, pp. 5 1–53.; Bosma, Koos. "New socialist cities: foreign architects in the USSR 1920–1940." In: *Planning Perspectives*, 2014, 29 (3), pp. 30 1–328.

and efficient production of living complexes based on principles of collectivisation.

Architects aimed not only at improving citizens' living conditions – providing every German with a minimum dwelling space, the right for which was fixed in the Constitution – but they believed, like their Soviet counterparts, that society could be perfected and a new reality formed through the architectural materialisation of the logics of 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). What became known as *Existenzminimum* in Germany greatly influenced not only the living space construction in the Weimar Republic, but, once being accepted in Soviet Russia and later in Sweden, it was placed at the core of both state policies concerning housing distribution and functionalist investigations into the development of new types of housing in all these countries.

The November revolution in Germany afforded an opportunity for modernist architects to become active agents in the formation of the new social order and in the production of modernist spaces for the population as a whole. As Kathlene James-Chakraborty writes in her book, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*,¹⁴ such architects as Bruno Taut, "acted quickly to mobilise architects and the general public, hoping that a new architecture would accompany and sustain the new political system."¹⁵ Taut believed that architects "were the ones best able to provide the structure for a harmonious society."¹⁶

The effort to architecturally realise the potentiality of capitalism into socialism lies at the core of the German experiment. Every German citizen was to be provided with *existenzminimum* – a minimal living cell that could functionally and aesthetically meet the basic needs of a German family. In the 1919 the position of the State control of the use of lands was fixed in the Constitution, and starting with the 1924 many cities began to introduce plans of housing reforms.

The leading architects had been working on the definition of *existenzminimum* in Germany and a minimal living cell in Soviet Russia throughout the 1920s. In 1929, Walter Gropius gave a report during the 2nd Inter-

¹⁴ James-Chakraborty, Kathlene. *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*. (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

national Congress of CIAM,¹⁷ where the new principles of housing construction were introduced with the purpose to raise the quantity of minimal living cells on the basis of their space conserving size. Along with his Soviet colleagues, Gropius considered it necessary not only to provide each German citizen with a fixed minimum of living space, which was calculated as 9 square metres per person, but he believed that each adult was to be designated a tiny, yet separate room.¹⁸ The transitional and temporary type of a Soviet *dom-kommuna*, the result of investigations into a rationally organised minimal living cell, reduced the size of the private living space to that of a sleeping cabin. The layout seemed spatially efficient for certain social groups (e.g. students), though the whole idea was less appreciated in Germany

German *existenzminimum* of around 9 square metres per person was accepted in Russia shortly after Gropius' report at the CIAM congress. In *Problema Stroitel'stva Sotzialisticheskikh Gorodov [The Problem of Construction of Socialist Cities]*,¹⁹ Nickolay Miliutin, an avant-garde architect and theoretician, as well as one of the designers of the *dom-kommuna*, records the size of a minimal dwelling as 8,4 square metres, describing the model living cell as follows:

An individual, i.e. calculated for a single person, living cell should serve:

- 1) For sleeping;
- 2) For a study with a book, etc.;
- 3) For individual rest;
- 4) For storing belongings, that are used by a tenant everyday (underwear, clothing, items of individual use, etc.);
- 5) For providing with elementary personal hygiene.

Drawing upon these functions (work, other purposes), an individual separate living cell should possess, albeit minimally, the following equipment:

- 1) A place to sleep in the form of a bed that can be folded onto the wall during the day, or a sofa that is transformed into a bed for the night, or, even, a bed of a regular type;

¹⁷ CIAM - The *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (International Congresses of Modern Architecture), 1928–1959. In 1929 CIAM II on Minimum Dwelling was held in Frankfurt-am-Main.

¹⁸ For more on the *existenzminimum* norm calculation see in: Gropius, Walter. *Scope of Total Architecture*. (New York: Harper and Bros, 1955).

¹⁹ Miliutin, Nickolay. *Sotzgorod*. (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatel'stvo, 1930).

- 2) A table for studies with the drawers for the items of intellectual work (note-books, books, paper, etc);
- 3) Two-three chairs or armchairs;
- 4) Journal table
- 5) Space for keeping clothing and underwear (e.g. in the wall)
- 6) A wash-basin
- 7) A wall-closet with a mirror for the items of hygiene.

Besides this, it is desirable to arrange shower cabins (at least one for two rooms).

This way a living cell will be able to transform and serve as a study during and a leisure room during the day, and as bedroom during the night.

Drawing upon the function of the living cell, its minimal size, including equipment, should be set as following:

- a) on the façade (external wall) – 2,8 metres,
- b) in depth – 3 m.

Which will make 8,4 square metres. If to consider 2,6 m as minimal height, then the minimal volume of a living cell will be 21,84 cbm-

It goes without saying that these dimensions are minimal and at the nearest opportunity they are to be increased.²⁰

The Soviet and German architects had predicated their search for a minimal dwelling solution on the main principles of functionalism – those of standardisation, mechanisation, and the industrialisation of the construction processes, as well as the collectivisation of the living space. In his manifesto *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (1935)²¹ Walter Gropius frames the main goal of standardisation as meeting “the needs of the community at less cost and effort by the improvement of its productive organisations.”²²

The potential offered by the standardisation and mechanisation of the living space was to be used not only to overcome the housing crisis, but to liberate life from everyday routines. Following Giedion’s declarations in *Befreites Wohnen*, Gropius declares:

²⁰ Miliutin, Nickolay. *Sotzgorod*, pp. 4 1–42.

²¹ Gropius, Walter. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1965).

²² *Ibid*, pp. 3 0–31.

[...] in the last resort mechanisation can have only one object: to abolish the individual's physical toil of providing himself with the necessities of existence in order that hand and brain may be set free for some higher order of activity.²³

Hence, both Russian and German architects believed in the ability of modernist architecture, as realised through these principles, to liberate 'living' from its menial everyday existence and thus optimise the freedom of its citizens to engage in practices of human flourishing and self-improvement.

Gropius, in fact, placed added emphasis on how the new functionalist method should be directed towards the person who inhabits it – the aim should be to humanise the space.²⁴ The re-organisation of the dwelling space required a new "spatial vision"²⁵ capable of providing "the aesthetic satisfaction of the human soul", which "is just as important as the material."²⁶

Unlike their Russian counterparts, who were liberated from the dual restrictions imposed by the pressures of market volatility and by the fickleness of commissioners' tastes, the German modernists did not have the luxury of embracing the new materials of steel, glass, and reinforced concrete in the new production of living space. What they did share, though, was a commitment to search for the harmonisation of space; they sought to come to terms with their contemporary reality as well as overcome class tensions within the existing capitalistic society and market economy. With respect to Bruno Taut's vision of modernism's architectural potential, James-Chakraborty notes:

Taut made it clear that, experienced empathetically, space formed by glass and concrete and transformed by coloured light could promote the recreation of 'organic' communities, erasing the class tensions that had bedeviled Wilhelmine politics. Social harmony would be born out of aesthetic harmony.²⁷

Among the declared tasks of the new architecture was the attempt to synthesise the maximum function with the minimum form. Inhabiting *exis-*

²³ Gropius, Walter. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, pp. 3 0–31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ James-Chakraborty, Kathlene. *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, p. 53.

tenzminimum spaces would also result in the re-forming of consciousness among the inhabitants: a renouncement of décor alongside architectural excesses and extraneous things. These would be replaced by a combination of clear and simple living cells, which, in spite of being very small, were convenient, well ventilated and fully lit.

The question of minimal dwelling was a topic that significantly set the agenda for both the German and Russian instantiations of functionalism. Swedish modernism, in contrast, did not seek to find alternative living spaces that would render anachronistic the traditional home. Rather it departed from the notion of the home as, first of all, a social unit inhabited by a family; the family then finds itself as part of a thriving neighborhood where several families cooperate with one another, and then, finally, the local neighbourhood units dissolve into the whole of the city formation.

German functionalists were targeting spatial solutions in which the minimal living cell served as its starting point. It was in fact assumed that the assignation of rational spatial organisation of minimal living cells to the lowest classes was to help them attain the standards of middle-class dwellings, the organisation of which was to adhere to the same functionalist principles, and the main agent in the formation of the modern city as a whole. Here both German and Swedish interpretations of spatial production run parallel with one another. And yet despite the notable points of similarity, the German mode placed as its point of departure the rationalised space of a minimal dwelling ready-made for the poorest tenant and his family. This newly organised space was capable of improving a worker's life and through its very organisation it was to serve him as a "social lift," as Gropius remarked on his work on *siedlungen* in Berlin:

But in all this interesting work the questions that engrossed me most were the minimum dwelling for the lowest-paid section of the community; the middle-class home regarded as an economically equipped unit complete in itself; and what structural form each ought logically to assume – whether as part of a multi-storied block, a flat in a building of medium height, or a small separate house. And beyond these again loomed the rational form for the whole city as a planned organism.²⁸

In the Swedish mode, the move from the flat to national planning was rather similar. Still it was not the living space itself, but a modernised, emancipated, and yet nuclear family that required a rationalised home,

²⁸ Gropius, Walter. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, p. 98.

which was set as a basic point of departure both for the urban organisation and for the development of society as a whole. The Russian mode and its state housing policy had, as it turned out, been running in quite the opposite direction in realising the goals of the cities' rational spatial planning, something to be further demonstrated with the example of the destiny of the garden city concept in early Soviet Russia.

In Sweden, rent control and the regulation policy over housing production and distribution were introduced in 1917, around the same time as in Germany and Russia.²⁹ Even though the social and political situation in Sweden was rather different, Sweden also declared the right for housing as a basic human right, while its chief mission was to find a solution to the housing crisis. Despite the fact that state housing control was soon abandoned and housing regulation was thus placed back in the hands of the market, the principles of the production of the living space in Sweden were similar to those in Germany and, initially, in Russia. This point is nicely summarised by the urban historian Thomas Hall:

Housing production³⁰ in the post war period has been influenced to a great extent by two fundamental ideas, both of which can be said to stem from the pioneers of the 1920s and 1930s: first, that a good home is the irrefutable right of all citizens regardless of income, and secondly that optimal solutions to the design of flats, dwelling-houses and urban districts do exist and are accessible to research.³¹

Yet, even with a more complex housing market situation, the Swedish government and its municipalities accepted responsibility to provide the population with housing. Thomas Hall lists the further means taken by the state: "rent subsidies and tertiary credits, and the municipalities by assuming responsibility for planning and the provision of land, and by establishing public utility companies as developers and owner administrators."³²

Important also in the Swedish case was its insight that the tenants' needs and their requirements surrounding the modern living space should be subject to a continuous process of investigating and identifying the tenants'

²⁹ For more on the Swedish housing policy see in: Thomas Hall, "Urban Planning in Sweden." In: Hall, Thomas (Ed.). *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. (London; New York; Tokyo; Melbourne; Madras: Chapman & Hall, 1991), pp. 16 7–247.

³⁰ Meaning 'housing production in Sweden.'

³¹ Hall, Thomas. "Urban Planning in Sweden," p. 213.

³² *Ibid.*

needs, something not only recorded in the *Acceptera* manifesto,³³ but also implemented as state housing policy. Here Hall outlines:

The functionalists were also keen advocates of research in order to discover normative solutions, and before the Stockholm Exhibition some investigatory work was done on the subject of planning and housing. But it was not until the end of the 1930s that building research was seriously launched, and then with two main thrusts: one concerned with the dwelling function, aimed at improving the layout and equipment of dwelling units, and the other geared to the rationalization of production with the help of standardization and industrial prefabrication.³⁴

Thus, all three countries introduced regulation over the production and distribution of housing and applied the method of functionalism to the construction of mass housing; each country developed its own distinct mode towards the production and reformation of the living space.

By the end of World War I, housing conditions were especially notorious. In Russia, for instance, a huge part of the urban population lived in barracks or densely populated apartments. In Leningrad, the barracks were located near large plants in industrial districts of the city as well as in central areas, such as Vasiliievsky Island and Petrogradskaya Storona (fig. 1).

A typical barrack would be comprised of a wooden shed and a kitchen with several stoves and ovens, a common bathroom with several basins and sometimes space for laundry and washing where a metal tub or a washbowl (those were also shared by inhabitants) could be placed. Living rooms were situated along the corridor, with one room given to one family. There would often be up to 40–50 rooms in a barrack. Most barracks in Leningrad were destroyed during the years of the Siege of Leningrad, either through bombardments or by citizens themselves who needed the wood for heating. Yet, the construction of wooden barracks as temporary shelters without facilities continued in the first post-war years. In actual fact, it is still possible to find inhabited barracks even in present-day St. Petersburg. As for other Russian towns, a huge part of the Russian population had lived in barracks until the 1960s, when mass industrial production of housing began.

In Germany, working-class tenants of metropolises resided in cellars and tiny rooms lacking basic facilities, with over half the residents of Sweden's

³³ See *Chapter IV, Part I* of the present thesis.

³⁴ Thomas Hall, "Urban Planning in Sweden," p. 214.

larger cities living in overcrowded one-room flats, often without immediate access to kitchens and bathrooms.

The struggle to improve dwelling conditions had not originated in the 1920s. Nonetheless, at this time, in all three of these states, it was accepted as first-priority. There were examples of housing experiments being conducted within the workers' estates. Dmitry Sukhin, for instance, in his article on the history of proposed solutions for the housing problem in Germany at the turn of the century,³⁵ describes barrack-type settlements for German workers during the second half of the nineteenth century as not only efficient but a progressive form of housing:

The “barrack” type of dwelling in German districts appears as an industrial type of housing near the factories in Mühlhausen in 1853. The very type of a “barrack” is the procreation of the turn of the XVIII and XIX centuries; the workers were granted with something that was the newest... science? The planning as a science did not exist at that time, but a “barrack” really suggested a special type of dwelling, which was certainly not the worst for that period: separate rooms, also kitchens, even though located across the communal hall; toilets were always placed in the yard – certain semi-separate dwelling. The German Building charter still nowadays defines the flats through their “separation” and non-crossing with the others.³⁶

Thus, the problem of a small living space, or, as it was often called, a living cell, was given close and thorough consideration. It was understood to be one of the primary and a most urgent solution to the extant housing crisis.

In all three of the countries considered in this study, functionalists searched for those means to rationalise and optimise already existing living cells. In the early 1920s many projects targeting their transformation were offered by Russian constructivists and German functionalists; the space of the living cells could be transformed depending on the size of the family as well as on their demands. These experiments were mastered by the Russian

³⁵ Sukhin, Dmitry. “Reforma – revolutsiya – rekonstruktsiya: tsiklicheskiye zavisimosti zhilogo stroitel'stva. Uroki dlya stroitel'noy Rossii. Puti resheniya zhilischnoy problemi v Germanii na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov.” [“Reform – Revolution – Reconstruction: the cyclical dependencies of dwelling construction. The lessons for the building Russia. The ways of solving the housing problem in Germany at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”] In: Malinina, Tatiana (Ed.). *Mass dwelling as an Object of Creativity*. (Moscow: BooksMArt, 2015).

³⁶ Ibid.

constructivist, Moisey Ginzburg, from the early 1920s.³⁷ For instance, Ginzburg developed a kitchen element that was designed based on findings from a study conducted into a housewife's movements around the kitchen. What resulted was the proper placement of cabinets within minimal spaces, allowing her to reduce the number of steps and movements taken around the kitchen, and thereby freeing up time for other activities.

Similar work was undertaken by an Austrian architect and designer Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who followed the famous slogan "first the kitchen and then the façade." In 1924 she designed the famous 'Frankfurt Kitchen,' according to which all objects were placed by maximising the spatial economy of the facilities (fig. 2). Here too the daily and routinised movements of the housekeeper around the kitchen were also carefully considered. All necessary utensils were rationally placed in the space of just 3.5 x 1.9 m. The same level of attention was given by architects to furniture and smaller interior details, from door handles to the size of the window. Everything was to be functional and to functionally-beautiful.³⁸

All investigations into the potential of small living spaces' necessitated collaborations between the architect and a tenant, and first of all, a housewife, who was the main agent of the new living space. In his article "First the Kitchen and then the Façade,"³⁹ Nickolas Bullock notes:

It is important to recognise, however, that this ideal of the New Dwelling and the new pattern of family life that it was to accommodate was not the product of an architectural rhetoric to be imposed on the housewife. As early as 1924 Taut was emphasising the need for housewife and architect to collaborate: 'Der Architekt denkt, die Hausfrau lenkt' (the architect thinks, the housewife guides); as the subtitle of his book, 'Die Frau als Schöpferin' (the woman as creator), suggested, the housewife was to play a creative role in shaping the New Dwelling.⁴⁰

³⁷The plans of the transformed interiors were published and commented by Moisey Ginzburg in the SA (*Sovremennaya Arkhitektura - Contemporary Architecture*) Magazine in the 1920s and summarised in his book: Ginzburg, Moisey, *Zhilische*. (Moscow: Gosstroyizdat, 1934). pp. 3 6–37.

³⁸ More on the genesis of the functionalist kitchen and application of scientific management concept to the formation of modernist and contemporary kitchen read in: Bullock, Nicholas. *First the Kitchen – then the Façade*. In: *Journal of Design History*. Vol. 1, No. 3–4, 1988, pp. 17 7–192.

³⁹ Bullock, Nicholas. "First the Kitchen – then the Façade." In: *Journal of Design History*. 1988 Vol. 1 (3–4), pp. 17 7–192.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

The idea of transformable interiors, developed by Ginzburg, was itself derived from the *existenzminimum* concept. For one thing, the size of 9 square metres for a living cell was accepted as the optimal measurements. In his drawings, a living room could be turned into a bedroom with fold-away beds, while the removal of sliding screens covering kitchen elements could immediately transform the space into a dining room with a kitchenette. Both in Russia and in Germany, and to a lesser extent in Sweden (recalling here the experience of *kollektivhus*), the small size of the living cells was to be compensated by providing residential blocks with communal facilities – such as laundries, canteens, and kitchens for common use.

The 9 square metre living cell as the basic unit for a private living space was at the core of not only the most radical housing types such as *dom-kommunas* in the Soviet Union or collective houses in Sweden, but it outlined the major principles of spatial organisation for the new modernist housing estates, which entered the scene during the 1920s, and which in an essential way articulated the grounds for contemporary mass housing solutions, residential blocks, and city districts in many East and West European countries.

1.3. The ‘new *byt*’ for the new living

The transformation of space into the new milieu, into what was called the ‘new *byt*,’ was greeted by Soviet avant-gardists as heralding a new dawn.

There is no literal translation of the notion of *byt* into English. In general use, it is closely related to *bytie* / *being*. But in its routinised everyday meaning, *byt* is the way a person goes through her everyday living; it includes the material environment of her dwelling, her responsibilities, the sequence of the things that she needs to have accomplished every day, with the help of all shortcuts, and benefits that she receives from the way her living is organised. *Byt* is, in a way, the opposite to *bytie* (*being*). The latter includes intellectual, spiritual, and emotional aspects of living, as well as dreams and desires, while *byt* is the reduction of *bytie* to simply the material substratum of a person and those practices that allow her and her family to make it through the day.

In the 1920s the concept of a ‘new *byt*’ was developed by avant-garde thinkers. It extended beyond its conventional understandings as everyday living practices and promoted ideas of merging art with technological production and their organic incorporation into everyday life. Masters of architectural constructivism argued for such organisation of *byt* that would

liberate a person (principally the housewife) from a substantial part of her practical everyday routines (e.g. cooking, cleaning, etc.) to leave her time, space, and energy for emotional, creative, and intellectual growth and hence to provide her with both temporal and physical space for the reformation of the social environment and the improvement of living standards. A dweller was to become the artist of her life and the functionalist method of the living space reformation was, to cite Henri Lefebvre, an architectural critique of everyday life that “has a contribution to make to *the art of living*.”⁴¹

The concept of the new organisation of *byt* that in Russia was, to a large extent, developed by an art and literary critic Boris Arvatov, had greatly influenced the theoreticians of architectural constructivism.⁴²

The question of reality’s reformation through the transformation of everyday living on both material and spiritual levels was widely discussed in the first post-revolutionary decade through the revival of thinking the opposition of spiritual *bytie* to materialistic *byt*, which cohered around one’s routinised life. In her book *Imagine no Possessions*,⁴³ Christina Kiaer outlines the major grounds of the debate surrounding the concept of the ‘new *byt*’.⁴⁴

In the Russian philosophical opposition between *byt* and *bytie*, the goal was to transcend material *byt* in favor of spiritual *bytie*. [...] This poetic urge toward transcendence also motivated Russian revolutionaries; in their case, however, the transcendence was ideological rather than spiritual, with the goal of collective happiness in a Communist future in this world. The Marxist materialism of the revolutionaries- the philosophical belief that economic existence determines social consciousness – did not exempt them from the traditional Russian contempt for the material side of life, that is to say, for *byt*.⁴⁵

The increasing interest in this issue was first summarised in a book by Leon Trotsky in 1923,⁴⁶ which, as Kiaer notes, “was unprecedented in the Russian

⁴¹ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 199.

⁴² His major works: *Iskusstvo I Klassi [Art and Classes]*, (Moscow; Petrograd: GIZ, 1928) and *Iskusstvo I Proizvodstvo [Art and Production]*. (Moscow: Proletkult, 1926).

⁴³ Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions*. (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The MIT Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ See chapter 2 “Everyday Objects”. In: Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions*., pp. 4 1–87.

⁴⁵ Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions*, p.53.

⁴⁶ Trotsky, Leon. *Voprosy Byta [The Questions of Everyday Life]*. (Moscow: Krasnaya Nov’, 1923).

intellectual tradition for an author to devote an entire book to theorising the political significance of everyday life,⁴⁷ and which was published more than twenty years before Lefebvre had put the subject of everyday life into focus for the purposes of his socio-philosophical critique.

The anti-materialist claims against traditional *byt* were supported by avant-garde thinkers and artists, such as Vladimir Tatlin and Boris Arvatov, the latter of whom considered *byt* “as a potentially active force,” which has a power to transform everyday life “organically” and flexibly.⁴⁸

Boris Arvatov criticised the object of everyday use – *the thing* – in the bourgeois world of capitalist society as satisfying “not the demands of the *byt*, but the demands of an eye,”⁴⁹ thereby estranged from the original function for which it had initially been produced.

During the contemporary architecture of that period, Adolf Behne’s observation of the existence of a gap or a break between the function and the visual appearance of a building was to be the main concern of his work, *The Modern Functional Building* (1926). He admitted that “a great gulf existed between formal and functional building because form and purpose were separated.”⁵⁰ He called for nothing less than a “return to the functional element”⁵¹ as a means of reconciling the wholeness and totality of being, putting things in the terms of Lefebvre.

Christina Kiaer summarises Arvatov’s critique of the bourgeois approach to the production of the material sides of the everyday life within capitalist societies – echoed in Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* – with its main objective to overcome alienation as a breaking point that produces both an artificial and fragmented reality:

His critique of bourgeois aesthetics for isolating the visual from the other senses, and so turning visual objects into spectacles cut off from the social context in which they were made and in which they should have had a social function, is similar to Walter Benjamin’s critique of the alienation of the senses under capitalism, and especially fascism, in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Arvatov’s theory of an aesthetics made whole again under socialism imagines that industrial technology will amplify and clarify all the human senses, rather than isolate and alienate them. His theory of material culture is therefore politically ambitious: the

⁴⁷ Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Arvatov, Boris. *Iskusstvo I Klassi*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 88.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

material culture of socialism will make the subject critical and conscious, and therefore invulnerable to the lure of capitalism.⁵²

Arvatov, like Lefebvre after him, argues for the construction of a proletarian culture, which should eliminate “the rupture between things and people that characterised bourgeois society.”⁵³

This construction presupposes, in addition, the establishment of a single methodological point of view that understands the entire world of things as the material form-creating basis of culture. Proletarian society will not know this dualism of things either in practice or in consciousness.⁵⁴

Arvatov’s concept of *bytotvorchestvo* – translated by Kiaer as “everyday-life-creation”⁵⁵ – aimed at merging the industrial production with art and its organic penetration into everyday life in order to make everyday life itself non-destructive, reducing the mundane to the level of being non-present, non-noticeable in a person’s everyday life. This understanding of the production and management of material objects of all kinds – from a door handle to a metropolis as well as to the conscious organisation of everyday routines – was similar to the perception of art as *zhiznestroyenie* [*life-building*] by Moisey Ginzburg. Both authors defined *bytotvorchestvo* as a method of producing living space, and, through it, reconstructing the entirety of the societal whole:

Everyday life (*byt*) consists of the fixed, skeletal forms of existence (*bytie*). The transformation of everyday-life-creation (*bytotvorchestvo*), in which changes in *byt* will move in organic, constant and flexible step with changes in *bytie*, will lead, in effect, to the liquidation of the everyday as a specific sphere of social life – so long the process of dissolving class barriers continues.⁵⁶

The goal of all transformations within the avant-garde aesthetics of constructivism, as formulated by Arvatov, is in the transcendence from production of *byt* – the lowest material datum of everyday life – to the

⁵² Kiaer, Christina. *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 68.

⁵³ Arvatov, Boris; Kiaer, Christina. (Transl.) “Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing. (Toward the Formulation of the Question).” In: *October*. 1997 (81), p. 121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

production of living space that is inclusive of all aspects of life that stimulate and effectuate the liberation and spiritual growth of humanity, necessitating the organic, conscious, and natural independency from the *thing*. As Arvatov concludes:

The main task of the proletariat as a collectivist class is in that art should become the creation not outside of the life of existing forms (easel painting, chamber music), but the creation of the forms of life itself. To create happy, beautiful life, but not to “reflect” it; to build, to merge an artist with the producer, to expand the wealth of human collective in real life, to shape the materials, by which people live in their everyday practice, – this is the truly great ideal that the working class is worthy of.⁵⁷

The combination of these concepts of *existenzminimum* and ‘new *byt*’ was accepted as the new policy and practical guideline for the realisation of life-building theory – a theory actively developed, advocated, and promoted by Moisey Ginzburg in Russia, Siegfried Giedion in Continental Europe, and Gregor Paulsson in Sweden. These two concepts thus formed the basis for the articulation of the very constructive principles that were deployed in the systematic construction of mass housing; whether on a higher or lower level of intensity, *existenzminimum* and ‘new *byt*’ are present in all three modes of functionalism investigated in this study.

A brief introduction of these concepts, which has been the aim for this chapter, will be important for the comprehension of both the genesis and the development of the new dwelling types and housing estates to be analysed in the following two chapters – those of *dom-Kommunas* – *Kollektivehus* and *siedlungen-zhillmassivs*.

⁵⁷ Arvatov, Boris. *Iskusstvo I Klassi*, p. 87.

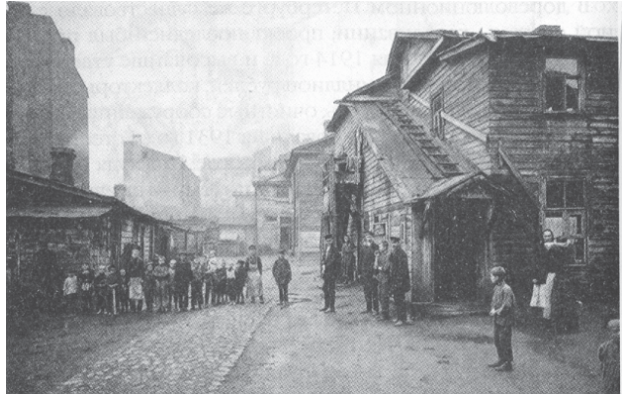


Fig.1. Workers' barracks on the Viborg side in St. Petersburg. Photo of the 1900s.



Fig. 2. Frankfurt Kitchen. Arch. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Photo of the 1920s.

CHAPTER II

Soviet *Dom-Kommuna* and Swedish *Kollektivehus* as life-building strategies, and *Kommunalka* as an immediate housing solution

The collectivisation and standardisation of the living space was accepted within all three modes of functionalism on ideological, methodological and aesthetical levels. It was also a practical and effective tool in overcoming tremendous housing shortage, an urgent problem being experienced in all three countries. Collectivisation was also considered highly important on a state level; from around 1917 onwards, all countries, even though under the pressure of different circumstances, had to take direct and immediate control over housing distribution.

The architects, whose role in finding practical solutions for the housing crisis was crucial, were concentrating on the development of new types of housing that were capable of accommodating as many people as possible in the shortest possible time.

There was a need for immediate solutions to place thousands of people into residence as well as for the urgent development of state policies that would effectively distribute housing on the new terms of a fair and socially-consciousness basis. In the present chapter I analyse the most radical means undertaken by the Soviet state shortly after the Revolution, and that were necessary in securing the sustainability of the newly institutionalised Bolshevik power. The abolition of private property realised in post-revolutionary Russia resulted in a radical reformation of housing distribution. Moreover, it also affected the methodology adopted in the production of the new living space, which at the time was concentrated in the hands of constructivists. This severely radicalised the Russian mode of functionalism, which resulted in the development of such new types of buildings as the *dom-kommunas*. These constructions were later to be reconceived and re-interpreted within other modes, on the one hand, leading to the communalisation and barrackisation of the country as a whole, on the other. The

Russian mode of functionalism, being the most intensive one, served as a source of inspiration and critique for other modes that had appropriated the Soviet experience and interpreted it in such a way that more sustainable types of dwellings and solutions for living space organisation could be constructed. These alternatives will be analysed in the following chapters.

In this chapter, though, I trace the development of the Soviet *dom-kommuna* as a new radical type of functionalist dwelling in order to verify the theoretical postulates of modernist theoreticians that were introduced in the first part of the present thesis. By analysing *dom-kommuna* as a constructive solution, I reflect on one of the possible ways through which modernist theory and its related aesthetics were put into practice. This solution was based on the principles outlined by avant-garde theoreticians and that were themselves the elementary grounds for the life-building concept: ‘collectivism,’ ‘mechanisation,’ and the ‘standardisation’ of the living space production. All these grounds could be traced in and through the history of the most radical and yet the least sustainable type of avant-garde architecture – a Soviet *dom-kommuna* and its Swedish analogue, the *kollektivhus*.

2.1. Soviet Kommunalka as the ground for state housing policy.

After the Revolution, Soviet Russia applied the most radical measures to the housing problem solution through the nationalisation of all private property, which allowed for the re-allocation of people to former privately-owned premises. The ex-owners were evicted through the program of municipalisation of the housing stock (that is, the rights for ownership were transferred from the privately-owned apartments of individuals to the city municipality). This in fact necessitated the mandatory and enforced displacement and relocation of former owners, often with a bourgeois background, from their homes in order to clear the living space for new tenants with either a proletarian or peasant origin. With the start of the *uplotnenie* (tightening) program that accelerated the process, the housing stock was shared between those in need of housing in accordance with the one-family-one-room principle. It was from out of this stringently followed principle that one of the most sustainable types of Soviet housing – *kommunalka* (a communal apartment) – was formed (fig. 1.).

The prototypes of *kommunalka* existed in St. Petersburg already in the eighteenth century, when not only separate rooms within one apartment or

a house could be rented out, but even corners within one room could be given to poor tenants for rent. But the true era of communal apartments began after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. While representatives of the former ruling classes were fleeing the country, the new capital of Moscow and the old capital of St. Petersburg-Petrograd, which received the name of Leningrad, had to welcome thousands of peasants that left their villages for big cities in order to escape from starvation, institutionalised by the so-called *prodrazvyorstka*.¹

The *uplotneniye* [tightening] program was initiated by the Bolshevik government in order to fight tremendous housing problem. The poorest citizens – workers, newly arrived peasants, former prisoners, demobilised soldiers, and people of no particular occupation – were given rooms in flats that formerly belonged to rich merchants or noble families. The ex-owners, if they had not already immigrated or had not been arrested, had to share facilities, such as bathrooms, kitchens, and halls with their new neighbors. The “tightened” original inhabitants lost their right to the ownership of their houses and apartments, after the commencement of the nationalisation process that declared all private property to be the property of the state.

The program of *uplotneniye* was realised in the severest way in those city districts that were located around existing or newly built industrial centres and sites of infrastructure. Housing stock was left under the governance of the new factory administration that intended to provide housing, first of all, to its employees, thus evicting those tenants, who were not their employee.

In the beginning, the original residents of the tightened flats kept some few metres of their former property, but by the end of the 1920s the so-called *zachistka* (clearance) started to clear dwellings of tenants who did not work at those factories, which administrated that particular housing stock and controlled the distribution of housing in that area. Thus, original residents or former owners were forced to either become employers of the plant or leave the house and clear square metres of the living space for the workers that at that time had more legal rights to demand for dwelling in that district.

By the 1920s, when the era of constructivism in mass housing had not even started, already nearly 40.000 workers received housing through the

¹“Prodrazverstka” is a surplus appropriation system when grain and other products were confiscated from peasants in an amount regulated by certain normative quantities that in practice would leave hardly anything for a peasant to survive on.

program of *uplotneniye*.² The size of a room given to a tenant was regulated by a special norm that in the 1924 was fixed as 8 square metres for a person regardless of his/her age.³ In some of these flats there were over 30 tenants that shared a hall, a kitchen, and a bathroom. People who faced the reality of living together needed to adjust, which led to an idea of the so-called *obschezhitie* (a dormitory that required collective living or co-habiting). Tenants of an *obschezhitie* tried to organise their everyday life in the most efficient way possible by sharing household duties (fig. 2–3).⁴

At a certain point this practice became so popular that the state believed it had discovered another ideological mechanism by which to raise the consciousness of a person to the new formation who would now think, as a priority, about the needs of society rather than her self-interests. The family, as a contingently constructed social institution, was declared something outdated, and it was quite easy to convince people in that idea, since migration in the first decade after the Revolution was huge; many young people were sent to study or work far away from their cities, families, and from their established and habituated ways of living. Communal living in a big apartment could make people feel a sense of belonging to a certain social group, which would serve as a substitute for the family, and eliminate the feeling of insecurity. Many houses in the late pre-war years and even after the war were from the very start constructed as *obschezhitie* or blocks of communal apartments.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, a huge housing stock was left in the former capital ready for the *uplotneniye*. The reason was that most of the former palaces, mansions, and apartments of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie became an available housing fund, since their former owners had

² On the housing policy of the first post-revolutionary years, statistics, and general information, see: Fyodorov, Alexey. “Opyt Resheniya Zhilishnogo Voprosa v Sovetskoj Rossii: Spravedlivoye Raspredelenie ili Vseobschaya Vakhanalija (na Materialakh Gubernskikh Gorodov Tsentral’nogo Promishlennogo Rayona).” [“The Experience of solution of the housing questions in Soviet Russia: fair distribution or the total Bacchanalia? (on the materials of the provincial cities of the Central industrial region)”]. In: *Aktual’naya Istoriya* http://actualhistory.ru/quarters_in_sov_russia; Dedyukhova, Irina. *Struktura Zhilishnogo Fonda i Metodi Upravleniya Im v Perviy Godi Sovetskoy Vlasti / The Structure of the Housing Fund and Methods of its Regulation in the First Years of the Soviet Power*. www.deduhova.ru/srvreform/sovmethod.htm

³ This norm was later increased to 9 sqm and remained as such till the end of the Soviet era.

⁴ See *Chapter II, Part I* of the present thesis on Walter Benjamin’s observations of the living space transformations in Moscow.

either fled, had been repressed or evicted. Due to various reasons, one of which was the new housing policy, by the start of the *uplotneniye* program, Petrograd had lost nearly two thirds of its pre-war population. In the year of the Revolution the population in Petrograd was 2,300,000, but by 1920 the population had dropped to as low as 740,000.⁵ Many citizens that belonged to the upper classes emigrated from the country for political reasons, while poorer residents left in the years of 1920–21 due to the risk of starvation; others died in the civil war or became victims of the red terror and other forms of repression. The workers of Petrograd left the city for the country side with the intention of growing food to survive, while an opposite flow of peasants, driven by collectivisation and ‘*prodrazverstka*’, was directed into the city, since people were looking for jobs at the plants.

Therefore, in early Soviet Russia the most effective and fast way to provide workers with dwellings was achieved not through the mass construction of new housing, as was the case in Weimar Germany, but through the program of municipalisation and the *uplotneniye* of the housing stock. Thanks to the workers’ migration, it provided the growth of the population to Leningrad in the middle of the 1920s⁶ and stimulated the development of *obschezhitie* as the most typical Soviet type of housing. The blocks of *obschezhitie* that had been built in the Soviet Union from the 1920s onwards were often identified as being a direct descendent from the experimental type of housing (the *dom-kommuna*) developed by the constructivists.

2.2. Dom-kommuna as a model for the future

The *Dom-Kommuna* preserved its experimental nature and remained an indicative feature of the architectural heritage from the 1920s. Interestingly, though, it was a type of housing that had not spread widely across the Soviet Union. After the state authorised the public repudiation of constructivism during the 1930s, *Dom-Kommunas* were no longer built. A chief difference between a *Dom-Kommuna* and an *obschezhitie* was in how everyday living practices were organised. *Obschezhitie* was often established in a building

⁵ Source: Yeliseeva, Irina; Gribova, Elena (Red.). *Sankt-Peterburg. 170 3–2003: Yubileiniy Statisticheskij Sbornik. [Saint-Petersburg. 170 3–2003: Anniversary Statistical Compilation]* V.2 (SPb: Sudostroyenie, 2003), pp. 1 6–17.

⁶ The population of the city reached over 1,5 million people by the 1925. Source: Yeliseeva, Irina; Gribova, Elena (ed.). *Sankt-Peterburg. 170 3–2003: Yubileiniy Statisticheskij Sbornik. [Saint-Petersburg. 170 3–2003: Anniversary Statistical Compilation]* V.2 (SPb: Sudostroyenie, 2003), pp. 1 6–17.

that was originally designed not for residential purposes, for example in a former theatre, hospital, convent, school, etc., or in a very large mansion, or even in a former royal palace. Hence, existing architectural space was converted into the living space of an *obschezhitie*. The upshot of this accelerated process of spatial conversion was that the municipality, along with new tenants, tried to adjust to that space and organise their living routine through an appropriation of existing resources. Some *obschezhities* were built from scratch and represented newly built blocks of living rooms. These were given to families or single tenants with a minimal set of facilities, such as bathrooms and kitchens, which were built for common use. A multi-storied building of an *obschezhitie* with its corridor system, where rooms were placed along the main hall, resembled the classical barrack organisation – what Adolf Behne would call “twelve doors in a long corridor,” pointing out the “mechanical sense” of these buildings.⁷ *Obschezhitie* reproduced living practices of *kommunalkas* (communal apartments) that were formed through the *uplotneniye* program. Those *obschezhities* that provided housing for families, could be complemented with kindergartens, so that women could work during the day.

The everyday living routines were organised in *obschezhitie* as a result of an adjustment to the given living conditions, rather than as a way either to implement the concept of the ‘new *byt*,’ as articulated by Arvatov or to achieve the liberation of the living from outdated household routines and practices, as expounded upon by Giedion in *Befreites Wohnen*. For the newly arrived peasants those new living conditions were usually worse in comparison to their previous dwelling in the village huts; while for the workers, who were moved from their former barracks, their life situation remained as precarious as it had been prior to the Revolution.

The total communisation of the country as well as the spread of communal apartments and *obschezhities* were not seen by the state as only a temporary solution for the allocation and relocation of huge masses of people. The municipalisation and “tightening” of the housing stock earned the state some experience regarding how to exercise control over its population in the most turbulent times. Here the new state formation possessed little relation to the modernist theory of life-building. Rather, soon the state would seize full power in providing citizens with housing as well as depriving others of shelter, whenever the need arose. In the first years after the Revolution, housing construction was paralysed; the living conditions were

⁷ Behne, Adolf. *The Modern Functional Building*, p. 120.

rapidly declining and many houses were left in a state of neglect. The state used existing housing stock that was decaying through lack of professional maintenance, turning the entire process into a means of social control. As Mark Mejerovich noted in his book *Rozhdenije I Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada* [*The Birth and the Death of the Soviet Garden City*]:⁸

In the beginning of the 1920s the state had not yet decided on the perspective for the types of housing. The new construction was run on minimal scale – in 1921–1923 in Moscow there were only three wooden houses built and seventeen half-destroyed houses reconstructed. Thus, in the period of 1921–1924 the state, using the housing shortage, expands collective forms of people's cohabiting in existing housing stock – rebuilding large apartments to the communal ones (one-room-one-family type), organises departmental *obschezhitie*, etc.⁹

In this situation, the state demanded from architects the development of such new types of dwelling that could reduce the housing shortage, on the one hand, and secure collective living, on the other.

It is important to note that both state and architects approached questions of collectivisation of the living space from different perspectives. Mejerovich emphasises that the state:

invests efforts into projecting the new housing fund that initially complies with the strategic orientation of the state towards the formation of labour-dwelling communes – i.e. the multi-apartment and multi-room housing of the communal type. In parallel with state power, some architects and their studios adopted their own initiatives in search for the architectural and urbanistic realisation of the future. This they sometimes did in a totally different direction.¹⁰

Architects welcomed the collectivisation of the living space from the viewpoint that it liberated tenants from the need to run all necessary household duties at home, freeing time and space for education, work, and per-

⁸ Mejerovich, Mark. "Rozhdenije i Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada. Gradostroitel'naya Politika SSSR. 1917–1926 gg. Ot Idei Poseleniya-Sada k Sovetskomu Rabochemy Poselky." ["The Birth and Death of the Soviet City-Garden. The City-building politics of USSR. 1917–1926. From the Idea of Garden-settlement to the Soviet Workers Village"]. In: *Vestnik Evrazii*. (Irkutsk: IrGTU, 2007), pp. 119–160.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53. Here I use the numeration of pages as provided in the electronic publication at [archi.ru](https://archi.ru/lib/e_publication.html?id=1850569462): https://archi.ru/lib/e_publication.html?id=1850569462

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

sonal growth. Yet collectivisation in their understanding did not mean the ultimate elimination of all private living space. The types of transitional communal houses by Ginzburg, brothers Vesnin, and other architects were developed in search for an ideal way to organise living space that was the most beneficial for a tenant and that would comply with her needs and meet the demands of the future modernised society.

One of the most famous experimental *dom-kommunas* was design by Moisey Ginzburg and Ignatij Milinis in 1928–1930 on Novinsky boulevard in Moscow (fig. 4–5.). Originally the house was designed as a complex of four blocks. Two of them formed a residential block with several types of apartments from single rooms to multi-room flats with toilets and kitchenettes, and a communal block, which housed a canteen and a gym. Both blocks were connected by a heated hall. Two other constructive sections housed a kindergarten and a nursery as well as technical facilities, such as a mechanised laundry and a garage. Thus, tenants were supposed to choose a level, to which they wanted to collectivise their living, which in this sense corresponded to the German mode of functionalism that assumed variability in choosing the level of collectivisation of one’s everyday life. Yet in the final realisation of the project (which was already outside of the control of its architects), the organisation of living space was highly collectivised, while additional living rooms were established in the spaces of kitchens and bathrooms, so as to locate as many people as possible. The original design for experimental housing was thus quickly turned into a conventional *obschezhitie*.¹¹

When developing organisation of living space in a *dom-kommuna*, Moisey Ginzburg prioritised the segmentation of spaces within a complex. On the level of the first category of the living space organisation, a communal kitchen and a canteen, as well as rooms for rest and socialising were mandatory, along with bathrooms (in those cases where a *dom-kommuna* possessed living cells without bathrooms). A second category included those facilities that could be shared by the tenants of several neighboring *dom-kommunas*, such as mechanised laundries, workers’ clubs, and kindergartens. Thus, as Selim Khan-Maghomedov notes, Ginzburg, in his proposal, suggested “the ideas of the stepped allocation of the network of communal-dwelling service.”¹² This type of living space organisation, though

¹¹ More on the types of the “living cells” as they were called by Ginzburg read in: Khan-Maghometov, Selim. *Moisey Ginzburg*. (Moscow: Arkhitektura-S, 2007), pp. 65–90.

¹² *Ibid*, p.75.

never fully realised within constructed *dom-kommunas*, laid at the core of the organisation of the later Soviet districts and micro-districts, which combined necessary facilities, such as kitchens and bathrooms in each individual apartment of a residential block with public canteens, laundries, and other services, which were available to the residents of the district, and which provided for several independent apartment blocks.

The project proposed by Moisey Ginzburg was rather close to the vision of collective housing by Sven Markelius, who designed a series of collective houses in Stockholm in the second half of the 1930s. At the very beginning a plan was to build three houses for about a thousand people with facilities that liberated tenants from a huge part of their house work. Mostly, women working outside of families were taken into consideration, and whose everyday life was to be 'liberated,' to use Giedion's rhetoric. Yet the project was not realised in full and instead of a thousand people, the *kollektivhus*, built at John Ericssonsgatan 6, was built as a block of one- and two- room apartments (fig. 6–7.). It was equipped with a collective kitchen that was connected with flats by service elevators to deliver cooked food, a public restaurant, and a kindergarten. On the top floor, there were a few four-room apartments, one of which was occupied by the architect Sven Markelius himself.

The *Dom-kommuna* was realised in Germany on a smaller scale as well. For example, the living routines of the workers who lived in the Friedrich-Ebert-*Siedlung* estate in Frankfurt¹³ were collectivised in all manner of ways. In spite of the fact that most apartments were provided with a separate kitchen and a bathroom, the territory was also equipped with spaces of public use, such as common bathing rooms (that corresponded to the Soviet type of collective *banya*), laundry, and a kindergarten.

Though, just like in Moscow and Sweden, the original construction plan was not fully realised, the ideas of collective or service houses in Sweden and Germany were not completely rejected and suggested a large amount of freedom for tenants to choose how much they wished to use the facilities that were provided by the public infrastructure.

2.3. Machines for living

The *Dom-kommunas*, proposed by Ginzburg in Russia and Markelius in Sweden, resembled a housing type that later formed the basis for the specific

¹³192 8–1939, arch. Ernst May, Herbert Boehm, Walter Schwagenscheidt, Bruno Taut.

organisation of contemporary hostels, apartment- and family- hotels that are widespread today. Yet, the idea of the mechanisation of the production of living spaces in the form of the new types of dwellings, which Le Corbusier called ‘the machines for living’, had found its most explicit realisation within the most radical mode of functionalism as practiced in Russia. The perfect human material for experimenting with the new forms of dwellings were considered the students, since they constituted the most flexible and adjustable social group and were to be transformed from what Lefebvre outlined as a type of ‘transitional men’ into the people of the future who could take responsibility for the further shaping of their living.

In the 1929–31 a young constructivist architect Ivan Nickolaev designed an experimental Dom-Kommuna on the Ordzhonikidze street that brought collectivisation of the living space to its fullest expression, realising an idea of the full mechanisation of living (fig. 8.). The collectivisation of life was considered not only from the functional and practical perspectives, but it was taken as a crucial instrument to form a new type of Soviet citizens, who were free from any philistine and petty-bourgeois possessions, as was argued by Arvatov. In a specificatory note to the technical designs of the project, Nickolaev outlined the major grounds for the ‘machines for living,’ which laid at the heart of the *dom-kommuna* living space organisation.¹⁴

One of the major principles was the communal use of a student’s individual space in a block, which completely eliminated privacy. A conventional living room, where such activities as rest, reading, and socialising were traditionally practiced, had to be replaced with a space of common use, e.g. a library, a club, a study room, etc. Sleeping and rest was given a space in a sleeping cabin for two to four people, and its size was determined by the 3 cubic metres of circulating fresh air per person.

The living space within this *dom-kommuna* was divided with consideration of a tenant’s everyday living practices such as sleep, meals, sport activities, studies, rest, etc. and considered students’ specialisations (music rooms for musicians, drawing rooms for engineers, etc.).

The organisation of the everyday routines was modelled to the guidelines articulated by Boris Arvatov in his theoretical works on the ‘new *byt*’ theory. Since everyday needs of a student were taken care of through the infrastructure and the very special organisation of the *dom-kommuna*, the

¹⁴ For the full list see: Khan-Maghomedov, Selim. *Studencheskiye Doma-Kommuni, Studencheskiye Obschezhitia* [Students’ dom-kommunas, students’ ibschezhitie]. http://www.alyoshin.ru/Files/publika/khan_archi/khan_archi_2_076.html#4 Further down, the summary of the grounds follows basing on this list.

possession of personal and privately-owned belongings was considered unnecessary. Only the very limited number of hygienic items that were required for immediate self-maintenance could be acceptable for the reason to teach students elementary self-care. Yet, self-maintenance was to be organised, first of all, with educational purpose and should have taken minimal time from studies and social life. Private ownership of ‘things’ was countenanced only with respect to clothing and pocket items, excluding e.g. underwear clothing and pyjamas for sleep that were provided and taken care of by the technical staff of the commune.

A family question was resolved in the same radical way, which declared isolated family cells non-existing in the commune. Children were to be given round-the-clock care with open access provided to parents at scheduled times. Spouses were considered equal members of the commune with same responsibilities and rights, regardless gender.

Eight-hour sleep was given special attention and sleeping cabins were to be accompanied with rooms for gymnastic and hygienic procedures.

Meals were to be served in the canteens by technical stuff and the meal service schedule was to be adjusted to students’ curriculum.

Dom-kommuna on the Ordzhonikidze street was to house 2000 tenants and consisted of two connected blocks, where zoning of the living space provided for the encircled conveyer living, thereby fully realising the mechanised principle of the organisation of the living space.

Aleksey Yemeliyanov, the head of the department of cultural heritage of Moscow, summarised the organisation of living in the Nickolaev’s dom-kommuna in one of his interviews giving on the issue of its historical reconstruction:

Obschezhitie was built in the efforts to mechanise the human everyday living. The authors of the project tried to provide students with such conditions of living that all processes, which were unrelated to their studies, were regulated by the strict schedule and realised as the conveyor belt. In the technical task for the construction it was indicated that the house was to remind the machine for living.¹⁵

Such *dom-kommunas* became incubators that experimented on real humans under the goal to raise people of the new formation. Architect Ivan Nickolaev described a day of his tenant in the technical task to his project

¹⁵ Alexey Yemeliyanov in the interview to the newspaper *Moscow* 24. 01 October, 2015. <https://www.m24.ru/articles/obschezhitiya/01102015/85940>

that was published in 1929 in the journal *Stroitel'stvo Moskvyy* [*The Building of Moscow*] with personal attitude and passion:

After all-awakening call a student, dressed in a simple linen pyjamas (panties or another simple suit), goes down to take some gymnastic exercises in a sport hall or goes up to the rooftop to exercise in the fresh air, depending on a season. The closed night cabin undergoes, since this moment and during the whole day, the energetic blowing-through. The entrance to the cabin is prohibited till the night. A student, after completing his exercises, proceeds to the dressing room to the wardrobe, where his clothing is placed. Here, in proximity, the row of shower cabins is located, where he can take a shower and change. In the hairdresser's room he finishes his toilette. After putting himself in order, a student goes to a canteen, where at the counter he receives a short breakfast or drinks tea; after which he is given a right to spend his time up to his consideration: he can leave for the studies at the institute, or go to the common room for studies, or, if he is getting ready for an exam, he can take a separate room to study. Besides, there is a common reading room to his disposal, a library, an engineer-drawing room, an auditorium, a studio, etc.

For some, who are prescript by a doctor, an additional time for a meal will be assigned – a second breakfast. Lunch in the canteen is served at a usual time that considers students return from the institute.

After lunch and a break that follows, a short evening study session restarts with those who are behind, some social work is run, and so forth. Collective listening to radio, music playing, dancing, and other diverse ways of self-entertainment are organised by the student himself, with the use of inventory available in the commune.

An evening call that collects everyone for a walk, finishes a day. After return from the walk a student goes to a dressing room, takes his night suit from a wardrobe, washes up, changes into his night suit, leaves his clothing together with his underwear in the wardrobe and proceeds to his night cabin. A sleeping cabin is being ventilated during the night with help of the central system. The air ozoning is used and the possibility of sleeping additives is not excluded.¹⁶

A very personal and compassionate tone is adopted by Nickolaev, which reminds of a citizen of the glass One-State city described in the first Russian dystopian novel *We* by Evgeniy Zamyatin, written in 1920. By the end of the

¹⁶ Nickolaev, Ivan. "Zadanie Dlya Projekta Studencheskogo "Doma-Kommuni" na 2000 Chelovek." ["The Task for the Project of a Student "Dom-Kommuna" for 2000 People"]. In: *Stroitel'stvo Moskvyy*, 1929, V. 12, pp. 12–13.

decade the novel was translated into English and became quite well-known to the Western world. Zamyatin describes a state that consist of a city built purely from glass, and whose citizens live in a collective space where transparency completely eradicates privacy. The rationally organised space in the One State controls every moment of its citizens' lives. They are deprived of individuality and everything that corresponds to it, including personal names. The living space leaves no chance for any irrational activities, emotions, and even thinking. Imagination and love are considered needless distractions. All citizens are indulged by a sense happiness that is solely secured through the rational organisation of their living space and their everyday activities.

In the *We*, human nature is already curbed through comfortable and rational living conditions; residents have agreed to sacrifice all components of their irrational nature, such as criticism, emotions, personal names, family ties, friendship, and monogamist love in exchange for comfort and constant happiness. Zamyatin, through his critique of exaggerated functionalist collectivisation, mechanisation, and the standardisation of the living space, predicts the destruction of the state from within. The city that he describes is a *dom-kommuna* made of glass. A utopian project turns people not into the freemen of the future, but into the soulless cogs within the state machine. Through the whole decade of the 1920s, the Soviet state had been supporting the trend towards a mechanisation of the living, which was first experimented with by constructivists. Yet the state had pursued its own purpose to control the population and to secure its own power. As Mejerovich concludes in his analysis of state policy towards mass housing construction in the Soviet Union:

At the core of the Soviet State's housing policy lies a legally defined law of the use of dwelling as the means of rule over people. State power uses dwelling as a means of coercion to labour and assigned life style, of coercion to sedentary and inclusion into the forming social organisation of society (through the labour-dwelling collective groups), since the exclusively state form of ownership and distribution of housing, under condition of its total deficit, gives state an opportunity to apply it as a powerful instrument of the organising pressure on the population.¹⁷

The building of Nickolaev's *dom-kommuna* was very close to the original plan, and yet living in the complex according to the architect's description

¹⁷ Mejerovich, Mark, *Rozhdenie i Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada*, p. 51.

and initial plan, which he introduced, was not sustainable as an everyday and continuous occurrence. As the chief architect of the reconstruction project for the Nickolaev's *dom-kommuna*, Vsevolod Kulish, noted in an interview to the portal *Moscow 24*, the composition and function of living practices that had once been instigated in the collective housing project soon had to change:

Just in two or three years after its opening, the commune began to be inhabited by the family-people, who had no relation to studentship, and they had completely different needs. As a result, the sharp functional division of the spaces began to decay.¹⁸

Thus the type of an ideal *dom-kommuna* failed to prove its sustainability in its pure form and was soon transformed into a conventional *obschezhitie*.

Dom-kommuna as a type, unlike *obschezhitie*, in which the newly formed living space was adjusted to the physical dimensions of the existing building, was always carefully and well-thought through from the stage of planning. *Dom-kommuna* intended to offer not only communal co-habitation in a house with shared facilities, but it intended to organise living practices in the most efficient way possible, thereby providing tenants with modern infrastructure for sustainable living. As Koos Bosma notes in his article “New Socialist Cities: Foreign Architects in the USSR 1920–1940:”

Russian architects were discussing not only the decentralisation of housing but also the nature of the dwelling itself. Vehement debates took place about women in labor process, destruction of the ‘bourgeois’ family, state education of children, and even creation of separate cities for children and their schools. In short: architects had to look for adequate artistic concepts for a new way of housing and a new lifestyle.¹⁹

Dom-kommuna was closely integrated into existing city infrastructure and served as an experimental laboratory for constructivists’ search for an ideal mass housing type. The goal was not to take tenants under total control, which was the main obsession of the state housing policy, but to liberate them from the routines of the traditional household.

¹⁸ Kulish, Vsevolod, in: “Pamyatnik Sovetskoy Utopii: Kakie Tainy Khranit Legendarniy Dom-Kommuna.” [“The Monument to the Soviet Utopia: What Secrets a Legendary Dom-Kommuna Keeps.”] For: *Moscow 24*, 2015, October 1. <http://www.m24.ru/articles/obshchezhitiya/01102015/85940>

¹⁹ Bosma, Koos. “New socialist cities: foreign architects in the USSR 1920–1940,” p. 309.

Depending on the family composition, most *dom-kommunas* offered various types of dwelling: from single rooms for 1–2 persons that were placed along the corridor (just as in an *obschezhitie*) to the multi-roomed apartments for larger families. Some of those apartments even occupied two floors (such as was the case in the *dom-kommuna* of Narkomfin, built by Ginzburg and Milinis). Architects tried to complement each flat with a balcony; they also oriented living rooms towards the sun and green spaces. The provision with individual apartments should have depended on the real and actual needs of a particular family, thereby aiming to provide a given family the most suitable type of a dwelling at any given time. In principle, when single people started families, they should have been given the opportunity to move on from shared rooms to separate flats. Since, according to Ginzburg’s plan, the type of *dom-kommuna* was to combine several types of living-cells, growing families could have moved within the same building of the *dom-kommuna*. In this respect, it was one of the solutions for a problem of a growing family, whose life conditions were constantly changing, and thus necessitating a transition to a different type of dwelling – a problem that has preoccupied architects from all eras.

A great German architect and urban planner, Martin Wagner, who devoted a huge part of his practice to the search for mass housing solutions, developed a concept of the *growing house* that could adjust to the changing size, constitution, and life style of a family.²⁰ Though his idea of the growing house was not tied to any particular building type, Wagner was critical of those houses that in any way resembled the type of a barrack, i.e. *dom-kommunas*.²¹

An ideal house for Wagner was a detached cottage, which allowed for affordable and fast extension. The districts were suggested to be planned by considering the possibility for extension and substantial changes to each dwelling unit. Thus, for Wagner, a living space of a home was to be considered for expansion from the very outset. In case of *dom-kommunas*, their already arranged living space should have carried the potential for people to circulate within that space, depending on their changing personal and family conditions. *Dom-kommuna* was a complete space, which embodied what Lefebvre calls an absolute space, and which separated living practices of its dwellers from the outer city space, making tenants squeeze

²⁰ See: Wagner, Martin. “Das Wachsende Haus. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Städtischen Wohnungsfrage.” In: *Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin*, vom 22. Oktober bis 14. Dezember 2015, pp. 1–144.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

their routines into the limits of a *dom-kommuna*'s highly collectivised and highly controlled spaces. Martin Wagner, on the contrary, proposed the opening and extension of space beyond its established borders, which was to be achieved through the rationalisation and standardisation of construction and which embodied the interpenetration of the inner and outer spaces of a house that, ever since Giedion's manifesto *Befreites Wohnen*, was declared essential for the German mode.

Yet, even in this most radical type of housing, which suggested the highest level of collectivisation of living, the complete abolition of individualism and privacy was not the final goal of constructivists. The idea of most of *dom-kommunas* was not to completely dissolve the private sector into the public one, but to provide the living space with sustainable connections and interlinkages between private and public sectors within the 'absolute' space of a *dom-kommuna*. The living space was to be segmented and yet to remain homogenous, where no sharp borders between the private and the public sectors existed, and where tenants did not feel uncomfortable when forced to realise their intimate practices in public.

The intentions of most constructivists, as Khan-Magomendov noted, were to "provide each family with a separate apartment. Ginzburg believed that economic potential of a flat is inseparable from the real possibility of its one-flat-one-family inhabiting principle."²² Apartments in *dom-kommunas* were rationally organised with the intention to provide tenants with only the necessary facilities. Yet most rooms and smaller apartments had individual kitchen niches and showers, which were never planned in *obschezhitie*s as they were usually established through the occupation of a building that was initially built as a non-residential construction. Besides, each *dom-kommuna* possessed a large collective kitchen and a bath block. Unlike in an *obschezhitie*, a collective kitchen was to give tenants not only space for cooking, but it was to function as a sort of canteen, where meals were prepared by the professional staff, and where workers or students could eat ready-made food on a daily basis, freeing their time from the necessity to cook. *Dom-kommunas* were also provided with self-operated and serviced laundries, gyms, libraries, clubs, and kindergartens, complementing living quarters with accessible public facilities.

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²² Khan-Maghommetov, Selim. *Moisey Ginzburg*, p. 67.

2.4. Leningrad *dom-kommunas* as monuments to the utopia of the ‘new *byt*’

Dom-Kommuna organised everyday living routines in a way that was close to an ideal of a Soviet *zhilmassiv* or a German *siedlung* – a housing estate where each living practice was run within the one undivided space of a separate building (such as a collective factory-kitchen, a collective *banya* (bath house), a workers’ club, a school, a hospital, etc.). What this was meant to achieve was the forming of closed districts that provided its tenants with all necessary infrastructure. The main difference was that in a *dom-kommuna* all these facilities were organised within the same building complex. This type of housing was more densely populated and dependent on industrial, political or educational institution as its organising centre. *Zhilmassiv*, on the other hand, preserved a closer reference to the concept of the garden city, as developed by Ebenezer Howard in the late nineteenth century. Unlike a *zhilmassiv* – a type of a housing settlement – *dom-kommuna* did not require any substantial change to the existing building surrounding it and thus it did not form a new district or a neighbourhood. It was rather a micro-model of a rationalised and highly collectivised society within a single architectural space, as described in Zamyatin’s *We*. Basically, one could be born and raised in a *Dom-kommuna* without leaving its walls, since all necessary facilities were organised under same roof, including e.g. nursery, hospital, and school.

Compositional planning and architectural appearance of a *dom-kommuna* was extremely important, unlike that of an *obschezhitie*, which was usually spontaneous in its planning and organisation, or which could be established in a former nationalised public institution that remained from pre-revolutionary times, such as a theatre or a noble mansion. Through its architectural forms, *dom-kommuna* resembled a materialised model of the new society. The major aesthetical components of a *Dom-kommuna*, as outlined by Moisey Ginzburg, were the following:

...the size, the height, the form of overall dimensions, illumination; the intensity and the character of illumination, the colour and the texture of all planes that limit the space.²³

Architects studied, realised, and promoted advantages of the communal living in their projects and were searching for the best architectural forms

²³ Citation in: Khan-Maghometov, Selim. *Moisey Ginzburg*, p. 87. Original bold.

that would provide its most efficient functioning. Still, most theoreticians of constructivism saw *dom-kommuna* as a temporary and transitional type of housing, suitable for the initial stage of an ideal society's construction within given harsh conditions. Unfortunately, soon most *dom-kommunas* were turned into *obschezhitiiyes* with 'tightened' apartments that were populated to the one-room-one-family principle. Most public places within *dom-kommunas* were turned into living quarters in order to provide housing for as many tenants as possible. At the end, *dom-kommuna* failed to prove its sustainability in Soviet Russia of the 1920s and early 1930s, since none of them were fully realised to the original design and idea, as noted by Selim Khan-Magomedov:

In evaluation of all *dom-kommunas* and houses of transitional type built in the 1920s, it is necessary to consider that in none of them the experiment had been carried out in compliance with normal requirements that were outlined in the project that assumed the long-lasting exploitation and full-scaled functioning of all communal premises.²⁴

In practice, *dom-kommunas* were realised either in a way that resembled more comfortable version of a family hotel or a *kollektivhus* as designed by Sven Markelius in Stockholm at John Ericssonsgatan (1935) and those that reminded of a typical Soviet *obschezhitie*.

One of the most famous examples of the poorly realised *dom-kommunas* in Leningrad was a house built for engineers and writers at the Rubinstein street, 7 in Leningrad, and that for its poor living conditions was called by tenants "a tear of socialism (fig. 9)."²⁵ Due to the lack of resources, it represented an imitation of the experimental type developed by Russian constructivists. Simple striped painting of the facades was to produce a dynamic effect and remind of avant-gardist ribbon windows; tiny balconies placed in checked order as well as some displacement of building volumes were to resemble the modernist aesthetics. It was also due to the economic scarcity that the living cells lacked individual bathrooms and kitchens. The organisation of the inner space resembled more a barrack rather than a rationalised type of a modern dwelling. The most famous tenant of the 'tear of socialism' – the Leningrad poet, Olga Bergolts – referred to her time spent in the *dom-kommuna* as living in the most ridiculous house. In the 1960s the building was reconstructed, and tiny apartments were furnished with

²⁴ Khan-Maghometov, Selim. *Moisey Ginzburg*, p. 87.

²⁵ Arch. Alexander Ol', 1929–1931.

kitchens and bathrooms. Today, the house remains the monument to a failed utopia of the ‘new *byt*’ organisation.

The more comfortable versions of *dom-kommunas*, which were built in Leningrad, were meant for the tenants who occupied high positions in the city administration, such as the *dom-kommuna* of Politkatorzhan (former political prisoners)²⁶ (fig. 10.) and the poshest residential building of the First House of Lensovet²⁷, which was designed at the dawn of the constructivist era in Russia, but completed at the turn of the art-deco of Socialist realism (fig. 11.).

Dom-kommuna of Politkatorzhan housed political prisoners of the tsarist regime, which were mostly socialists and thus possessed special respect in the city. This collective house can be considered the closest one to the type of *dom-kommuna* that was articulated by Moisey Ginzburg. A house of clear constructivist forms was built on a beautiful spot of the Petrograd Island, overlooking the picturesque Neva river, on the one side, and the major symbol of tsarist repressions – the Peter & Paul Fortress, which served as political prison till the early 1920s – on the other. This *dom-kommuna* complex consisted of three 6–7-storey blocks. In accordance with the policy of the ‘new *byt*’ that discouraged women from cooking at home, there were no kitchens in the apartments, which consisted mostly of two rooms. Yet, each flat, just like in the project by Sven Markelius in Stockholm, was supplied with an electrical heating box to warm up the food that was prepared in a collective kitchen. The complex had its own cinema and a concert hall for 500 people; a restaurant, mechanised laundry facilities, and a kindergarten. Besides all this, *dom-kommuna* and its tenants commemorated sufferings of former political prisoners in the form of a museum of labour prison and exile, which was placed in the building. This produced another symbolic meaning that added to the very location of the house in front of the former prison and to the background of its tenants. As the architectural historian Boris Kirikov noted:

The exemplary dom-kommuna didactically demonstrated the care of state about veterans of revolutionary movement, whose heroic example served to the upbringing of the new generations.²⁸

²⁶ Arch. Grigory Simonov, 192 9–1933.

²⁷ Arch. Evgeny Levinson and Igor Fomin, 193 1–1935.

²⁸ Kirikov Boris., Stieglitz, Margarita. *Leningrad Avant-Garde Architecture. A guide.* (St. Petersburg: Kolo Publishing House, 2008), p. 246.

Yet, in an ironic coincidence, many of the former tsarist political prisoners that had become new tenants of this *dom-kommuna* soon became the prisoners of the Stalinist regime – as Boris Kirikov recalls, almost fifty-four names from the list of house tenants ended up as victims of Stalin's repressions.²⁹

The last Leningrad residential building that possessed an already distant relation to the *dom-kommuna* type was the First Residential House of Lensovet, built in the early 1930s for the Bolshevik party elite (fig. 12.).³⁰ Apartments of 2–6 rooms were far from modest in size and design, with in-built furniture, some even furnished with nut and oak tree. Each apartment had its own kitchen and a bathroom, yet communal facilities such as a collective kitchen, a laundry, rooms for the personnel, a kindergarten in the inner yard, and a canteen still resembled the *dom-kommuna* type through its initial spatial organisation. In its original form, the complex was to be supplied even with a solarium and a beauty salon. The house possesses expressive modernist forms, yet it produces a feeling not of a rationally and dynamically organised living space for the proletariat, but rather a posh bourgeois residential house. Modernist forms in this case perform not a functional role, but they rather resemble a fashionable and prestigious game in modernism that first started with Le Corbusier and that after the World War II was revived in the Western world.

An innovative type of a *dom-kommuna*, which had been developed by Russian avant-gardists, was realised mostly in the largest cities of the Soviet Union and always on an experimental basis. As examples of the most famous *dom-kommunas* in Moscow demonstrate, the way of living envisaged for this type of collective space, due to various reasons. The theory failed its literal translation into the architectural practice under the influence of economic, political, and social factors. Even in its best incarnations, the *dom-kommuna* tended in reality to slide into other types of dwelling. Those were either conventional *obschezhitia*, as in case with Moscow *dom-kommunas*, or a posh hotel, as in case with the First House of Lensovet in Leningrad or as in the version of a *kollektivhus* introduced by Sven Markelius in Stockholm.

Even if in the very beginning *dom-kommunas'* residents were forced to adjust to the constructed space, they later still had to re-appropriate it in order to make this space liveable – be it in the proletarian or bourgeois

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Arch. Evgeny Levinson and Igor Fomin, 193 1–1935.

sense. The space of the future had been lost to the needs of the moment. In this respect, the *dom-kommunas* represented utopian islands, outside of whose borders there was a chaotic and storming sea of reality that lacked any infrastructure, and moreover, any resources to sustain the existence of utopian machines for living.



Fig. 1. One of the “Stakhanovetz” workers in his old room in kommunalka in central St. Petersburg. Photo from 1936.



Fig. 2. “Obschezhitie” of the engineering and economics college. Photo from 1930s.



Fig. 3. Women's "Obschezhitie" of the Engineering and Construction Bureau of NKVD. Photo from 1936.



Fig. 4. Dom-kommuna of Narkomfin. Arch. Moisey Ginzburg, Ignaty Milinis, 1928–30. Photo from 2017.



Fig. 5. Corridor in the Dom-kommuna of Narkomfin. Photo from 2018.



Fig. 6. Collective House on John Ericssonsgatan 6. Arch. Sven Markelius, 1934. Photo from 2018.



Fig. 7. Collective House on John Ericssonsgatan 6. Arch. Sven Markelius, 1934. Photo from 1936.



Fig. 8. Restaurant in the collective house on John Ericssonsgatan 6. Arch. Sven Markelius, 1934. Photo from 1936.



Fig. 9. Dom-kommuna on Ordzhonikidze street in Moscow. Arch. Ivan Nickolaev, 1929–31. Photo from 2016.



Fig. 10. Dom-kommuna on Rubinstein street (“A Tear of Socialism”). Arch. Alexander Ol', 1935. Photo from 2010.



Fig. 11. Dom-kommuna Politkatorzhan. Arch. Grigory Simonov, 1929–33. Photo from 2015.



Fig. 12. First House of Lensovet. Arch. Evgeny Levinson and Igor Fomin, 1931–35. Photo from 2015.

CHAPTER III

Building New Living Space through *Siedlungen* and *Zhilmassivs*

Dom-kommunas were the result of a literal translation of the most radical mode of functionalist aesthetics into architectural practice. Yet as a type, they had not been introduced into mass housing in Europe, even though they had become a source of inspiration for many transitional types of contemporary dwellings that accommodate residents for only temporary stays – e.g. hotels, student campuses, hospitals, refugee camps, etc. Among the main features of the radical mode of functionalism, which was fully realised in the *dom-kommuna* type, was the immediacy of its space, the ability to provide for mobilisation and mobility, as well as its overall transitional character. *Dom-kommunas* remained the localised beginnings of modernism within the cities' old organisations. They had not yet changed the nature of city landscapes so that they would become experimental condensers – that is, laboratories for further mass housing solutions requiring a more sustainable and less transitional character, as well as facilitating the reform of entire districts and whole cities, the result of all of which would be the production of a new living space, not only within the walls of the modernist buildings, but beyond them.

The theoretical and architectural studies of the 1920s developed new ways of spatial organisation, not only within the immediate living space of a home surrounding a person in her private life. Rather, in the modernist age the living space extended beyond the walls of a dwelling, as it was depicted on the *Befreites Wohnen* cover. Borders between interiors and exteriors were erased through various means: architecturally (through the introduction of new materials, e.g. reinforced concrete and glass into mass housing construction); infrastructurally (through being connected to sites of work or study), and socially (by promoting of various activities outside of one's living quarters).

The development of modernist estates, which were realised on a mass scale in Soviet and West-European cities, did not highlight the break with both the past and architectural experience to the same extent that the *dom-kommunas*

would; but nonetheless they reformed and re-thought the whole idea of everyday living in conformity with modernist aesthetics, the functionalist constructive method, alongside the realisation of the principles of *existenzminimum* and of the ‘new *byt*.’

The new housing estates of the 1920s that appeared in Leningrad, Berlin, Stockholm, and other cities of those countries comprising this study, were not exclusively invented by functionalists, since in spite of the level of radicalism pertaining to the declared break with the architectural tradition, the architectural experience and heritage of previous ages were investigated and appropriated by representatives of modernism.

Modernist housing estates of the functionalist era, known as *siedlungen* in Germany and *zhilmassivs* in Russia, bear resemblance to the concept of the garden city, developed by Ebenezer Howard in the late nineteenth century.

In the present chapter I analyse the history of the formation of these new types of housing estates that formed the ground of the contemporary mass housing solutions and overall city planning in modern Germany, Sweden, and Russia. Through a comparative analysis of existing housing estates during the 1920s, I reflect on the operation of the three modes of functionalism in practice while continuing to verify the theoretical postulates of modernist aesthetics.

I take the theory of the garden city, which was one of the most influential in urban planning of the first half of the twentieth century, in order to reflect on the ways this theory was translated into constructive practice in each case country. This helps to reveal both the nature and the destiny of each mode of functionalism and to reflect on their sustainability under different social, economic, and political circumstances.

Germany and Sweden represent two unprecedented cases of how modernist aesthetics merged with ruling state policy. Under social democratic rule, both Weimar Germany and Sweden are testament to the true cooperation between the state and avant-garde art production. Through such collaboration, Weimar Germany and Sweden managed to produce innovative modernist living space on a level of mass housing construction, which ultimately altered everyday life for millions of citizens. Constructivism in Russia, on the contrary, had been quickly captured by the Bolshevik state and soon disposed of. It had first observed and tolerated experiments by avant-gardists, only then to appropriate their ideas regarding the transformative potential of the functionalist living space in order to exercise further control over its population. This it achieved

through seizing both the means of distribution of housing stock and the production of appropriate mass housing, which would sustain that control.

In the present chapter I aim at providing a multi-levelled analysis of the produced living space in the forms of, first of all, German *siedlungen* and Russian *zhilmassives*. These will allow for not only a tracing of the history of these formations, it will moreover permit an understanding of the mechanisms by which modernist aesthetic theory was translated into mass housing construction, and finally to open up the possibility to reflect on the relations between the three modes of functionalism and those ideological state apparatuses (the so-called ISAs) that, according to Althusser, had shaped the societal structures of the time.

3.1. The concept of the Garden City in mass housing planning of the 1920 and 30s.

One of the major concepts that influenced the development of mass housing in the young Soviet state was the idea of the Garden City by Ebenezer Howard. It represented a new type of settlement designed according to concentric plans and accompanied with open green spaces, parks, and radial boulevards extending from the centre of settlements to their borders. These garden cities were to be self-sufficient and autonomous from the old cities. Once they became so big that self-provision was no longer possible, new garden cities were to be constructed. Garden cities were meant to combine the benefits of country living with the amenities and enhanced infrastructure of big cities without the risks of overpopulation. This design should have eliminated social tensions within communities and provided, in both a fair and an efficient way, the distribution of resources between members of its community.¹

Yet, none of the European or American regions received a garden city that fully resembled Howard's model. In early Soviet Russia, among those districts where the idea of the garden city was realised in a most precise way was the Sokol village in Moscow, built in 1923 by architects Markovnikov, brothers Vesnin, Kondakov, and Shchusev.

From the very beginning those estates that most resembled Howard's urban utopia, both in Russia and Europe, maintained close connections to

¹ Ebenezer Howard published two major books, in which his concept was introduced in detail: *The Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898 and the *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1902.

the big cities. The same could be said about Letchworth and Welwyn garden cities laid out by Howard himself in the UK; the Hellerau garden city in Dresden initiated by businessman Karl Schmidt-Hellerau; Gartenstadt Falkenberg in Berlin by Bruno Taut, and Södra Ängby residential district in Stockholm, built by Edvin Engström already in the 1930s (fig. 1–2.). In each of these cases, the main deviation from the original concept was that none of them were autonomous from their metropolitan centres.

Those European experiments resembling Howard's models were not the sustainable towns that were able to define their own organisation and infrastructure; in fact, they neither offered work opportunities and services for their inhabitants, nor did they maintain other development patterns that were crucial for Howard's garden city concept. And yet Howard's utopian theory furthered the "anti-urban model of the early post-war period," as noted by Ludovica Scarpa, in her commentary to Martin Wagner's *Growing House*.² Influenced by Howard's ideas, Wagner declared, after he had begun heading the city planning and building control in Berlin during the 1920s, that "the day of the metropolis was over."³ As an architect and city planner, Wagner argued for the establishment of new relations between city and village, but blamed the capitalist market economy for standing in the way of realising their fusion. Scarpa summarises Wagner's vision of the future development of the garden city in the following way:

The new relationship between town and country and the highly organised planned economy based on the laws of the machine would produce the new "country-town", where Wagner would take his focus on this development to its logical extreme.⁴

A similar implementation of the country-town like living space was developed by the Soviet state through the concept of 'smychka' – the complete morphing of city and village that would result from the industrialisation of the country. The ideal outcome would thus be that the space of the state becomes completely homogeneous without resembling either a town or a village. Both Wagner and his Soviet colleagues argued not for the

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² Scarpa, Ludovica. "The Technocratic Utopia: The House is Growing, the City Shrinking." In: Martin Wagner, *Das wachsende Haus*. (Teil des Ausstellungsprogramms Wohnungsfrage am Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, vom 22. Oktober bis 14. Dezember 2015), p. 185.

³ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

production of the concentric settlements, which, as Howard suggested, were isolated from one another. Instead, they championed the mutual dissolution of the metropolis and the country into a new type of living space that appropriated the highly industrialised organisation of the cities with developed infrastructure, and yet preserved immediate access to nature for each of its citizens.

Yet, those estates that were designed in Berlin, such as Gartenstadt Falkenberg (fig. 3–10.) and Großsiedlung Britz (Hufeisiedlung) (fig. 11–17.) or Södra Ängby in Bromma near Stockholm are first of all residential districts that are completely dependent on Berlin's and Stockholm's infrastructure. The same applies to the Sokol garden village in Moscow. Their existence and functioning was provided by the central towns' communication systems, thereby turning them into the dormitory towns rather than into sustainable independent settlements. And even though the life of their tenants was organised in a more rational and healthy fashion, the suburbs created became the epitome of residential areas against which Howard argued, since instead of constituting their own town districts, they ended up complementing the big cities, making them more sustainable and resistant to elimination – Howard's ultimate goal.

Still, those programmatic estates, generally referred to as garden cities, were certainly designed under the strong influence of Howard's ideas. They became early platforms for the functionalist experiments that later defined solutions for mass housing construction and outlined its further development deep into the twentieth century. All estates mentioned above were extremely different from each other in size, planning, type of housing, social status of their inhabitants, infrastructure, and overall architectural appearance. If in Berlin the garden-*siedlungen* combined various types of housing from individual villas to the multi-apartment blocks, since they were designed for different social groups of people, then Södra Ängby in Stockholm was realised as a posh and fashionable residential district that consisted of villas designed in purely modernist forms. The Sokol village in Moscow should be recalled as a unique example of the complex that consisted of individual cottages, yet their rationalised forms referred to peasant huts rather than to the Le Corbusier styled bourgeois villas of Södra Ängby in Stockholm.

All these estates were built under different political, economic, administrative, and social circumstances. What they had in common was the period of construction and the reference to the concept of an English garden city combined with the functionalist approach.

Such combination resulted in the development of new types of housing in Europe during the 1920s: *siedlungen* in Germany and *zhilmassivs* in Russia, examples of which were creatively processed in other European countries during the 1930s and later on.

The Swedish mode of functionalism did not further develop the concept of German *siedlungen* and Russian *zhilmassives* in its own construction practice. What it did instead was to turn towards the development of the city through the interconnected network of neighborhoods. This development could be said to derive from Lewis Mumford's fundamental work *The Culture of Cities*, published in 1938.⁵ In this text precisely, neighborhoods were considered the key elements of a larger city's organisation, rather than remaining under the impact of Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.

Mumford argued for the smaller-scaled districts that were equally distributed around the town rather than for the production of the larger semi-autonomous suburbs or the city-satellites.⁶ Lucy Creagh, in her article "From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse of Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54),"⁷ notes that

[...] the neighborhood unit would be achieved with the same tightly planned apartments that developments in the 1930s had consisted of. What did change after the process of re-evaluation and auto-critique in the late 1930s and early 1940s was the way these apartments were combined to create groupings at a range of scales and public space of varying experimental quality. The interplay between the private home and public amenities became a primary object of experimentation.⁸

Yet, the later projects for satellite suburbs around Stockholm demonstrate closer consideration of Howard's ideas. A case in point would be the "Diagrammatic plan for a suburban community of around 10 000 inhabitants" by Sven Markelius, which represents a concentric plan of Howard's garden city with open spaces divided by radial boulevards that depart from the city

⁵ Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*. (San Diego, New York, London: HBJ, 1970).

⁶ See: Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*.

⁷ Creagh, Lucy. "From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse of Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54)." In: *The European Welfare State Project: Ideals, Politics, Cities and Buildings*. Autumn 2011, vol. 5(2), pp. 05–24.

⁸ Creagh, Lucy. "From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse of Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54)," p. 12.

centre⁹ and other models that can be observed in *Det Framtida Stockholm* of the time.¹⁰ The Stockholm districts constructed during the 1950s resemble the Garden City concept. They are highly autonomous from the Stockholm city centre, possessing of well-developed infrastructure, such as libraries, culture halls, shopping centres, schools, office buildings, etc., as well as incorporating wide green areas and open spaces into living environments. This, for instance, can be observed in the districts of Vällingby and Farsta, designed by architects Backström and Reinius during the 1950s in the outskirts of Stockholm, which are close to Stockholm city centre through a well-developed system of communication and transportation networks.

The concepts of the Garden City concept had an important impact on functionalist urban planning as well as on the development of modernist types of housing estates, such as *siedlungen* in Germany and *zhilmassivs* in Russia. Yet, as already noted, functionalist approaches were not realised in an open – or even for that matter, a hidden – conflict with state governments of the Weimar Republic and Sweden; the state was a true ally to modernist architects. The same did not apply to Soviet Russia. Here, constructivists became the objects of manipulation by the Bolshevik government long before their working method and aesthetics were officially abandoned.

I will further trace and analyse the origins of modernist housing estates in Russia and Germany. Yet, in the Russian case it is crucial to recall how the social, political, and economic situation in the early Soviet state that shaped the new types of mass housing. This means that not all settlements constructed in the country during that period are a part of the functionalist heritage.

3.2. Constructivists searching, the state watching: development of a new housing policy in Soviet Russia

In the post-revolutionary Russia of the 1920s the state was watching carefully, first with sympathy, later with concern, but always with great interest, after the development of constructivist theory and practice. In the

⁹ Markelius, Sven. *Det Framtida Stockholm*. (Stockholm: K.L. Beckman, 1945). See also reference in: Creagh, Lucy. "From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse of Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54)," p. 15.

¹⁰ See in: Hall, Thomas. "Urban Planning in Sweden." In: Hall, Thomas (ed.) *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. (London; New York; Tokyo; Melbourne: Madras Chapman & Hall, 1991), pp. 167–246.

beginning constructivists were given the front pages of newspapers and journals to disseminate their ideas; they were also given commissions and provided with the financial means to build.

The results of their work were closely studied by the state from all possible angles: economy, ideology, politics, timing, and efficiency. During the 1920s the new state had not yet developed any unitary policy that might solve the shortage in housing. The government had no other means to develop housing policy besides watching different experiments that were being realised within the modernist movement. Its apologists welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution with great enthusiasm and were ready to break with the past not only in the art of building, but in all other respects.

Moreover, constructivists were not simply the minstrels of the Revolution, but highly trained and experienced professionals able to offer fast and efficient solutions. Thus, the theoretical and practical investigations undertaken by the constructivists were, during the 1920s, running in parallel with the surveillance and critical evaluations made by the state.

Once state power had accumulated to such a degree, constructivists were deemed disposable. With their purely scientific approach to construction of reality and with their aim to raise a liberated man of the future, they were extraneous. Thus constructivism faced severe critique and was later prohibited along with the theories that directly or indirectly influenced its development, including the concept of the Garden City.

Despite the fact that during the second half of the 1920s the notion of the garden city officially disappeared from the authorised lexicon, from state commissions, and from the press, both the method developed by Russian modernists and the conceptual elements of the Garden City endured during the process of Soviet mass housing construction, until the end of the regime.

3.3. From the garden city to the red village

In the beginning, the state supported the idea of turning Soviet towns into garden cities. As Mark Mejerovich notes:

The appeal to the idea of the garden city in the post-revolutionary period serves as an initial point in the conceptualisation of town-building, not only

regarding the reformation of existing towns, but towards the future ones as well.¹¹

The regulation committees responsible for city-planning in Moscow and Petrograd assumed the transformation of the largest metropolises into garden cities. Numerous housing cooperatives around the country were building garden settlements, or, as they were called, garden villages. The reason for this was that these settlements were built for two to three thousand people, and were thus smaller in size from what had been initially planned (thirty-two thousand people in each garden city).¹²

During the first post-Soviet years the idea of the garden city was popular. In 1922 an effort was made to restore garden cities in Moscow that had existed before the Revolution. The garden city had been subject to a severe critique from state authorities that saw it as threatening the future communist society, since living in individual English-styled cottages implies an “individual dwelling” that “does not comply with the idea of collectivism in the form of formation of the labour-dwelling collectives.”¹³

Both the state and the architects refrained from referring to the English garden city concept. First, the term of the garden city was replaced with the “garden village,” then with the “workers’ village” or “red village.” In this way any reference to Howard’s model was soon eliminated from official formulations, as summarised by Mark Mejerovich:

Since its first days, Soviet power had happily accepted the idea from Ebenezer Howard. In a period of ten years it ideologically condemned it, not only prohibiting the application of it, but consigning it to complete theoretical oblivion: between the 1930s and the 1970s the idea of the garden city, if it was mentioned in the textbooks on the city planning, then it was only done so as an example of the unviable conceptual model and of the vicious experience of a city-building practice that did not deserve to be imitated. Yet in the prevailing mythological version of its abandonment, which had been

¹¹ Mejerovich, Mark. “Rozhdenije i Smert’ Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada. Gradostroitel’naya Politika SSSR. 1917–1926 gg. Ot Idei Poseleniya-Sada k Sovetskomu Rabochemy Poselky,” p. 36.

¹² More on the regulation policies see in: Mejerovich, Mark. “Rozhdenije i Smert’ Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada. Gradostroitel’naya Politika SSSR. 1917–1926 gg. Ot Idei Poseleniya-Sada k Sovetskomu Rabochemy Poselky.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

articulated already in the Soviet period, the true reason for the prohibition of garden-cities in the USSR has never been disclosed.¹⁴

Already by the end of the 1920s the “workers’ villages” were equally distant from the reference both to the garden city concept and constructivist aesthetics. They remained an unfortunate product of the 1920s-1930s Soviet State housing policy. The workers were forced to live in a perverted space that resembled something in between a town and a village in such a way that it implemented only the shortcomings of both.

The typical ‘workers’ village’ was constructed around a certain industrial centre (a factory, mine or power station). According to the electrification plan of *GOELRO*,¹⁵ which aimed to provide the country with fast economic and industrial growth, the new industrial centres were usually built some distance away from other metropolitan or even populated areas. Thus, the new ‘workers’ or ‘red’ villages were often built far from existing traditional settlements.

Workers were moved to apartments in housing-blocks deprived of direct access to land. After a housing committee had announced a competition for a new workers’ village it could happen that the contest was won by a project, which offered as its proposed suggestion the construction of individual houses (cottages or villas). And yet such approval was seldom the case, since the state favored multi-apartment blocks rather than individual houses. Even if independent villas were built, they were inhabited by several families that shared kitchens and other facilities in the house.

The green areas in the workers’ ‘red villages’ were used not for individual farming, but as public areas. Tenants didn’t have private gardens in which to grow food, otherwise natural for living in the countryside. They could apply only for the use of seasonally rented kitchen gardens, so as to grow vegetables. Those gardens were kept under close regulation by the factory administration that provided workers with housing. In this way the very sense of the countryside, i.e. living in close connection to land, was purposely eliminated.

One could assume that disconnecting land from industrial labor, itself a major feature of town life, would be compensated by a well-equipped infra-

¹⁴ Mejerovich, Mark. *Gradostroitel'naya Politika SSSR 1917–1929. Ot Goroda-Sada k Vedomstvennomu Rabochemu Poselku [The City-Building Policy of the USSR 1917–1929. From the Garden City to the Departmental Workers’ Village]*. (Moscow: Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye, 2018), p. 325.

¹⁵ The State Commission for Electrification of Russia established in the 1920.

structure providing all residents with the necessities for living. The problem was that town-like infrastructure was hardly ever built in workers' villages, owing to both economic and logistical reasons.

The dense concentration of villages, where people were forced to live in small apartments or even in communal flats in 2–3 storied blocks, was not caused by the lack of land or high construction costs, as was the case in Western Europe. As many reports by architects of that time show, the cost of the construction of the small one-storey single-family houses, when combined with the low cost of land, was financially more viable than the construction of multi-storied panel blocks.¹⁶

State policy discouraged workers from living in separate cottages hidden behind private gardens, since not only would they dramatically lower control over workers' living practices, but they would limit the capacity for the penetration of communist ideas.¹⁷

Tenants were provided with housing by the administration of the plant at which they worked. Private or even cooperative ownership of land and housing, as suggested by Howard, was unthinkable. A dwelling was given to a worker for as long as he was employed at the factory. One could not simply live in a 'red village' without having a job at the plant. Housing became a means of manipulating a worker, since it was the major way of keeping him at his existing place of work and to control his private and social life. As Mejerovich concludes, the goal of the state was to "communise" the whole country. The state aimed not at the rehabilitation of the wholeness of the everyday and to overcome alienation in Lefebvre's sense; rather the aim was to control the population through the very spatial and social organisation of everyday life. Again Mejerovich writes:

The communal dwelling is an effective lever to influence workers, since providing them with housing, the administration is afforded the opportunity to recruit and form labour collectives; to reward leaders through providing them with additional square metres; to frighten lazybones and truants with eviction; to sustain labour discipline; to punish the fired workers through enforced eviction. The administration was indifferent to outside workers.

The labour-dwelling communes, which were being formed by connecting workers to their factories, aimed at establishing a type of relationship that had much in common (besides the army discipline) with "labour-armies". In

¹⁶See architects' reports in: Mejerovich, Mark. "Rozhdenie I Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

these labour-armies a certain type of the collective unity of people was to be formed through the close interlinking of industrial production and living processes. Due to the “transparency” of living, the major subject of everyday conversation and discussion becomes the business of labour, within which relations of industrial production should be corrected by one’s neighbours, and in which the status in everyday life becomes the stimulus for labour achievements. Relations of friendship (and leadership) should flow from the living situation to the working environment and back again – which means that industrial production and everyday private relations should be interconnected. Ideally, as the state believed, the whole urban population of the country (workers, both blue and white collar) should be gathered into such communes.¹⁸

The idea of communal living, according to which both family and private life were exposed to the community, was affirmed in opposition to the villa, the embodiment of the bourgeois mode of living, which was regarded as a source of exploitation of men by men.

3.4. Cooperation and contradictions between the functionalist method and state housing policies within the three modes of functionalism

It is significant that most constructivists had seen no contradiction between socialist ideology and housing estates in which one family occupied an individual villa. Along with their Western counterparts, Soviet architects argued for the construction of single-family cottages, affirming their economic viability in thinly populated areas.¹⁹

German and Swedish functionalists valued individual houses as an ideal form of a dwelling. Yet, since it was not possible to provide the whole population with individual cottages, functionalists were developing other types of dwellings that would bring living conditions closer to the comfort of cottage living, and where a high level of collectivisation was not just a means of eliminating of privacy, but also it served as a way to eradicate workers’ isolation from their community – what Lefebvre called alienation. Targeted was the delegation of care over routinised practices to the overarching infrastructural system provided for that community. Construc-

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁹ For more on the calculation of economic efficiency of the single-family villas, see: Mejerovich, Mark. “Rozhdenie I Smert’ Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada,” pp. 74–76.

tivists never denied the connection and immediate access of dwellers to nature and land, which, on the level of town-planning, required solutions that made possible the interpenetration of city and village life. In this light, we would have to consider the idea of “conglomeration” that was at the heart of Howard’s garden city concept and that was reconsidered in the theoretical and architectural practice of German modernists, such as Martin Wagner and the concept of the *growing house*.

Even if these modes of functionalism were engaged in heated debates over the ideal type of dwelling for the modern city, all agreed on the need to satisfy the dwellers’ demands for access to both the cities’ infrastructure and natural resources of the countryside. This is concisely articulated by Walter Gropius:

The nostalgia of the town-dweller for the country and the countrymen for the town are the expression of a deep-rooted and growing desire that clamors for satisfaction. Technical developments are transplanting urban civilization into the countryside and reacclimatising nature in the heart of the city. The demand for more spacious, and above all greener and sunnier, cities has now become insistent. Its corollary is the separation of the residential from industrial and commercial districts by the provision of properly coordinated transport services. Thus the goal of the modern town-planner should be to bring town and country into closer and closer relationship.²⁰

In turn, Bruno Taut, who developed his own concept of the crown city, emphasised the importance of green public gardens, areas of relaxation, and accounted for institutions that could satisfy demands for experiences of pleasure that were considered crucial for human well-being, and that Lefebvre believed could help in the reconciliation of man’s fragmented everyday existence. Yet, as Kathleen James-Chakraborty notes, “Taut’s ultimate goal, however, was the ennoblement of daily life, something that required more than frivolity.”²¹

In his investigations into the necessary conditions for the implementation of the growing house concept, Martin Wagner argued that one of its essential features was the closeness of an urban dwelling to nature.²² As Ludovica Scarpa summarises:

²⁰ Gropius, Walter. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. (Massachusetts, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), p. 100.

²¹ James-Chakraborty, Kathleen. *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, p. 52.

²² Read more in: Wagner, Martin. “Das Wachsende Haus. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Städtischen Wohnungsfrage.”

The 'return to nature' was clearly inspired directly by the existing, anti-urban tradition in Germany. Wagner now wrote that the big city 'has sinned against humankind': Yet in this context he was not evoking a purely regressive utopia; instead, more than anything else, this was a utopia of absorbing into itself the unpredictable as positive energy. Wagner foresaw a new leisure society where there would be time to spend on oneself, on culture, on play, and on one's children.²³

Yet, Wagner insisted that the new housing policy he advocated was only possible to realise with a planned economy and with the complete ownership of land by the state:

How grateful we would be if we too had the opportunity to convert the existing system of mutually competing cities, with their near-insane propensities to run idle and to squander wealth, into well-planned components of a major central and a minor regional consumer economy. [...] National planning in this country will remain an illusion as long as there is no State Economic Council with full jurisdiction over the territory of the whole nation and all its natural resources.²⁴

The need of the planned economy and a radical approach to the means of producing living space was an idea that united most European modernists, including for example the famous Czech avant-garde thinker and artist Karel Teige, who was concerned with ideas associated with minimal dwelling. In his 1932 monograph, devoted to housing crisis solutions, he writes:

The key to the solution of (the housing) problem lies in the question of private property in particular, and the production and social situation in general [...] Since the housing question, as an inseparable part of the housing crisis, is inextricably linked to the current economic system, it cannot be eliminated unless this system is eliminated and a new one established.²⁵

In Sweden during the inter-war period and beyond, individual houses (*egna hem*) were constructed on an industrial scale for the lower-income classes. The size of this construction project was even more extensive than in

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²³ Scarpa, Ludovica. "The Technocratic Utopia: The House is Growing, the City Shrinking," p. 186.

²⁴ Wagner, Martin. "Russia Builds Cities." In: El Lissitzky (ed.) *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), p. 205.

²⁵ Teige, Karel. *The Minimum Dwelling*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 60.

Germany and Russia, even though, as Thomas Hall notes, “the small houses built as part of public planning schemes represented only a tiny part of the total production.”²⁶ Examples of those estates can still be found in Stockholm, in the districts of Tallkrogen, Norra Ängby, and Enskede.

Even though they introduced their own housing regulation policies, Germany and Sweden still operated within market controlled economic systems, according to which the spread of individual housing construction depended first of all on cost and affordability.

In Soviet Russia, on the other hand, the question of individual housing was not only an economic, but a socio-political and an ethical issue.

Russian constructivists had developed projects for single-family cottages,²⁷ but few were built on the new housing estates. The counterargument for this could be the high costs of introducing communication systems to each and every separate house. Not that this was the case. In both settlements with individual villas and apartment blocks, gas and hot water (often cold water too) were provided not to each house or flat, but to the shared properties such as collective *banyas* (bath houses) and kitchens. Such common facilities could either be in separate buildings on the territory of the workers’ village or a designated space within the housing blocks shared by tenants.²⁸

Even when developing the new types of buildings, such as collective *banyas* and collective kitchens, constructivists did not mind the presence of individual bathrooms and kitchens in the apartments. A special space for them was given in most *zhilmassivs*. As to why bathtubs and showers never found their way into the bathrooms – this was owing to the low scale industrial production of bathtubs in the Soviet Union.

The decision to maintain flats without any facilities was taken by the housing committees who altered original projects by constructivists for economic as well as ideological reasons. In contrast with state housing policy, constructivists offered a new way of living, where after the end of hard working day a man – but first of all a woman – could choose to socialise and educate herself rather than do the cooking and the washing in the kitchen. Collective *banyas* and kitchens were the means for women’s liberation from

²⁶ Hall, Thomas. “Urban Planning in Sweden.” In: Hall, Thomas (ed.). *Planning and Urban Growth in the Nordic Countries*. (London; New York; Tokyo; Melbourne: Madras, Chapman & Hall, 1991), p. 212.

²⁷ See for instance projects by Moisey Ginzburg in: Khan-Maghomedov. *Moisey Ginzburg*.

²⁸ For more on the communication systems within workers villages see: Mejerovich, Mark. “Rozhdenie i Smert’ Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada.”

kitchen slavery. On the contrary, the collectivisation of everyday living practices, as realised through Soviet state policy, only made a worker's life more difficult, since cooking, washing, and laundry remained their personal duties. At the same time, because kitchens, laundries, and washrooms were intentionally kept apart from the living quarters, it paradoxically took more of the tenants' time and efforts to maintain them, as well as, of course, resulting in less space for private communication and family life.

The difference between modernist constructivism and the Soviet state lay precisely in the very goals that each set for their search for an ideal mass housing solution. Architects planned their estates with the intention to ease tenants' lives, to liberate them from everyday routines, which took time and energy from their work to improve themselves. While building rational living spaces, construction costs were kept as low as possible. On the other hand, the state was interested in holding a worker hostage to his site of employment, controlling his life in all its aspects, in order to maintain its own power.

The economic, political, and the social situation of the 1920s forced the government to employ any means necessary to keep the masses under control. Industrialisation and collectivisation caused enormous migration within the country. Driven by civil war and hunger, workers were leaving cities and their poorly paid jobs at the plants for the countryside, where they hoped to grow food to survive. Not that the economic situation was the only reason for migration; during the period of 1917 and 1921, the state forcibly relocated workers with their families from their individual houses in the towns' outskirts to the city centres, thereby depriving them of any possibility to manage their small vegetable gardens. As Mejerovich notes, in spite of the government's "ideological spells and assurances that it was acting in the interests of the workers – improving their living conditions – for many workers such relocation turned out to be worse for their living situation."²⁹

By the 1920s Russia's urban population was declining dramatically. Under these testing conditions, the main leverage that the factory administration could exercise to keep the worker in his place was to provide him with housing.

The development of workers' settlements was almost entirely handed over to the factory administrators. The security of having a living space soon became a new means of manipulating, punishing, and generally affecting the morale of the worker. Against this backdrop, the idea of providing an em-

²⁹ Mejerovich, Mark. "Rozhdenie i Smert' Sovetskogo Goroda-Sada," p. 85.

ployee with private living arrangements in, for example, an individual cottage, was not conducive to exercising such levels of control, and therefore, even if in certain contexts such accommodation remained the cheapest and most spatially efficient option, it was generally discouraged.

Families who shared whole apartments, or at the very least shared some facilities (such as kitchens and bathrooms), had to open up their most intimate living practices to the public. Neither spaces nor particular times of the day were available for one to extricate oneself from community living. Family and religious holidays were replaced with an abundance of ‘red days’ – different celebrations placed in the service of communist ideology and taking place in the various workers’ clubs where one’s attendance was mandatory.

The life of an inhabitant was organised in such a way that a man would not be allowed to leave his plant; he was chained to it on point of fact of having a living space for only as long as he worked there. The holder of a living unit could be punished by forced eviction if he did not meet the requirements of what it meant to be a good worker and tenant, thereby depriving him of the very means for survival.

Those practices ensuring that an employee remain at his specific place of work were both fixed and strengthened through different legal procedures, such as the requirement that everyone register at one’s place of living (*propiska*), a legal stipulation that effectively limited one’s mobility. The problem was that many workers did not have passports, which were needed for their place of registration to be recorded in the first place. As a consequence, certain undocumented workers could not move around the country legally. “Labour books” were introduced to keep a comprehensive record of the worker’s previous and current jobs, as well as her behaviour and personal characteristics.

“Workers’ red villages” remained quite unique, though; they were developed around newly formed industrial sites. In older metropolises the situation was quite different, and thus other means were deployed in providing housing for workers.

3.5 The neglected heritage of the Russian avant-garde

Although a common feature of Soviet Russia, the workers’ red village does not belong to the avant-garde heritage. Still, those workers’ villages built during the 1920s and 1930s were among the general population often identified with constructivism. Thus, constructivists were unfairly blamed for

inhuman living conditions in which the Russian people were forced to live. A room or an apartment in a red village was often the only alternative to a barrack.

In post-war Soviet Russia constructivism as a theory and a practice had been already officially denounced. This meant that among the general public little was known about what constructivism was and what kind of buildings belonged to it as materialisations of its architectural style. Between the 1930s and 1950s, while many avant-garde architects were still alive, constructivism was heavily criticised, only for it later to be neglected and forgotten. This might be one reason why little recognition is given to the avant-garde architectural heritage in Russia, resulting in the dilapidation and destruction of its buildings. The Russian avant-garde has received support neither on an administrative level nor among the general public.

Preserved modernist districts, which resemble the true constructivist style – such as *zhilmassivs* – are nowadays located in the central parts of cities, where land is most expensive. Owing to this fact, these housing estates are often the most vulnerable to either replacement or destruction.

Tenants who still occupy houses built by the avant-garde architects are often unaware of their high artistic and cultural value, and indeed it is hard to convince them to recognise this value, since after ninety years of neglect the buildings themselves remain in poor condition. A usual argument for the destruction of a constructivist housing heritage advanced by those interested in replacing the low-rise buildings with modern sky-scrapers, is that people do not want to live in flats without bathrooms. Residents often support efforts to remove constructivist houses, if the outcome will be the improvement of their own living conditions. But as was the case some ninety years ago, the absence of facilities in buildings cannot be considered the fault of Russian constructivists. The original projects included all modern facilities available for that time.

The point to be underlined here is that the architectural heritage of the Soviet period of Russian history is still very vulnerable and it remains in a poor condition due to neglect and low maintenance. Besides the reasons already mentioned above, there are other ethical factors that account for why constructivism is today barely recognised. According to Natalia Dushkina, an architect and architectural historian, as well as a member of the ICOMOS³⁰ Russian and international executive committees:

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³⁰ ICOMOS, *International Council on Monuments and Sites* is a non-governmental international organisation dedicated to the conservation of the world's monuments and sites.

The situation is further aggravated by a number of ethical considerations, since most of the architectural and artistic movements of the 20th century energetically rejected the very concept of heritage. The creative impulse underlying the architecture of this period, and especially the modernist movement, with its principles of innovation, a fundamental change of architectural language and break with tradition, was charged with an immense destructive force, which resulted in numerous serious losses in various countries around the world. In this respect Russia, which made an outstanding contribution to the development of the “thinking of modernism”, is a unique example that demonstrates this process at its great intensity. In conjunction with post-revolutionary political ideology, such specifically Russian artistic and architectural manifestations of Avant-Garde as Suprematism and Constructivism, as well as the later, post-war Stalinist architecture and the neo-modernism of the 1960s and 1970s, paved the way for the destruction of the “gold reserves” of Russia’s historical heritage. The professional cadres of architecture, blinded by the unrestrained destruction, became effectively incapable of any moral vision and understanding of architecture as a fundamental artistic and historical category.³¹

In order to develop strategies for the preservation of avant-garde heritage, it is important to realise that mass-housing in Soviet Russia in the 1920s consisted not of purely constructivist solutions. By the start of WWII, one of the leading types of housing in Russia remained the wooden barrack with its austere corridor system, where a whole family would occupy one room, and where all facilities (e.g. shared kitchens and bathrooms) were located either at the end of the corridor or outside the barrack itself, in a separate building.

3.6. *Siedlungen* and *zhilmassives*: prototypes of the new building types

Investigations into new housing types and living space solutions had during the 1920s led to the development of new modernist types of settlements, known as *siedlungen* in Germany and *zhilmassives* in Russia. As discussed earlier, these settlements were greatly influenced by the concept of the Garden City. But not only this; at the same time, these new housing complexes appropriated some features from the late nineteenth and early

³¹ Dushkina, Natalia. “Survival or Fall? On the fate of a ‘new heritage’.” In: Kudryavtsev, Alexander; Dushkina, Natalia (eds.). *20th Century Preservation of Cultural Heritage*. Conference materials. (Moscow: Viva Star, 2006), p. 86–87.

twentieth century workers' settlements in the industrial centres of Germany and Russia. In Germany a *Margarethenhöhe siedlung* in Essen,³² founded in 1910 for the employees of Friedrich Alfred Krupp's business might be mentioned as an example of a socially-oriented workers' settlement.³³ In Russia, of course, the workers' housing estates exhibited even more radical socialising solutions. For instance, the Gavansky town settlement in St. Petersburg, built between 1904 and 1908 by the architect and engineer Nickolay Dmitriev, consisted of five residential blocks. Three of the five blocks included one- to three- room flats arranged without halls; these were meant for workers' families. Those buildings were provided with kitchens for common use. Two other buildings were organised as hotels for single workers. The complex contained an innovative and well-developed infrastructure; its territory included both a nursery and a school; a shop, a canteen, a hospital, a library, and a lecture hall. Other features characteristic of the later modernist settlements were the free allocation of buildings, which retreated from the traditional "red line" placement of blocks adjoined along the main street, as well as the rejection of the closed inner yard. The blocks were instead located in parallel with one another. This later developed into line-building – a procedure widely practiced in Germany, especially after the new *siedlungen* were constructed on the vast territories along the outskirts of larger towns. In St. Petersburg during the 1920s, the land spots were rather small, and because of this fact line-building was not so widely applied. At the same, though, both the construction of perimeters and an entirely enclosed yard were completely rejected, and thus a break was made with old conventional techniques and practices.

Green areas with playgrounds for kids, arranged in between the blocks of Gavansky town, were a direct allusion to the Garden City model. The architect Nickolaev ensured that even the tiniest, separate and isolated flats were kept apart from each other. Thus, the collectivisation of everyday living was not part of a general idea underpinning the organisation of living spaces within the new settlements for workers in the early twentieth century. In his article on the early Russian housing settlements, Ivan Sablin mentions the

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³² This construction lasted from 1910–1938, arch. of the original plan – Hessian Georg Metzendorf.

³³ For more on this settlement see in: Helfrich, Andreas. *Die Margarethenhöhe Essen. Architekt und Auftraggeber vor dem Hintergrund der Kommunalpolitik Essen und der Firmenpolitik Krupp zwischen 1886 und 1914.* (Weimar: VDG, 2000).

memories of a Russian and Soviet Academic, Pelageja Kochina-Polubarinova, who once lived in the Gavansky town before the Bolshevik Revolution:³⁴

Our rooms were small. In the corner of the outer wall a storage room with a narrow door and triangle shelves were inbuilt. A little window to the street was kept open and in the winter the storage room was used as a refrigerator. There was a library and a hall for lectures and concerts in one of the houses. I took music lessons, using a grand piano at the concert hall. Sometimes, together with other girls, we were dancing at parties in the same hall [...] Since the beginning of the War, all public premises were used as hospitals. Soldiers who were convalescing, took walks in the yard or sat on the benches in the streets by the yard's iron fence.³⁵

Another experimental workers' settlement was built to commission by Ludvig Nobel in St. Petersburg, near his factory plant along the Lesnoy and Sampsonievsky prospects in 1914. It was constructed in the 'northern modern style' by architects Roman Meltzer and Feodor Lidval, the latter of whom was of Swedish-Finnish origin (fig. 18.) Ludvig Nobel was known for his liberal-left political views. Seeking to avoid any class segregation of his workers, he had actualised a workers' town in which his own mansion stood next to housing blocks meant not only for the higher-ranking managers in the plant, but for manual workers too. The social orientation of Nobel's settlement was revealed through the very organisation of their living space: workers had access to a library (a reading house), built next to the Nobel family's living quarters; all workers would participate in social activities together with members of the management's and the owner's families.

The prototypes of spatial organisation of modernist housing estates can also be traced in Sweden, for example in the Hemgårdén complex in Stockholm, built between 1905 and 1907 under the influence of Danish and American experiences of one-kitchen housing estates. The flats were built without private kitchens, with food cooked by personnel in a large kitchen serving all the residents on the estate.³⁶ The idea behind such complexes

³⁴ Sablin, Ivan. "Perviy zhilmassiv" ["First Zhilmassiv."] In: *Kvartal'nyi nadziratel'*. In: *Sobaka.ru Journal*. January, 2009. Vol. 1 (73). Online publication: <http://kn.sobaka.ru/n73/04.html>

³⁵ Citation in: Sablin, Ivan. "Perviy zhilmassiv" ["First Zhilmassiv."] In: *Kvartal'nyi nadziratel'*. In: *Sobaka.ru Journal*. January, 2009. Vol. 1 (73). Online publication: <http://kn.sobaka.ru/n73/04.html>

³⁶ Read more in: Vestbro, Dick Urban; Horelli, Liisa. "Design for Gender Equality – the History of Cohousing Ideas and Realities." In: *Built Environment*. 2012, Vol. 38 (3), pp. 315–335.

gained greater traction against the backdrop of growing participation of women in the public sector, as well as the need to optimise greater efficiency from those maids in the service of certain private households. As Vestbro and Horelli outline in their article “Design for Gender Equality – the History of Cohousing Ideas and Realities”:

At the end of the 19th century a public debate took place in some European countries about the need of the growing middle class to find solutions to the problem of hiring domestic servants at an affordable price. One idea that came up was to “collectivise the maid”, by producing urban residential complexes where many households could share meal production.³⁷

Hemgårdens’ spatial organisation was a result of the rationalisation and optimisation of the bourgeois way of life. What it did not intend, however, was to change profoundly the very social nature of everyday life. The families ended up living in conventional flats that simply lacked kitchens. They could order meals from the central kitchens three times a day and receive food through the special lifts directly to their tables. Once they had finished their meals, they would send the dirty dishes down for cleaning. It was precisely this solution that was later used by Sven Markelius in his Communal houses in Stockholm. Traditionally, any cooking was done in individual kitchens by maids who lived in the apartments of their masters, thereby requiring special rooms for them to live. Thus, the construction of centralised kitchens allowed to save living space in the flats, as well as it helped to reduce the expenses for the upkeep of individual kitchens and maid rooms; finally, it ensured better value for money from the maids themselves, since centralised cooking in bigger kitchens meant a higher concentration of work with less staff.³⁸

The social constitution of these residential blocks was representative not of working-class dwellings, but rather of upper-middle class officers and businessmen.

Experiments with worker settlements, the living conditions of which were improved through low rent costs and the rational organisation of everyday routines, can be traced further back in history. Here, the *Fuggerei* settlement can be recalled (fig. 19.). This particular living arrangement is considered the world’s oldest social housing project for the poorest workers

³⁷ Ibid, p. 325

³⁸ Vestbro, Dick Urban; Horelli, Liisa. “Design for Gender Equality – the History of Cohousing Ideas and Realities,” p. 326.

built in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1516, and is still to this day being used for this purpose. A realised social utopia exists, supported by the founder's family expenses, with an enigmatic cost of rent per household of one euro per year.³⁹ Thus, efforts to find the forms for the rational organisation of the living space for all classes have been undertaken ever since the times of Thomas Moore, and they had certainly contributed to the development of modernist types of living space on all levels – from a sleeping cabin in the *dom-kommuna* to more extensive city planning. In turn, those social experiments with housing types and their organisation into larger settlements were realised in the 1920s on a scale that was unprecedented, marking the transition of the housing question to the level of government. This in its turn led to a recognition of housing as a basic and fundamental human right.

Later in this chapter I will provide both a historical overview and a comparative analysis of the major types of housing settlements that were developed in the interwar Europe and that to this day constitute the grounds for contemporary European mass housing production – Russian *zhilmassives* and German *siedlungen*. In the present chapter I refer to examples of *siedlungen* built during the 1920s in Berlin and to the *zhilmassivs* designed at the same period in Leningrad.⁴⁰ The housing estates in both Leningrad and Berlin are chosen for a comparative analysis because the building themselves are rather well preserved and thus they allow for a tracing of the historical development of these mass housing types from the expressionist complexes of Bruno Taut in his Gartenstadt Falkenberg, and the suprematic motifs in the low-rise blocks of *zhilmassiv* in Traktornaya street built by Alexander Nickolsky, to the large industrial-scaled complexes of Weiße Stadt by Salvisberg, Ahrends, and Büning, and finally to the Bateninsky *zhilmassiv* by Grigory Simonov.

³⁹ For more information see the official site of the estate: <http://www.fugger.de/home.html>

⁴⁰ The *siedlungen* in Berlin which will serve as the objects for analysis include: Gartenstadt Falkenberg, *Siedlung Schillerpark*, *Großsiedlung Britz (Hufeisiedlung)*, *Wohnstadt Carl Legien*, *Weiße Stadt*, *Großsiedlung Siemestadt (Ringsiedlung)*. In Leningrad: *Zhilmassiv* on Traktornaya street and Serapohimovsky district, *Palevsky zhilmassiv*, *zhilmassiv* of the textile workers on Tkachey street, *Baburinsky zhilmassiv*, *Kondratievsky zhilmassiv*, *zhilmassivs* at the Lesnoy Prospect.

3.7. The origins of soviet *zhilmassivs*

Leningrad's *zhilmassivs* serve as examples of modernist housing estates in which both the new technologies and the ideology of mass housing production are expressed and realised in the most clearly and explicitly. While Moscow preserves some of the most striking examples of radical constructivist solutions, and which have become prominent objects of world avant-garde heritage, Leningrad remains more representative of mass housing residential areas that shaped and re-formed the life of Soviet citizens during the first decade of Soviet power.

Moisey Ginzburg outlined several criteria for ensuring the standardization of quality for new mass housing: size, height, forms, and dimensions, illumination, the colour and texture of all planes and surfaces that limit the space.⁴¹

In 1920s Leningrad, the construction of *zhilmassivs* became a key objective. Here, Boris Kirikov notes:

The arrangement of *zhilmassivs* became in those years a priority. It was connected to the search for a new type of economy dwelling and new principles of spatial organisation of the land plots.⁴²

From the middle of the 1920s the sites behind the Narva gates were built up with several *zhilmassivs*, such as the complex in Traktornaya street and the Serafimovsky site. At the same time the Palevsky *zhilmassiv* had been constructed in the Nevsky district of Leningrad (fig. 20.). Between 1926 and 1929, in the nearby Tkachey street, the *zhilmassiv* for textile workers was built (fig. 21.). By 1927 the development of the Viborg site had begun, and by 1930 the Baburinsky and Kondratievsky *zhilmassivs*, as well as the Bateninsky *zhilmassiv* (fig. 22.), were built, along with a few residential areas in Lesnoy prospect.⁴³

To a lesser or greater degree, most of these *zhilmassivs* combined and appropriated features of a more radical and more 'absolute' type of *dom-kommuna*. Yet they introduced innovative organisation not only within a singular building or a complex of buildings, but they were responsible fore

⁴¹ For more detailed description of the criterions, see: Ginsburg, Moisey. *Zhilische*. (Moscow: Gosstroyizdat, 1934).

⁴² Kirikov, Boris. *Arkhitektura Leningradskogo Avangarda*, p. 75.

⁴³ Most of these projects were built by Alexander Nickolsky, Alexander Gegello, Grigory Simonov.

restructuring the organisation of the entire district under the idea of collectivisation. As the architectural historian Ivan Sablin notes:

During the construction of *zhilmassivs*, the whole complex of new types of buildings were developed, which were to destroy the *cliqueness* of family life; to take a person out to the street, and, finally, to subordinate one's individual personality to the commune – those of houses of culture, prophylactic clinics, factory-kitchens, up to and including the unique *dom-kommunas*.⁴⁴

A *zhilmassiv* became the most sustainable and innovative type of mass housing in Soviet Russia. It realised its full potential first of all in Leningrad. Modernist Soviet *zhilmassivs* as well as the Weimar Republican *siedlungen* laid the ground for the development of contemporary residential estates around Europe.

3.8. The first Leningrad *zhilmassivs*

The first Soviet *zhilmassiv* was raised in Petrograd in the Narva District on the site of the densely populated workers settlement close to the Putilov (later Kirov) Plant, the largest factory in the country. The *zhilmassiv* in Traktornaya street became the very first platform for conducting social experiments in mass housing, which combined the concept of the Garden City with the functionalist approach, and which at the same time managed to overcome existing social and financial limitations (fig. 23–25.).

The idea was not only to provide workers with shelter, but to construct a new social space that was conducive to the ideology of wider society. Thus, architects developed new types of buildings that would reform and reschedule the life of a person. In her everyday living a worker would go through certain buildings and spaces, the function of which was to take care of her needs: she slept in one of the living cells in a *zhilmassiv* – an apartment block; she would then go to eat in a factory-kitchen (fig. 26.), work at the plant, wash in a collective *banya* (bath-house), and in the evening she would spend her leisure time in a palace of culture (fig. 27.).⁴⁵ The special Raisovet building was designed for the administration of the Kirov district.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Sablin, Ivan. For an online publication of the exhibition *The Realized Utopia. The Architecture of the 1920s. Russia-Germany*. St. Petersburg, Museum of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts, 30.09 – 26.10. 2008. <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/.../article/.../14934>

⁴⁵ Arch. Alexander Gegello, Alexander Nickolsky, Grigory Simonov, 1925–1927.

⁴⁶ Arch. Noy Trotsky, 1930–1935.

In order to receive medical aid one would go to the so-called “profilacoriy”⁴⁷ (fig. 28) – a multi-medical and rehabilitation centre. Children attended a brand-new school in the district (fig. 29).⁴⁸ Thus, politically, mentally, and socially routines were meticulously controlled, carefully calibrated in order to preserve the rhythm and trajectories of everyday living: from the food consumed to the suit the worker puts on for a concert arranged. The district infrastructure served as a mechanism of social and mental reform and control over the personal development of its dwellers.

The new residential area was constructed by architects Alexander Nickolsky, Alexander Gegello, and Grigory Simonov on a huge wasteland near the Narva Gates. They adjusted modern technologies of contemporary housing constructions that had been used in Europe, such as of German *siedlungen*, in order to fit both Soviet reality and the state commission. In this project, architects partially realised the idea of line-building widely used in German cities. They located rooms in apartments so that bedrooms and stairwells faced the north, while living rooms overlooked the south to provide more daylight. The space of the inner yards, the widths of the Traktornaya street, as well as the size of the apartments themselves, were designed in such a way that they remained in perfect proportion to man and the needs of man.⁴⁹

There were several types of apartments of two- to four-room flats for one or two families. In each flat a place for a bathtub was left in the kitchens, yet since there was no mass production of bathtubs at that time in the country, all flats were without bathrooms. Living in these houses was quite different from other communal apartments and *dom-kommunas*, within which people would manage their housekeeping together. Architects were themselves criticised for designing low-rise blocks including intimate and self-contained flats, the design of which hearkened back to the concept of the Garden City.

Still, by 1925–1927, when the *zhilmassiv* on Traktornaya street was in the process of being constructed, it became obvious that life in a multi-roomed communal apartment would work satisfactorily only for younger single people – e.g. students and young workers – and only then until the moment they formed their own families. The idea of the total elimination of a family as a social unit did not work, and even the supposition of real equality

⁴⁷ Architect Lev Rudnev, 1928–1930.

⁴⁸ Arch. Alexander Nickolsky, 1925–1927.

⁴⁹ For the detailed description see: Kirikov, Boris. *Arkhitektura Leningradskogo Avangarda*, p. 81.

between spouses, so widely promoted at the time, was not reached in the 1920s. Most wives during that period still preferred to remain the principal housekeeper, or they had to combine daily work with traditional household tasks, thereby doubling their duties. Families were still striving to occupy their own living spaces, which, by the 1930s, was limited to 9 square metres per person (regardless of gender and age). If an apartment was bigger – well, then more tenants could be moved in.

Another feature of Leningrad constructivism is its connection with St. Petersburg's urban traditions that had generally been left untouched during the 1920s. Ivan Sablin notes that ensembliness and careful attention to the general aesthetical idea of the district, characteristic of traditional architectural planning in St. Petersburg, was also a feature of avant-garde thinking in Leningrad. Thus, he writes:

One of the most characteristic features of Leningrad constructivism was its deeply thought-through planning. It is this very planning that provides connections between new districts with the town-building picture of St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a whole, and which distinguishes these *zhilmassives* favorably, when compared to their Moscow analogues, where allocation overrides any formal logics.⁵⁰

This connection is visible in the earliest *zhilmassivs* in both Traktornaya street and Stachek prospect. The planning of these new sites was unprecedented for St. Petersburg; the architects Nickolsky, Simonov, and Gegello transgressed the traditional St. Petersburg 'red line', where all buildings were constructed along the same façade plane with the extension of blocks into either closed or semi-open inner yards. The blocks in Traktornaya street were built leaving gaps and passageways between the houses. Yet the main focal-point was given to the street with a driveway designed as an alley; in this way, the frontal orientation of the ensemble, typical to St. Petersburg, was preserved. Another feature of the old St. Petersburg – the architecturally accented entrance to the estate – was realised in the four-storied blocks oriented towards the main prospect that raised above the three-storied houses, thereby providing the entrance with a fancier character.⁵¹

With respect to entrances, similar motifs can be found in: the Bruchfeldstraße *siedlung* by Ernst May in Frankfurt; Weiße Stadt in Berlin by Salvisberg, Ahrends, Büning, and the Britz *siedlung* by Taut, among others.

⁵⁰ Sablin, Ivan. "Perviy zhilmassiv." Online publication: <http://kn.sobaka.ru/n73/04.html>

⁵¹ See top image on the front page of the *Part II* of the present thesis.

Another characteristic feature of St. Petersburg is that Traktornaya street's perspective is embellished with an expressive picturesque silhouette of the School of the October's 10th Anniversary.⁵² Most perspectives along the main avenues of St. Petersburg end with vertical dominants – i.e. the spire of Admiralty, Alexander's Column, Obelisk on Ploschad' Vosstaniya, the monument to the Siege of Leningrad on the Victory Square, and others besides.

In estates built later, Leningrad architects paid careful attention to the inner planning of *zhilmassivs*, giving preference to the semi-perimeter building that formed spacious green yards. The yard was still a more familiar and recognisable type of spatial organisation for the citizens of St. Petersburg-Leningrad, than the *savoir-faire* of avant-gardist urban thought – i.e. the line building that provided a housing estate with better illumination, ventilation, and a greater feeling for the spacious.

For instance, at Palevsky *zhilmassiv*⁵³ (fig. 30.) the two symmetrical estates occupy a large spot of land with green areas and children's play grounds inside spacious yards. Apartments are placed within two-storey blocks that are more reminiscent of a Swedish *radhus* rather than a constructivist collective house. Palevsky *zhilmassiv*, though nowadays viewed as a classical 'constructivist' ensemble, is the least representative of an idea of collective living, since most flats are provided with individual entrances from the yard. A direct connection with the land, as well as accentuating the separation between inhabitants, is somewhat unprecedented in the housing practice of Leningrad and St. Petersburg; the *radhus*, as a distinct type of housing type, was not spread across St. Petersburg until recently.

Both Russian and Western modernism rejected *décor* and any synthesis of arts (painting and sculpture) in their architecture. The artistic expressiveness of a created object was reached through the purely architectural means obtained from the idea of a building *per se*, in its functionally necessary and approved elements. The standardisation and typisation of construction were not only cheaper ways to solve the housing problem, they were also the tools used in the formation of the new social environment and new mentality of collectiveness that proclaimed the prioritisation of the well-being of the common over and above petty private interests.⁵⁴

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⁵² Arch. Alexander Nickolsky, 1925–27.

⁵³ Arch. Alexey Zazersky, Nickolay Rybin, 1925–26.

⁵⁴ For more on the theoretical grounds of modernist aesthetics see *Part I* of the present thesis.

The compositional layout of all blocks is far from being monotonous and it was designed with great care, thereby demonstrating the avant-garde's sensibility towards the estate, with the use of a great variety of displaced volumes, a combination of geometric forms that penetrate one another in the most unexpected of ways; loggias that break the smoothness of walls; framings of entrances, and endless minor details that would later form the basic vocabulary of constructivism.

At the same time architects preserved the ensembleness of the estate in a way that remained traditional for St. Petersburg: the architectural compositions could be perceived from a certain point of view all at once and as a whole. The major architectural ensembles of St. Petersburg are given one or two perspectival points through which their wholeness show themselves (i.e. those post-cards views that turn the buildings into recognisable symbols). Interestingly, with the *zhilmassivs*, architects went further and granted modernist estates with several points, including points within the spaces themselves. These multiple points nonetheless allowed the viewer to comprehend and perceive the whole structure and the whole composition of an estate from each point at once.

This is rather different from, say, the Berlin *siedlungen*, where, also due to the size of the settlements, it is impossible to perceive the composition of its estate from one point at once. It is also impossible to approximate the size of a Berlin *siedlungen* from a random glance, since most were built through several phases. Each of those phases had left its own visible compositional sector with its own inner structure and design. The only exception to this is the central ensemble of the Großsiedlung Britz⁵⁵ (fig. 11–17.) with its famous row of living blocks bent into a horseshoe around an oval pond. Although, even when entering the Horseshoe estate, it is impossible to guess its overall composition, nor is it possible to apprehend the full extent of the architectural forms it has to offer to the visitor.

The character of the first Leningrad *zhilmassivs* was similar to the atmosphere generated in a garden city. Nickolsky steps away from the red line, traditional for St. Petersburg, placing the rows of three-storied blocks along the alley that runs perpendicular to the main street – the Stachek Prospekt. The entrance to the *zhilmassiv* from the main street is marked by the two four-storied buildings, which rhymes e.g. with the entrance to the Weiße Stadt in Berlin: the raised blocks, set along the Arosier Allee, which

⁵⁵ Architects Martin Wagner, Bronu Taut, Leberecht Migge. See also the middle image on the front page of Part II of the present thesis for a general view.

open the view to the main accent of the estate's centre – the Bridge House by Otto R. Salvisberg. The minor entrances to the estate are highlighted in the same way.

Each row of Traktornaya street's buildings consist of eight blocks that do not create a mirror-reflection of their opposite sides, but are designed variously (fig. 23–25.). Stepped blocks widen the street as it enters the Stachek prospect, highlighting its representativeness. The Traktornaya street itself is designed as a green alley, which adds to the serene and verdant character of the estate. Minor entrances to the estate are marked by expressive semi-arches that frame inner space into semi-open yards, which, at one and the same time, forms more intimate living spaces for private habitation as well as looking welcoming to visitors.

The principles of line building in Leningrad were realised during the 1920s in both the estate on Lesnoy prospect 59,⁵⁶ and the *zhilmassiv* of *Krasniy Treugolnik* (“the red triangle”) Plant.⁵⁷ Still the line (ribbon) building was not nearly as widely spread in Leningrad as it was in Germany – for instance, in Rommerstadt *siedlung* near Frankfurt by Ernst May. The development of line building in Germany was first of all dictated by the need for better sanitisation. Closed and confined yards and tight buildings were fertile ground for different infections, especially tuberculosis. Line building was one of the most powerful tools to fight those diseases, securing good ventilation and illumination for both the streets and the flats.

Line building required enormous sites for construction. *Siedlungen* around the largest German cities were planned for up to 25 000 tenants each. Leningrad *zhilmassivs* could not compare in size with such huge constructions. It is for this very reason that the architects could afford to preserve not only traditional features of St. Petersburg urban planning and architectural design but also elements of Howard's concept of a garden city, which could be found in smaller German *siedlungen*, such as Bruno Taut's famous Gartenstadt Falkenberg (fig. 3–10.), or in some sections of the larger settlements, for example the Britz Horseshoe *siedlung* near Berlin (11–17.).

3.9. German *Siedlungen*

Since 1925 Ernst May had been working on the construction of new districts in Frankfurt-am-Main. He introduced the projects of villages – the

⁵⁶ Architect Grigory Simonov, 1929–33.

⁵⁷ Architect Iosif Langbard, 1927–29.

so-called *siedlungen* along Frankfurt's outskirts. One of the very first German *siedlungen* was built by Ernst May on Bruchfeldstrasse between 1926 and 1928.

German functionalists introduced the new planning of residential estates. In contrast to the traditional perimeter building that formed self-enclosed yards, the architects invented line-building with large green areas or light spacious yards between the rows of houses, within which gardens and parks – as well as zones of public use, such as cafes, shopping centres, and kindergartens – were laid out.

In Frankfurt these ideas were easier to realise than in other German cities. First of all, the socially-oriented city municipality provided much support; secondly, the city itself was quite small, with a population of around 500 000 people at the time. This made it possible to complete the construction of further peripheral *siedlungen*, supplementing it to the original planning.

Ernst May started applying industrial methods to mass building. The standardised elements – e.g. wall panels – were produced at the plants, and though assembling them required the use of rather expensive cranes, the centralised and standardised production lowered the overall construction costs. The Rommerstadt *siedlung* built by Ernst May near Frankfurt in 1927–1929 serves as another representative example.

In 1927, German *Werkbund* organised in Stuttgart an exhibition of mass housing solutions, entitled *Die Wohnung [A Flat]*. It was here that the Weisenhoff *siedlung* was introduced. The project was led by Mies van der Rohe, who gathered together the leading masters of the avant-garde (Oud, Stam, Le Corbusier, Gropius, brothers Tauts, Behrens, among others) to create an experimental environment within which the essential principles of modern mass housing construction could be revealed. Alongside multi-apartment blocks, single family villas were also built within the bounds of the estate; the construction of individual houses was considered acceptable within the German mode of functionalism.

Siedlungen were planned as residential areas provided with the most updated technologies. The Dammerstock *siedlung* built by Gropius and Haesler in Karlsruhe in 1929, was provided with central heating and a central water supply. There were elevators in the blocks as well as laundries, freezers, and kitchens.

The situation was different in Berlin. It was impossible to reconstruct the old inner-city structure. The advisor for city development at that time was

the architect Martin Wagner, who initiated the construction of *siedlungen* in peripheral districts of Berlin.

One of the leading architects of *siedlungen* near Berlin was Bruno Taut. By this time, he had already been experimenting with city planning, working simultaneously on ideas associated with garden cities as well as with utopian fantasies surrounding glass crown-towns.⁵⁸ When Taut turned to communal planning he implemented ideas drawn from the concepts of the city crown and the Garden City. As Kathleen James-Chakraborty notes:

Civic architecture, to Taut, should do more than fulfill a functional or symbolic agenda. He believed that the city crown should provide the public with spaces for the shared pleasures that would create and sustain a sense of community. Relaxation was as important as high-mindedness.⁵⁹

One of the earliest proto-*siedlungen* that resembled Taut's passion for expressionism as well as his indebtedness to the concept of the Garden City, was built by the architect before the outbreak of World War I on the eastern side of Berlin.⁶⁰

Bordered by the streets of Akazienhof, Falkenberg, and Gartenstadtweg, the Gartenstadt Falkenberg preserves a uniquely intimate image of a garden town (fig. 3–10.). While the majority of houses were built for single families – 23 out of 34 residential units – the houses themselves are nonetheless arranged in different ways: free standing cottages; adjoined row houses; single family terraced houses, and units for several families. The estate includes both public green areas and alleys as well as small private gardens. The difference in heights and slightly irregular paths, which continue throughout the estate, produce a paradise-like feeling of a garden town isolated from the noise of central Berlin. It is an estate in possession of its own rhythm. The forms and volumes of most buildings are rather conventional, yet the colour palette of the entire garden-town consists of fourteen different shades of colours,⁶¹ thus making the entire area strikingly bright and expressive without this compromising its otherwise organic and natural appearance. Taut paints entire walls in fresh local colours: the

⁵⁸ See Taut, Bruno. *Die Stadtkrone*. (Jena: Diederichs, 1919).

⁵⁹ James-Chakraborty, Kathlene. *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, p. 52.

⁶⁰ For a detailed description of the Nomination for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List, see: Markus Jager's *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*. Berlin, 2006. pp. 33–36.

⁶¹ As mentioned by Markus Jager. See: Jager, Markus: *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*. (2006). P. 35.

famous ‘Taut’s blue’ – nearly ultramarine – yellow, pink, black and white. Markus Jager describes the use of colour in the Gartenstadt Falkenberg in the following way:

It is certainly not by chance that Taut who as a young man found it hard to decide whether he wanted to become a painter or an architect used colours at Falkenberg which he had used in his early pastel drawings. The blue of the sky in his landscape paintings returns in the blue faces of the Falkenberg row houses. Here at Falkenberg he used the colours for entire faces. It covers entire walls as if they were panel paintings and the white painted eaves cornices might well be the painting’s frames.⁶²

Yet this abundance of colourful facades does not produce eclectic mosaic impressions. Jager correctly notes that this colour composition expresses “the sense of solidarity, which was the basis of the Falkenberg housing cooperative.”⁶³

The cottages are simple and plain in their design, and the bright local colours, which become “bolder and unconventional” than ever before, open up the ground for the modernist search for an expression of a general architectural idea through its material forms, texture, and colour.

As noted by Markus Jager, while Gartenstadt Falkenberg “became generally known as the ‘paintbox housing estate’ soon after its completion,”⁶⁴ by the 1920s, once avant-garde theory had matured, the leading colour of modernism became white as the most truthful expression of purity, clarity, and the cleanliness of the functionalist architectural language.

The newly produced living space was associated with white, since it was to be cleansed of all the dirt from the past.

Purification, clearance, destruction – these were the necessary means employed and the terms used by functionalists. No matter how loud these proclamations were in manifestoes, they were realised in Germany and Russia with different intensities.

The destructive potential of modern architecture was the route towards a new barbarism: the condition for the formation of a new humanity, which was highly regarded by Walter Benjamin.⁶⁵ On destruction as a means of

⁶² Ibid, p.34.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶⁴ Jager, Markus. *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*. (Berlin; München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012), p. 29.

⁶⁵ See *Chapter II, Part I* of the present thesis.

purification for the sake of modernity to acquire its new forms, Hilde Heynen notes:

in Benjamin's view, destructive work is essential for the process that humanity is obliged to go through in its historical confrontation with technology and with modern civilization. [...] Destruction is crucial because purification is essential for every form of vitality.⁶⁶

The clarity and purity of German *siedlungen* were realised on all levels: from open planning, line building, large green lawns, and cross-ventilated apartments with loggias, to the smooth textured walls, the clear geometric facades, and the freshness of local colours.

German functionalism could have gone in a different direction were it not for World War I. The very first Berlin housing estate – the Gartenstadt Falkenberg – was begun by Bruno Taut before the War broke out, and he revealed functionalism's expressionistic nature. Bruno Taut was no less a painter than an architect when he worked on his first idyllic settlement.

One of the major negations of functionalism was the denial of any synthesis between the arts and architecture. In the Gartenstadt Falkenberg, it is not a synthesis of painting, sculpture, and architecture, but their complete fusion. Just as Cézanne was sculpturing his paintings, Bruno Taut was painting his architecture. It was not the facades that were painted with bright pure colours, but rather it was the colours out of which the walls were themselves composed. The colours defined the architectural forms and achieved synergy with the surrounding landscape.

At the same time, it was pure functionalism that did not work with fragments of reality, but with the very milieu as its material. The district became one of the most precise realisations of Howard's utopia. German functionalism went the way of purification and rationalisation from the Gartenstadt Falkenberg by Taut to the Weiße Stadt by Wagner, Arhends, and Lesser; from the intimacy of 'original huts' to the *abstractiveness* of the white sea liners, sailing into the future (fig. 31–32.).

Whiteness as testimony to purity and to a purified truth laid at the core of the functionalist method. Whiteness was to be raised to the level of the transparency of glass and to the sound of metal. Whiteness was to be preserved and very-well maintained; it required permanent cleaning. Nothing

⁶⁶ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, pp. 110–111.

looks as miserable and scruffy as an unclean white surface; the white facades demand constant care.

The new reality was modelled through the sharpness and sobriety of architectural forms, through the ribbon windows that provided an abundance of transparency and daylight, and through the whiteness of the freshly washed walls.⁶⁷ The new living space was shaped into a giant cruise ship that was sailing in the pure waters of the sea of modernity. The Weiße Stadt was the port, the gates, the model of the clean, rational living, with no traces of the dirt, pain, and misery of human existence left on its immaculately white surface.

The Weiße Stadt could only appear on open land, possessing no particular reference either to Berlin or to any other city in the world. It requires huge efforts to maintain the purity and whiteness of its walls that praise cleanliness, correctness, and hygiene. The whiteness manifests the immediacy of functionalist architecture, since any procrastination in its constant cleaning instantly leads to the visible marks that the weather, human activities, and living per se leaves on its facades. Its walls need human resources to fight against time and to keep the walls spotless through the continuous work of removing the traces of life.

Nothing looks more miserable than neglected functionalist architecture. Its ruins are the least picturesque; they speak for man's failure to defeat time. Whereas the ancient ruins stand as symbols of resistance to time and declare the vitality of art, the ruins of modernist architecture admit defeat in that battle.

The Weiße Stadt exhibits no reference to national, cultural, professional or any other detail about either the inhabitants or the creators. Its architecture is so extremely concrete in its purity that it becomes abstract. Its ambition is to demonstrate independence from both chronology and history; it declares its commitment only to the present. And yet, it is an illusory architecture; it is a mirage that requires constant human care not to disappear. It is not self-sustainable and it cannot last on its own for longer than a moment.

⁶⁷ For more on the white walls of the modernist architecture as an expression of modernity – on the connection of the ‘white skin’ of functionalist buildings to the clothing fashion of the time, and on the resemblance of the modern life perception through the social and psychological aspects of bodily relations to the urban space in the modernist era through an analysis of the colour white – see in: Wigley, Mark. *White Walls, Designer Dresses. The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

The architectural mirage of the Weiße Stadt was replicated and reproduced relentlessly in later decades, resulting in numerous similar residential estates around the world. The whiteness of its walls was adjusted to the less easily soiled shades of grayish, greenish, and yellowish – that is, those unclear colours whose pigments already contain the dirt. The pure and intensive architectural forms were “humanised” and reduced to the boring repetition of sets of squares and rectangles. The multi-dimensional organisation of the facades was simplified to the flat monotony of dormitory districts; street passages were stretched to endlessly tedious alleyways. The mass housing of later decades demonstrates the illusory nature of functionalism as an architecture of the immediate: its descendants look hopelessly outdated when compared to the houses of previous eras.

The purification of functionalist architecture in Germany was accomplished mostly within and by itself. It was the architecture that was being transformed from the inside by professionals. When Berlin was acquiring suburbs of modernist architecture, it was governed by a brilliant avant-garde architect Martin Wagner. In Russia, on the contrary, it was the whole surrounding reality that was being reconstructed by everything and everybody. The architecture of constructivism was just one of the means used in the process of the reformation of reality.

Despite the fact that by the middle of the 1920s Taut had already distanced himself from expressionism, he was still far from the extreme pragmatism of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*. Along with his Russian colleagues, Taut dreamt about changing reality through transforming the cities. The architectural symbolism of an imaginary model of a dreamt social reality is explicit in the Britz *siedlung* near Berlin – the famous “Horseshoe Estate” built in 1925–1933, which, as Ivan Sablin notes, serves an example of the “harmonious balance of utilitarian and aesthetical beginnings in the planning.”⁶⁸

Just like in Gartenstadt Falkenberg, Taut delicately preserved the architectural connection to the natural landscape:

He reacted to the topography and the natural space and he integrated garden town elements like small houses and tenants’ gardens as well as common functional and event spaces into social housing of the 20s, thus creating a completely novel housing estate landscape.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sablin, Ivan. “Perviy zhilmassiv.”

⁶⁹ Jager, Markus. *Nomination for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List: Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*. (Berlin, 2006). P. 40.

The Horseshoe *siedlung* maintains a connection to modernist architecture, as well as to the concept of the Garden City, and even to the ensembliness of the complexes of classicism and “style epochs.” The connection to the historical tradition is revealed through the incarnation of such architectural motifs into the estate’s layout as, for example, a long residential building that reminds a medieval city fortification wall (a so-called “Chinese wall” or a “Red Front”), behind which the smaller cottage-like row houses with gable-roofs stand close to the urbanistic functionalist higher-rise apartment blocks with flat roofs (fig. 11–17.).

The organisation of the Horseshoe *siedlung* is a clear example of modernism’s polemics with tradition. As Markus Jager notes on the resemblance of a long bloody-coloured apartment block to the fortification wall and the medieval urban tradition:

This gesture consists of two long rows of thirty equal three-storied house units whose tower-like projecting staircases literally remind of military architecture. The two blocks with their blood-red plaster, called “Red Front” or “Chinese Wall” remind us of the fact that the dispute between modern and traditional architecture in the 1920s was not carried out only on paper. Yet, with a clever dialectical turn Taut formulated precisely here an invitation to the residents and passers-by to enter the large housing landscape: the inside of the horseshoe. The head buildings of the horseshoe with brilliant white facades interrupt the “Red Front” at Fritz-Reuter-Allee. Here is – flanked by community buildings – the main entrance with the flight of outside steps down to the horseshoe pond.⁷⁰

The main square of the estate is dominated by the clear water of an oval pond that repeats the curve of the horse-shoe central building. The entrance to the Britz *siedlung* is nearly grand with its wide staircase that descends to the pond, and which Jager calls “the key urban design feature of the whole estate.”⁷¹

Yet, behind the horseshoe the atmosphere of the private smaller-scaled settlements is produced by the rows of adjoined single-family cottages arranged in multi-coloured ribbons hidden behind cherry trees and acacia bushes. Landscape architect Leberecht Migge arranged the green areas in both garden-city estates designed with an artistic touch and under the fascination before expressionism. The green areas combine carefully thought

⁷⁰ Jager, Markus. *Nomination for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List: Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*, p. 40.

⁷¹ Jager, Markus. *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*, p. 52.

through ensembles that accompany main squares, yards, and paths with a wild natural romantic oasis of small private gardens that conceal the brightly painted doors that often lead directly to the apartments, many of which still preserve the original bright paints of the walls and ceilings.

Martin Wagner, who contributed to the planning and construction of the Britz *siedlung* had long cooperated with Leberecht Migge and considered the integration of green natural landscapes into an estate as a crucial factor in the production of the new living space. Franziska Bollerey in her article that complements the publication of Wagner's *Das Wachsende Haus* by Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt in 2015 notes on the town-planning concept developed by Wagner in the 1920s, and through which he "strove for the unity of policy, economy, culture, and ecology":⁷²

"The sanitary green", as Wagner titles his ecological cause, was directed not only toward the macrocosm of the metropolis, but also toward the microcosm of human being – apartment house.⁷³

The colouring of the Britz Horseshoe *siedlung* is its inseparable part. It combines organically the natural shades of grass, trees, flowers, and plants that vary through seasons and that make the facades and the windows reveal their texture and colours differently. From out of this appears the houses, which perform their rhythmical and spatial composition in different fashion, at each time of the year.

Colour scheme and architectural composition are the main and formative features of the estate. Due to the large size of the Britz *siedlung* (29 hectares were to accommodate over 5 000 tenants), the composition of the whole estate could not be grasped neither from a single point of view (except for its central part with the pond and the horseshoe-like bent residential block), nor by strolling around its micro-districts. To both tenants and visitors alike, the composition is revealed through motion (one on the main features of functionalism) –that is, while walking or driving around, as well as through the very everyday living on the estate. The multi-centred composition requires the very practice of living to sense its very organisation, which refers, on the one hand, to cubism through its multi-dimensional compositional arrangement and, on the other, to suprematism

⁷² Bollerey, Franziska. "The Intelligent House: Ecological, Economical and Flexible." In: Martin Wagner, *Das Wachsende Haus*, p. 177.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

through its clear colour scheme and rhythmic articulation of functionalist multi-apartment blocks that border the settlement from the north.

Markus Jager emphasises the importance of the use of colour in Britz *siedlung*:

Colour is used as an element of design and for providing structure at the Britz estate even more than at Falkenberg. The uniform use of white and blue in the house units along the horseshoe stresses its closedness. On the inside only the internal walls of the loggias are blue whereas on the outside blue colour has been used for jambs and staircases. For the surrounding single-family row houses Taut abstained from using a uniform colour for each block. By means of differentiated colouring using bright red, yellow, white or blue integrally coloured stippling (sand-float finish) he makes urban and spatial correlations optimally perceivable. Each row or group of houses got its own colour, each street its own spatial colour identity.⁷⁴

The living space produced within the Britz *siedlung* is diverse in its form and function; it accommodates different forms of dwellings – from private cottages to the multi-flat and multi-storey apartments – and yet it is not an eclectic space. It is nearly classical in its composition, with a very determined centre and radial streets running away from it; this is another realisation of the garden city concept, with a strong idealistic feeling of living in a modelled paradise, according to which a produced living space sets a certain rhythm and even an artistic style of residing within its closed frames.

The northern borders are outlined by an expressively modernist ribbon of a residential building designed by Martin Wagner. Together with the “Red Front” they form a city wall that encloses the rural-longing cottage-estate.

In both their idea and composition, German *siedlungen* revealed the intention to combine the concepts of both private and collectivised living. The German mode of functionalism never reached the level of the collectivisation of a Soviet *Dom-Kommuna* and was not hostile towards the ‘small’ man. The Berlin *siedlungen*, unlike more radical solutions suggested e.g. for Frankfurt, were closer to the *zhilmassivs* of Leningrad in the way they organised their living spaces. As opposed to the large serial estates of Moscow, the *zhilmassivs* in Leningrad formed idyllic islands, where a tenant

⁷⁴ Jager, Markus. *Nomination for Inscription on the Unesco World Heritage List: Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*, p. 40.

was not completely detached from the land and where the living space was filled with a flavour of intimacy.

Serial housing blocks in both Berlin and Leningrad were individualised. People living there might have been dreaming of their own happiness rather than of world revolution.

Yet, it should be noted that *siedlungen* in Berlin were first of all large residential estates, where people were returning after a day spent in the scurry of a big city. *Siedlung* was to become a home that would provide a tired dweller with equally well planned indoor and outdoor living spaces. As expounded by the modernist theoreticians of all modes of functionalism – from Ginzburg and Giedion to Paulsson – the living space was not limited to the interiority of the flat. Rather, it should be extended to the whole area of an estate providing its inhabitants with functional, infrastructural, and aesthetical diversity, as well as with immediate access to nature through, for example, small private gardens or vegetable allotments. Ludovica Scarpa interprets Wagner's attitude towards the idea of the new home that allows for an extension of its capacity and its functional potential ("the growing house") in the following manner:

[...] the house of the near future would provide space for personal hygiene, gymnastics, leisure, and the relaxation essential to cope with the enormous strain that modern life places on the nervous system.

The new house, Wagner comments, would have a large garden – in essence an extension of the interior living space. There one could take the sun, work in the garden, or play with children; in the warm months of the year, you could even eat and sleep there.⁷⁵

Architects of the *siedlungen* did not mind social diversity inside each living estate. There was no contradiction in multi-apartment blocks and single-family villas co-existing within the same estate. But every family was provided with a small and yet separate apartment, equipped with a minimal though a set of really existing facilities that covered the basic needs of each family. In this way, early Berlin and Leningrad estates were close in their delicate attitude towards the preservation of traditional forms of dwelling within the newly produced living space.

Yet, Russian *zhilmassivs* suggested a higher level of collectivisation of the living space through the development of special types of buildings that took

⁷⁵ Scarpa, Ludovica. "The Technocratic Utopia: The House is Growing, the City Shrinking," p. 184.

care of routines that traditionally operated within private homes. German *siedlungen*, on the other hand, did not require their tenants to expose large part of their everyday existence to the public. The living space, however, did extend to the outdoors, to an individual garden and to such facilities that remained in common use, such as mechanised laundries, canteens and nurseries –all to ease the everyday routine, though not by eliminating it entirely.

In most of the *zhilmassivs* in Leningrad, the residential blocks were rather intimate in character. They were inseparable parts of the produced living space that consisted of new and more radically functionalist building types: the collective kitchens, clinics, collective *banyas*, schools, palaces of culture, administrative buildings, and so on. These new buildings, which conquered a large part of the Soviet dwellers' daily routines, were more intensive in their material forms than the residential blocks, attracting and adsorbing tenants into their tight networks. The housing blocks were not little islands of from which to escape the big cities, they were instead part of the living space that was extended to the size of the city.

Certainly, the ultimate purpose of a German *siedlung* was not as radical as the Soviet *zhilmassiv*, which in its Leningrad version was itself a compromise with a still traditional city resident and his demands. The German *siedlungen* did not pretend to be a model of the future transformed society, they rather modelled and improved what was simply present, making it tolerable.

Certainly, the ideas of the social transformation of society through architectural means captured architects in both Soviet Russia and Western Europe. The borders were still relatively open and the flow of ideas was circulating freely, adapting to each particular state and town.

3.10. German functionalism: getting along with the everyday

Despite the close affinities between Russian and German functionalism, the latter had worked with and within a different reality. Even though both practicing the same methods and possessing similar intentions, Russian and German functionalists nevertheless produced different living spaces.

The living space of German *siedlungen* was more habitable and inviting for settling. The sustainable settlements that have been preserved up to the present also became possible due to the fact that ideas of urban utopias, such as the garden city, were being implemented to a greater degree in German *siedlungen* than in Russian *zhilmassivs*. Tenants of German

siedlungen were not required to break with their past experience to fit into the new living space. They were offered rationalised spaces, where the right to live in comfort was not suppressed. Even though most of the mass housing produced by functionalists in Germany was leased to tenants for a life time, the way the living was organised within the estates themselves had a resonance with privately owned and traditional households. German dwelling remained the possession of its tenants.

Hilde Heynen notes that Benjamin's understanding of a dwelling, "as an active form of dealing with reality that surrounds us, in which the individual and his surroundings adjust to each other," reflects a "hurried contemporaneity" that "involves the constant shaping and reshaping of a casing."⁷⁶ The process of reshaping and adjustment is recognised here as reciprocal, and this was a feature of the living space produced through the German mode of functionalism: a tenant was not placed to adjust her life to its improved form and content, but it was a space that she could continue shaping and appropriating to her needs.

This possibility was secured in a large number of separate flats and separate living sections of town houses and even in villas, with direct access to the kitchen, beds, and gardens, along with the presence of individual bathrooms and kitchens in the apartments. A family as a social unit was not threatened to the same extent as in Russia; and tenants could more or less regulate the amount of collectivism they wanted to embrace in their everyday living. They often had a choice between raising children at home and sending them to nursery, between cooking in their "Frankfurt kitchens" and using public canteens.

Though the preferences of architects and authorities were towards a higher collectivisation of living, in practice tenants often re-appropriated their living space to the level of semi-bourgeois coziness.

When you walk today through a perfectly refurbished functionalist *siedlungen* in Berlin, you feel as though you are a visitor of a national park or an open-air museum. The aura of the place is there, delicately cherished through the UNESCO recognition of the estates' status of high historical and cultural value. The light breeze of history and its appreciation evokes nostalgia for the modernist utopia, where memory requires the most delicate preservation and promotion on the state level.

People still live there. They appropriate the clear and yet picturesque rationality of house planning by adding idiosyncratic and dysfunctional

⁷⁶ Heynen, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity*, p. 108.

touches – just ugly details that ruin the very nature of the estate and that do not leave utopia a chance. The balconies are often filled not only with colourful flowers, but with all kind of decoration – toys, sculptures, souvenirs, hand-made amulets that undermine the strict geometry of the facades. The gardens and kitchen beds, for which architects suggested plants to preserve the necessary colour scheme and heights with an idea to highlight the clarity of architectural forms, are full of random trees and petty-bourgeois signs of comfort: deck-beds under colourful umbrellas, decorative jackstraws and mills, gnomes, plastic storks, and unavoidable ducks of all sizes and colours. Everything that functionalists were clearing out came back, claiming their rights for the re-appropriation of space.

Leases for apartments had been transferred to the next generations; families had become rooted into a living space that failed to preserve its transparency and its independence from the site. There are only a few windows through which the plans of the flats, original colours of the walls and, in rare cases, even functionalist furnishing can be seen. Most apartments had lost their transparency and colours by the means of curtains, modern wall paper, and an abundance of window decorations.

In comparison to Soviet Russia, the living space of German cities during the 1920s seems to be less dehumanised – and still today it remains both attractive and livable. Meanwhile Russian constructivist space required the complete adjustment of a tenant to the produced space. It was more fragmented and partitioned than in the German iteration. In Germany, the clearance of the space meant hygienic sanitation, rather than the destruction of traditional living. Line building was implemented, first of all, to avoid the spread of tuberculosis, rather than to stimulate people for social activism.

3.11. Mass housing in Sweden

Sweden did not continue developing the concept *siedlung/zhilmassiv* during the interwar period. Instead, it concentrated on the organisation of the living space within more or less conventional residential blocks. Most houses built in the 1920s were 6–8 storey high, 16-metre deep blocks that arranged several (four to ten) apartments on each floor to provide maximum

efficiency in the use of elevators.⁷⁷ Thus most apartments lacked cross-ventilation, which, by that time, was accepted as a norm in both the German and Soviet modernist *zhilmassivs*.

In both the 1920s and 1930s the arrangement of the new blocks into certain complexes had not provided solutions that would ideologically, functionally or aesthetically influence the further urban development in Sweden. Thomas Hall notes:

In an aesthetic context, urban development during the 1920s exhibits traces both of nineteenth-century classicism with its emphasis on straight axes and visual foci and monumental places and of the small-scale planning of the early twentieth century with its interest in variety and intimate spatial solutions.⁷⁸

Most of the residential blocks were arranged around courts, which, in the struggle for more light and better hygiene, became more spacious (so-called *storgård*); in contrast to traditional well-yards, the courtyards were semi-opened. Yet, since most residential areas were built up by individual developers eager to make the most out of the land, Hall notes that “most new building in Sweden was still effected plot by plot”, in a rather haphazard way.⁷⁹

All this would later change after the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, once the functionalist method was being systematically applied to the production of new living space and the distribution of housing was further concentrated in the hands of the state. During this period, the ‘thick’ houses (*tjockhus*) were replaced with the ‘thin’ lamella blocks, 8–10 metres deep (*smalhus*), with only two flats on each floor and windows placed on each side. This design provided compact apartments with cross-ventilation and better lighting. Most flats consisted of one or two rooms, a kitchen with a place for a dining table, a bathroom and a tiny hall. The functional zoning of living space into sleeping, dining, and working areas was well-organised even if the floor-plans remained quite restricted in size.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ For more on the arrangements of apartments within the housing blocks of the time see: Ikonnikov, Andrey. *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura Shvetsii / Contemporary Architecture of Sweden*. (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1978), pp. 60–67.

⁷⁸ Hall, Thomas. “Urban Planning in Sweden,” p. 207.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Read more in Ikonnikov, Andrey. *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura Shvetsii*, p. 61.

Already the first generation of parallel lamella blocks, built in the 1930s in Kristineberg and Fredhäll in Stockholm, were provided with communal facilities such as laundries and sometimes, even, playrooms.⁸¹

The districts of Traneberg and Hammarbyhöjden, which followed in 1934, continued the distribution of slab blocks favoured by the Social Democrat Axel Dahlberg, who headed the Stockholm municipal real estate office and established this type of dwelling as the panacea for the housing crisis. However, Dahlberg would soon be criticised and mocked for his ‘one size fits all’ approach; he was accused of spreading boring residential complexes around the city, as Lucy Creagh writes:

By the end of the 1930s, Dahlberg’s uncompromising attachment to the narrow block as a solution to workers’ housing would become the subject of parody in the conservative press not only for the uncompromising zeal with which he dispersed these three-storied, pitched-roof constructions across Stockholm, but for the monotonous environments they engendered.⁸²

Lucy Creagh notes that it was in actual fact the authors of the *Acceptera* manifesto, who were the “harshest critics of these new housing developments.”⁸³ Creagh goes on to cite a lecture from Gunnar Asplund, published in the *Byggmästaren* in 1936.⁸⁴

Asplund argued that while this approach to housing offered great increases of daylight and fresh air, the length of identical apartments, representing ‘the infinite repetition of the standardised element, mass crowding without expression of individual life’, were not only marked by an aesthetic ‘monotony, gloominess’ but were sociologically dangerous.⁸⁵

Thus, the case of the mechanical interpretation and utilisation of the functionalist method, as well as the simplification of its aesthetics by state officials was not specific to the Soviet context, but it was an inevitable part of the process of putting modernist theory into architectural practice. The difference was that the Swedish state was not engaged in a game of decep-

⁸¹ See more in Creagh, Lucy. “From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse on Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54).” In: *The European Welfare State Projects: Ideals, Politics, Cities and Buildings*. 2011. Vol. 5(2), p. 8.

⁸² *Ibid.* pp. 8–9.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁸⁴ Asplund, Gunnar. “Konst och Teknik.” In: *Byggmästaren*, 1936, 14, pp. 170–175

⁸⁵ Creagh, Lucy. “From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse on Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54),” p. 10.

tion against the producers of its new living space, as was the case in Soviet Russia.

The Soviet and Russian urban historian, Alexander Ikonnikov, who was fascinated by twentieth-century architectural developments in Sweden, also noticed the utilitarian character of the 1930s housing blocks constructed in Swedish cities, remarking that relationships between the dwellings and their natural surroundings “were based on hygienic assumptions.”⁸⁶ Even if problems with insulation, ventilation, and illumination were resolved through applying in a systematic fashion line-building, the problem was that “psychological factors were practically not considered.”⁸⁷ Yet, Ikonnikov argues, the dwellings were connected with the surrounding landscape through the variety of placements and solutions of balconies which, just as it had been implemented by Taut and Wagner in the Britz *siedlung* and other Berlin estates, extended the indoor living space to the outdoors, thereby becoming “organic extensions of apartments” that at the same time “preserved their intimacy.”⁸⁸

Though Ikonnikov had written this book in 1978, within Soviet historiography it was one of the earliest analyses of West-European functionalism as a trend that had contributed to the formation of the contemporary living space and mass housing solutions across Europe. Ikonnikov introduced the history of Swedish architecture to a Soviet audience placing emphasis on its ‘functionalist’ period, indirectly comparing it to the Soviet architecture with a sense of a hidden mourning for a method that had been suspended from its native architectural scene. Ikonnikov presents a somewhat external perspective and critique of the consequences and results of the functionalist methodology, which had served to underline contemporary mass housing construction in various countries. Ikonnikov’s text shows signs of Soviet censorship, however, since he is forced to repeatedly remind the reader that the Swedish model is not socialist enough.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ikonnikov, Alexander. *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura Shvetsii*, p. 62.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ It is obvious that Ikonnikov’s editors made him insert paragraphs that were to undermine his sympathy towards the still functionalist means of the living space production in Sweden. For instance, in the introduction to his book, Ikonnikov, generally praising the ‘third way’ that Sweden had chosen to build a welfare state “under constant pressure from the masses, but without a revolutionary explosion,”⁸⁹ he cannot avoid sharing an impression by the Soviet publicist Mikhail Kol’tsov, who travelled to Stockholm in 1935. Even though a largely respected writer and journalist, Kol’tsov was arrested in 1938 at the peak of Stalin’s repressions and was killed in 1940. He was later rehabilitated, but it is still hard

It was not until the end of the Second World War, when Swedish architects developed their own concept of neighborhood units, that spatial and psychological interlinkages were considered important between the indoor and outdoor living spaces, between private and public elements of everyday living and necessary levels of collectivization. As Lucy Creagh summarises:

[...] the neighborhood unit would be achieved with the same tightly planned apartments that developments in the 1930s had consisted of. What did change after the process of re-evaluation and auto-critique in the late 1930s and early 1940s was the way these apartments were combined to create groupings at a range of scales and public space of varying experimental quality. The interplay between the private home and public amenities became a primary object of experimentation.⁹⁰

The first designed estates in Stockholm appeared by the end of the War with the clearest example being the star-type dwellings in Gröndal in Stockholm.⁹¹ These estates showed a close consideration of modernist architectural forms by the authors of Berlin *siedlungen*, even if in fact the very concept of the multi-beam and obtuse-sectioned forms was first introduced

to say the extent to which his words, which Ikonnikov cites in 1978, resemble his real impressions from a stay in Sweden. Here Ikonnikov cites Mikhail Kol'tsov in support of an argument that the tempos of spiritual culture development were much behind the growth of material wealth in Sweden (Ibid.:4): "The comforts of life, the meals, the sleep – they are more than a cult in Stockholm. It is a passion that had transformed to religion and psychiatric mania [...] the bourgeois deification of amenities degenerates into the true idiotism. Civilising each and every function of a human organism to the bitter end, people unnoticingly hit the opposite, they become the effete two-legged cattle." (Ibid.)

Considering the year of Kol'tsov's visit to Stockholm, which was most likely arranged by Maxim Gor'ky, a big international celebrity at that time, who attracted Kol'tsov to participate in many of his projects, these lines were a necessary part of his report upon his return from the capitalist world, which, otherwise, could have resulted in him being an active member of a Trotskyist terroristic organisation – his official indictment three years later. This episode may add to the atmosphere of the 'creative discussion' that was to run by constructivist architects shortly after Stalin's decree of 1932, which had led to the abandonment of the avant-garde in Russia (see the first chapter of the present thesis). Practicing constructivist architects, in general, were much less affected by the consequences of the 'discussion,' than their literary colleagues, due to a lack of specialists, who could realise the building plans delegated by the state.

⁹⁰ Creagh, Lucy. "From *Acceptera* to Vällingby: The Discourse on Individuality and Community in Sweden (1931–54)," p. 12.

⁹¹ Architects Sven Bäckström and Leif Reinius. See the front page to the Part II for the general view.

by the Russian avant-gardist Nickolay Ladovsky in his search for new housing types already in the 1920s.⁹²

Later on, though, the concept of the Garden City, as well as the urban theory developed by Lewis Mumford⁹³ – along with the appropriation of the functionalist heritage – led to the development of such model districts in Stockholm as Vällingby.⁹⁴ These districts combined both the diversity of individual and multi-apartment dwellings characteristic of Berlin *siedlungen* with well-organised infrastructure arranged through a complex of specially arranged public buildings. Thus, besides providing dwellers with necessary public facilities for shopping, entertainment, and a communal service sector, such districts exercised a certain degree of social control over their population – a main objective of the living space organisation in Soviet *zhilmassivs*.

Within the Russian mode of functionalism, Soviet *zhilmassivs* reformed the living space. This was achieved first of all through its very spatial re-organisation and production of a new type of building that collectivised everyday routines and exposed living to the public sphere. In the German mode, the extension of the living space also went beyond the walls of the house, however it was limited by the borders of the *siedlung* that became very well-designed oases. Here artistic and designer solutions, fully revealing their functionalist aesthetics through various forms and spatial solutions, satisfied not only the demands of the worker to find shelter and rest after the end of the work day, but to provide everyone with the opportunity for personal growth and self-development. This was meant to be achieved through the organisation of one's living space within modernist forms of artistic expression – such as spatial compositional diversity, landscape architectural design of the public and private green sectors, the colours and textures of the dwelling. Thus, both the Russian and German modes of functionalism suggest ways of establishing different connections and inter-plays between the public and individual.

⁹² See, for instance, his project for the residential district in Moscow of 1924 with a general plan for two types of housing – with three-petal and shifted blocks. More details can be found in e.g.: Khan-Maghomedov, Selim. *Nickolay Ladovsky*. (Moscow: Arkhitektura-S, 2007). pp.47–50.

⁹³ E.g. Mumford's famous *The Culture of Cities*, first published in 1938. Here he promotes the decentralisation of cities and living space production through the development of modern residential districts that considered the importance of both the relationships of urban elements with natural landscapes and well-developed infrastructure that provided a connection of these districts to larger city centres.

⁹⁴ Arch. Sven Markelius, Sven Bäckström, and Leif Reinius. 1949–1952.

3.12. Three modes of functionalism: a shared utopia

In their size and free planning, which nonetheless remained both functional and rational, the Berlin *siedlungen* are closer to the concept of Howard's garden cities. The first Leningrad *zhilmassivs*, however, cannot be called *siedlungen* – they are neither independent villages nor suburbs, but they are estates that are closely integrated into the structure of Leningrad. If Berlin *siedlungen* (as well as later Stockholm districts of Vällinby or Farsta) were built as garden suburbs connected to the old city centre by the transportation system, then Leningrad *zhilmassivs* became inseparable parts of the city with their own independent infrastructure.

The planning of the first estate in Traktornaya street is rational and regular, it gives possibility for potential growth and is not closed within itself, preserving friendly connection with older parts of the city. Similar *zhilmassivs* that were constructed within the same period in several parts of St. Petersburg (e.g. Serafimovsky, Palevsky, *zhilmassiv* at the Tkachey street, Baburinsky, Kondratievsky, and *zhilmassiv* at Lesnoy prospect) not only complement the city with healthy modernists suburbs, but reproduce its own tissue of Leningrad, forming sustainable self-maintained districts. With a sense of organic embeddedness into an existing urban structure, these *zhilmassivs* are more distant from the independent character of English garden cities than they are to Berlin functionalist suburbs.

The paradox lies in the fact though, that Howard argued against suburbs, since his garden cities were to be self-maintained structures, independent from bigger towns. German *siedlungen*, on the other hand, formed sleeping residential estates, where people would engage in their routines outside of working hours and spend their leisure time. The space of a *siedlungen* was spatially separated from its tenants' working space of e.g. a factory by a buffer zone, which the tenants had to go through in order to reach their place of work, a site of entertainment or other services such as medical care, school, an educational centre, etc. This separation of spaces had grown from the Gartenstadt Falkenberg to the Weiße Stadt. It drastically contradicted the model offered by Howard, according to which all sites a tenant lived through during the day were to be placed within the borders of a garden city, producing no zoning of space inhabited by the residents. As Markus Jäger notes on the Weiße Stadt and Siemensstadt estates, the last modernist *siedlungen* completed in Berlin:

The last two estates have become a symbol of international Modernism even beyond the city boundaries of Berlin. They not only represent a paradigm shift in architecture and urban design, they also indicate a change in the social structure and have led to mono-functional satellite estates with a clear separation between residential accommodation and the workplace.⁹⁵

The idea of the garden cities was closely considered by Russian constructivists too. Howard's idea was realised through the very well-developed infrastructure within residential districts. There was no necessity left for a tenant to go beyond the borders of an estate, since her working place, living quarter, necessary services, and entertainment were located within the same *zhilmassiv*. The original structure of *zhilmassivs*, their basic idea, was to give tenants an alternative to traditional city life, where the time it took to cross distances between functional zones stole a lot of life time from the dweller. This alternative was offered not through the return to the village, but through a developed and well organised infrastructure within the estate itself.

Here lies another difference in the character of constructivist *zhilmassivs* from Howard's garden cities. If the goal of the latter was to eliminate the difference between the village and city life through providing its tenants with the benefits of both, then *zhilmassivs* marked no return to the countryside. The first estate built by Bruno Taut in Berlin – Gartenstadt Falkenberg – was the realised utopia of the garden city idea. But he would quickly leave behind this dream-space of his youth; for it could not be further developed as a practical model for mass housing construction in his country.

Still Taut, as well as other German functionalists, never broke with the idea of accommodating each tenant with her own garden. They never broke the connection of a dwelling with land even in the most densely populated *siedlungen*, such as Carl Legien or Weiße Stadt. The concept of an outdoor living space, developed by Taut and supported by Wagner, was realised in all major *siedlungen* of Berlin. Those outdoor living spaces were green private areas that could be used as kitchen gardens or zones for private relaxation, though they were always combined with public lawns, playgrounds and park-like squares.

German *siedlungen* provided shelter for their tenants where they could hide and rest from the city life that was raging outside the estates' borders. Those borders were often materialised through the long ribbons of houses

⁹⁵ Jäger, Markus. *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*, p.10.

that resembled fortification walls in their design (for example, in the Britz *siedlung*) or by producing an impression of fence-like borders that protected residents from the stress of the bigger city (such as in Weiße Stadt, Siemensstadt, and Carl Legien).⁹⁶

The character of the Leningrad *zhilmassivs* was completely different. Much smaller in size (first of all due to economic reasons) they were not meant to conceal their tenants from public view, keeping their private lives tucked away from the community, but on the contrary – they were to expose tenants' living practices as much as possible in order to improve them in the process of transforming a former peasant into the perfect resident of the future. Even if compared to their Moscow colleagues, Leningrad architects were more delicate towards using tenants as material for social experiments, the problem was that they had no overarching goal with which to provide the tenants, in the form of an idealistic set of pure benefits about city- and country life. Architects of *zhilmassivs* had planned neither private gardens nor individual villas for their residents. There was less variety of the floor-plans given to apartments, while the bigger ones were to be shared by two families.

Both German and Swedish modes never broke completely with the model of one's own home containing a private little garden. Eva Rudberg describes how there appears to be an articulation of “the utopia of the everyday,” which has been realised in Sweden since the establishment of functionalist aesthetics. This utopic dimension reveals itself in a longing for a private cottage with a garden in a collectivised space of a modern town:

For the competition for cheap housing in Stockholm in the early 1930s, the Co-operative movement's architect office presented an entry bearing the motto “One day the earth shall be ours”. It shows a modernist housing estate with a man digging in the ground, a woman serving coffee, a young man reading the newspaper, and the artist himself sitting in the foreground, all of which provides the atmosphere of a Swedish idyllic scenery. But the motto comes from the best known of all revolutionary songs, the International: “Workers in the countryside and in the cities, One day the earth shall be ours (or: let us henceforth claim the earth...)”. The perspective of international solidarity combined with the Swedish dream of a garden of one's own; the farmer who has moved into the city to become an industrial worker wins back a piece of land. The picture superimposes the national and the international dimension, in a common hope for the future [...].⁹⁷

⁹⁶ See the image on the book cover.

⁹⁷ Rudberg, Eva. “Building the Utopia of the Eveyday,” p. 152.

The German mode, even while propounding and realising more radical transformations of the living space, nonetheless stored a similar utopian picture somewhere in the back of its collective mind.

In Soviet *zhilmassivs*, a resident's living space was no longer divided into the working, sleeping or leisure zones; everything became homogenous. All spaces, including that of the factory plant, became part of a tenant's living space. All their living practices were assigned to that homogenous space. The everyday schedule of a man and his living routines were sliced and strung on a thread, which, in turn, was turned into a circle within that space: from the sleep through the breakfast, work, and leisure to the evening shower and back to his bed. Through this model of enchainment the state saw the strings of control, while constructivists – the potential for liberation of men from the outdated routines of everyday life.

Ivan Sablin outlines this core difference in the approach towards the very final goal of the newly materialised living space between its Soviet mode, on the one side, and, in this case, the German and Swedish modes, on the other. The Soviet mode targeted the dissolution of the private space of a home and stretched the living space within the everyday routines that were incorporated into the all-encompassing meta-living space of a state. German and Swedish modes, on the other hand, targeted the liberation of the dweller not so much from, but more within his everyday routines, reconciling all pieces of a fragmented life into the wholeness of his being, to recall Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*. Here Ivan Sablin concludes:

One can endlessly argue about formal virtues and shortcomings of Soviet *zhilmassivs* – in social respect the superiority of our *zhilmassivs* over German *siedlungen* and any others, first of all, from the point of encompassing of all spheres of existence, is obvious. But now, this specifically “Soviet” feature can provoke in someone a sustainable dislike towards the monuments of the 1920s. In German *siedlungen*, in spite of the whole spectre of new means that were set in the ground already at the stage of projecting of a future complex, such as laundries, kindergartens, free public recreational zones, some sort of bourgeois features are still preserved. During the construction of *zhilmassivs* the whole complex of the new types of buildings is being developed, which are called upon to demolish the isolation of the family life, to take a man out to the street, and, finally, to subordinate an individual to the collective – the houses of culture, rehabilitation centres, factory kitchens. Up to the unique *dom-kommunas*.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Sablin, Ivan. “Perviy zhilmassiv” In: *Kvartal’nyi nadziratel*.” In: Online publication: <http://kn.sobaka.ru/n73/04.html>

The elements of communal living penetrated into the model of *zhilmassivs* along with the new types of buildings that suggested tenants to share their everyday living practices: collective kitchens, banyas, and clubs. The working place – in case of Leningrad, a factory – was located within the spatial area of a *zhilmassiv*.

As the state strengthened its power, it swept away all humanistic elements of the garden cities that remained within *zhilmassivs*, such as separate apartments, small size of the low-rise buildings, and spacious green yards – the last vestige of the private garden. The state prohibited the notion of the Garden City, constructivism was abandoned, and the concept of *zhilmassiv* as a model for mass housing construction was perverted into the workers' villages, just as the *dom-kommunas* degenerated into conventional barrack-like *obschezhities*.

Yet those *zhilmassivs* built in the 1920s in Leningrad have survived through the twentieth century to the present. Even in their contemporary dilapidated state, they provide inspiration to many modern housing estates in the process of being constructed in St. Petersburg today, whether or not contemporary architects are conscious of this. The paradox of this metamorphosis is that those contemporary estates that allude to the *zhilmassivs* of the Russian constructivists, which provided the vulnerable and exploited working class with social housing, nowadays are the fashionable examples of posh residential districts for the elite.



Fig. 1. View to Södra Ängby. Arch. Edvin Engström, early 1930s. Photo: 1938.



Fig. 2. A Villa at Södra Ängby. Arch. Edvin Engström, early 1930s. Photo: 1938.



Fig. 3-10. Gartenstadt Falkenberg. Arch. Bruno Taut, 1913-16.



Fig. 11–17. The Hufeisensiedlung (“Horseshoe Estate”) Britz. Arch. Bruno Taut, Martin Wagner, Leberecht Migge, 1925–33.



Fig. 18. Nobel's Housing Estate in St. Petersburg. Arch. Roman Meltzer and Feodor Lidval, 1914. Photo from 2016.



Fig. 19. Fuggerei Housing Estate in Augsburg, 1516.



Fig. 20. Palevsky zhilmassiv in St. Petersburg. Arch. Alexey Zazersky, Nickolay Rybin, 1925–28. Photo from 2018.



Fig. 21. Zhilmassiv of the textile workers at Tkachey Street in St. Petersburg. Arch. David Butyshkin, Lev Tverskoy, 1926–29. Photo from 2018.



Fig. 22. Bateninsky zhilmassiv at Lesnoy prospect in St. Petersburg. Arch. Grigory Simonov, 1930–33. Photo from 2009.



Fig. 23–25. Zhilmassiv at Traktornaya street in Leningrad.
Arch. Alexander Gegello, Alexander Nickolsky, Grigory
Simonov, 1925–27. Photos from 2018.



Fig. 26. Factory-kitchen of the Kirov District. Arch. Alexander Gegello, Alexander Nickolsky, Grigory Simonov, 1925–27



Fig. 27. Palace of Culture named after Gorky. Arch. Alexander Gegello, Alexander Nickolsky, and Grigory Simonov, 1925–27.



Fig. 28. "Profilactorii" (Medical and Rehabilitation Centre). Arch. Lev Rudnev, 1928–30.



Fig. 29. School. Arch. Alexander Nickolsky, 1925–27.



Fig. 30. Palevsky Zhilmassiv in St. Petersburg. Arch. Zazersky, Rybin, 1925–26.



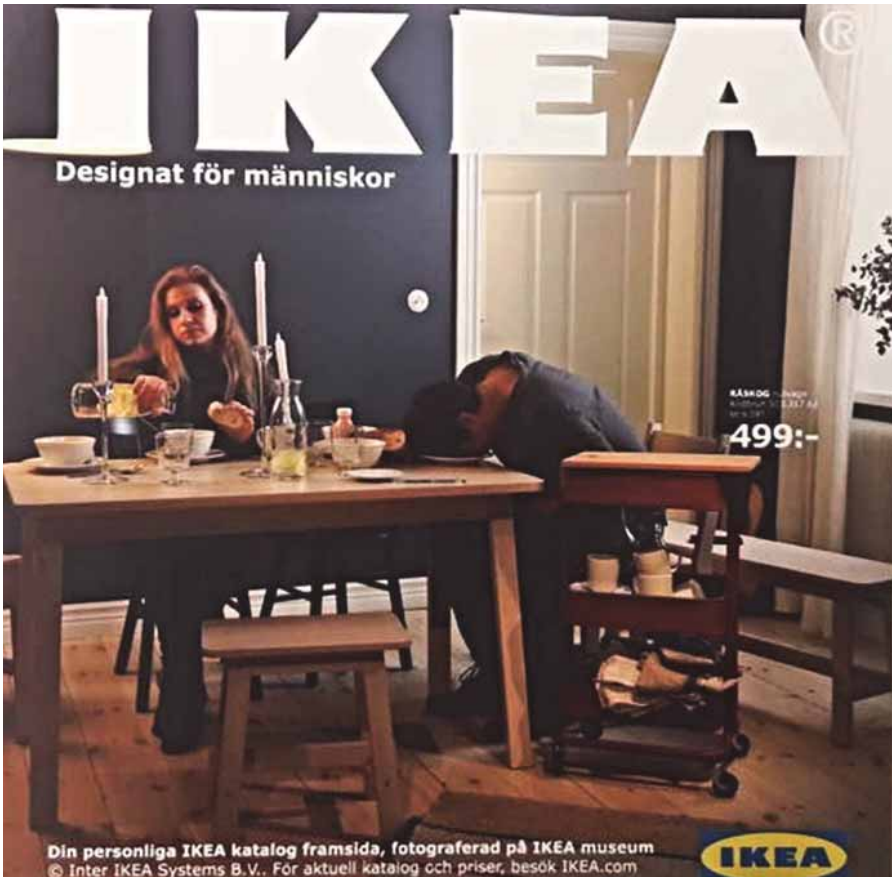
Fig. 31–32. White City in Berlin. Arch. Otto Rudolf Salvisberg, Bruno Ahrends, Ludwig Lesser, 1929–31.



Fig. 33–35. Siemensstadt Siedlung. Arch. Otto Bartning, Fred Forbat, Walter Gropius, Hugo Häring, Paul-Rudolf Henning, Hans Scharoun, 1929–1931, 1933–34.

CHAPTER IV

IKEA Case: From 'Better Things for Everyday Life' to the
'Better Life for the Many'



The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the Swedish mode of functionalism as a life-building concept, and how this notion of life-building was applied to the production of living space during the twentieth century. A further aim is to trace the destiny of the Swedish mode of functionalism through a reading of IKEA catalogues. These catalogues have been published annually ever since 1951 and whose circulation today – it is said that the number of printed and distributed copies exceeds 210 million copies per year – is second only to the Bible.

From its inception up until the present-day IKEA has contributed not only to the notion of Swedish design, but to the notion of Swedishness *per se*. Indeed, outside of Scandinavia the company is often identified with Sweden – that is, with the life style that the country projects of itself and the social model it is meant to have invented. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that IKEA functions as the mass culture ambassador for this North European nation. The company emphasises and sustains this profile throughout the entirety of its business operations, from the promotional campaigns to the inner corporate regulations. Sara Kristoffersson outlines the major components of this profile in her book *Design by IKEA. A Cultural History* (2014),¹ citing from the company's website:²

[...] IKEA also creates an essentially Swedish self-image by alluding to modernity, democracy, and social and economic justice just as frequently as using romantic images of the countryside: 'IKEA was founded when Sweden was fast becoming an example of the caring society, where rich and poor alike were well looked after. This is also a theme that fits well with the IKEA vision.'³

Swedish exhibitions declared the home the millstone of the welfare state construction. The 1917 furniture exhibition, organised by the Svenska Slöjdföreningen (the Swedish arts and crafts society) at Liljevach art gallery targeted furnishing solutions for small apartments and was highly evaluated by Gregor Paulsson in his *Better Things for Everyday Life* (1919). In the post war period, the *Without Borders* Exhibition in Stockholm (1957) was organised by the Swedish Cooperative Movement, which was founded in

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¹ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*. (London, New Dehli, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014).

² To Kristoffersson's footnote: http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_GB/about_ikea/the_ikea_way/swedish_heritage/index.html (accessed October 10, 2013)

³ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 57.

1919 as a consumer organisation, contributing to the promotion of the home as “essential for the development of the Swedish welfare state,” and as “the leading force in marketing and producing Swedish functionalism.”⁴

The *Without Borders* exhibition had been organised just a year before the first IKEA store opened its doors to the customers in Älmhult in Southern Sweden, close to the home of its founder Ingvar Kamprad. Helena Mattsson describes the *Without Borders* exhibition as “a highly significant event in the Swedish 1950s” that “aspired to present the new “global world” without borders that was taking shape after the war.”⁵ Architecture played a role as the main reformer of the new borderless world, with the notion of home placed at its centre:

In the exhibition *Without Borders* the role of home as a means of production was stressed, also in the layout of the exhibition. By being placed at the lowest level, and at the end of the visitor’s trajectory, the home was the basis for the world of dreams, located at the top level, and for the intermediary level of commodities. Here everyday life has become transformed into an aesthetic of social realism. In this zone the individual is supposed to internalise and negotiate the conflicts generated in the previous worlds between desires and needs, personality and standard.”⁶

The first IKEA store declared its attachment to modernism through the very architectural design of its building; it resembled the Bauhaus style with its pure white walls, clear forms, and ribbon windows (fig. 1.). The ambition was to attract as many customers as possible, making them spend both time and money in the showrooms by, for example, opening an in-store restaurant, for IKEA was “fully aware that people could not buy on an empty stomach.” Another strategy was to make the new store in Älmhult “a magnet for tourists from near and far.”⁷ Nearly sixty years later, in 2016, the building of the first store in Älmhult was turned into the IKEA Museum. It introduced the narrative of IKEA’s success through a rather straightforward

⁴ Mattsson, Helena. “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein Sven-Olov, (eds.). *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 86.

⁵ Mattsson, Helena. “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism,” p. 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*. TITEL books AB for IKEA of Sweden AB, Litopat S.p.A., Italy, 2013.

exhibition on the history of living space in the country of Sweden, tracing its rags to riches story, as one of the exhibition signs explains, from “a poor, isolated European country to a modern role model.” IKEA itself is represented as the chief contributor to the modernisation of living space not only in Sweden, but globally; a lifetime project of its founder Ingvar Kamprad, whose image welcomes everyone who enters the museum (fig. 2.). IKEA’s main goal and business philosophy crystallises around the motto: “*To create a better everyday life for the many people.*” From this motto a modernist lineage can immediately be traced back to Gregor Paulsson’s claim, from 1919: “*Better things for everyday life.*” The line drawn between Paulsson and Kamprad is thus meant to encompass the century of Swedish modernism’s success.

The IKEA catalogues allow one to trace the commercialisation of functionalism in the sphere of living space production through the study of its global distribution and consumption. Catalogues record and reveal the most contemporary trends in furnishing and mass interior designs from the early 1950s – initially IKEA had not aimed to develop its own style. The company had instead appropriated trends that were already out there, both visible and available. The twist that the catalogue added was to represent those consumables in clear and attractive ways, so that they would be understandable to and desired by the middle-class customers; more importantly was their affordability for mass consumption. Specifically, on the style of the first IKEA catalogues, Eva Bjarnestam writes: “The style in the IKEA catalogues was simple, functionalistic and more youthful, often called ‘ultramodern’ or ‘up-to-date’.”⁸

IKEA offered the most fashionable trends at the most affordable prices. Yet the company never undermined the desire and demand of those with higher income for the luxury goods, offering cheaper basic lines along with luxurious and premium quality pieces. Here is how Bjarnestam describes the initial concept of the IKEA catalogues that remains same today:

The catalogue concept can be traced back to the first issue. Next to a sofa and armchair of high technical quality with a slightly higher price, there is almost always a cheap version.⁹

Initially, IKEA did not intend to branch out into modernist aesthetics. Functionalism was neither a conscious choice of style nor a thought-

⁸ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

through marketing decision. It was the nineteen fifties, an era dominated by functionalist aesthetics that also saw the popularisation of the very notion of living space production. IKEA had simply rolled with the times, picking up functionalist objects and putting them on sale. At the same time there seems a certain inevitability about this meeting between modernist design and the Swedish furniture retailer: with its major focus on optimisation and rationalisation of all available resources of production, design, and marketing, IKEA could not have become anything else but the functionalist IKEA at the time it was founded.

In this sense, IKEA confirmed the claims of the most significant intellectual figures of functionalism, namely that art should merge with technology and should be produced through industrial means based on the twin principles of rationalisation and standardisation. Such were the necessary means that allowed not for the simple substitutability of one temporary style for another, but for the reformation and improvement of the production of the living space and of aesthetics *per se*. In all the functionalist manifestoes of the 1930s, the task of connecting the artistic with the industrial means in the production of the living space for a contemporary society – pregnant with technological and aesthetical potential – was a core and defining principle of the functionalist method. IKEA accepted the functionalist directive to “catch the beats of a day;” but what Ginzburg proclaimed in the revolutionary spirit of artistic and socialist unity, IKEA adopts as its marketing strategy.

The Swedish mode of functionalism – the most consumption-friendly of all its modes – declared its first priority to be the satisfaction of people’s needs, and IKEA, in turn, demonstrated an amazing capacity to adapt to the needs and wants of the widest number of individuals.

In *Acceptera*, the most important Swedish architectural manifesto of the time, it was readily acknowledged that housing “has become a commodity produced for sale, and as such must suit as many buyers as possible.”¹⁰ *Acceptera* immediately claimed that in this intention to serve as many people as possible, the produced living space should “fulfil certain minimum standards in terms of quality.”¹¹ This claim was carefully considered by IKEA, which promised high quality of goods at the possible lowest prices, and which by living up to this promise could satisfy the needs of the many.

¹⁰ *Acceptera*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 187.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Accepting functionalist methodology as its major marketing strategy and business philosophy from the very beginning, IKEA searched for design and stylistic ideas that would meet the aesthetic profile most demanded at the time.

The catalogues themselves leave the imprints of IKEA's search for its own identity; at the same time, IKEA demonstrates its modernist credentials owing to this very search. What is revealed to be most modernist about IKEA is the very fact that it was a product of its times.

Ingvar Kamprad never denied the fact that he was ready to appropriate any idea that would lead to the rationalisation of the production process and the increase of sales, admitting that he was pinching ideas wherever he could find them.¹²

Eva Bjarnestam picks up an example from the company's marketing history that is concealed behind the catalogues of the late 1950s and that represents IKEA's ability to quickly assimilate new trends and inventions that might carry commercial potential:

You can't always be first. In 1955 teak became popular, but IKEA has missed that trend. Kamprad and Lundgren were at a furniture fair in Stockholm and discovered that virtually every furniture maker was displaying teak. The printing press was swiftly contacted and the text "now also available in teak" was placed under many pictures in the catalogue, with a guessed price. After that it was just a case of visiting suppliers and getting them to buy teak veneer – after all it was in the catalogue...¹³

An example, then, that demonstrates the company's ability to appropriate new ideas, believed to be a necessary condition for commercial success, and which certainly distinguishes IKEA from the utopian investigations undertaken by artists and independent designers, who always struggle with promoting their ideas. IKEA claims that the originality of a product design should not be the aim in itself. The main thing is to help the product reach as many people as possible and – if to refer to the philanthropic side of IKEA's profile – to affect and better as many peoples' lives as possible.

Picking up ideas that were already lying around would sometimes mean lifting plagiarism to the level of commercial campaigns. If there were more expensive original designs by other companies already on the market, they would quickly be turned into cheaper IKEA versions. In an advertisement

¹² Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 16.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 32.

campaign used for the re-opening of its flagship store on the outskirts of Stockholm in the 1980s, plagiarism was turned into a virtue, brazenly announcing: *'Not for the Rich. But for the Wise.'*¹⁴

Accusations of plagiarism have followed IKEA over its history, leading to legal wrangles, though many of which were successfully resolved. Kamprad has learnt to turn any failure, mistake or an obstacle, from the inconvenient facts about his own biography to controversial commercial campaigns and stolen designs, into an advantage that at the end had led to increased sales. Emphasising the company's social responsibility and concern over the needs of average and even poor people in an effort to satisfy their demands for a good home, IKEA defended its right to offer luxury designs copied from the product lines of other stores at much more affordable prices. Sara Kristoffersson calls it "concern for justice:"

In this context it is easy to see IKEA as a cheeky imitator, cleverly emphasising that the name of the game is follow-my-leader. But the advertising¹⁵ and its rhetoric also suggest a real concern for justice. There is an implication that IKEA is doing something positive for people with limited means. The store becomes a sort of Robin Hood, taking from the rich (copying exclusive high-street stores) and giving to the poor (the mass of people).¹⁶

The focus of the present research is not to investigate the moral qualities and sincerity of IKEA's social claims, though I should certainly admit that related issues have been widely discussed in the mass media. My aim instead is to offer a visual analysis of the contents of its catalogues, so as to trace the ways the aesthetics of the living space has changed through the second half of the twentieth- and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

A chronological approach to an analysis of the IKEA catalogues makes possible an efficient tracing of how the modernist background behind IKEA designs have been played with as well as how IKEA has itself transformed

¹⁴ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 41.

¹⁵ Here Kristoffersson refers to the poster which advertises eight industrially produced IKEA brandy glasses with a bottle of Remy Martin, placing them against some hand-made but closely resembling glasses from a high-street store, advancing the claim that not only do the IKEA glasses possess the same design value and quality but, with the money saved, they afford the possibility of a full glass of luxury brandy. The ad asked: 'Did you hear about the man who bought such expensive glasses but could not afford any brandy?' (Kristoffersson, 2013:41).

¹⁶ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 43.

over time. Further, approaching this material chronologically will give greater visibility to those changes taking place within the everyday living spaces; indeed, one of the empirical virtues of the IKEA catalogues is that they show the everyday in all its complexity. It is not by accident that recently prints from the catalogues have ended up as real museum exhibits, going some way to realising what Le Corbusier once quipped, that “the true museum is the one that contains everything.”¹⁷ On the other hand, together with the showrooms at the stores and the IKEA museum exhibition halls, the catalogues that immaculately present the history of the living space in its everyday representation introduce the everyday living space as a staged spectacle, according to which, as Lefebvre at least understands it, reconciles the fragmentation of the everyday. Unlike the world of the cinematograph that uproots a spectator “from his everyday world by an everyday world *other* than his own,”¹⁸ IKEA puts on stage such an everyday, which remains everyone’s possession, thus keeping alienation from view. If to follow Lefebvre, IKEA aims at producing and displaying “the art of living” then it “implies the end of alienation – and will contribute towards it.”¹⁹

In reality, the overriding goal of IKEA is the drive for profit which, according to Lefebvre, inevitably plays the determining role in a bourgeois society, thereby diminishing the genuine ‘art of living’ to a commercial show performed on an average theatre, where the real needs of the total man are substituted with cheap material things and entertaining pleasures:

As with every genuine art, this will not be reducible to a few cheap formulas, a few gadgets to help us organise out time, our comfort, or our pleasure more efficiently. Recipes and techniques for increasing happiness and pleasure are part of the baggage of bourgeois wisdom – a shallow wisdom which will never bring satisfaction. The genuine art of living implies a human reality, both individual and social, incomparably broader than this.²⁰

Yet, one of the secrets of IKEA’s success lies precisely in this trick of selling “cheap formulas” for “the genuine art of living” that “implies human reality, both individual and social.” In its business philosophy and marketing strategies IKEA goes beyond the ‘thing’ and the ‘gadget’, referring to the real values that can enter the stage, after it takes care of satisfying our basic

¹⁷ Citation in: Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity*, p. 212.

¹⁸ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

demands for comfort and pleasure through accommodating our everyday life with its products.

IKEA skilfully plays, almost in a satirical way, with many of the staple modernist tropes – such as, for example, the ‘new *byt*’ by Arvatov and *Befreites Wohnen* by Giedion. By offering to sell consumables that promise to ease its client’s everyday routines the customer is provided with an image of being detached from any dependence on these things, the liberating result of which is that time, space, and money is saved so that she can concentrate on the importance of non-material practices.

By tracing the history of IKEA, it is thus possible to follow the history of modernist ideas through the twentieth century in their borrowed, commodified, revised, and yet fully implemented form.

Similarly, the fact that IKEA appropriated and, in many cases, directly copied designs of other producers, allows for a visual analysis of the most desirable furnishings of the period that were not necessarily unique to IKEA. IKEA furniture does not introduce original designs, but rather, depending on the circumstances, it proposes general solutions for living spaces, the specific problems about which are keenly and acutely felt by its clients. These solutions are developed with the use of a functionalist methodology that prioritises standardisation, the application of industrial means for the production of living space, and the rational use of available resources. The unification and standardisation of the living space, which makes all apartments “look the same” is an inevitable outcome of this methodology. At the same time, this strategy proves its sustainability and commercial success decade after decade. IKEA, with its truly modernist thinking, offers the possibility to arrange a large variety of interiors while sustaining the individuality of their character through the production of endless combinations of standardised and mass-produced items. Their diversity, in turn, is reduced to a rather limited number of suggested types that are continuously reproduced over the decades. Here, in essence, IKEA follows the instructions put forward by *Acceptera*:

Housing now offers greater possibilities for variation than in the past. The possibility of satisfying individual demands in the design of a dwelling must, for the vast majority of low-income earners, be limited to a choice of type.²¹

²¹ *Acceptera*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 187.

IKEA is the only company of a global size, which has collected the imprints and records of home trends over the past seventy-five years in its catalogues, and which, through its commercial practice, has contributed to the formation and development of the contemporary living space.

In this respect IKEA catalogues are an important source of study, since they replicate, re-appropriate, and re-produce certain types of furniture and living space solutions that preserve their initial modernist aesthetics. Doubtlessly, these types have altered through the decades, adjusting to the new demands of the time as well as to the social, political, and economic changes in the various regions in which IKEA has been in operation; its global reach has affected the ways living space is organised and furnished internationally. The very fact, though, that IKEA could afford to preserve its modernist profile confirms in a certain way the sustainability of the functionalist method as well as the flexibility of its application under various circumstances. It was the universality of the functionalist method that was emphasised by Moisey Ginzburg in his spirited defence of modernist aesthetics against Socialist realism during the period of the “creative discussion” in the Soviet Union, in the 1930s.²²

In my review of the IKEA catalogues I will often refer to Eva Alte Bjarneham's *Ikea: Design and Identity* (2013), a text I have already mentioned above. Bjarneham provides an official narrative of the company's history and offers extensive commentaries on some of the most famous IKEA products. Her text is also helpful inasmuch that it lists the main events in the company's history. Bjarneham's work does not operate as a critical analysis of the company's profile, since, published as an official book on IKEA, it seeks to represent its history in the most advantageous way.

A more critical introduction to IKEA as a cultural phenomenon is provided by Sara Kristoffersson in her *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, which still follows and favours the official line of the company's own corporate representation.

Among the sources connected to the marketing and business aspects of the company's profile that are relied upon in the present chapter include: Ellen Lewis' *Fenomenet Ikea*,²³ and the dissertation theses of Anna Jonsson, *Knowledge Sharing Across Borders – A Study in the IKEA World*²⁴ and

²² See Part I, Chapter I of the present thesis

²³ Lewis, Elen. *Fenomenet Ikea*. (Malmö: Liber AB, 2006)

²⁴ Jonsson, Anna. *Knowledge Sharing across Borders – A Study in the IKEA World*. (Lund: Lund Business Press, 2007)

Miriam Salzer, *Identity Across Borders. A Study in the "IKEA-World."*²⁵ These works focus on the analysis of IKEA's business philosophy, its global expansionism, as well as its marketing technologies. When these things, alongside the company's ideological, aesthetic, and design profile, are considered, then a comprehensive understanding of the history of IKEA history emerges. For the purposes of this study, however, the above dimensions must be understood in terms of their integrated involvement with the modernist aesthetics and the functionalist methods that constitute the grounds and the supports upon which the production of living space is based. Only in this way does the contemporary living space, as represented by IKEA, reveal itself in all its multi-layered and articulated complexity.

The methodology adopted for the purpose of analysing the catalogues is inspired by Beatriz Colomina's *Privacy and Publicity*, in which architectural images and images of architecture are analysed as mediated domains of historical and analytical representations of modernist space.

Beatriz Colomina reads photographic images of architectural objects by Le Corbusier and photographs taken by him during his trips, as well as the photographs of the works, mostly interiors, by Adolf Loos. While Loos' interiors, as proudly noted by the architect, "are totally ineffective in photographs,"²⁶ Le Corbusier, through various ways of production and editing of his photographs, makes them not only represent an architectural object, but he also produces a space within the medium of a photographic image. Le Corbusier not only engages into production of buildings and their photographic representations, but he involves into the process of production of space, operating with all forms and components of contemporary means of production and perception.

The main mechanism by which this is accomplished is, according to Colomina, the "culture industry", the vehicles of which are mass media: cinema, radio, publicity, and periodical publications. Le Corbusier engages fully with this industry. Indeed, it is arguably only through such an engagement that architecture could itself become industrialised."²⁷

To continue this logic, when reading images from IKEA catalogues, as Colomina does with the photographs of architectural works by Le Corbusier that he had staged himself, I see those IKEA images not as the

²⁵ Salzer, Miriam. *Identity across Borders. A Study in the "IKEA-World"*. (Linköping: Department of Management & Economics, 1994)

²⁶ Citation in Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 104.

²⁷ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 107.

pictures of items produced by a furniture company and arranged into photographic scenes, but I read them as the images of the living spaces as imagined, arranged, and introduced in those circumstances that were the most characteristic of that particular year when a catalogue was published. These images are read as products of “culture industry” of the time and, when observed in their sequence and analysed in their visualised progression from one decade to another, they become the images that not only represent the living spaces that had been propagated, desired, and demanded at that time, but that had also produced those spaces, even if they had never existed in their physical matter as in the case with fully digitalised interiors, which nowadays constitute most of IKEA catalogues’ content.

Colomina refers to a book by Stanislaus von Moos, first published in Germany in 1968,²⁸ who noted on Le Corbusier’s ignorance towards relation and connection of his architecture to any particular site, claiming that the architecture for him “is a conceptual matter to be resolved in the purity of the realm of ideas.”²⁹ Colomina continues that when architecture is being photographed, it is incorporated into a two-dimensional space of a printed page, which “returns it into the realm of ideas”:

The function of photography is not to reflect, in a mirror image, architecture as it happens to be built. Construction is a significant moment in the process, but by no means its end product. Photography and layout construct another architecture in the space of the page. Conception, execution, and reproduction are separate, consecutive moments in a traditional process of creation. But in the elliptic course of Le Corbusier’s process this hierarchy is lost. Conception of the building and its reproduction cross each other again.³⁰

The images of the IKEA catalogues often remain within the realm of the ideas and imaginary, they are not in any way connected to any particular site. IKEAs interiors bear no connection to the exterior of a supportive building, and de facto they are themselves seldom the interiors as such – they are imagined spaces. Images in IKEA catalogues are the prints of the living space in production; when read one after another, they introduce nearly linear history of contemporary living space. They are the archives of

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²⁸ Here I refer to the following edition: Moos, von Stanislaus. *Le Corbusier – Elements of a Synthesis*. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009) First published in Germany in 1968.

²⁹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

ideas of means and forms of the living space production, the records of a search for what should constitute the inside of the mass-produced contemporary housing.

This reading of IKEA images in this way helps to draw a genealogical line to IKEA straight from the functionalist era, thereby providing the ground for a further analysis of IKEA's genetic relation to a modernist aesthetics and to the functionalist methods directed towards the production of living space.

4.1. The living space in print: an overview of the early IKEA catalogues

The first IKEA catalogue from 1951 'opens a road to good shopping' with its motto *Vägen till goda inköp*. It places the MK chair on the cover (fig 3.). In 2013 the same chair under the new name of STRANDMON returns to the stores and catalogues (fig. 4.). It is promoted as one of the iconic IKEA products, with a biographical note added that Ingvar Kamprad regards it as his favourite armchair; one he is always happy to take a rest in when he returns home This armchair symbolically bridges IKEA's past and present, building its own historical narrative through an uninterrupted row of catalogues.

IKEA keeps writing its linear history, inscribing it into the national and even global history. Past and present are linked through the revival of items designed in the early years and where their continued success is predicted. All of this (the success of IKEA, the success of its products) is meant to reflect on and be a reflection of Swedish success. As noted by Sara Kristoffersson:

The linear narrative is constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end. Specific events are linked to each other in chronological order with a logical connection and intelligible explanations of IKEA's success concept. The past becomes meaningful while, at the same time, the future is predicted. And the story ends in similar fashion to many other success stories: the hero is victorious, achieving his goal and winning the adulation of the people.³¹

The MK/STRANDMON armchair re-introduced in the 2013 serves as one of the monuments to the timeless combination of comfort, quality, and design. Three years later, in 2016, the IKEA museum is opened in its first

³¹ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 21.

store in Älmhult. But it can already be observed through the catalogues where since 2013 IKEA has been turning to its own roots, bringing the most popular pieces back to its product range. Not only the Swedish past, but IKEA's own past becomes the source of inspiration and a point of reference, which historicises and legitimises the timelessness and sustainability of the IKEA world.

The first catalogue offers both pre-packaged furniture sets, for example for the living room, as well as separate furniture pieces. The functionalist approach to the organisation of living space can be traced through furniture designed for multifunctional interiors. For instance, the INGA LILL fold-down 'Murphy' beds could easily help turn a living room into a bedroom (fig. 5.). The idea of transformable interiors was carefully considered by Russian constructivists, such as Moisey Ginzburg; German and Austrian architects, such as, for example, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky; as well as by the members of the Bauhaus school.

An interesting glimpse into the time recorded in the first catalogue is the EVA kitchen sofa that can be folded into a double bed (fig. 6.). The fact that it the sofa-bed was meant for a kitchen assumes the possibility that not only a living room or a cabinet could be converted into a bedroom, but a kitchen could function as a sleeping area too. The very existence of such an item of furniture discloses the tremendous housing shortage and lack of living space within Swedish homes at the time (the situation in Russia and Germany would be even worse).

The idea that a living space required strict zoning in accordance with the function it performed, was something promoted by functionalism. It was already realised at the design stage of ground floor planning, as outlined in *Acceptera*:

A clear trend toward differentiation of the plans of dwellings in view of these three functions³² is a fundamental feature in building modern design.³³

Unfortunately, as the *Acceptera* authors admit, "far too often the living room is the only room", which requires to "make full use of the space." In response to this problem, the authors suggest the following solutions:

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³² These are the functions of a dwelling as outlined in *Acceptera*: "to provide space for housework, cooking, etc., to enable the family to gather for meals and spend time together, and to offer a place to rest and to sleep at night" (*Acceptera*, 2008:198)

³³ *Acceptera*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 199. (In bold in the original)

[...] sleeping arrangements must serve as seating during the day or via mechanical device, wall beds, “Murphy beds” or the like, be concealed from view. In the most difficult cases even living rooms will be cramped, and each item of furniture required is to serve a number of purposes. Somewhere to sleep can, as mentioned, offer seating during the day, a place to write has to be combined with furniture for storage and perhaps with a bookcase as well, and so on.³⁴

The very existence of the folding bed, designed for a kitchen and introduced in a catalogue, signal that this type of furniture was in high demand. Beyond this, it indicates the lack of living space available to an average dweller. What it thus shows is that the limited space forced some family members to sleep in the kitchen or, alternatively – and which ultimately amounts to the same thing – that the only room in the home had to combine the functions of a living room, bedroom, as well as the kitchen.

Folding beds and bed-sofas that allowed for multifunctional interiors were among the core products in the early 1950s catalogues. Since the beginning of the *Miljonprogrammet*, initiated in 1965 – a state sponsored programme that significantly eased housing problems in Swedish towns – foldable beds declined in popularity, and even though today they have not disappeared from the catalogue pages entirely, the accent has been shifted to regular sofas.

IKEA’s continuous careful consideration of consumer needs and demands in different regions can be traced through a comparison of two recent catalogues – the Swedish and Russian versions of the 2016 edition. It is common for IKEA to slightly change the range of its products and their representation depending on supposed regional differences (i.e. differences of a cultural, social, and meteorological nature).

In the Swedish edition of the 2016 IKEA catalogue, the sofa section begins on page 214 and comprises of eight pages of products. Five of the eight pages introduce regular sofas that cannot be folded and transformed into night beds – seventeen pieces altogether. Two pages are dedicated to sofa-beds³⁵ – where eight various designs are presented. In the Russian catalogue from the same year, the sofa section begins on page 212 extending to six pages, out of which five pictures promote sofa-beds – sixteen different versions – with only one page set aside for the display of regular beds (amounting to four different types).

³⁴ Ibid, p. 202.

³⁵ One page is occupied by the iconic STRANDMON armchair in green.

Foldable sofas are still extremely popular in Russia, owing to housing shortage and the unaffordable costs of apartments. Often several family generations are forced to live in the same apartment where each room of the living space is assigned to a separate family. Thus, each generation sleeps in each room of the flat, which makes the option of a sofa-bed the best solution for an interior that serves a living room during the day and a bedroom during the night. Yet even those who do not lack the space, and can afford a separate living room and a bedroom, nonetheless still buy a foldable sofa as a sleeping place for guests and visiting relatives, customary as it is to offer guests an overnight stay after even the most spontaneous visit or celebration. It is also customary for Russian families to insist that even their most distant relatives, when travelling in their area, stay with them, rather than book a hotel. A gesture meant to express true care and hospitality, even if their home is too small to accommodate guests.

Differences in life styles affecting the organisation of the home and of home furnishings have been carefully studied by IKEA from the start. This meticulous care to differences hearkens back to the continuation of a tradition of surveying households, initiated in Sweden in the 1930s in order to identify a dweller's basic needs.³⁶ Eva Bjarnestam outlines the activities that help the company adjust its range according to local variations in customer taste and preference:

Early on in the process of developing a range, IKEA began visiting normal homes to see how people furnish their homes and solve their living problems. This enables the company to form an idea of which problems have not been solved [...]

Wherever IKEA is, it also carries out regular market surveys to gather information about its customers. IKEA also has focus groups which give their views on the catalogue, for instance.³⁷

Sometimes these adaptations have led to controversial decisions, such was the case in 2013, when IKEA was heavily criticised in the mass media for erasing women from the Saudi Arabian catalogue.

The *Acceptera*'s call to use the available floor plan to its capacity, where "at least the most important requirements can be met" and to develop solutions

³⁶ For example, the 1933 survey that resulted in the '*Report on the Social Conditions of Housing*'. See the "Introduction" by Mattsson and Wallenstein In: *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, pp.16–18.

³⁷ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 208.

through which “the minimal cube can be used for maximum benefit”³⁸ was a repeated mantra that, during the 1950s, IKEA was cognisant. The ‘minimal cubes’ of living space appear even on the front cover of the IKEA catalogue from 1958 (fig. 7.) yet the ‘cubist’ concept has not been developed further and remained a decorative element that suggests a multidimensional perception of the idea of living space. The motto on the cover: *Lyckokast till önskebo* (*successful in designing desirable living*) announces the company’s high achievements in satisfying not only people’s needs, but their wants as well.

In the middle of the decade IKEA offered its customers a free service called *Where should the cupboard go?*, which suggested design of individual interiors and their furnishing with IKEA products.³⁹ Beginning in 1953, the floor plans were introduced in catalogues, and in 1955 the sketch of a floor plan was placed on the cover (fig. 8.). Thus, already in its early years, IKEA shifted from an emphasis on designing and selling the furniture and products for home to the production and selling of living space.

Catalogues now included drawing pages on which a customer could draw a plan of her apartment before visiting the showrooms (fig. 9.). This idea would also return in the 2000s when IKEA started publishing detailed dimensions of the FAKTUM kitchen elements as well as publishing advice on how to use their online program for the purposes of kitchen design. Yet help and assistance in planning could still be received in the stores themselves.

As for the black and white, and colour photographic images in the catalogues from the 1950s – they still display mostly separate furniture pieces, furniture sets, as well as their various combinations suggested for different rooms: for example, a soft-furniture set with a cupboard and a carpet, or a combination for a bedroom, etc. At this time, images of entire interiors (be it a single room or an entire apartment space) showing a clear function were hardly offered. Thus in the early examples of catalogues the reader was not always informed on the transformative potential of the furnishings, receiving little hints about their efficient use. In this sense IKEA was way behind the ways in which interior solutions were presented in the functionalist projects of the twenties and thirties, as well as behind those modelled living spaces installed during various housing exhibitions of the interwar period. At this early stage, functionalism revealed itself in IKEA only through a modest modern design and owing to the high functional potential of sepa-

³⁸ *Acceptera*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 198.

³⁹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 25.

rate objects for everyday use, such as, for instance, stools and tables that could be inserted into each other, thereby saving space.

IKEA's major aesthetic message during the 1950s was "what [is] practical and important [is] also beautiful."⁴⁰ This slogan referred to the earlier Swedish functionalist texts by Ellen Key *The Beauty in the Home* (1899) and Gregor Paulsson's *Better Things for Everyday Life* (1919). Both texts defined the beautiful as necessarily possessing functionality and purposefulness. The same strapline returns to the catalogues in 2010s when, for instance, the 2015 catalogue introduces products for the home with a foreword about what IKEA understands as good design: "Design in our understanding – is not simply a beautiful form. It is the high quality for the many years as well as the necessary practicality."⁴¹

The 1960s catalogues open with a rather functionalist cover reminiscent of constructivists photo-collages. Here the slogan *Önskebo till önskepris* (*Desirable home at desirable prices*) is used as an image-forming element (fig. 10.). The *Önskebo till önskepris* slogan had in fact appeared a few years earlier, in 1958, when introducing original IKEA designs. This was itself significant, since, as discussed above, the company had initially been selling from different producers and suppliers. The same motto would appear again on the cover of the 1961 catalogue (fig. 11.).⁴²

In the 1950s and 1960s IKEA heavily contributed to the formation of a "reasonable" consumer, putting emphasis not only on the satisfaction of a customer's needs, but also by appealing to her desires. The need to construct a reasonable consumer as the 'right' element for the welfare state system – educating her through marketing strategies by arranging the choice of products available on the market – was considered one of the state's primary tasks already by the *Acceptera* authors. Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein conclude that "in Swedish functionalism it is the very consumption of the commodity that produces the new consumer."⁴³

⁴⁰ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 30.

⁴¹ The IKEA catalogue, 2015: 159)

⁴² For a short reflection on the issue of dwellers' needs and desires – as well as to the moral aspect of distinguishing between the two – in addition to their potential for commercial appropriation through the reasonable consumption policy for the production of a new society, was previously discussed in the chapter of this thesis on the Swedish mode of functionalism.

⁴³ Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov "Introduction" In: *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, pp. 16–18.

IKEA's mottos and marketing claim to offer people what they want and to organise the homes they *desire*. But this was not an IKEA invention, rather a response to the 'desirable homes' campaigns organised by Swedish retailers at the beginning of the 1950s.⁴⁴ What was specifically stressed in the campaigns run by IKEA through its showrooms and catalogues, was precisely *the affordability* of a *desirable* home.

This emphasis on the affordability of desired things was at the core of the IKEA strategy in the 1950s. However, this had some unintended yet predictable consequences. The company soon garnered a reputation of the company for selling low-quality products. This forced IKEA into a defensive position, and in the 1960s it needed to demonstrate that cheap did not necessarily equate to poor quality goods. During this time, catalogues were used to improve the company's image:

All IKEA catalogues explained how IKEA was able to keep its prices low, but towards the end of the decade it also talked about "Low prices coupled with good quality" – that it had to be "Low price with meaning."⁴⁵

4.2. 1960s: The living space for sale

From the beginning of the 1960s, IKEA had started promoting its store in Älmhult. Yet, the store was introduced not only as a showroom, where customers could touch products and observe them in various combinations before submitting orders. It was more than this: what was offered was a particular *living experience*: as a weekend family trip; as an excursion to the world of contemporary design; as a choice for a summer holiday destination, as for instance promoted in the 1960 catalogue under the heading *Bilsemester i Sommar (Summer Driving Holiday)*.⁴⁶

A visit to the store was to be an end in itself: to make the journey to Älmhult was to go to IKEA. A stay in the town was filled with great impressions that contributed to the image of IKEA as a company that did not only produce goods for the home, but that produced experiences and memories, and that formed lifestyles. As described by Eva Bjarnestam (fig. 12.):

⁴⁴ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁶ The IKEA catalogue: 1960, p. 11.

Travelling to Älmhult in the early 1960s was like taking a charter flight – an experience for the whole family. In 1963 you could stay overnight in the new motel, a ‘swimotel’ with 25 rooms and a swimming pool. The restaurant was “ultramodern and fitted with an electric oven, etc.” The expanded exhibition spaces displayed furniture in its setting, and personnel who “really know interiors” showed the furniture with influences not only from Sweden, but also Denmark, Italy and the US. The company still talked about a showroom rather than a store. Customers ordered their furniture, which was then delivered.”⁴⁷

The arrangement of goods for the home was tied to the tradition of “home exhibitions” from the first half of the twentieth century in Europe. These exhibitions were important not only for business, industry, and commerce; they were popular public events too, attracting huge numbers of visitors (for instance at the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930). These fairs additionally had influenced on state housing policy.

One of the most significant exhibitions of the late 1950s in Sweden – the *Without Borders* exhibition of 1957 in Stockholm – introduced mass-produced commodities, such as objects for everyday use, kitchen utensils, and dishes. There were rows upon rows of apparently indistinguishable household objects. But, on closer inspection, they revealed decorative design patterns; the delicate hand of the artisan was fused with the power of industrial production. This merging of two conflicting worlds were at the core of the collective design concept from the 1930s onwards, and was promoted as part of the application of the functionalist method to modern living space production.

In these exhibition spaces, everyday life was celebrated as a continuous spectacle, which might have invoked the social orientation of modernist aesthetics. As Helena Mattson writes:

Using a repetitive technique of presentation was a way to de-emphasise the uniqueness of each item, and to highlight their communal quality. The object appeared to be absorbed into a mass ornament, which gave the individual commodity an architectural and spatial quality – it created a new environment.

Toilets and washbasins were piled up to construct spatial environments through walls, and the large number of identical objects being repeated created different wall ornaments. In this way, the functional object was reduced, or may be rather transformed, into a decorative building element.

⁴⁷ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 47.

Even the bulbs were given a double function, hanging as “fringes” from the lamp-shade. Through this organisational strategy, the products produced new patterns and forms as events, and the individual product has to give place to the personal experience of the space as a whole.⁴⁸

This same strategy, borrowed from the modernist arsenal of spatial and artistic expressions, according to which the repetitive image of a mass-produced object emphasises the nature of industrial and collective design, has often been exploited by IKEA in the representation of its everyday products and household utensils in contemporary catalogues, especially in the stores (fig. 13–14.).

With the opening of the IKEA museum in Älmhult, the apogee of the serial representation of objects is reached: various products are fixed to the walls, arranged in a spectrum of colour, the immediate effect of which is a throwback to pop-art (fig. 15.). These halls lead to the exhibition rooms, introducing the ‘IKEA World’ through the art space formed by its basic product range.

IKEA has been incorporating artistic spheres, curatorial practices, and museum organisation strategies into its marketing strategies from the very beginning. Eva Bjarnestam, in her official history of IKEA, recalls the very design of IKEA’s flagship store at Kungens Kurva near Stockholm (opened in 1965), which remains the largest IKEA store in the world. The shopping mall is circular in its shape with galleries arranged in a manner allowing for a spiral ascension when roaming through its spaces. The idea for the design came to Ingvar Kamprad after visiting the Guggenheim museum in New York.⁴⁹

The new store had revealed IKEA’s concept to sell not only furniture and goods for home, but to sell ready-made living spaces, prefabricated in the exhibition halls:

The store at Kungens kurva has genuine, well-considered home interiors along its 24-cornered walls. Not stiffly arranged furniture in small groups, but real environments based on activity and action. The boundary between products and the home environment was erased.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mattsson, Helena. “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and personalisation in Swedish functionalism,” p. 90.

⁴⁹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

In her “Museum” chapter from the book *Privacy and Publicity*,⁵¹ Beatriz Colomina recalls a story from the *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932. Colomina reflects on different approaches towards modernism and contemporary style between Le Corbusier and the exhibition curators, Philip Johnson and Henry-Russel Hitchcock:

But where for Le Corbusier this contemporary style was to be found precisely in the everyday object and the industrial product, that is, in the unself-conscious anonymous design, for Johnson and Hitchcock the International Style was specifically established by a few masters and masterpieces. [...]

For Le Corbusier, concerned with the everyday, the new style is everywhere and precisely for that reason difficult to discern. For Johnson, concerned with exclusive moment of high culture, the difficulty is that the International Style necessarily dies in the very moment it is canonised.⁵²

Colomina notes that although the exhibition encouraged the introduction of private houses by famous modernist architects, curators still aimed at establishing the “dichotomy between art and life, the artwork and the everyday object, by maintaining a hierarchy between architecture and building, between ‘the aesthetic’ and the ‘technical or sociological’.”⁵³ Yet, the department of architecture and design, which was established in the museum as a direct consequence of the exhibition, addressed a wider audience than those who could afford “architecture in addition to building,” as noted by Hitchcock and Johnson.⁵⁴ Specifically, “middle class and mainly women” were targeted. As Colomina concludes:

The international Style publicized the private, not simply because it exhibited the private houses of some art collectors, but because it offered that image for mass consumption in the form of the multiple, relatively affordable, designer objects that were part of it: rugs, chairs, lamps, tables, appliances, and so on.⁵⁵

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⁵¹ Colomina, Beatriz. “Museum.” In: *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, pp. 201–232.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵⁴ Citation in: Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Thus, the intimate sphere of the home – that is, the enclosed world of the everyday – entered the public space of a sophisticated museum. As Le Corbusier would argue (and as noted by Colomina in her monograph), as a result of both this territorial encroachment of domesticity as the proper space of art and the transformation of the status of routinised objects into museum artefacts, the museum “was ‘everywhere’ – in the street, in the city – but missing at home.”⁵⁶

This elevation of everyday anonymous objects of industrial design into the museum space was reconfirmed in the IKEA store at Kungens Kurva. With its highly contemporary architectural form modelled on the Guggenheim Museum, the borders between an art museum and a furniture store, between museum exhibits and industrially produced objects, were once again blurred. The objects in the store were not simply presented as commodities, but as cultural objects of international collective design. This IKEA marketing strategy cites Le Corbusier’s modernist definition of a true museum “that contains everything”, which, as Colomina argues, affirms that “the museum and the world become conflated with each other.”⁵⁷

IKEA stores offered not simply products for sale, but the living space. Indeed, the issue to be negotiated was the same for modernist architecture, which, as Colomina argues, was “from the beginning, a commodity”⁵⁸ – a supposition that would be made explicit by the time of the *Modern Architecture* Exhibition at MOMA.

The living space offered for sale in IKEA stores includes more than just the furniture arranged in the showroom; after all, none of the partitioned exhibits even form a complete interior or a ready-made solution available for commission and delivery. What is exhibited and offered for purchase in an IKEA store is the sense of the living space as a complex articulated whole, comprised of relationships between first the physical spatial dimensions of a room and the furniture, through which the room is inhabited; second, between the mass produced everyday items and more exclusive art objects and artefacts that keep personal memories and thus individualise the space; and perhaps most important of all, between material components of the home environment and the living activities practiced outside of the dwelling space – that is, between the physical space and the life styles, cultural codes, and feelings that infuse the living space, both within and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 212.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 195.

beyond the walls of a home. In short, IKEA offers an organisation of space that considers the porous and dynamic relation between the private and the public.

Since the opening of the Kungens Kurva store, people were invited not only to shop for items, but to participate in the production and reformation of their living spaces. Bjarnestam notes in this regard that even the name of the store raised a discussion on whether it should be called “Möbel-Ikea” or just “Ikea”. Even though at the beginning both names were in use, the store was soon left under the sign of simply IKEA, emphasising not the type of products that was sold inside, but the very concept of the living space organisation that the company offered for sale.⁵⁹

Since 1961, catalogues started to include images of living spaces, gradually retreating from framed representations of completely staged interiors. The cover of the 1961 catalogue (fig. 11.) displays a shot of a room corner where a furniture set consisting of a sofa and two armchairs, arranged around a coffee table, is partially cut off from the picture, directing attention instead towards a TV furniture set and the TV itself, which at that time had become an inseparable part of a regular modern apartment. Drawing a further parallel with Colomina’s investigation into the work of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, it is helpful to note how the photographic technique of representing the living space through a dramatic photographic cut was practiced by Loos in his interiors and their images. Colomina calls this “a strategy of physical separation and visual connection”,⁶⁰ the target of which was the reproduction of everyday living spaces through a staged interior organisation that would then be subject to a reframing: “What is being framed is the traditional scene of everyday domestic life.”⁶¹

The IKEA catalogue image (fig. 11.) extends beyond the living room furniture set and shows a dining area with a round table and five chairs around it, thus demonstrating an example of a multifunctional interior with well-distinguished zoning. The everyday living delicately enters the picture through a basket that stands on the floor near the chest board as if somebody had forgotten to remove it before the picture was taken. The unsuspecting basket becomes the expression of a real lived interior.

This trick to create a feeling of an inhabited space through indications left by an absent body was also incorporated into Le Corbusier’s architec-

⁵⁹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 255.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

tural images. Colomina describes its effects in relation to a series of photographs taken at the Villa Savoye:⁶²

And even once we have reached the highest point of the house, as in the terrace of Villa Savoye on the sill of the window that frames the landscape, the culminating point of the promenade, here also we find a hat, a pair of sunglasses, a little package (cigarettes?) and a lighter, and now, where did the *gentleman* go? Because of course, as you would have noticed already, the personal objects are all male objects (never a handbag, a lipstick, or some piece of women's clothing). But before that. We are following somebody, the traces of his existence presented to us in the form of a series of photographs of the interior. The look into these photographs is a forbidden look. The look of a detective. A voyeuristic look.⁶³

The images arranged and presented in the IKEA catalogue are much more innocent and decorative in expositing inhabited spaces than those of Le Corbusier. Nevertheless, they refer to the same aesthetic, even though they aim at producing an inclusive and inviting, rather than a deceptive and mysterious, effect.

Once one begins thumbing through the pages of the 1960s' catalogue, the images that one encounters still possess a strong staged effect, and yet they continue promoting multifunctional interiors that are ready for living. The living spaces in the catalogue demonstrate the functional zoning of rooms. Living-room spaces are combined with dining areas (fig. 16.) or working-corners where, for example, a sewing machine or a writing desk stands, resembling traditional gendered occupations of the owners or a bedroom set is accompanied with a baby cradle that reveals the constellation of a young family.

The early 1960s catalogue images explicitly stage the living spaces for a particular cohort of inhabitants – usually a nuclear family, modelling the function of each spatial zone through easy to follow and clear indices: objects connotative of a particular occupation, specific furnishings that will appeal to different age groups, etc.: such considerations go into representing domestic life as an attractive spectacle, forming and directing the desires of potential customers. In this way, these images are closer in their “theatricality,” as Colomina puts it, to Loos's interiors, which, she claims, are con-

⁶² Ibid., p. 289.

⁶³ Ibid.

structed “by many forms of representation (of which built space is not necessarily the most important):”

Many of the photographs, for instance, tend to give the impression that someone is just about to enter the room, that a piece of domestic drama is about to be enacted. The characters absent from the stage, from the scenery and from its props – the conspicuously placed pieces of furniture – are conjured up.⁶⁴

Yet, to Loos, the deliberateness of the reproduction of an inhabited living space, this ‘theatricality’, should demonstrate not the drama of a designed interior, but the drama of the family life – a twist that was subconsciously captured and developed by IKEA in its catalogues. IKEA followed Loos’ representations of living spaces both through physical arrangements of his interiors and their photographic representations.⁶⁵

On the pages of printed catalogues IKEA always sticks only to positive dramas of the everyday, promoting happy and pacifying sides of living – from morning routines in sunny bathrooms and peaceful slumbers in cosy bedrooms to the family celebrations in living rooms, and fun activities performed in kitchens. Yet, on the other hand, the company’s television adverts have often adopted a contrasting tone, exploiting irony all the way up to the extremes of black humour. This has, from time to time, resulted in absurdist and sometimes shocking plot-lines, from the American “Story of an abandoned lamp” (2002)⁶⁶ to the French ad of a stool “C’EST SOLIDE” (2011),⁶⁷ as well as the Russian commercial “If our characters knew about our new kitchens, these deaths could be easily avoided” (2013).⁶⁸

The first clip (“Story of an abandoned lamp”) tells the story of an old red lamp, whose owner – a nice looking young woman – discards the lamp from her cosy corner by the window that overlooks a dark and a rainy street. The lamp looks into its former window, where its ex-owner is enjoying the warm glow from a brand-new IKEA lamp that now occupies the very space that it once had stood. The rain is pouring, and sentimental sad music evokes strong feelings of empathy for the abandoned lamp. Then a passer-by suddenly stops in front of the lamp, making the viewer pray for

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⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 250.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

⁶⁶ Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU-cori12KU>

⁶⁷ Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfhfS_WRqRI

⁶⁸ Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH2HPAuolio>

him to adopt it. But instead the man turns towards the camera, announcing with a disgusted face: “Many of you feel bad for this lamp. That is because you’re crazy. It has no feelings. And the new one is much better.”⁶⁹

The French video presents a solidly built stool (unlike all the other chairs and armchairs before it). The twist, however, turns on the fact that an old man uses the stool to commit suicide after a series of failed efforts. In the case of the Russian commercial, the advert shows three men committing suicide because they have been turned into kitchen slaves by their wives who refuse to cook in the old and grubby kitchens.

The use of black humour in commercials is, of course, not an invention of IKEA. What is particularly noteworthy is how the general theme explored in the IKEA ads is the relation between a human being and IKEA objects, which become essentially natural and organic elements of, basically, any living space. The bodily experience of the living space leads to “domestic melodramas,” as Colomina names them, and which Loos mentions in his writings on the “question of house.”⁷⁰ There he argues for a representation of a home interior as, first of all, a space where life and death happen. He describes, for example, a suffering woman, crying before she is about to die or commit suicide; the event happens in a room where in that very moment the trivial question about the quality of interior design is egregiously inappropriate and misplaced.⁷¹ An interior should be represented as a space that opens up towards the drama of life and not simply designed for the purpose of exhibiting its decorative qualities to a random and disinterested viewer. In this connection, Colomina notes:

[...] Loos is saying that the house must not be conceived of as a work of art, that there is a difference between a house and a “series of decorated rooms”. The house is the state for the theatre of the family, a place where people are born and live and die. Whereas a work of art, a painting, presents itself to a detached viewer as an object, the house is received as an environment, as a stage, in which the viewer is involved.⁷²

Throughout the catalogues IKEA upholds Loos’ statement of representing interiors as habitable living spaces, putting emphasis on depicting happy

⁶⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU-cori12KU>

⁷⁰ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 252.

⁷¹ See full citation in: Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 252.

⁷² *Ibid.*

dramas of the everyday living that are sustained and furnished with delicate care from the company.

By the early 1960s children's rooms entered the catalogues, admitting and promoting the necessity to provide for different age groups with separate spaces based on their particular preferences and life-styles. One of the interiors represents a boy's room under which the following text is written: "Stabila grejor och abetsytor behövs i grabbarnas rum" ("stable objects and workspaces are needed in boys' rooms"), thereby drawing attention to a toddlers' special needs.⁷³

An image of a teenager's room is designed in a lively manner, and one can guess about the age, gender, and interests of the occupant through its very spatial arrangement: posters on the walls; sports flags; bottles of cola and food on the table. Even if in a very modest way, they show the world of the teenager during the early sixties.

Catalogues serve an educational purpose, since they both show and explain the necessary elements of a child's living space. The 1961 catalogue features a room for two girls of different ages, where bright colours of blue and green dominate. The interior includes toys and play-furniture as well as a writing desk for the elder sister. The title declares: "Glada färger och god belysning i två små flickors eget rum" ("Happy colours and good lighting in the room of two little girls").⁷⁴

In this way IKEA engages in two prescriptive operations: (i) promoting the necessity of separating out the living spaces for children as well as (ii) setting the standards for the arrangement of a child's room, its design, and the equipment to be placed therein. Everything must be calibrated and arranged so as to be most beneficial for the child's physical and psychological health.

Only in the catalogues from 1967 onwards are people present not in the staged interiors, but in the images of the spaces that are lived: the first is of a teenager lying on a soft rug in the living room listening to music.⁷⁵ He does not pose for camera, but rather a moment of his everyday living is captured. In his Villa Savoye series (already referred to in this chapter), Le Corbusier depicts the living space in the form of a woman vanishing from the camera's view. She does not avoid the camera, rather she is totally unaware of it fol-

⁷³ The IKEA catalogue: 1961, p. 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁵ The IKEA catalogue: 1967, p. 24.

lowing her. In commenting upon this image, Colomina notes that “here we are literally following somebody, the point of view is that of a voyeur.”⁷⁶

The boy lounging around on a rug, living his life under hidden the surveillance of a camera will soon be replaced with more glamorous female models, who become the decorative elements of the interiors that have been carefully arranged. The models help to sell the furniture rather than promote the idea of the living space. The habitable living spaces are often represented in catalogues through the images of interiors that are filled with tactile and sensible knick-knacks, little incidental reminders that are supposed to connect to the idea and feeling of one’s home: something individual, peculiar, and thus imperfect, carrying the traces of domestic melodramas that are performed within these everyday spaces.

4.3. 1970s: Searching for identity

In the space of a decade, this pattern of capturing moments of everyday life within IKEA-produced spaces will become a distinctive IKEA feature. In the meantime, – during most of the 1960s and the early 1970s – IKEA interiors would mostly be ‘decorated’ with classy-looking female models: young women of middle and upper class appearance, wearing causal, yet well considered fashionable clothes; their hair touched by a professional hairdresser, their makeup perfect, and their poses revealing a clear awareness of the photographer, even if a direct gaze into the camera is avoided, thereby giving the impression of being otherwise occupied, either with a magazine or by friendly conversation (fig. 18–23.) Women are hardly ever depicted as engaging in household chores, thereby adding to the idea that the home should be a place for relaxation; even if these same women are often surrounded by the clatter and chatter of playing children. An exception to this rule can be found in a small image within the 1973 catalogue,⁷⁷ where a woman sewing is photographed with her back to the camera. The image functions as a way to address the place of work within the arrangement of the living space.

Female models figure also on the 1970 and 1971 covers, serving as decorative elements of interiors, rather than as their possessors and inhabitants, while children are absorbed in the “natural” and “idyllic” state of play.

⁷⁶ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 293.

⁷⁷ IKEA catalogue: 1973, p. 95.

Men arrived onto the scene belatedly, from the very late sixties (fig. 24–25.) This could suggest that the target audience during previous decades was mostly women, supposedly more inclined to identify with glamorous models or those care-free mothers resting in their perfected interiors. When men are finally represented in the catalogue images, they appear often indirectly, mostly from the side or from the back, usually playing the partner’s role in a woman’s conversation or in a child’s entertainment (fig. 26–27.). Men began to take more active roles in the catalogues from the mid-seventies onwards. In the 1974 cover, for instance, a man appears as more than just a bystander (fig. 28.). Yet, even then it is the woman who still has the leading role in the party. On the one hand, this indicates once more the catalogue’s principal addressee and, which, at the same time, can be retrospectively interpreted as sustaining an overall feminist profile that IKEA has claimed from the very beginning,⁷⁸ even if until the mid-seventies, the representation of women in the catalogues was fetishised.

The everyday quality that the living space is meant to embody through these images is diluted with the presence of clothes that uniformly hang on the rails; the images themselves seek to tell the viewer something about the gender and class belonging of the inhabitants who reside in these living spaces, even their family composition. But all is sanitised, cleansed of its everydayness. The characters of these images reminiscent of those by Loos, as interpreted by Colomina: “The photographs suggest that it is intended that these spaces be comprehended by occupation, by using this furniture, by “entering” the photograph, by inhabiting it.”⁷⁹

Since the middle of the 1970s this sense of a perfected order of things has fallen away, with people being shown in their more natural everyday occupations. To give a few examples: a man and woman are having breakfast or a coffee break in the kitchen with the table set in a more careless manner (fig. 29.); a woman is feeding her child (fig. 30.) or cooking in the kitchen; a man and a woman are towelling themselves after shower.

The living spaces of the 1970s allow routines to reveal a sense of cosiness and the charm of everyday life. The rooms are not entirely prepared for a visitor, be it a photographer or a guest; they are arranged in a manner that is enjoyable *for* the inhabitants. As Ellen Key claimed in her *Beauty in the*

⁷⁸ As e.g. throughout the official book on IKEA history by Eva Bjarnestam: Bjarnestam: *IKEA. Design and Identity* (2013).

⁷⁹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 293.

Home, “for it is my own eyes, not the eyes of my friends, which I should please.”⁸⁰

A young woman reads a magazine, relaxing on the sofa with her pyjamas on: this image contrasts with those of the perfected models of previous years – she is a possessor of her space, not a staffage or a decorative element; she is simply living her life (fig. 31.). The creative chaos and the results of children’s work enter their colourful rooms (fig. 32.), even a small personal story about sending dad to a shop for an armchair and a bed, as if hand-written by a child, complements the catalogue of 1974.

Yet, these images are not yet the images of the lived spaces that were captured by camera in their continuing everyday existence. They are still genetically connected to the spaces depicted in Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye series, which are the spaces that are first produced and then ‘inhabited’ by his characters, whether they are present in the picture or not. The spaces in the images, both in Corbusier’s photographs and the IKEA catalogues of the 1970s, are *first* imagined and *then* materialised. The human presence within these interiors may produce the effect of these spaces being inhabited, while both the very habitation and the effect reached through these images remains under the total control of their authors. “The house is drawn with a picture already in mind,”⁸¹ as Colomina writes, commenting on Le Corbusier’s reflections over the notion of modern habitation in light of the Villa Savoye photo series:

“The key to the problem of modern habitation,” continues Le Corbusier, is “to inhabit first ... placing oneself afterward (*Habiter d’abord ... Venir se placer ensuite*).” But what is meant here by “inhabitation” and by “placement”? [...] To “inhabit” here means to inhabit that picture. Le Corbusier writes: “Architecture *is made in the head*,” then drawn.⁸²

IKEA’s catalogue images of the 1970s introduce not the inhabited living spaces, but rather pictures that are merely inhabited. What remains most apparent with the catalogues from this period is the still obvious sense of a company advertising commodities for sale.

The on-the-spot shots that reveal little joyful moments spent at home may sometimes look rather comic, whether it is done intentionally or not;

⁸⁰ Key, Ellen. *Beauty in the Home*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. p. 53.

⁸¹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 315.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 314. Le Corbusier’s citation from: Le Corbusier. *Précision sur un état présent de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal, 1930), p. 230.

this is the case, for example, with the photograph that promotes TAJT soft armchairs and divans designed for the “jeans generation” demanding “status-free” homes.⁸³ As Eva Bjarnestam explains in the official story of IKEA:

In the 1970s it was finally time for beautiful everyday objects to reach the many people. Those born in the 1940s had left the barricades and had children, and now they wanted status-free furniture.⁸⁴

In one of these images, a man is pictured from his back, half-laying on a folded ‘status-free’ blue jeans divan, leaning on its side pillow (fig. 33). He grabs a glass from a large low round coffee table, where several bottles are standing in the company of a large bowl containing fruit. A man is wearing his seventies-styled crimson gown, and his bare legs are dressed in same-colour crimson socks. He is completely alone, while his appearance and occupation suggest a certain devotion to his life as a bachelor.

The picture placed below the image of the man leisurely drinking in his gown possesses a different character. The idea here is to promote armchairs that are introduced in several fabric designs. In the background, a man in a fashionable white turtle-neck sweater and blue jeans is sitting on a chair striking a contemplative pose. A table with a chess desk stands in front of him. The armchair on the other side is empty: the man is playing chess with himself.⁸⁵

The most controversial set of images to be found in the 1974 catalogue – themselves symptomatic of 1970s and the unintended but normatively laden character of their presentational content – is highlighted by the slogan “en skön stund” (“a nice moment”) (fig. 34). On the left side of a full-page spread, two men are presented as sitting in a corner of a wallpapered room, which in both its colour and pattern matches the dressing-gown of the “drinking man” from the previous scene. The two men sit on white plastic chairs, which possess a very contentious history, but which have recently been relaunched by IKEA under the name SNILLE.⁸⁶

⁸³ The IKEA catalogue: 1974, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ It may be noted that chess appears very often in the catalogues during the 1970s, even more often than, for example, dominoes.

⁸⁶ Here the story of a controversial use of the rights for design chairs, which IKEA had on sale in the 1970s as told by EVA Bjarnestam: “IKEA’s own plastic chairs were not always entirely successful, so it also acquired the rights to chairs, including one that Svante Schöblom had worked on as a student at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design

The two intelligent-looking men smoke cigarettes, drink whisky, and play cards: they enjoy their “nice moment.” The corner of a room is decorated with a colonial-looking decorative composition of a plaster column topped with a green plant in a basket. A shelf in the back displays a chess board and some old books. The whole composition is very characteristic and even stereotypical for the mid-seventies in the nature of its characters’ occupation and appearance, as well as in the eclectic choice of the interior’s colours and forms. The men, who spend their leisure time in luxury fashion, while drinking expensive alcohol, should have raised the prestige of the white plastic chairs in the eyes of a consumer. The plastic furniture is in focus, as the two chairs are left empty to allow the viewer to appreciate their forms in full. That was obviously a necessary arrangement since the plastic furniture was considered cheap-looking and had not sold successfully in the beginning.

On the side page, some ‘female’ ‘nice moments’ are introduced, featuring women and children together. One of the pictures shows the quality of leisure time that a mother spends with her children by doing some craft-work. The picture is full of soft idyllic light, and each family member, effortlessly yet immaculately dressed, is concentrated on the creative process at hand. The photo below shows a housewife, dressed in a snow-white apron and a kerchief, rolling out dough on the table. The darkness behind the windows stands for either an early morning or a late-night hour. Beside is a photo of the same table, which is already carefully laid out for the family breakfast, with the morning sun streaming through the windows. Certainly, this constellation of images gives an idea of traditional gender roles, and of what the ‘nice hours’ for a man and a woman should look like. In Sweden, the nineteen-seventies was a period of innovative forms, colours, materials, and lifestyles, which yet sometimes formed boundless combinations. It is unlikely that IKEA had sought to be ironic by presenting these images, which, from the point of view of today, have an outlandishness and kitsch character about them: the catalogues simply resemble the relationship and

in Stockholm. The chair was injection moulded polypropylene with a characteristic seat curve and profile. It began being produced by the company Overman in 1972 and was made by IKEA the following year under the name *SNILLE*. After a few years IKEA had developed its own models and stopped selling Overman’s chair, which had been sold under the name *Clipper* in Sweden and the rest of Europe. In the early 2000s, however, IKEA bought the tools and production rights for the chair from Overman, and *SNILLE* is now back in IKEA’s range” (Bjarnestam, 2013:74).

lifestyle norms of their own time, depicting what was thought to be the best and what was attractive for people on the very basis of those times.

Yet through the presentation and distribution of norms and fashions that remain rooted to a certain historical time, these images reproduce and sustain them. This effect that printed media has was understood and exploited by Le Corbusier who, as Colomina notes, “came to understand the press, the printed media, not only as medium for the cultural diffusion of something previously existing but also as a context of production with its own autonomy.”⁸⁷ Through the arrangement of interior images in catalogues, IKEA reveals its modernist approach towards the representation of modern living space as both a commodity and an ideological product.

Still, with respect to the general arrangement of the catalogues from the 1970s, the presentation of objects within designated rooms took precedence over the images of complete interiors and living spaces. The IKEA of that time thus placed its marketing emphasis on the range of those “better things for everyday life” that were available to the customers. The modernist accent of the late 1960s had shifted, then, away from the representation of the organised living spaces to the representation of ‘things.’ Back in the sixties, the catalogues suggested ready-made solutions for the whole apartments. (e.g. in the 1965 edition where the spatial organisation for a two-room apartment was offered for as little as 3300 SEK, and where all elements were carefully and thoughtfully articulated and arranged) (fig. 35.). Ten years later, in the mid-seventies, the attention is drawn back to the details and to objects that were to express the spirit of the decade. In the seventies IKEA concentrated on its basic range, which, according to the first commandment of the *Testament of a Furniture Dealer* by Ingvar Kamprad, outlines IKEA’s identity:

The emphasis should always be on the basic range, the part that is typically IKEA. It should be simple, straightforward, durable and easy to mix with other products; be an expression for the lighter, freer way of living and express form, colour and joy with a youthful stamp for all ages. The youthful style of the 1960s, which continued in the 1970s with plastic, steel tubing and chipboard furniture, was ‘typically IKEA.’⁸⁸

With regards to the representations of the living space representations, the catalogues of the mid-1970s adopted the non-staged and spontaneous

⁸⁷ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 104.

⁸⁸ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 74.

approach: “on-the-spot” images were meant to better capture the moment of the everyday life in action. The everyday, the mundane, and the routine are depicted not only as unavoidable, but as attractive parts of people’s lives instantly recognisable to everyone. The function of the image was thus to invoke within the viewer a feeling of spontaneous and untrammelled joy that everyday life is meant to bring to the home. The feeling to be invoked was “a bit like popping round your neighbours in those good old days,”⁸⁹ as Bjarnestam describes it, in her commentary to one of the 1975 catalogue images (fig. 36.). In practice, the actual images that were meant to produce this affect in the reader of the catalogue comprised of the following: pictures of toys being spread around the children’s rooms, with the kids rolling and having fun; a woman sitting on a bench next to a pile of cleanly washed laundry and hanging towels, brushing her hair without trying to look sexy (fig. 37); the presence of domesticated animals (mostly dogs) whose role is to interrupt the effect of carefully choreographed and staged interiors.

On the cover of the 1976 catalogue, we gaze at a similar looking man in a white turtleneck sweater and blue jeans who had previously played chess with himself in the 1975 edition (fig. 38.). Only that, on this occasion, he has given up his game and instead sits on the couch, relaxed, enjoying reading the newspaper, while his dog lies under the table, asleep. It is a moment of repose, a moment of becalmed joy that welcomes and opens-up to the pleasing images of the everyday and that temporarily suspends the moment of having to flip over to the pages where the listed products and indexed costs are contained.

In the 1977 catalogue, a visit to an IKEA store was once again suggested as a solution for vacations or a weekend sojourn; families are featured with the kids entering a store, eating in the IKEA restaurant and spending time at the on-site playground. Shopping in IKEA is rendered synonymous with what it means to spend quality time with the family (fig. 39.).

Throughout the 1970s, IKEA is still searching for the strategies to represent its objects, which are meant to be introduced not merely as distinctive commodities, but as the necessary and organic elements of everyday life. At the same time IKEA strives at constructing and promoting familiar and desired living spaces, which are introduced through the catalogue images as if they were random shots from a day of a regular person – of the ‘everyman’ and the ‘everywoman.’ And yet IKEA in that decade had not overcome a staged effect of these “natural spaces;” in spite of their attempts to

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

do the contrary, they are deliberately arranged in a way that makes it clear that IKEA should be an inseparable part of these spaces. Catalogues remain the order books that still advertise IKEA's products, even in a broader sense, – be it a singular item or a complete lived interior.

4.4. 1980s–1990s. Searching for identity of the living space: For the wise or for the rich?

In the official book on IKEA written by Eva Bjarnestam, each decade is highlighted with the list of major events that were influential at the time and that had left their mark on IKEA's history and identity.

The arrival of the 1980s is characterised in the official narrative as a challenging period. In the visual aesthetics of its products, IKEA was drifting away from the very modernism with which the company had explicitly identified for several decades. The 1980s are outlined by Bjarnestam as a transitional period under the sway of post-modernism:

The beginning of the 1980s became a transition period. Collectivism stood against individualism, simplicity against luxury and frivolity, and modernism against post-modernism.⁹⁰

Dealing with aesthetical controversies, IKEA shifted towards irony and satire in its advertising campaigns and product presentations. The motto of the decade became the still rationalistic “*For the wise, rather than the wealthy.*”⁹¹

The adoption of certain marketing strategies was meant to help IKEA reach both to the ‘palaces and cabins.’⁹² The arranged living spaces displayed in the showrooms of the stores were personified and individualised through inserts of authentic non-IKEA items. These things were meant to resemble personal memories of anonymous possessors, and they were supposed to convey the idea that some old inherited things – or those bits and pieces that evoke dear and cherished memories – have their place within a modern interior. What a modern and functional space needs is a few trinkets and ornaments that provide the personal touch. This hint was already given by Ellen Key, in her *Beauty in the Home* (1899). Key was an important influence on IKEA, as readily admitted by IKEA itself, for whom her presence “is clearly evident in IKEA's concept of creating a better life for the many

⁹⁰ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 101.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

people.”⁹³ Arguing for the purification and rationalisation of homes in order to make them more functional, convenient, and easy to take care of, Ellen Key suggests a decluttering of rooms from old, unnecessary, pseudo-decorative, and non-practical things, is necessary. For it is the presence of the unnecessary and the non-useful in the home that prevents it from revealing its true beauty:

Most women who inherited an old-fashioned home did not even have enough good taste either to leave it intact or to rearrange it to meet modern demands without completely destroying its uniqueness. All of these now disfigured rooms could still have looked pleasing if these women had kept only the furniture that was really needed; if they had hung a few woodcuts or fine photographs on the walls... if the colours of the rooms had been harmonised instead of screaming at each other; and if all the ugly hand-stitched needlework items had been exchanged for simple, homemade tablecloths, rugs and curtains.⁹⁴

Yet, she continues, some inherited, memorable, and good-quality things can remain at home and successfully complement modern industrially produced furniture, providing interiors with a unique character:

[...] rooms must not appear as if they exist for their own sake. They should be an expression of the personal needs and taste of their inhabitants, their memories and feelings, their history. Grandmother’s Gustavian bureau can very well be placed among newer furniture, if only its noble simplicity is not disturbed by modern knickknacks displayed on it. Grandfather’s heavy armchair need not at all be banished to the attic, only pushed into a corner where it is not in the way or, better still, where it invites you to rest and contemplate a beautiful vista or picture.⁹⁵

By the 1980s the IKEA style was known and recognisable around the world, and yet with this global recognition and success came the inevitable problem of becoming too familiar, dull, and prosaic. The two unquestioned principles of standardisation and collective design began to detract from the desirability of its products in the eyes of spoilt consumers who now were demanding uniqueness, creativity, as well as high-class appeal, in addition to a wish to individuate their homes: the living space was now a surface on

⁹³ Ibid., p. 201.

⁹⁴ Key, Ellen. *Beauty in the Home*. In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 40.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

which the expression of individuality and freedom should be exercised. Bjarnestam describes the situation as follows:

It emerged that IKEA was accepted in some rooms and spaces, but not everywhere, and not where people wanted to express their own personality.

The survey also revealed that IKEA was associated with the lack of imagination and creativity and signalled being hard up for money: buying at IKEA was essentially choosing the simplest solution. So instead of showing how creative IKEA was, now the aim was to show how creative the customers were. Commercials were made which focused on people, rather than furniture and products.⁹⁶

The cover of the 1980 catalogue is full of bright fabrics, dishes, and kids promoting the “child-patrol,” which delegates to children the authority to control an imaginary quality of products and services that IKEA offers to and for children (fig. 40.).⁹⁷

Yet from the beginning of the 1980s, when IKEA deals with general ‘anti-modernist’ trends, looking for some new means of expression, people gradually disappeared from the pages of the catalogues. The problem now was that IKEA could not identify any image of its target clientele, aiming to reach to all classes. IKEA’s failure to draw a unified portrait of a citizen of the contemporary classless society demonstrated subconscious acknowledgement that this classless society had not been reached (if at all) since the modernist decades, when functionalist method had been used as a main tool for social reformations and for the construction of the welfare state. The sterile but fancy interiors of pastel and concomitantly the bright local colours, perfectly ordered, were left sterile and untouched on the catalogue’s pages (fig. 41.). At this stage IKEA sought to cover all possible aesthetic and stylistic bases: it would add a little luxury touch to the furniture, look for inspiration in classicism and other traditional designs, while arranging the still modernist-looking spaces in a more ornate, posh and sophisticated manner. With all this said, IKEA still claimed to have been faithful to its modernist roots, which, during the 1980s, was now the atypical alternative to many of the ‘*typically* eighties’ design choices. Bjarnestam explains the chosen strategy:

⁹⁶ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 106.

⁹⁷ IKEA Catalogue of 1980, pp. 2–3.

The IKEA STOCKHOLM series and high-tech furniture with a simple, elegant, somewhat anonymous style inspired by modern technology and the Bauhaus school, also fitted well with the mid-1980s... The emphasis was put on the craftsmanslike details and the careful choice of materials, the light birch harvested from the central Swedish countryside.⁹⁸

In the 1980s, the concept of the “better everyday life for the many people,” which had derived from Paulsson’s “better things for the everyday life,” was now extended to the idea of “a more beautiful everyday life”.⁹⁹

IKEA declared a so-called “creative consumer” as its target client. The trouble was that there were no images of such a consumer given in the catalogues. Sleeping dogs, women cooking, men drinking on their own, and children drawing on the walls, were now inappropriate for the pages of the latest catalogue that now went looking to satisfy the desires of those longing for luxury modernism, upper-class comfort, and a certain quirkiness that might appeal to an ever differentiating and individualistic client-citizen.

When beginning the chapter on IKEA during the 1990s, Eva Bjarnestam declares the return of the “ideas and design language of modernism” as well as the development of a discussion surrounding “a new functionalism and new modernism” in architecture.¹⁰⁰ Yet the aesthetics of the catalogues during this new decade marked no radical departure from their presentation in the eighties.

What is a little less obvious in the 1990s is the sterile and tired-looking character of the images in the 1980s; pets and children were gradually returning to interiors, and yet they serve a decorative purpose and act as staffages, rather than active agents and possessors of the represented living spaces (fig. 42.). People involved in everyday activities appear on the pictures only as visual support to explanations of certain suggested activities, for instance, children jumping on the sofa to test its quality or family members assembling a table in a rather staged manner to demonstrate the DIY principle (fig. 43.). Interiors are arranged to show that they are lived as if owners have just left the room before it was photographed, leaving their crafts, foods or clothes lying around the space (fig. 44.). And yet rooms remain carefully prepared to show the interiors in their best light, clearly disclosing the principles of their designs. In this respect IKEA returns to the conventional non-critical introduction of its products, to the genre of a

⁹⁸ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 109.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 135.

traditional catalogue, in which, as in conventional mass media, photography is “uncritically received as a fact”, as Colomina puts it.¹⁰¹ The difference of the modernist approach towards an advertising image, as pioneered by Le Corbusier, was that the images had introduced creative re-interpretations of everyday objects, transforming them from the “objects of the most perfect banality” – where they possess “the advantage of a perfect readability and of being recognised without an effort”¹⁰² – to the active agents of production of the new artistic meanings. As Colomina describes Le Corbusier’s methodology:

Le Corbusier takes pleasure in reconstructing the images thus “constructed”, isolating for instance, some of them from their original context, and illustrated magazine or a mail order catalogue, and drawing sketches after them. Again, the sketch learns from what the photograph excludes. By drawing he is obliged to select, to reduce to a few lines the details of the image. The performed image thus enters Le Corbusier’s creative process, but interpreted.¹⁰³

The theme of everyday life makes a come back to the living spaces depicted in IKEA catalogues during the second half of the 1990s. The items of everyday use – such as magazines, books, and coffee mugs – invade the living interiors in a more relaxed and interpretative manner, while social activities are represented mostly by children (fig. 45.). Lifestyles and relationships are not yet an integrated part of living at home, and natural looking living spaces are promoted first of all through the in-store showrooms.

In regard to design, the company refers back to the concept of Swedish design and “Scandinavian style, which would return IKEA to its roots and give the company a sharper design profile” through, for example, the introduction of the IKEA PS (*Post-Scriptum* collection).¹⁰⁴ And yet while the idea of Swedishness is increasingly stressed as part of the company’s identity, the living spaces themselves, produced for the purposes of the catalogues, are arranged in a manner that should be attractive to as many people as possible and in such a way that would not establish particular imaginary (stereotypical) patterns surrounding potential owners and their everyday routines.

¹⁰¹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 100.

¹⁰² Citation in: Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 130. Original source: Amédée Ozenfant; Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. *La Peinture moderne*. (Paris: Editions Crés, 1925), p. 168.

¹⁰³ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁴ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 146.

The images are thus more carefully controlled. This attempt at controlling the image can, for illustrative purposes, be again paralleled with an example to which Colomina refers in commenting on the extent of Loos's participation in the production of his own interiors images, such as Khuner villa built near Payerbach in 1930. Colomina argues that Loos "adjusted the photographs to better represent his own idea of the house,"¹⁰⁵ erasing "distracting" domestic objects, such as lamps, rugs, and plants that conceal it.¹⁰⁶ IKEA was similarly censoring and controlling images of the living spaces introduced for sale in order to present an ideal interior that would be attractive to as many as possible.

Through the 1980s and 1990s IKEA struggles with choosing its new business philosophy. It is forced to find the right balance between the desire to meet an upper-class demand for high-quality luxury design, and thus extend its target consumer group on the one side, and yet, on the other side of the equation, to preserve its democratic and status-free profile that appeals to the younger and less profitable consumer groups.

By the turn of the century Scandinavian design had become a historical trend with its well-known stylistic profile, which had been appropriated through the decades but which now was becoming the object of criticism; this demanded, from the part of the company, "a general revision of deeply rooted perceptions."¹⁰⁷ A grounding feature of Scandinavian design – and the Swedish mode of functionalism that has been promoted world-wide, and which IKEA consciously adopted as part of its own identity – was its social orientation, practicality, and rationality; whence IKEA's motto: "for the wise, rather than the rich." The main social ambition of Swedish functionalism was to resolve the question, as formulated by Eva Rudberg, of "how to build a utopia of the everyday in Sweden?"¹⁰⁸ A high conceptual goal was the construction of a classless society and a *Folkhemmet* welfare state, where no one was left behind and where inhabitants shared and enjoyed not only access to state resources that were fairly, justly, and equally distributed between all its members, but the very aesthetics of a new living as well:

The historical narrative has ended up on the side of the norms and is characterised by a lack of diversity and exaggerated homogeneity. As a rule it is

¹⁰⁵ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 271.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*. P. 95.

¹⁰⁸ Rudberg, Eva. "Building the Utopia of the Everyday," p. 158.

claimed that Swedish design is characterised by functionality and shaped by critics who are involved with society. Norms and ideals that have not accorded with the Swedish design identity, in other words mass-produced, standardised everyday products for the common man, have thus been marginalised.¹⁰⁹

In the 1980s and 1990s IKEA tried to stand on the grounds of orthodox Swedish functionalism, which had shown signs of limiting its marketing potential. As Kristoffersson notes, IKEA chose to defend “the traditional view of Swedish design in order to emphasise its profile,”¹¹⁰ thus leaving catalogues with images of empty living spaces for ‘creative consumers’ to appropriate them in accordance with their own needs. The interiors hence become more universal but for that very reason, more abstract and less personalised. The modern character of the living spaces and IKEA’s family-friendly profile are preserved by the very modest use of idyllic children’s and teenager’s images, now reduced to several pages in the catalogues or to the covers, such as in the 1999 catalogue (fig. 46.).

The final catalogue produced in the 90s implements a new strategy of publishing articles that represent IKEA’s profile as a socially responsible company, which takes care of the environment and other countries’ well-being, where, due to socio-economic conditions, IKEA products are as yet inaccessible and unaffordable. This supports the company’s claim, as formulated by Sara Kristoffersson, that “the goal of increased sales does not exclude a sense of social responsibility.”¹¹¹

The first “social” article that concluded the 1999 catalogue reports on the program developed to support rainforest reproduction in Borneo, which was initiated by IKEA and called *Så ett Frö (plant a seed)*, when a percentage of customers’ in-store spending was to contribute to reforestation. Ever since IKEA has been organising numerous philanthropic and charity campaigns that are widely reported and promoted by the company itself both through its catalogues and outreach campaigns. In this way IKEA strengthens its socially-oriented profile, on the one hand, and, on the other, “cleans its hands” of numerous accusations that have been levelled at it – from the destruction of virgin forests and the use of child labour to critical

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¹⁰⁹ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 94.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

questions targeting Kamprad's own personal biography about his past connection to Nazism.¹¹²

4.4.1. Twenty-first century: IKEA as an (Un)critical cultural platform: from entering art spaces to becoming one

The new millennium reveals the durability and persistence of the functionalist method in the sphere of living space organisation and production, as well as its continual appeal for the global market. Functionalism as a historical trend reaches the apex of high universal recognition, even returning as an accepted fashion in post-Soviet Russia where it had experienced the longest and severest neglect. For its part, IKEA has been actively involved in retrospective exhibitions that promote Swedish design as part of Swedish national identity by, for example, sponsoring an exhibition *IKEA at Liljevalchs*, at the Röhsska museum in Gothenburg in the summer 2009. In doing so, IKEA inscribed itself into the history of both national and world modern design.

Already in the 1990s, IKEA had become both an object of artistic critique and a subject for various art projects, serving a source of raw material for contemporary art that addressed issues of globalisation, commodification, and the consumerism of everyday life.

For instance, in 1998, IKEA was an object of aesthetical and artistic critique by a group of contemporary artists. Entitled *Lebensraum – or IKEA at the End of Metaphysics*, the exhibition was organised by Daniel Birnbaum and hosted by *Nordiska Museet* in Stockholm. It was the setting for what Birnbaum calls 'IKEA art', – a new genre, which, as he notes, by that time had already reached beyond the Swedish borders, and which, through the use of the IKEA ready-made objects, seems "to comment on some aspects of IKEA's global influence."¹¹³

¹¹² See Sara Kristoffersson's section "IKEA in the Limelight" in her book *Design by IKEA*, p. 99–101.

¹¹³ Birnbaum, Daniel. *IKEA at the End of Metaphysics. Art and the IKEA Spirit*. In: *Frieze*. Nov.–Dec. 1996 (31). Electronic publication: <https://frieze.com/article/ikea-end-metaphysics> Accessed: August, 2018.

Among artists who have objectified IKEA as an art source and a domain for socio-cultural critique of the globalised everyday living include such artists as: Clay Ketter; Andrea Zittel; Jason Rhoades; Joe Scanlan; and Jeff Carter; Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro; the photographer Koya Abe; the designer Adriana Valdez can also be mentioned. Read more on their artistic work e.g. in: Allen, Emma. *From Showroom to Studio: Artists Repurpose IKEA Products*. In: *Artnews*. 2013 (6). Electronic publication: <http://www.artnews.com/2013/06/19/the-ikea-esthetic-in-art/> Accessed: August, 2018.

One of the most widely discussed artistic experiments with and within the IKEA living spaces was a 2007 *American Family Sitcom* shot in IKEA stores in the US, Germany, and Israel by Guy Ben-Ner.¹¹⁴ Without the permission of the company, Ben-Ner turned IKEA into a stage where the showrooms served as a theatre that performed the everyday. This kind of theatre was appraised by Lefebvre in his *Critique of Everyday Life* with reference to Chekhov's plays. The theatre, as Lefebvre cites the famous Russian playwright, "ought to represent everyday life."¹¹⁵ The trivialities of existence, which are at the heart of Chekhov's plays, should, according to Lefebvre, produce a spectacle (traditionally a means of alienating a man from his everyday through the dramaturgical representation of the everyday of *the other*). Such a spectacle has the possibility of reconciling alienated man with the wholeness of his being, since as a viewer man will be able to recognise himself and his everyday life being performed on stage. The Ben-Ner's film had turned IKEA store into a cultural platform, a stage, where the triviality of the everyday objects displayed for sale had organised the living space as a scene for his real family, the members of whom performed their everyday living in the 'sub-real' IKEA rooms in the most trivial ways.

The *Stealing the Beauty Video* imitates a day in the life of an average family within the imitated living spaces reproduced in the store. The artist's family simply enters IKEA's interiors during the stores' official opening hours. The family starts performing their everyday routines ignoring customers and announcements for staff. They discuss issues that any parents would be familiar with, as well as taking shower, having meals, going to bed in the showrooms and doing other things besides, within the various interiors that are respectively designed for each routine. The representation of the everyday is thus introduced through multi-levelled imitation: Guy Ben-Ner imitates a sitcom that imitates everyday living of an ordinary nuclear family within the imitated living spaces of IKEA warehouses. At the same time, this performance can also be read (in Althusserian terms) as an imitation of the reproduction of the means of production of living spaces imitated within the showrooms. IKEA does not only imitate living spaces within its stores; it reproduces them, propagates, and transforms them into the real living spaces of its customers. Thus, the customers, on the backside

¹¹⁴ Read more in: Allen, Emma. *From Showroom to Studio: Artists Repurpose IKEA Products*. In: *Artnews*. 2013 (6). Electronic publication: <http://www.artnews.com/2013/06/19/the-ikea-esthetic-in-art/> Accessed: August, 2018. The trailer of the *Stealing the Beauty* video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8ygeihSPlk>

¹¹⁵ Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 7.

of this marketing mirror, imitate the IKEA showroom interiors by reproducing these imitated spaces within their homes. Moreover, it is precisely through this secondary imitation that customers reproduce the routines and norms of their practicing.

The camera in Ben-Ner's videos is placed outside of IKEA's interiors, leaving the store's pathways between the staged living spaces and lenses, thereby capturing unsuspecting customers, who are strolling by, checking out furniture and prices. Most passers-by are oblivious of what is happening in the showrooms. Ben-Ner's family remains invisible among tons of people checking beds, taking a seat at the dining tables, and going through the kitchen drawers. The scenes, in which adult family members quarrel over private issues and bore their kids with sermons while wearing bath gowns and behaving as if they were at their own home, often goes unnoticed by the shop customers.

This artistic experiment resonates in some significant ways with Sergey Eisenstein's unfinished project from the late 1920s, the *Glass House*.¹¹⁶ Eisenstein was screenwriting a story of a house purely built of glass. The walls of this house were transparent, yet the dwellers lived there as if there were real walls between their spaces. Although people were not physically blind, they could not see each other due to a certain 'trained ignorance.' Eisenstein records in his notes that "the ignorance towards each other is to be given through that those who are acting through the walls and floors do not see each other, since they do not look – trained ignorance."¹¹⁷

In the society of ignorance, where dwellers had unlearned to care and to notice what was happening behind the transparent glass walls (a woman dying from hunger, an attempted suicide, a love scene) there is no control over each other and no care for one another from within. The prerogative of vision was initially given to the camera – a mechanism that observed life in the house. The mechanical eye of the camera at that point was not a con-

¹¹⁶ The idea of the film *The Glass House* came to Eisenstein in 1926 during his trip to Berlin, where he brought his *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) for its premier, as noted by Oksana Bulgakowa in her book on Eisenstein's biography: Bulgakowa, Oksana. *Sergei Eisenstein. A Biography*. (Berlin-San Francisco: Potemkin Press, 2001), p.114. The first notes on the *Glass House* appeared in Eisenstein's diary in January 1927 when he interrupted his work on the *General Line* agitation film to begin working on *October* together with Grigory Alexandrov. Reference to the date is obtained from the following article by Naum Kleiman: "Steklyanniy Dom' Eisensteina" ["The Glass House' of Eisenstein."] In: *Iskusstvo Kino [The Art of the Cinema]*. 1979 (3), 94–114, p. 94.

¹¹⁷ Citation in: Kleiman, Naum. "Steklyanniy Dom' Eisensteina." In: *Iskusstvo Kino*. 1979 (3), p. 96.

trolling organ; it did not mean to interfere with those living in the building. In his video clip Ben-Ner uses the camera in a similarly unobtrusive way – it is just a recorder, an uncritical passive observer of everyday routines. The camera is there to build a frame that limits a displayed interior in the store into an inhabited living space, while the lens becomes a window through which a viewer observes living within the recorded space. Members of Ben-Ner family physically ‘inhabit’ the space of displayed interiors: they penetrate it in order to begin ‘living’ there. The camera records their life, concentrating on the very moment of living within a particular surveyed space. In so doing, it borders and frames the space for external viewers, allowing them to inhabit it as spectators. It becomes both an optic and symbolic window to the living space, a window that, as noted by Colomina, is like the photograph since it too is first of all a means of framing.¹¹⁸

The viewers of the Ben-Ner video clips, just like the viewers of Eisenstein’s film need to learn to see again, to overcome this ‘trained ignorance’ by which the ‘many people’ are conditioned, most of whom are IKEA customers who go about their business, unaware of being recorded, noticing neither the camera nor the melodramas of the everyday taking place around them. They are the dwellers of Eisenstein’s *Glass House*. In his notes for the project, Eisenstein highlighted the leading themes of the film, which Kleiman formulates as “loneliness within the constant being on people” and a sense of “visibility from all sides.”¹¹⁹ The house’s transparent glass walls serve as separating screens; the presence of the translucent partitions prevent any communication occurring between people. As Eisenstein later records: “There is nothing heard through the glass!”¹²⁰

In *Stealing the Beauty*, Ben-Ner demonstrates that in contemporary reality these physical transparent glass walls, which prevent people from seeing and hearing each other, are unnecessary, for they have already been already installed with the heads of people.

As already mentioned, in the case of Eisenstein, the original intention was to regard the function of the camera as a mechanical eye. Interestingly, though, in his notes he proposed to shift the prerogative of vision to the human-like characters, such as: the *Architect*, the old creator of the building; the *Poet*, the only tenant who has the ability to see, and the *Robot*, who first helps the poet to convince the others that they should learn to see,

¹¹⁸ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 128.

¹¹⁹ Kleiman, Naum. “‘Steklyanniy Dom’ Eisensteina,” p. 96.

¹²⁰ Citation in: Kleiman, Naum. “‘Steklyanniy Dom’ Eisensteina,” p. 108.

and later assists the poet to destroy the glass house. The architect and the Robot later turn out to be the same person. As Oksana Bulgakowa writes, when Eisenstein personalised the mechanical eye of the camera, “he gave the gift of vision to a poet and transformed the ‘comedy of the eye’ to the ‘drama of enlightenment.’”¹²¹

In case of Ben-Ner’s camera – it only functions as a passive observer, never transformed into an active agent. Yet, those few IKEA customers who do notice the camera and pay attention to the scenes performed in the interiors, become those “poets” who disturb the recording of the sitcom. Not that they interrupt nor do they choose to sabotage the theatrics. The camera continues its surveillance, and those who *can see* become part of the plot. They are not cut off through montage, but are preserved in the published version of what becomes a documentary record.

I possess no evidence of Ben-Ner’s reference to Eisenstein’s unfinished project, and it is likely that *Stealing the Beauty* does not consciously refer to the *Glass House* in any way. But this does not preclude an analogical reading. These two radically separate projects are nonetheless linked through the metaphor of a transparent “glass house” – a residential building in the case of Eisenstein, and an open space in the IKEA store in Ben-Ner’s sitcom. Both authors refer to and work with the products of modernism. It is known that the prototype for the *Glass House* was a 1921 project by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – a glass tower on Berlin’s Friedrichstrasse. Oksana Bulgakowa admits that Eisenstein’s project was “a polemical response [...] to Bruno Taut and Mies van der Rohe’s glass architecture,” and that Eisenstein “envisioned his own glass palace as an architectonic image of America.”¹²² One of the explicit aims of Eisenstein’s film was a critique of Western society’s hyper-individualism, which he opposed to the collective forms and strategies of life-building as realised in the Soviet Union and as demonstrated through his propagandistic film *The General Line*. Completed in 1929, *The General Line* tells the story of the construction of a kolkhoz – a collective farmers’ organization, with barns, warehouses, and cowsheds styled in Le Corbusier modernist forms, which is meant to represent a model of the future communist society and is realised in a vision dreamt by the main heroine in the film, Marfa Lapkina. *The Glass House* project was never finished; Eisenstein failed to come up with a realistic and satisfying

¹²¹ Bulgakowa, Oksana. *Sergei Eisenstein. A Biography*, p. 115.

¹²² Bulgakowa, Oksana. “Eisenstein, the Glass House and the Spherical Book. From the Comedy of the Eye to a Drama of Enlightenment.” In: *Rouge*. 2005, V(7). Electronic publication: <http://www.rouge.com.au/7/eisenstein.html>

conclusion regarding what should happen once the *Glass House* has been destroyed. While Eisenstein could not finish his film without a conclusion, Ben-Ner does not bother about a one. A post-modernist piece of art does not demand an end. Yet, the space within which Ben-Ner works resembles the space of Eisenstein's *Glass House*: a transparent space that serves as a glorified storage house promoting accessible and affordable commodities for the masses to possess. The open space of an IKEA warehouse allows the whole idea of the living space to be converted into a set of indefinite and substitutable units that are ready to be pulled off straight from the rails; just like a garment from a clothing boutique, everything is there to be tried, tested, and considered in a public space that remains a personal relation between individuals and the products.

Both the IKEA showrooms interiors and its twenty-first century catalogue images thrive for the imitation, and ideally, for the reproduction of the homeliness of living spaces. Interiors arranged within showrooms should not only be watched, but they should be felt. The tactile experience of space was to be physically affordable to the customers visiting the stores, while catalogue images were to evoke feelings of coziness and lived spaces through the arrangement of light, colours, and everyday objects spread in a 'natural' way as if they had been used just a moment ago. The catalogues were to be infused through a series of scenes invoking happy moments of the everyday, and which in the absence of the showroom would compensate for the impossibility of any first-hand direct experience of the interiors. The viewers of the catalogue should be able to identify themselves with the catalogue characters; and thus the images and situations within which they are recorded should be as close to the viewers' situations, expectations, and their looks, as possible. Here, the showroom interiors and catalogue image designers would have done well to possess Loos' sense of interiors:

The artist, the architect first senses the *effect* that he intends to realise and (then) sees the rooms he wants to create in his mind's eye. He senses the effect that he wishes to exert upon the *spectator* ... homeliness if a residence.¹²³

The significance of bodily existence within this space is already considered by Loos, who, as Colomina puts it, perceives architecture as "a form of covering":¹²⁴

¹²³ Citation in: Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 264. Originally from: Loos, Adolf. "The Principle of Cladding." (1898). In: *Spoken into the Void*. (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1982), p. 66.

For Loos, the interior is pre-Oedipal space, space before the analytical distancing that language entails, space as we feel it, as clothing [...].

[...] Loos privileges the bodily experience of space over its mental construction: the architect first senses the space, then he visualises it.¹²⁵

And yet the showrooms with their reproducible imitations of cozy interiors sustain those invisible walls of the *Glass House* that are satirised in Ben-Ner's film. These walls are the inevitable side effects of the technologies needed to produce living space, as developed and aesthetically outlined by the modernists. The apparatuses necessary for living space production are those that enable the formation of the new barbarians, who continue to train their ignorance, securing their inability to see. It is ultimately an affliction inherited from and cultivated through the modernist era.

When brought together, these two projects allow one to trace a general line that connects the contemporary methods of spatial representation and bodily operation within living spaces, from modernism to our own contemporaneity. Even if it has as its principal target the critique of America as the apogee of bourgeois modernity, Eisenstein's image of a glass house possesses a European prototype built by one of the famous socially-oriented architects who propagated the liberating potential rather than destructive effects of modernist architecture. And yet despite this, the *Glass House* by Eisenstein –as well as, it should be said, the *Glass Tower* by Mies –could be located anywhere in the world. The same applies to the contemporary IKEA stores. These buildings are independent of their natural sites; they represent ideology and brand rather than particular architecture.

This independence of architecture from its natural sites was already being asserted by Le Corbusier – incidentally, a close friend of Eisenstein's. It was a principle that he would remain faithful to in his own architectural practice. Modernist architecture claimed that a building must not adjust to a landscape or to penetrate somehow into its existing order. What it should do instead is to appropriate that landscape, – any landscape, through the very universality of its forms. The universality of forms means their reproducibility and their appropriateness to any site. Le Corbusier, for instance, continuously demonstrates the independence of his architecture from any individual landscape. Colomina notes this with respect to Le Corbusier's groundless objects (such as the Villa Schwob, built back in 1916). His aim

¹²⁴ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 265.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

was to further purify these forms through photographing the building's facades in a way to "adapt them to a more 'purist' aesthetic" by concealing some details (such as, for example, pergola) and highlighting others:¹²⁶

Le Corbusier discarded everything that was picturesque and contextual in this house, concentrating on the formal qualities of the object itself. But the most striking modification in the photographs of this house published in *L'Esprit nouveau* is the elimination of any reference to the actual site, which is, in fact, a steep terrain. By eliminating the site, he makes architecture into an object and an ideal site is a constant in Le Corbusier's architecture of the twenties. For example, he designed the small villa for his parents on the shores of Lake Geneva before he knew its specific location. And in Buenos Aires he proposed a suburban development consisting of twenty "replicas" of Villa Savoye.¹²⁷

As applies to most contemporary large chain stores in the world, the modern IKEA malls reproduce the objective and universal types of a warehouse, the architecture of which neither corresponds to a particular site nor does it represent a certain style. What it does represent is the brand, first of all through the colours, which dominate and diminish the architectural forms. Any IKEA store, unlike the first exhibition hall in Älmhult or the first store in Kungens Kurva, is an "architectureless" construction, a three-dimensional logotype which encompasses the reproduced living spaces displayed for sale indoors.

Thus, these few examples that connect IKEA as an experimental art platform and aesthetical domain to the modernist cinematographic experiments of the twentieth century, on one side, and, on the other, to the modernist methodology of the production of living space and architectural form-thinking, render visible its genetic relation to modernist aesthetics, thereby making it a living example of a transformed modernist product.

4.5. 2000s and 2010s: back to basics and consumption as a life-building strategy

Since the early 2000s IKEA catalogues have returned to promoting living spaces rather than the interiors themselves. As such, the adjustability of the functionalist method is emphasised along with its ability to meet both the

¹²⁶ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 107.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

practical and aesthetic demands of the present. The notion of *Folkhemmet* (the people's home), for instance, even makes its appearance on the cover of the 2002 catalogue (fig. 47.).

The cover of one of the 2000 catalogue versions features a young woman who has just entered a room, glancing towards the camera (fig. 48.). While aware of the photographer she feels completely 'at home' in the IKEA-produced space. She enjoys a cosy evening at home; she does not mind sharing her living space with a viewer, not that this is communicated directly to the observer. It is rather the fact that her home exhibits all the features of the contemporary life-style, and that this exemplary living space will be appreciated and desired by many, that the young woman is not put out by the watchful gaze. It is with the catalogue cover from 2000 that IKEA returns to the habit of sending a multi-layered and polysemic message to its readers in a form of a motto or slogan, the function of which is to provide an overarching and general idea for the year's edition. In the case of the Millennial cover, we read the words "the hour for change," a formula that reincarnates the modernist preoccupation with the design of the future.

These four words become an important part of the catalogue's design. It is not simply an informative description and a straightforward promotion of products or interior solutions, but 'the room for change' slogan serves as the very motor by which desired spaces, as well as of their representation through images, is interminably reproduced. Such a juxtaposing of text and image was exploited by Le Corbusier in his critical engagement with advertisements of his time. Images and texts serve as constructive bricks for the production and representation of meanings and interpretations, which in turn can be used in accordance with the authors' artistic or marketing goals. About this, and in particular with respect to Le Corbusier's specific methodology Colomina notes:

Photography in Le Corbusier's book is rarely employed in a representational manner. Instead it is the agent of a never-resolved collision of images and text, its meaning derived from the tension between the two. In this technique Le Corbusier borrowed much from modern advertising: the association of ideas that can be produced through the juxtaposition of images and of images with writing. [...] In Le Corbusier's books, images are not used to "illustrate" the written text; rather they construct the text.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 119.

The fragments of the everyday, captured at a particular moment through the use of “on-the-spot” shots, are valued once more as an effective marketing strategy and thus make their return to the IKEA catalogues: families are living their lives through catalogue pages, sharing their homes and demonstrating that IKEA always leaves a room for an individual’s own re-appropriations and alterations of the living spaces it designs. Just as it was back in the 1970s when, as Eva Bjarnestam puts it, “customers were encouraged to think of IKEA in different living situations and stages of life, such as when the family expanded or the children left home, when moving, separating or growing older.”¹²⁹

There are few principally new inventions that IKEA allows into its catalogues in the twenty first century. Instead of a motto, the cover of the 2001 Swedish catalogue (fig. 49.) features the company’s website address after introducing online sales in Denmark and Sweden.¹³⁰ In 2001, for the very first time in the company’s history, a catalogue features people of colour as models (fig. 50.). As had become customary from the mid-nineties onwards, texts reporting and explaining the importance of IKEA’s philanthropic activities in operation around the world, had become a mainstay in the annual catalogue, raising awareness over environmental issues and social problems (fig. 51.). A reader and potential consumer is encouraged to contribute to the charity programs through the very act of purchasing at IKEA, and thus to help reach the ethico-political objective, articulated by its founder: a *better life for the many*. The component of social responsibility and the global aim of improving people’s lives is a universal aim of modernist aesthetics, and it is constantly emphasised through the IKEA catalogues and advertising campaigns. The way in which IKEA understands and achieves this universal aim, however, is by working endogenously to the logic of capital (and thus quite at variance with the Russian, and to a lesser extent, the German modes of functionalism). The principle of contributing to a “better life for the many” is by and through the process of stimulating consumption; what IKEA promotes and strengthens is therefore *the reproduction of consumption through consumption*, which at one and the same time works against the principles of greater global economic and social sustainability as it does to promise to its customer the hope of redemption through following the consequences of that very consumption.

¹²⁹ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 76.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

The notion of corporate social responsibility, which went viral during the second half of the last century, has now reached a point where, if it is to sustain its operation on the global market, then a pledge to some nominal commitment to the principle of global justice has become a necessary economic and marketing element of a company's profile. As Sara Kristoffersson notes:

Companies are no longer judged purely by prices and by the quality of their products, but their commitment to society can cause them to appear to be sympathetic and loyal and these qualities can then be used for marketing purposes.¹³¹

Just through the simple paying of a fee on the cost of the commodities they purchase, those consumers of living spaces produced by IKEA and the like receive indulgence from the very idea of political and moral responsibility over the significant impact that their consumption habits are having on the global ecological and social environment.

The charity programs are highly profitable marketing strategies too, which serve to stimulate the growth of supply and demand when the consequences from increased production of unnecessary needs and wants – that is, the stimulation of desire for constant home renewal – are covered by easy participation in global relief and economic stimulation programs, requiring nothing more from the concerned customer-citizen than *more* purchasing and consumption.

Consumption has been an integral part of the Swedish mode of functionalism as well as its most distinguishing feature from the radical ascetic mode of Russian avant-garde with its propagation of the 'new *byt'*' concept, which rejected any forms of consumerist possessions.

Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein note that Swedish architectural and design discourse "points towards a policy where the individual was to be made into a consumer on the market and that the right regulating and educating marketing strategy should result in the formation of citizens that "desire appropriate things."¹³² Even though the ideal consumer of the Swedish mode of functionalism was to be reasonable and responsible for her choices, the idea of the negation of consumption as an established relation between material things and the means of their production, was

¹³¹ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 102.

¹³² Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. *Introduction*. In: *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. P. 8–33. P. 16.

alien to Swedish modernists; Russian constructivism, on the other hand, considered the act of consumption as both immoral and illusory in human existence, the truth of which lies through a deeper relation to the material world as a whole (and not to particular objects) as well as to others.

IKEA has taken on the roles of both producer and educator of a mass consumer through the design of its product range and organisation of living space solutions, as well as through the strict regulation of production and distribution of the standardised diversity of goods. IKEA products become irresistibly attractive and unavoidable due to the unconditional principle of affordability to which its business model zealously adheres.¹³³

Through the catalogues of the 2000s and 2010s IKEA integrates a more advanced marketing strategy. The company does not only offer ready-made solutions for the living spaces, but integrates a consumer into the very process of generating these ideas and solutions; it interprets its own product range as a source of inspiration for dealing with everyday living situations. But not only this, for the company makes a bolder claim, declaring its product range to be the raw material for creativity as such. IKEA does not only sell objects for the production and reproduction of the domestic living space, it elevates both itself and the objects it produces up to the level of professional art production, such that professional artists use IKEA ready-made objects as both materials and backgrounds for their artworks. IKEA sets itself up thereby as the dominion for endless creative interpretations and possibilities. Through the use of IKEA objects, artists criticise not only IKEA, but the whole contemporary consumerist society, of which IKEA serves as the most recognisable symbol.

Yet, as has happened many times before, IKEA skilfully shifts the accent from itself being an object of the artistic critique of consumerist culture, to the very instrument and means of that critique. IKEA comes close to representing itself as an anti-consumerist organisation, promoting the multi-functional nature of its products and its creative approach to their use as a way to attenuate and not accelerate practices of consumption. Providing customers with ideas of how to save their money by spending less on the objects of everyday use, IKEA promotes a conscious attitude towards resources, on the one hand, while, on the other, deftly stimulating cus-

¹³³ More on the history of development of the IKEA business policy, internationalisation, and marketing technologies see in: Salzer, Miriam. *Identity Across Borders. A Study in the "IKEA-World"* (1994); Lewis, Ellen. *Fenomenet Ikea* (2006); Jonsson, Anna. *Knowledge Sharing Across Borders- A Study in the IKEA World.* (2007). See bibliography list for the full references.

tomers to buy things that without IKEA's heavy promotional campaigns they would not think they would need at all. It is because of this that the classical IKEA internal slogan "*The Product Range – Our Identity*" best captures the company's identity as one based on the variability and adjustability of its products.

Whatever challenge IKEA has encountered on the way to its growth, – be it an ideological clash or a problem of changing fashion or a hard-to-penetrate foreign market, IKEA has resolved them by adjusting the representation of its product range to a variable field of contexts (e.g. historical, aesthetic, geographical, cultural and political). The product range with which it is associated is a result of its problem-driven model; IKEA responds to the demand of the times, as Miriam Salzer outlines:

IKEA's products, home furnishing articles, constitute the "physical outcome" of IKEA. They are the artefacts. The tangible commodities of IKEA's activities. As such, they do not only convey meanings to the organisation of what IKEA is all about, but they are also an important part in forming IKEA's image on the markets. Together with IKEA's stores, ads, commercials, catalogues, etc., the products contribute to the images that we, as outsiders and particularly as customers, construct of the company.¹³⁴

In the twenty-first century IKEA shifts to advertising solutions rather than products, convincing a consumer that she produces her own living space, when selecting from the product range offered by IKEA. The company switches from promoting its products as ready-made decisions, or as objects that fill in an empty living space, to promoting its products as the tools for the living space solutions, leaving the creative process of home design to a customer's own taste and needs. In the long and meandering searches of the 1980s and 1990s, when Kamprad instructed the company to concentrate on the client rather than on the product, the result was two-fold: first, it meant the abstraction of living spaces and second, in a paradoxical way, it resulted in the visual absence of the target consumer on the catalogue pages. By the 2000s he offered to sell the products, masking them under a concept of the free distribution of ideas.

Certainly, IKEA regulates and prefabricates the ideas and their solutions, as well as in the individual living space design. All the same, a customer gets the impression that she is not a passive buyer, but an active producer and designer of her own home. In this way IKEA solves the problem of the de-

¹³⁴ Salzer, Miriam. *Identity Across Borders. A Study in the "IKEA-World,"* p. 111.

personalised and non-imaginative consumer who turns to IKEA in the search for simple solutions.

In the early 2000s IKEA entered the huge Russian market after several years of setbacks¹³⁵ with the slogan that was recognised as the most successful Russian advertising motto in the past twenty years: *Got Idea-Got Ikea!* (*Jest' Idea – Jest' Ikea!*).¹³⁶ This motto serves as a crystalline expression of the wider marketing strategy to offer ideas and solutions rather than to promote sales of goods.

4.6. The new old living spaces

The catalogue from 2002 is divided into six sections, each suggesting a certain life situation that can be turned from a problem to a resource of inspiration for self-exploration of a myriad of possible ideas and solutions for the (new) living space. Each section of the catalogue is said to reveal major issues and demands within the field of contemporary domesticity:

1. A home for a BIG FAMILY
2. A home for PEACE and quietness
3. A SMALL home with big ideas
4. A home – FINALLY!
5. A home that can quickly become NEW
6. A CONNECTED home

These sections offer not only spatial solutions for established life situations (for example, when a family has grown too big or when someone is looking for easy tips to renovate the old or furnish the new apartment, etc.) additionally, they also advance re-interpretations and redefinitions of the very concepts of the “home,” of “living” and “co-habiting,” as well as the notion of a “big family” *as such*:

A home for a BIG FAMILY

Mama-papa-child? No, more: mama – mama’s new man – his children – her children – their common children. Home is full of children. All want to play toy and games, eat, watch TV. Here you can see how to create a modern

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¹³⁵ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 169.

¹³⁶ According to the survey by the Russian PR and marketing portal *sostav.ru* (2010), published in many Russian mass media and internet resources. In common use the slogan became an adverb and is familiar to most Russians.

home for a modern family without getting a feeling that you have moved to a kindergarten.¹³⁷

The transformation of a society through changing a traditional notion of the home was at the core of functionalist aesthetics. The Russian mode initially argued for the complete dissolution of the family as a social institution and called instead for the collective upbringing of children born outside of conventional marriages through an organised system of state educational institutions. The Swedish mode was less radical in this respect, and yet *Acceptera* claims that the notion and constitution of the family as a social institution should open up to the demands of the time, as Sven-Olov Wallenstein sums up:”

But as we will see, this reassembling of the family must now obey a different logic that emphasises its openness and capacity for future transformations; it is no longer the hearth around which everything revolves, but an *apparatus* (bearing in mind the sense of the term *dispositif* in Foucault) that must be able to integrate new technical, scientific, and moral intentions, while still performing the task of connecting the individual to the larger social order, safeguarding against individual anomalies, and in this sense ensuring ‘security’ at a basic level.¹³⁸

A transformation in the traditional notion of the family is a requirement for the successful arrangement and production of the new living space. This idea has clearly been revived by IKEA for the purpose of introducing a “new” perspective to living space solutions. Big ideas for small homes was another functionalist approach to the realisation of *Existenzminimum* concept, which suggested that the rationalisation and the optimisation of a minimal living space are necessary conditions in the production of functional dwelling. As an example, IKEA suggests solutions for a 42 square-metre apartment for a nuclear family comprising of a mother, father, and son, and with the presentation of these solutions, floor-plans are brought back into the catalogues.¹³⁹

A remarkable thing is that it is a single-room apartment with a kitchen, which does not allow for separate rooms for the child and his parents – the

¹³⁷ IKEA catalogue: 2002, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Wallenstein, Sven-Olov. “A Family Affair. Swedish Modernism and the Administering of Life.” In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov, (eds.) *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 194.

¹³⁹ IKEA catalogue: 2002, p. 29.

type of home that was most typical in Swedish cities during the 1930s but the existence of which have returned since then as the only affordable option. The acute sense of a housing shortage has intensified ever since, not only in Sweden, but in most large cities in the world.

Thus, the multi-functionality of the living space and its transformability has become once more an important quality sought for in a home. The announcement to the second section of the 2002 catalogue, which claims to provide big ideas for a small house, admits that “most of us live in smaller places than we would want,”¹⁴⁰ suggesting a puzzle to be solved while arranging a living space for a family of three in a 42-square metre apartment. IKEA claims that in order to make small places work for you, you need to think big from the start,¹⁴¹ thus introducing a functionalist approach to the living space solution. This approach considers the rational and calculated use of each square inch of the living space as well as its rational zoning, turning the only existing room to a transformable living cell that works as a play- and a living-room during the day, and as a bedroom at night.

The first section of the catalogue refers to the arrangement of the living space for a family of a complex composition with children from multiple marriages. It emphasises, first of all, the social nature of the changes that have affected the traditional family constellation, and thus claims for the need to meet the demands of an extended family within a fairly large apartment. The second section deals with the spatial problem of a small apartment, which is initially insufficient for even a small family of three. It goes onto underline the lived reality that many people must today deal with restricted spaces and unaffordable rents, which are the direct consequences of the housing shortage.

The third section combines the problems of the two previous sections by adding the economic aspect of a lack of disposable income, which serves as an obstacle for the successful acquisition of a fully functional living space.

The home- FINALLY! section of the catalogue offers ideas for the first home.¹⁴² But, as IKEA are themselves fully aware, the realisation of the dream reveals in reality more problems. A first home is most likely still to be inadequate in terms of its size. Further, the possibility of acquiring the first home might be the consequence of a financial calculation made on the part of two or more individuals to *share* an apartment together for the sake

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¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² IKEA catalogue: 2002, p. 37.

of cutting the cost of rent. In each of these cases there is nothing *final* about the first acquisition of a home. It is most likely a short-term solution where the home-owners are always-already preparing for the next move. It leads to the real possibility of a constant migration from one place to another, raising the question of mobility and the transitional character of contemporary living spaces, as well as of the long-term necessity to move frequently from place to place. Here IKEA makes a shift from the promotion of a conventional notion of home and everyday life to the acceptance of a non-stable space, where one stays only temporally, as still a home. The living space is turned into a fluid concept that adjusts everyday life to constant spatial, territorial, and also social transformations. No longer is the notion of home fixed within the same rooms, flats, buildings, districts, cities, and even countries, but it is constantly a matter of movement, migration, of an indefinite series of readjustments to changing and shifting of circumstances. IKEA thus admits that the contemporary understanding of everyday life is not tied up to a well-established and sediment set of routines and routes between house, workplace, and the nearby supermarket.

The living space stops being a fixed point of reference, a stable shelter around which all everyday practices are organised and which involves everyday interaction with members of the same family, since co-habitants also constantly change and so do not necessarily belong to either a family circle or a network of friends. In the 2019 catalogue the definition of home is condensed to a motto: “*Home is where I hang my clothing.*”¹⁴³ (fig. 52.).

IKEA has always noticed and considered situations on the housing markets in addition to sociological changes in the everyday life patterns that affect home arrangements. Catalogues have served not only as promotional printed materials and price indexes, but they have been featured as manuals for how to solve various life challenges in a ‘fun and easy’ manner. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this profile has been strengthened. Sara Kristoffersson puts it in the following way: “The mood [of the catalogues] has always been jauntily familiar and inclusive: we understand your situation and we are here to help you.”¹⁴⁴

The “first-home situation” is described in the catalogue with sympathy and understanding:

¹⁴³ “Hemma är där jag hänger mina kläder”. IKEA catalogue: 2019, p. 149.

¹⁴⁴ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*. P. 26.

First home. No money, no curtains, no mama, no first-hand contract lease – probably the most radical home in your life! Since you are unlikely to stay there longer than for four months at a time, the smart furnishing requires an extra careful consideration. There should not be many furniture pieces, they should probably have wheels or could be easily folded together, and preferably weigh less than 3 kilos.¹⁴⁵

Such a home should not only be transformable, but transportable and easy to assemble on a new spot. IKEA offers here easy-to-carry solutions for dealing with youngsters whose resources are limited to their physical ability to carry all they need for a new home in a couple of blue FRAKTA bags. The idea of measuring living possessions with the IKEA shopping bags was artistically reworked by Adriana Valdez Young, an artist, who turned the famous blue FRAKTA plastic bags to the material, source and measurement units of her own life's critical representation. For instance, Young refashioned the blue shopping bags into dresses, broadening their use from more conventional storage units and laundry-bags, and making the level of IKEA's penetration to the everyday living on a global level. Yet, she went further, when she started reducing her material possessions so that they could fit only in a few shopping bags. She thus transformed the iconic blue bag, commonly used for shuttling one's IKEA consumables from the check-out to the car, into a unit of measurement, in order to expose the unrestrained consumerist culture all around her. Young's reasoning is introduced in an article by Emma Allen, "From Showroom to Studio: Artists Repurpose IKEA Products:"¹⁴⁶

"But how many IKEA bags would it take to pack all of the contents of an average American home?" she asks. "The IKEA Frakta blue-tarp bag is an icon of our global consumer lifestyle and the excess consumption this entails."

To combat this impulse for immoderation, the artist began shedding her possessions, to the point that when she moved from Brooklyn a couple years ago, all of her belongings fit into two Fraktas. "And you know what? One of the first things I did when I got to London was to go to IKEA and buy all the basics I needed to restart my home," Young says. "They fit in exactly two

¹⁴⁵ IKEA catalogue: 2007, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ Allen, Emma. "From Showroom to Studio: Artists Repurpose IKEA Products." Electronic publication for the artnews.com portal, 06.09.2013. <http://www.artnews.com/2013/06/19/the-ikea-esthetic-in-art/>

IKEA bags. So now the footprint of my possessions is equal to four IKEA bags. I can feel like this is an accomplishment.”¹⁴⁷

Another demand met in the next section of the 2002 catalogue stands for the renewal of living space under the use of limited resources. Affordable solutions for making a home look and function in a new and different way are suggested without involving much skill, time, and budget.

The final concept, that reveals a problem indicative of the present but is redescribed as a creative solution by the catalogue is the general trend towards flexible work-time, self-employment, and free-lancing: with more people working from home, rational zoning of the living space is called for as a solution: the effective combination of a home with an office space, so that all family members can sustain their everyday routines – their working and resting hours, their timetables and schedules – without stress. The development of computer and digital technologies allows a distant office to be arranged in any place, and yet smart zoning is still required to avoid conflicts within the family, i.e. when all members share and use the same living space for different ends.

Another situation to be resolved through the suggested solutions found in the catalogue, is when a person stays overnight in the office, which is first of all a place for work and business meetings. The phenomenon of living in an office has received a special name in Swedish, *bokal* (from *bo-* to live and *lokal* – a premise, usually a commercial office): “Here you can really work, if you want to. Or at least pretend that you do.”¹⁴⁸

Each of these sections serve to outline the major trends in contemporary everyday living and they reflect changes that require the continual adjustment of the organisation of living space and living practices to these changing circumstances – everyday problems experienced by, as the IKEA motto says, the “many people,” but that translate into a huge opportunity for the company’s own projected growth and profits.

Through its catalogues IKEA promotes a way of thinking that resonates with what had been outlined already in the 1920s and 1930s by functionalists as the only efficient life-building strategy: a strategy of perceiving living space as a complex combination of both spatial dimensions and living practices. A living space is not purely outlined by its material borders; it is

¹⁴⁷ Allen, Emma. *From Showroom to Studio: Artists Repurpose IKEA Products*. Online publication.

¹⁴⁸ IKEA catalogue: 2002, p. 7.

defined by and through the relation of its material dimensions to the temporal, cultural, and psychological.

As a result, the catalogue from 2003 suggests quitting “square thinking:” “Think in cubic metres and you will get 5 times more space”¹⁴⁹ (fig. 53.). Thus IKEA continues explaining how it manages to keep its prices low and its quality high.

Throughout the 2000s, IKEA sustains its orientation towards the first commandment of *The Testament of a Furniture Dealer* (1976) which outlines the main marketing directions towards the production of a wide range of products and solutions at the lowest possible prices:

We shall offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.¹⁵⁰

This commandment reveals that the company is aware that most people around the globalised world – and not only in Sweden – are dealing with the same everyday life situations, where each and every person aims towards somehow arranging their living spaces, regardless of their cultural, social, and economic differences. Bjarnestam offers the following ‘official’ interpretation of the commandment:

The commandment is based on the idea that everyday life is a global business opportunity – the many people, wherever they may live, have the same needs: eating, sleeping, storing, socialising and so on. Most of them don’t have a lot of money to spend on their homes, and space is often restricted. So low price comes first.¹⁵¹

4.7. Digitalisation of the living space

Since 2006 IKEA has started including computer-generated images into its catalogues. At this point in time, between 60 and 75% of all single product images, both in catalogues and on the website, are computer-generated.¹⁵² In the 2010 catalogue the first whole-room computer-generated image was

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¹⁴⁹ IKEA catalogue: 2002, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Citation in: Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 197.

¹⁵¹ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 197.

¹⁵² Parkin, Kirsty. “Building 3D with IKEA.” Online publication: http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/CGSFeatures/CGSFeatureSpecial/building_3d_with_ikea

included and over subsequent years their number has been constantly increasing.¹⁵³

From this time onwards, physical originals of living spaces have ceased to exist on IKEA catalogues' pages. Catalogues now show representations of digital models of those spaces that have never existed: a digital trick that appropriates imaginary spaces in order to produce desire to materialise these spaces into real physical ones in a customer's home. The origins of this trick can be traced back to Le Corbusier's avant-garde experiments conducted on the popular advertisements of his time. Beatriz Colomina refers to a specific example of Le Corbusier's play with images of a bidet produced by Maison Pirsoul. Le Corbusier published the images on top of his article *Autres icônes: les musées* in *L'Esprit nouveau*, alongside an image of Duchamp's *Fountain* by R. Mutt of 1917.¹⁵⁴

Colomina discusses the fact that no originals of Le Corbusier's depicted objects could actually be found, since they "both exist only as reproductions", while "the original object, the actual urinal has been lost."¹⁵⁵ Colomina continues:

The origin of the first is its publication in the pages of *L'Esprit nouveau*; there is no other "original". The second was supposed to have been exhibited in the Salon of Independents in New York but never was, as it was rejected; what remains is only the photograph of it. Nevertheless, it is this document, together with a piece of contemporary criticism by Beatrice Wood in *The Blind Man*, a New York dada journal, that has assured this piece a place in history.¹⁵⁶

Existence of a real object, of an "original", which is promoted on the advertisement through its image is not necessary anymore. The presupposed possibility of mass reproduction of standardised objects (in the case of IKEA – both of its products and ready-made interiors) has not been questioned since Duchamp's famous urinal. Once technology made possible the avoidance of a physical object in the process of its imagery reproduction, it has been almost entirely excluded for the sake of the optimisation of the cost of production.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, p. 171.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Duchamp's urinal was signed by the author, which elevated an industrially produced object to the level of an art-work. The publishing of its image within the museum exhibition space – even though that space has never exhibited that object to public, – included it into the register of museum exhibits. IKEA living spaces, produced by means of computer-generated images of objects that have never existed in the physical world are still recorded for the history as set interiors in the company catalogues, and they will be later exhibited within the existing physical space of the *real* IKEA museum in Älmhult (fig. 54.). The images without originals represent models of space that are to be physically reproduced within real homes – they are the sketches of real spaces that can be connected up with the “paper architecture” of the Soviet avant-garde, the value of which was created on its own account, without there being any necessity to transform the designs into real constructions.

Many living spaces that are depicted in contemporary catalogues have never existed in physical reality. Digitalisation of the living space has become a part of everyday life through mass media (television, the internet, etc.) and there is little interest among us to distinguish between real and imagined spaces, or to even take a closer look. Yet, the digitalisation of everyday living space requires from the producers to preserve the feeling of it being real; to preserve the possibility of a tactile experience of this space so as to make them attractive sales objects, as emphasised by Kirsty Parkin, a digital designer for CGSociety, an international organisation of digital artists:

When IKEA started to look at creating more than product images in 3D a few years ago, they already had a set look and feel for IKEA pictures. They wanted to keep the sense of reality and the feel of a "lived in" environment when moving over to digital workflow. They didn't want their customers to see or even more importantly feel any difference. Says Martin, "We understand how important the knowledge of home furnishing is. How homes look, how homes feel, and so on. The experienced photographers at IKEA have been working with the interior designers on re-creating this feel for fifteen to twenty years, some of them. We needed to translate that knowledge over to the 3D artists who were tech-savvy but in some cases coming directly from school. We needed them to understand the kind of feel we wanted the images to convey. It was very hard at the beginning."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Parkin, Kirsty. *Building 3D with IKEA*. Online publication: http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/CGSFeatures/CGSFeatureSpecial/building_3d_with_ikea

The presentation of living spaces within the pages of the IKEA catalogues is set the task of translating the feeling of a material home into a space that has never existed, to produce a sense of bodily presence within the physical space of a home, and to convince a customer that what they see is an image of a real existing home that they can purchase and have delivered to their door.

Yet, at the same time, IKEA continues reproducing living spaces in their stores, providing its clients with possibility of experiencing something tactile and emotional, forging an affective connection to the material world of IKEA objects as well as to the conventional notion of home as a material space.

The digital images of home interiors in the IKEA catalogues do not intend to destroy the materiality of the living space, nor do they offer an alternative definition of a home that would be something other than a material space. Computer-generated images do not transit perception of the everyday to virtual reality, rather they produce the augmented reality where physical space is partly or completely produced through the use of computer technologies. A contemporary catalogue interior is an imitation of the physical world; it is an image of an image, a reproduction not of the physical space, but of the feeling and an impression of that space.

For IKEA, the notion of home is something to be renewed, optimised, and rationalised for the sake of producing a better and easier life. Still, the home remains a well-defined physical place, around which everyday life is concentrated; and the mottos and slogans that are spread across catalogue covers never question this assumed sense.

Mottos receive various translations for different national editions, but they concentrate around the same idea of the home as the most important place in the world, as claimed on the 2008 catalogue cover (fig. 55.). The 2007 cover received various mottos in different countries from *Lev Livet Lite Enklare* (*Live a little easier or simpler life*) in Sweden to *Life begins at Home* or *Celebrate your Everyday Life* in English editions.

Even in the most recent catalogues IKEA stands for the traditional notion of home that is rationalised and optimised through the conventional means of smart furnishing. Being a furniture retailer, IKEA sees the main tool of living space organisation in solutions that are realised through material things, such as furniture, dishes, lighting, fabrics, etc.

It is remarkable, then, that the images of the catalogue living spaces, many of which are fully digitalised, do not allow digital technologies and their images into the interiors themselves. The fast digitalisation of dwellings, the 'smart home' technologies and the very concept of digital homes

are completely ignored. The image of a living spaces as first and foremost a furnished space (be it an apartment or, more rarely, a villa) is the image of a familiar and even a conservative home. IKEA continues operating with functionalist methods and concepts that were developed ninety-five years ago and that could not include digital tools for the production of living space at that time. The problems of a growing housing shortage, of economic and migration crises, are meant to be resolved through the same means of rationalised furnishing, as was suggested by the avant-garde during the interwar period.

For IKEA, the home is the space subject to all the conditions and constraints of the physical world, while virtual reality is exclusive of material things and their possession. IKEA stands on the material side of the living space, claiming through one of its covers for the 2011 catalogue that “it is the inside that matters.” The motto certainly carries huge business potential, since humanity will always need material things to sustain its living. However, can the contemporary living space be limited either to the world of material things or to the living practices that operate within this space? The living space is rapidly turning inside out, where the ‘out’ is no longer a step beyond the walls of a room and towards the outer bounds of social and urban space, as was the case in the modernist era. ‘Moving out’ now means a transition to virtual living spaces, where for many their Facebook home pages produce more strings with which to attach them to a notion of home – as a place of belonging and storage of memories, information, emotions, and relationships – than their short-term rented dwellings and their temporary living practices. These virtual strings often prove to be more stable and sustainable than material things; they are easy to carry along in a smart phone or a laptop – and thus easier to maintain and develop. The temporary dwellings with alien furniture, immediate infrastructures, jobs, occasional co-habitants, and necessary activities that fill in the changing everyday life of many people at every given moment turn out to be more ephemeral, even though they seem to be more material. The everyday life may fit into a smart phone better than into the physical walls of a temporary home.

The fast-increasing mobility of everyday life forms circumstances when possession of a stable home as a point of return and as a point of reference is no longer a necessary and sustainable condition for the production of feeling of being at home. As was envisaged by functionalists, the notion of home can be reduced to the things that one can carry with her, or as the artist Adriana Valdez Young suggests, – into the four IKEA blue FRAKTA bags. The notion of home as a point of reference is not necessarily a place

where one can return; that point can be reduced to a material symbol of a notion of home or to a virtual space where one feels at home.

4.8. First the kitchen, then the home: moving along with the everyday

For the modernist aesthetics and for the functionalist method as such, the kitchen served as the major object of reformation and as the major reference point, from which the transformation of the whole home and then, further, of the whole society was to begin.¹⁵⁸

In the catalogue from 2017, IKEA promotes a SUNNERSTA kitchen that can transform not only any space to a living place, but that can be taken to any new place, thereby helping to appropriate that next place into a home (fig. 56.) “A kitchen that you can take with you when you move”¹⁵⁹ is a striking symbol of contemporary everyday living. It can be easily assembled at the places that are not meant for kitchens and thus ensure that living in some form can continue on an everyday basis. For radical cases, the SUNNERSTA kitchen does not even require a canalisation system. Its description in the Swedish edition claims that “even if you are young and have a thin wallet you can still get a kitchen that works.”¹⁶⁰ A solution for a temporary living situation, and one that is typical for those who are young and have just moved out. In the Russian edition, the original slogan ends up being a fully formed sentence: “That’s why it is ideal for those whose main wealth is their youth rather than a huge salary.”¹⁶¹

The SUNNERSTA kitchen constitutes a material point of reference to those who cannot afford a sustainable home and thus are forced to live their lives through transition. The very development and appearance of such a kitchen is, from the pages of the IKEA catalogue, a material indication that vast numbers of people – from students and jobless adults to working migrants and refugees – are deprived access to a sustainable material home.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ if to recall the projects of rationalised kitchens by e.g. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky and Moisey Ginzburg that stood up for the principle “*First the kitchen and then the façade*”.

¹⁵⁹ IKEA catalogue of 2017: p. 39.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ IKEA catalogue: 2017. Russian edition, p. 39.

¹⁶² Further on the kitchens’ representation in the IKEA catalogues as a subject of social semiotic approach see in: Ledin, Per; Machin, David. “Forty Years of IKEA Kitchens and the Rise of Neoliberal Control of Domestic Space.” In: *Visual Communication*. 2018, Vol. 0 (0), p. 1–23.

Since the beginning of the 2010s IKEA have emphasised the small home as an object of rationalisation and optimisation, which can provide sustainable everyday living under such headings as, for example, to “be above the challenges”, suggesting ideas for multi-functional interiors.¹⁶³ In a similar way to the beginning of the 2000s, IKEA turns back to those living situations that require cohabiting or dwelling in small spaces – the so-called *compact living*, where advice is given about how best to “make the walls work,” and claiming that there is no such thing as a shortage of space, but rather a shortage of ideas.¹⁶⁴ Catalogues become manuals for how to optimise space in the home; they explain how to organise available space, in order to enjoy everyday life more, declaring that: “A home does not need to be big, just smart” (fig. 57.).¹⁶⁵

Another thing that distinguishes the catalogues of the 2010s is the growing visibility of IKEA’s designers, which in previous decades were kept anonymous (fig. 58.), despite the fact IKEA has collaborated with both famous and young designers from the start, as noted by Sara Kristofferson:

To a much greater extent, designers now function as a marketing ploy. This change of mind is probably related to the current trend where designers are credited with as much importance as the products themselves. In line with other brands like H&M, IKEA has featured its collaboration with well-known designers and this has also come to be seen as an aspect of marketing because working with famous designers generates publicity from the media.¹⁶⁶

With regards to visual and formal expression, IKEA keeps working within the broad tradition of a modernist aesthetics, given that contemporary trends favour it. IKEA openly declares modernism its source of inspiration, defending its direct citation of modernist designs from the past and arguing, with Kamprad’s words, that “the products have grown more or less from one another,”¹⁶⁷ Bjarnestam continues:

Most contemporary modernists are in fact neo-modernists and part of this century-old tradition of similar ideas and mutual inspiration. IKEA too has clearly joined this tradition.¹⁶⁸

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¹⁶³ IKEA catalogue: 2012, p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ IKEA catalogue: 2012, cover.

¹⁶⁶ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 65.

¹⁶⁷ Bjarnestam, Eva. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 217.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

An emphasis on the function of catalogue images shifts from the introduction of ready-made interiors to a problem-solution based approach, so that the purpose of the image now is how best to fit everyday living practices – hobbies, work, and living routines, etc. – into existing living spaces. The images depict heavily lived spaces that are busy with people, children, and where things are often spread around the rooms. The living space is now treated in light of the whole complexity of its everyday existence. IKEA does not depict as much of the living space any more, preferring pictures of everyday living itself, where IKEA becomes a natural environment of that everyday, which is appropriated and adjusted by its inhabitants to their living practices. As Jean Mark Tersen, the Customer Relation Operation Manager at IKEA Group, notes: “People use our products in the most unexpected ways, and that is great. Since we create them for this very reason.”¹⁶⁹

The 2014 and 2015 catalogues suggest a division of spaces into sections that refer not to the zoned spaces or types of rooms (e.g. “bedroom”, “living room”, etc.), but to the everyday activities. Accents are shifted from the functions of the room to living practices: “we are resting;” “we are putting things in order;” “we are eating;” “we are cooking;” “we are sleeping;” “we are taking care of ourselves;” and the final section that, for example, in the Russian version can be read two-fold: “the goods for the life *of* a home” or “the goods for the life *at* home.”

The “religious appreciation of everyday life” as Barbara Miller Lane defines the nature of Ellen Key’s text *Beauty in the Home*¹⁷⁰ has been heating the pages of recent catalogues, with a motto of English and Swedish editions: *Where the everyday life begins* (front cover) – *And where it ends* (back cover) (fig. 59.). Yet the motto for the Russian edition was changed to the *Awakening Love* (front cover) – *Falling asleep with love* (back cover). The notion of the everyday in Russia still possesses rather strong negative connotations, carrying associations with the “hard and grey routines” of Soviet times. IKEA puts special efforts into fighting with a perception of everyday life as “grey,” starting with the front message for the section on the goods for home where it is claimed that “Every day is important”, and noting that IKEA “wants to make everyday life not only more beautiful, but also easier:”

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¹⁶⁹ IKEA catalogue: 2014, p. 42.

¹⁷⁰ Miller Lane, Barbara. “An Introduction to Ellen Key’s ‘Beauty in the Home.’” In: Creagh, Lucy, Kåberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. (New York: MOMA, 2008), p. 25.

When a home meets your lifestyle, your living becomes easier and more pleasant.¹⁷¹

The contemporary catalogues first of all sell the ideas, they offer help in conflict-solving situations, and, with often a touch of irony, they suggest compromising solutions with regards to the very organisation of living space. An especially good example here is lifted from the 2016 catalogue, which advises playing with both the sensual and routinised aspects of relationships within a family:

Ideal compromise

He loves spartan conditions, but you want it in a softer manner? It is so simple to be together, when each of you – is in her own space!¹⁷²

Contemporary catalogues do not represent any new concept of living space representations, they rather step away from representing pre-arranged and complete living spaces. There is a strong inclination towards featuring practices, activities, and problem-resolving processes, but always in a ‘fun and easy way.’ There is a whole range of expressed emotions to be found on the pages of IKEA catalogues, but with one obvious restriction – there can only be the expression of positive emotions, since the home is depicted as the place where only happiness and joy live.

IKEA has always worked in the direction first pointed out by Ellen Key and Gregor Paulsson, both of whom admitted that most people could not afford high-quality products of exclusive design, which were identified as luxury products in *Acceptera*, and which were outlined as the high-standard ones by Russian constructivists. The solution that IKEA offers is what Ellen Key calls “wholly modern, comparatively inexpensive furniture”¹⁷³ of good quality and good design that should elevate the average level of the living space’s quality (and thus the quality of life) by making these products affordable. The possibility of ensuring that products remain affordable is by systematically applying mass industrial production methods as well as adopting principles of collective design. As was suggested by Ellen Key:

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¹⁷¹ IKEA catalogue 2015, p. 3.

¹⁷² IKEA catalogue 2016, p. 87.

¹⁷³ Key, Elen. “Beauty in the Home.” In: *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*. p. 47.

But with a little thought, a little effort, you can nevertheless have quite beautiful furniture at a reasonable cost.¹⁷⁴

In Kamprad's testament addressing how the company should further develop as well as in his message to the whole of humanity he claims that reality should be perceived not as a never-ending fight with arising problems, but as a source of endless opportunities, since the "Future is filled with possibilities."¹⁷⁵

4.9. IKEA as the heir to the Swedish mode of functionalism

It was not from the very beginning that IKEA realised its organic connection to Swedish functionalism and accepted functionalism as its major stylistic and aesthetical ground. Neither was it from the very start that the company resembled and emphasised its Swedishness. Sara Kristoffersson notes that IKEA's profile "has not always been Swedish" and that IKEA was 'Swedecised' only in the late 1970s when it started conquering markets outside Scandinavia.¹⁷⁶

By that time Sweden was strongly viewed as the flagship country of Scandinavian design that resembled style: it "was elegant and unassertive without decorative excesses" and "usually employed natural materials."¹⁷⁷ But the most important thing was that the "Swedish modern", as it was often called outside Sweden, resembled the image of its motherland "as a golden mean between socialism and capitalism", which Kristoffersson calls "a useful marketing aid for Swedish design":

The style synchronised with the political middle way and the concept is often claimed as an example of the international success of Swedish designers.¹⁷⁸

IKEA appropriated successful and trustworthy images of its home country as a marketing strategy to promote its products internationally, even though by that time most of them were produced outside Sweden. Miriam Salzer, in her thesis on IKEA's business identity, outlines major components of the

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¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Citation from: Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁶ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 62.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

national character that the company had appropriated. That this national character translated through the company's self-presentation is clear to most Swedes, she claims, but "outside Scandinavia, however, it is not quite as natural:"

The "IKEA-way" of doing things is often viewed as a "Swedish" way. Cost-consciousness, team-spirit, informality and egalitarian relationships are all regarded as values emanating from the Swedish or "Smålandish" culture. For many Swedes, most parts of IKEA's official policy feel quite natural; it is a part of how we are [...].¹⁷⁹

The goal "to reach out as extensively as possible," as noted by Kristoffersson, required an identity "which can also be understood globally."¹⁸⁰ The image of Sweden and its recognition as one of the leading countries in the sphere of design were extremely appropriate to IKEA's goals.

The merging of the functionalist method and Swedish national identity into the core of IKEA's business philosophy is articulated in the essay published in the catalogue from the 1995 Exhibition in Milan where the IKEA PS collection was introduced. Sara Kristoffersson brings up a citation from the text of the catalogue in her book,¹⁸¹ which outlines how the company articulates functionalism and an image of Sweden as part of its own corporate identity:

Swedish and Scandinavian design have been famous ever since the beginning of the twentieth century. The Swedish model has also become synonymous with good value, functionality and quality together with an ambition to achieve widespread accessibility. IKEA PS is a complement to IKEA's normal range and aims to emphasise it.¹⁸²

IKEA has intentionally emphasised its Swedishness ever since. In exhibitions such as *From Ellen Key to IKEA* at Röhsska design museum, it draws its ancestral lines back to Swedish functionalism. It has appropriated modernist slogans¹⁸³ and has referenced many of major texts on Swedish modernism. Kristoffersson writes:

¹⁷⁹ Salzer, Miriam. *Identity Across Borders. A Study in the "IKEA-World,"* p. 151.

¹⁸⁰ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History,* p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Kristoffersson's footnote: *IKEA PS. Forum för design* (text by Kerstin Wickman) (Älmhult, IKEA of Sweden, 1995)

¹⁸² Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History,* p. 67.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

Beauty in the Home, Better Things for Everyday Life and *acceptera* were of great importance to the dominant agenda and public discourse on architecture and interior design in Sweden. Housing became a political issue with political solutions.¹⁸⁴

Sweden, its national identity, Älmhult as the home town of the company (fig. 60.), and its founder Ingvar Kamprad became inseparable parts of IKEA's corporate self-presentation and branding policy, all of which are visible in its daily business operations and activities (from promotional campaigns and marketing strategies to exhibitions). Through using and benefiting from its Swedishness – specifically, the nation's achievements in the social and cultural spheres – both IKEA and the Swedish state serve to promote the country's image globally. As Sara Kristoffersson states:

IKEA does not merely sell design. It sells Sweden and, indeed, Scandinavia, too. Few international brands have such an explicitly national profile. IKEA has made 'Swedishness' a virtue in itself, as well as an essential aspect of its strategy for the brand. The blue and yellow logotype alludes to the Swedish flag, while the products have names that associate them with Sweden and Scandinavia; and Swedish food is served in IKEA's restaurants under the device 'A Taste of Sweden.' It is not just a matter of aesthetic and concrete references, for IKEA also makes use of more abstract notions about Swedish society and Swedish design.¹⁸⁵

The result of this cooperation between corporate and national brands is outlined by the Swedish Institute responsible for the promotion of the positive image of Sweden internationally:

To visit IKEA is to visit Sweden. IKEA fits very well onto the official brand platform of Sweden... The brand of the company could very well be described in the same terms as the platform for Sweden.¹⁸⁶

The range of products are declared to be another important part of IKEA's identity – a point made in the first of the nine commandments of *A Furniture Dealer's Testament* by Ingvar Kamprad. The products identified with IKEA should refer either to traditional or to modernist Swedish background. The idea, as formulated in the official narrative, is the following:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 59–60.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

In Scandinavia, the basic range should be perceived as typically IKEA, and outside of Scandinavia as typically Swedish.¹⁸⁷

The image of IKEA as part of Sweden's national rather than, more narrowly speaking, having only a corporate heritage has been supported and promoted by the company for decades. In his interview to Eva Bjarnestam, Ingvar Kamprad recalls an incident with a customer who was disappointed with the company's decision to change the width of the famous *BILLY* bookcase. This little exchange 'made him realise' that IKEA is actually a part of Swedish national heritage:

One customer wrote 'please bear in mind that the company doesn't belong to you, but the Swedish people.' I've thought about that many times. IKEA belongs to the Swedish people!¹⁸⁸

The successful incorporation of Swedishness into the company's profile is emphasised in the official narrative of the company's history, which has been always devoted to promoting the values of Swedish modernism, which, in turn, were predicated on the main principles of the Swedish welfare state – with its solidaristic conception of social justice and its responsibility to improve people's lives, with its notion of society modelled on a 'people's home' for all without exclusion. Bjarnestam defines Swedish Modern as "not actually a style, but rather a movement because it was underpinned by political and social ideas." She suggests that this was precisely a natural ground for IKEA to build on, citing its leader:

It is not hard to discern a model for IKEA's business concept of "creating a better everyday life for the many people" by offering "well designed, functional home furnishing products at prices that are so low that as many people as possible are able to afford them".¹⁸⁹

Thus, IKEA's reference to the Swedish nation and its multiple appropriations of its political and cultural history stand in line with its self-definition as being entirely consistent with the development of the Swedish mode of functionalism from the times of Ellen Key's *Beauty in the Home*. Each of IKEA's catalogues or advertisements is a testimony to Swedish modernism and a manifesto that borrows its style and prophetic character

¹⁸⁷ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 206.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

from the avant-garde manifestoes, even though in a softened and ironic way. Along with Ellen Key and Gregor Paulsson who claim that “the public wants a durable and beautiful product at a reasonable price,”¹⁹⁰ Kamprad sets the ambition to prove that this claim of the successful unity of high quality and low price is possible to realise through efficient and innovative use of resources. Reproductions of home interiors in stores, promotional campaigns, catalogues, Kamprad’s testaments, and handwritten letters to the employers as well as training courses for the staff and charity programs – all target not only the constant increase of sales, but there is an aim to educate and promote the functionalist philosophy of rational consumption and gradual life improvement. These basic principles have become part of IKEA’s Swedish identity, something that the company had been hankering for throughout the twentieth century. The ambition lies in that all these means should help IKEA make Sweden a better home for the people, as Bjarnestam states:

Firmly rooted in the idea of a typical Swedish home and the Swedish welfare society which was now starting to take shape, this is how IKEA began furnishing Sweden.¹⁹¹

As discussed earlier, the Swedish mode of functionalism places home at the centre of its aesthetics. The reforming of an entire society should begin from the reformation of the home – this was the message sent by Ellen Key and supported by both Gregor Paulsson and the writers for *Acceptera*. The study of human needs and desires, their identification with and satisfaction about the process of forming the living space lies at the core of the Swedish mode’s methodology. Ingvar Kamprad continues and appropriates this methodology, first declaring the home as a starting point and then claiming to begin with a definition of the people’s needs and desires in order to find the best and cheapest solutions to satisfy them:

We would start with people’s needs and wishes, and combine them with the requirements of production and the materials. We would bridge the two. We still call this fundamental idea the bridge technique.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Paulsson, Gregor. “Better Things for Everyday Life,” p. 85.

¹⁹¹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 203.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The problem of bridging the conflict between thought and feeling – one of the major dramatic outcomes of modernity – was considered by Giedion as one of the most urgent questions to address for the sake of human salvation, and is an issue that has already been discussed in the previous part of this book.¹⁹³ Thus, IKEA appropriates, whether consciously or unconsciously, the problematics of European modernist aesthetics as well as finding commercial solutions that are applicable to the mass market.

Using the heritage of European modernism as the source of sustainability of its basic product range, which, as it was mentioned earlier, constitutes the first commandment of Kamprad's testament, IKEA claims to rework and bring to life those functionalist ideas that were previously considered utopian but that, owing to the methods and strategies incorporated by IKEA, became available to humanity:

Many of the products that were designed at the Bauhaus, for example, remained as prototypes and were not put into production until years later. They were not immediately mass-produced in the way that their designers had intended. IKEA associates itself with political and social radicalism. The company claims not just to share its visions, but also to realise them. While modernist pioneers dreamed of housing and furnishings being available to all, IKEA has actually put this into practice.¹⁹⁴

All solutions that are developed by IKEA aim to better people's lives through improving their living spaces. This idea was first proposed, at least within the context of the Swedish mode of functionalism, by Ellen Key in her *Beauty in the Home*. Contemporary living spaces in Sweden as well as in the most remote regions of the world where IKEA is represented, are still studied and surveyed – another method that had been used by Swedish functionalists in the 1930s and 1940s, as part of the Folkhemmet policy development.

An individual home was placed as the foundation of the entire Swedish society by Swedish modernists. Through reforming individual homes the whole country will be reformed. Unlike the Russian mode, which believed that through architectural means the materialisation and reproduction of a new revolutionary ideology could alter reality, and unlike the German mode, which intended to form a more didactical living space, through which the organisation of people's living practices could be regulated, the

¹⁹³ See Chapter III. *The German Mode of Functionalism*.

¹⁹⁴ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 113.

Swedish mode departed from the definition and satisfaction of not only the needs, but also the desires of the inhabitants of the living space, which was not necessarily to be newly produced, and for which a gradual improvement would be acceptable.

The softer version of the Swedish mode of functionalism proved to be more sustainable and desirable both in Europe and across the ocean, as well as more understandable and adjustable to commercialisation.

Reflecting on the first decades of IKEA's rise, when the company instinctively linked itself to the Swedish mode of functionalism, Sara Kristoffersson notes:

The style proved right for the times. In the era of the cold war, Scandinavian modernism was seen in the USA as offering a warm, soft contrast to strict modernism with its German roots. While the latter was described as being authoritarian, cold and highly regulated, Scandinavian design was seen as humanist and democratic: a modern style that was not overly radical and that was social without being socialist.¹⁹⁵

IKEA claims to be a socially oriented company that is there to help as many people to solve their housing problems as possible. Since the times IKEA realised that functionalism was to become its identity, the company started offering solutions for those problems that were indicative for the times: those of the small size apartments, the necessities to share flats, and to constantly move from one home to another. Yet, besides satisfying basic needs that are the same around the world – e.g. those of a sustainable shelter, functionality, and minimal comfort – IKEA profits from the production of both needs and desires of which its customers were unaware before they entered a store or opened the pages of the catalogue. Hence IKEA demonstrates a high level of adjustability to the age with its caprices of stylistic preferences and fashions, showing its ability to maintain its modernist profile as well as to remain responsive to the social challenges and cultural differences in the countries it enters. IKEA applies the functionalist method, which had already been developed during the pre-war decades. This often raises the criticism that the company uses modernist slogans and methodologies that are outdated for the complexities and changing dynamics of today's contemporary world, as outlined for example in the critique of "the company's public motives and the actual circumstances" by Sara Kristoffersson:

—
¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

IKEA's social narratives can be said to depend upon outdated points of departure. The company makes use of modernist slogans and mottos that were actually formulated in circumstances that are different from those obtaining today. The rhetoric should be seen as a product of the time. One has to take into account the lack of housing and much poorer material standard of living that we are familiar with today. During the early part of the twentieth century there were demands for a sort of democratisation of beauty [...] there is a certain anachronism between IKEA's rhetoric and actual needs.¹⁹⁶

The abovementioned discrepancies, I would argue, are not the problems of the mottos and appeals that do not belong to the contemporary times, they are rather the results of having to adjust to a variety of customers' social backgrounds. IKEA thrives for selling the same range of products in all regions where it is represented and to promote Swedish design in all countries, arguing for its universality and adaptability to the people's needs and desires around the world. This universality and flexibility is one of the grounding claims of European functionalism in all its modes, along with the claimed timeliness of the formal language of modernist design. The unified, recognisable, and understandable design that should be read as Scandinavian outside of its own region of Northern Europe should at least go some way into indicating its sustainability in countries with very different economic, political, and social environments. While addressing general population and lower-budget customers who demand for the simplest and cheapest solutions on the one side, IKEA at the same time offers a line of higher-class products for a more sophisticated consumer on the other. In the last years the mottos and slogans from the ninety twenties have become urgent once more, as the world experiences increased migration and a growing housing crisis. The catalogues and ready-made interiors offered by IKEA in stores may be read as the litmus paper of social problems that IKEA is ready to resolve for the greatest profit to both the company and its consumers.

IKEA's "standardised diversity", a term which was coined by Stuart Ewen,¹⁹⁷ offers a wide range of products and solutions that seemingly satisfy different tastes; this too has become another important part of IKEA's

¹⁹⁶ Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by Ikea. A Cultural History*, p. 118.

¹⁹⁷ See: Ockman, Joan. *Architecture and Consumer Paradigm in the Mid-twentieth Century*. In: eds.: Mattsson Helena., Wallenstein Sven-Olov. *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*, p. 177.

business philosophy, allowing it to attract as many customers as possible: from corporate clients to refugees.

The Swedish mode of functionalism in the 1930s and 1940s became a ground upon which Sweden developed its own ‘Swedish’ or ‘third’ way. For IKEA, it became the ‘IKEA-way’: the company’s official methodology and business philosophy is that it does not mind combining traditionalism and an appeal to human irrational desires, on the one hand, with adopting the functionalist approach in order to reach straight forward and efficient solutions for living spaces, on the other. IKEA thrives to satisfy as many needs and desires as possible, even if the large number of those needs and desires are produced by the company itself.

Certainly, IKEA encourages consumerism, a reproducer of the very system from which it was itself produced. But as a business that is steeped in the tradition of twentieth century art, the way in which aesthetics and economics come into a relation is perhaps more significant for this study. For IKEA aestheticises consumerism through its very critique and self-irony.

Consumerism was the first enemy of the Russian mode of functionalism and was disapproved by the German mode as well. Yet, the Swedish mode recognised people’s longing for comfort, pleasure, and those little things that make a home and everyday living pleasing to the eye. The Swedish mode of functionalism has never been anti-consumerist, and IKEA, as a commercial project that aims to maximise its profits as much as possible, *unilateralises* the consumerist side, proving its sustainability as an aesthetic form even on a highly competitive global market.

Helena Mattsson in her essay “Designing the Reasonable Consumer,” argues that the new relation between an object and an individual had produced an ambivalence “on the level of personal desires,” which, according to modernist ideology, was to be maintained by the state through the rational organisation of processes of production and consumption:

The landscape of consumption and the relation between person and object shifted dramatically in Sweden in the beginning of the twentieth century – for the first time mass production had an impact on everyday life, especially in the cities. This however produced an ambivalence on the level of personal desires: standardisation implied a lack of personality, but at the same time commodities were displayed precisely in order to induce a desire. In the emerging modern society, the subject was a consumer that must learn to

handle this ambivalence and the new structures of desire should also control the production of objects.¹⁹⁸

It is in this approach to the object, which both fulfils and constitutes the living space, that the core difference between the two opposite ends of European functionalism lies.

For instance, Boris Arvatov as well as the *LEF*'s apologists argued for the elimination of both object and desire, so as to own it through the rational organisation of the 'new *byt*' (being or living).¹⁹⁹ The new relationships between the living space and its inhabitants, according to Russian constructivists, were to lead to the establishment of new relationships between individuals and their social activities. There was no assumed stimulus that could forge any relations between the individual and the material objects with which she uses and by which she is surrounded. Ideally, the living space was to be organised in such a way that an individual would not need to use any objects besides the very basic ones, and therefore those other objects would play no significant role in satisfying her desires. The goal was to reach a state where the social activities and relationships between individuals – and not the objects would themselves inspire and satisfy their wishes, needs, and desires.

The Russian philosopher and anthropologist Igor Chubarov in his book *Kollektivnaya Chuvstvennost: Teorii i praktiki Levogo Avangarda* [Collective Sensitivity: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde]²⁰⁰ notes that it is this very approach to a material object that distinguishes the industrial doctrine of LEF from the ideas of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius:

It is an important fact here that, unlike theoreticians of the industrial art in Russia, their Western colleagues stood on the positions of pure utilitarianism – of the economic value and purposefulness of the everyday objects, which here served as abstract aesthetical principles that were formulated on the basis of a one-sided understanding of the idea of technological progress. Thus, the path to the fetishisation of the produced objects and even to their

¹⁹⁸ Mattsson, Helena. "Designing the Reasonable Consumer." In: Mattsson, Helena; Wallenstein, Sven-Olov, (eds.) *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State*. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), p. 81.

¹⁹⁹ Read more in the Chapter I of this Part of the thesis.

²⁰⁰ Chubarov, Igor. *Kollektivnaya Chuvstvennost: Teorii i praktiki Levogo Avangarda* [Collective Sensitivity: Theories and Practices of the Left Avant-Garde]. (Moscow: Publishing house of the Higher School of Economics, 2014)

sacralisation was opened under the condition of constant replacement of art with pure technicism and industrial design.²⁰¹

Even though IKEA, like both the Russian and German functionalists, prefers to associate itself with large industrial processes rather than with the handicrafts of art and design projects,²⁰² it nonetheless aestheticises its commodities and promotes the value of the everyday and, very often, those unnecessary objects that make life more joyful.

It can therefore be concluded that IKEA rests on some of the major principles and distinguishing features of the Swedish mode of functionalism; it maintains strong ties to a sense of Swedishness; it identifies its working methods and aesthetics within traditional Swedish lifestyles, and places the individual at the centre of its ideology and aesthetics. IKEA, following the ideology of the Swedish mode of functionalism, claims to improve a person's life through the improvement of her home, which, in turn, is perceived as something much more important than just a shelter, but which, at the same time, is the part of a more general living space, comprising of many individual homes. Taken together, these features build a country that in spite of the contemporary critique of its devotion to the utopian ideals of a welfare state, still strives to remain the *Folkhemmet* – the people's home. IKEA transfers and spreads the ideals of the Swedish mode of functionalism through commercial channels, contributing to the idealistic image of Sweden as the last island of the lost welfare paradise.

For the time being, the Swedish mode is the only stance of functionalism that has survived to the present day as a universal and flexible method that can alter the life of the masses and that can reform the living space on a global scale – even if the reform must take commercialised forms. In the 1920s and 1930s it was the Russian constructivists who were dreaming that their method would become an indispensable tool in the realisation of World Revolution, while German functionalists were ready to rebuild the world in the image of their own modernist aesthetics. In the twenty first century, only Swedish functionalism, benefiting through its use of soft power, has insinuated itself into the consciousness of the “many people,” finding its literal way into the homes of the world, with a touch of Swedishness and a taste of timeless modernism, doing all this while reaching its main goal of continuously conquering the world. As Ingvar Kamprad claims:

—
²⁰¹Ibid., p. 256.

²⁰² Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 209.

As long as there are human dwellings on our planet, there is a need for a strong, efficient IKEA that strives to meet the needs and wishes of the many people.²⁰³

²⁰³ Citation in: Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 17.



Fig. 1. IKEA museum in Älmhult (the building of the first IKEA store).



Fig. 2. Entrance to the IKEA museum.



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Fig. 4. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 5. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Fig. 6. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 7. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Fig. 8. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.





Fig. 9. From the IKEA catalogues. Exhibition in the IKEA museum. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 10. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 11. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 12. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig.13. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.
 Fig. 14. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 15. Introduction Hall of the Main Exhibition in the IKEA museum. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V. 2016



Fig. 16. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Fig. 17. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 18. From the 1969 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 19. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 20. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 21. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 22. From the 1970 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 23. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 24–25. From the 1969 and 1971 catalogues. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 26. From the 1973 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 27. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 28. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 29–30. From the 1974 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 31–32. From the 1974 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 33. From the 1974 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 34. From the 1974 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Möblera 2 rum, kök och hall för mindre än 3300:- kronor..

Trerummars både rum, hall och kök är komplett möblerade med gardiner, mattor, stängsidor och armstolar. Givningsskattan 6,6 % är inkluderad i priset.

Välj IKEA för bästa kvalitet - och spara en rejäl skatt på uttryck.

Priser för 2 rum, kök och hall (inkl. skatt):
 - 1 rum, kök och hall: 2200:-
 - 2 rum, kök och hall: 3300:-
 - 3 rum, kök och hall: 4400:-
 - 4 rum, kök och hall: 5500:-



Fig. 35. From the 1974 catalogue. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Fig. 36. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 37. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

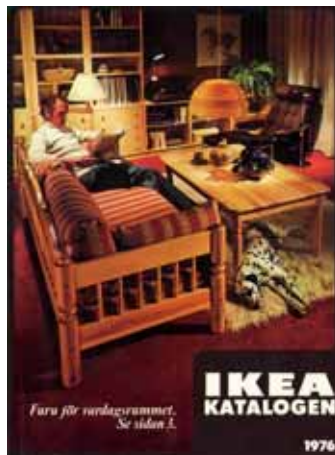


Fig. 38. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 39. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

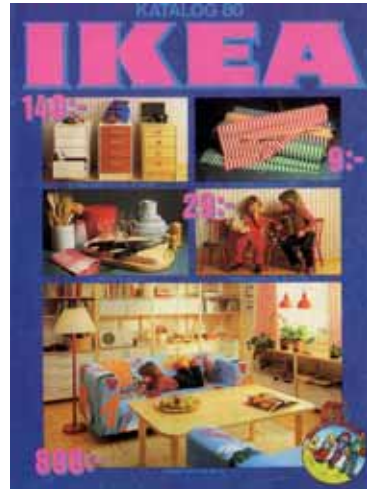


Fig. 40. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

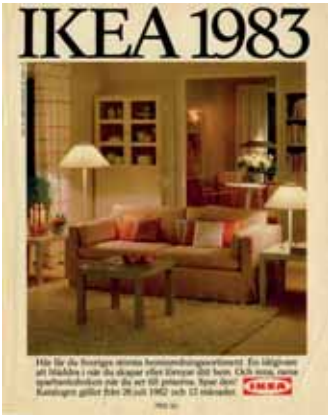


Fig. 41. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 42. From the 1990 catalogue © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 43. From the 1993 cat. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 44. From the 1994 cat. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 45. From the 1996 cat. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 46. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 47. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 48. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 49. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 50. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 51. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 52. From the 2019 cat. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 53. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 54. Exhibition hall in the IKEA museum.



Fig. 55. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 56. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 57. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Fig. 58. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 59. © Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



Fig. 60. A building in Älmhult.

Conclusion

The contemporary living space has been formed under the sway of modernism. Mass-produced industrial homes that most of us live in today are designed to the standards that were developed back in the era when functionalism had promised to change people's lives for the better through the application of the whole spectrum of humanistic values translated into functionalist working methods. Art was turned into a constructive tool, a functional instrument of *zhiznestroyenie – life-building*. Avant-garde art declared itself to be an active agent in its own contemporaneity, where its theories became themselves the tools for a critical analysis of reality. In unison with the powers of industrial production, the theories of aesthetic modernism became a means for not only improving social conditions, but of transforming humanity itself.

The unconditional faith placed in the power of technological progress paved the way for the mechanised and digitalised living space of today: accelerating the sense of transience and mobility; cutting the strings with traditional practices of the everyday; decentring individual experiences, and loosening the semantic ties of notions such as family and home.

The present study aimed at introducing the ways through which the notion of home had been transformed into the notion of living space, demonstrating how modernist theory, ultimate in its positivist character, had materialised into architectural practice.

Despite all the inevitable disappointments of modernist theory and practice, which, in the failure to actualise itself, preserves only its utopian nature, the major aim of functionalism – to reform the world through the fusion of art and industry – had been achieved in an unseen rise in living standards and in the unprecedented affordability of housing. Never before has housing in Europe been produced on such a scale, neither before or after has standardised dwellings succeeded in providing the general population with homes that met the modern requirements for rationality, hygiene, security, and comfort. Not only had functionalism outlined and articulated those requirements, it turned them into a reality, and into the natural parts of our everyday lives.

Our apartments are designed to the standards that were outlined by the functionalists: we cook in our upgraded Frankfurt kitchens; we keep peace in families thanks to our apartments' rationally designed floor plans that allow for zoning and private spaces in the small-sized dwellings; we enjoy green areas in highly industrialised cities, and every morning we shuttle our children to the kindergartens, which are located on the way to the office. All this was carefully thought through, struggled for, and put into constructive practice by the functionalists who aimed at making our lives better.

Yet, there is always another side of a coin that shows itself in moments of economic and political crises. What makes any humanistic theory – and functionalism definitely belongs there – is that the effective practicing of functionalist methods requires the unconditional support from the state.

Functionalism's potential to reform the everyday living space is realisable only once it has reached the position of state ideology, thereby becoming an ideological state apparatus (ISA), to put it in Althusser's terms. Perhaps, it is due to its emancipatory character that functionalism can be successfully practiced only in welfare states, which themselves possess some emancipatory traits. Once a state retreats from its devotion to the principle of welfare for all its citizens, functionalism diminishes to little more than a set of rationalising tricks that are capable of nothing besides dealing with the local tasks of optimising available resources and regulating the means of production.

Capitalist models of the state result in the commodification and commercialisation of the functionalist method; functionalism is harnessed for the purpose of profit-maximisation and the efficient and unimpeded operation of market forces. The history of IKEA, as told in the last chapter of this thesis, goes some way to explore the capitalist appropriation of functionalist principles.

Yet, IKEA – a product of modernist aesthetics – claims to have bigger and bolder ambitions than profit for its own sake; and this *might* be one reason for its longevity on the highly competitive and capricious market place. Its declared goal of 'making life better for the many people' carries at least some sort of progressive impulse that accounts for its vitality; although, with the passing away of IKEA's founder and ideologue Ingvar Kamprad, there can be no guarantee that its commitment to the expounding of welfarist ideals will abide, once the profit margins and projected growth rates decline.

The seed of a utopian project's demise is often sown with the end of its creator(s). There is a logic to this morbidity. The functionalist utopia requires the full mobilisation and participation of the state within civil

society. Collectivisation, itself an essential principle of all welfare states, requires the strict regulation of the use of state resources, as well as control of the production and distribution of products and services between the members of a collectivised community; collectivisation increases dependency on state provisions.

In order to rebuild society, functionalism requires the unconditional concentration and subordination of all available resources, again something achievable through the high regulation of everyday living practices and control over the means of the production of living space, and which, in turn, leads to an extension of the sphere of administrative control over life.

The early years of Soviet Russia, the Weimar Republic, and *Folkhemmet* of Sweden had provided functionalism with the necessary conditions to realise its potential for effecting social reforms. In countries that distanced themselves from socialist experiments, functionalism had remained, to a large extent, a beautiful theory realised into brilliant, yet singular, and expensive architectural objects or even estates (e.g. works and projects by Le Corbusier), where the theory had not developed into a state-defining ideology and state-administered practice.

Once the functionalist states retreated from the true social orientation and turned towards totalitarianism, as in case with Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, functionalism swiftly faded, giving way to architecture that aimed at building not the reality but the ideology.

There is always an ineliminable gap that exists between an articulated theory and its materialisation into practice. Since the second half of the century that gap has been filled with increased uniformity of (re)produced dwellings as well as with the de-individualisation and de-personification of the living space as such.

After welfare states turned their backs on functionalist aesthetics and decoupled the link between art and industry, functionalism, which continued outlining technological processes of mass housing production, transferred its aesthetic into the sphere of design. Thus, both the constructive principles of functionalism and the beauty of its expressive language have been preserved, even if in a disjointed state. Detached from mass industry and deprived of ideological power, functionalism transformed into a commercial affair, on the one hand, and into a purely mechanistic building technique, on the other. Its declarative artistic language and strong social appeal were appropriated by the *haute couture* fashion to be read as a cute naïve decorative element. Functionalism stopped being a working method and became an art of design. On the mass market, as revealed through the case

of IKEA, it had realised its significant reproductive potential not only in satisfying the basic needs of IKEA consumers, but in the very consumerist process of the endless reproduction of those needs.

The aim of the present thesis has been to articulate and analyse those substantial changes that had happened under the influence of functionalism in its original state. There were three countries selected for analyses, each of which represented the structure of three modes of functionalism developed in the present thesis: the Russian (*radical*), the German (*practical*), and the Swedish (*social*) modes.

All three of the modes of functionalism introduced in this book had, in their theoretical and practical approaches, placed as a central element the notion of the home as an object of reform.

The German and Russian modes had retreated from the use of the very word “home,” which was replaced by a “dwelling” or a “living cell.” Such an act of redescription can be seen in Moisey Ginzburg’s *Zhilische* of 1934. Ginzburg was conscious about the use of these terms; one of the goals of constructivism was to destroy the traditional understandings of the home and family, with all the routines and rituals they had for centuries encompassed. Russian constructivists disassembled the material and psychological links that had come to constitute what they took to be the irrational idea of the home; that idea, of which we all seem to be the bearers and for which we often yearn but about which we know not what. In disclosing the illusion of the home, Russian constructivists deprived it of its original meaning and importance.

The idea of the machines for living introduced by Le Corbusier was developed by Russian constructivists, but it was pushed to its extreme: the idea of living mechanisms, according to which everyday life is pictured as a plant, and the human is but a moving element that has secured for itself its proper functioning. This human element was supposed to be an indicator of the sustainability of the whole through a social meta-mechanistic operation, the functioning of which would be placed in the charge of the architects. The idea of man’s liberation from the chains of social injustice through rationally re-constructing his everyday practices had come at the price of nearly depriving him of the possibility of *living* his life. Living *operations* and their strict orderings were to replace living *experiences*. The living experience of an individual was pre-conditioned, and every man was to be placed within a constructed artificial habitat where her preformed experiences were kept under the control of the state.

In the early part of the 1920s, and the construction of new residential areas was on the agenda in Russia, the project's real commissioner was neither the future tenant nor the state –after all, the young Bolshevik government had not any articulated requirements for the production of the new housing and had not even developed its standards by that time. That particular responsibility was readily accepted by the practicing avant-garde architects themselves who developed the new theory of mass housing standards and turned them into a material reality. The ‘natural’, ‘essential’ or ‘traditional’ needs of a person were not under consideration, and even if they were, then it was only for the purpose of destroying or reforming them as part of the process of constructing the ‘total man’ of the future.

It was not the architecture that was built for man. Rather the goal set for man was to fit in and to adjust to the new living conditions. It was through making that adjustment that man acquired the qualities needed to be a true and equal member of the future communist society. By the 1930s, the didacticism of the constructivist method, now transformed into an embedded institution and a state ideology had taken on a sinister appearance. Detached equally from both the ‘masses’ and the communist ideal, constructivism became a sort of strange, alien, and finally suspended theory, with the material realisation of its projects revealing only one side of its universally embracing theory.

The life-building concept that lay at the core of constructivist architectural practice did not mean the construction of a certain house, ensemble or a district, – it required the re-construction of society *in toto*, and not only the living environment, but the social, mental, and ideological apparatuses as well. The idea of liberation and purification within the theory of constructivism, when materialised in architectural forms, could sometimes intimidate with its sharpened, angular, and intensified forms. The fact that this architecture was radically new in its forms and modes of expressions, and thus less readable both to the ‘masses’ and its ‘leaders,’ created the sense of threat to the endurance of the new regime being established at that time. Abstractiveness and formalism – those were the main objections leveled at constructivist architecture thrown from above. The messages sent by constructivists were as loud and powerful as they were unclear to their addressee. Thus in spite of their practicality and declared adjustability to any economic and political situation, it was safer to suspend functionalism altogether and to offer instead something more familiar and readable, which was suggested under the name of the socialist realism.

At the same time, by the end of the decade, a certain degree of disappointment with the outcomes could be observed within the constructivist movement itself. It was obvious that people were not changing fast enough and, moreover, were unwilling and unable to adapt to the architectural environments that had been offered. People tried to arrange their life in the old, habituated ways, while being placed in a new living space with a totally different arrangement. On the other hand, ravaged by civil war, the economic capacity of the new state was low; a problem from the outset, since architectural projects were too dependent on the economic situation of the country. All this meant that the realisation of the full scope of the architect's designs for mass housing construction in full was nigh impossible. The high ideal (almost of a piece with the Renaissance) of a standard that correlates with the perfected materialisation of an architectural idea, in practice shrank to the use of standard as a consistently applied set of rules. The result was the production of abstract 'match boxes' instead of the rational machines for living, on the one hand, and workers' villages instead of the garden cities, on the other.

A striking difference in approach to mass housing can be observed in attitudes surrounding pleasure and leisure in both its Russian and West-European modes. Everyday life of a constructivist *zhilmassiv's* tenant was to be organised so that his household was as invisible as possible. The dissolution of house-holding routines and, ideally, of a family as a closed social cell, would allow man to free a substantial part of his time and energy to work on the global futuristic project of constructing communism. Private life as a set of certain everyday practices hidden from the view of the community was eliminated through a complete dissolution of spatial sectors and functional zoning within a house or an apartment.

The intentional elimination of privacy and the dissolution of links between people, which otherwise made it possible to form family and intimate friendship circles was idealistically seen by the theoreticians of the avant-garde as a step towards human liberation from any ties that might hold an individual back from socio-personal fulfilment. Later, at the peak of Stalin's regime, that idea was perverted and used as a means for the state to exercise full political control; people were now forced to break the links with their past and improper present for their own good. One's divorce from the past and from loved ones often became a matter of survival. In the present study I demonstrated the mechanisms by which these links were broken architecturally, within the experiments of constructivism. Elaborated on a higher ideological level by Stalin's regime, this mechanism

of breaking the links of familiarity between people can be illustrated through the example of the perversion of the idea of the garden city concept into a workers' village.

The precedence of the public over the private, and the unquestioned acceptance of the common goal of building a future for all, required that one sacrificed one's individual interests and comforts and, if necessary, one's own life; this was the ideological message of all communist states. Capitalist states place the emphasis on the satisfaction of private interests above the well-being of the common, arguing that common well-being will be improved as a simple market reflex, if the state provides every individual with socio-economic possibilities so that each and can make what they choose from their lives – and if they choose not to improve it, then they are left poor, destitute, but nevertheless free. The Swedish state, searching for the “third way” took responsibility to provide for its citizens' everyday life, while the functionalist method had become the main tool for improving society. This required from the state an extensive penetration into the private sector, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it never demanded from its citizens to sacrifice their private interests, thereby placing the satisfaction of individual needs at the centre of state ideology.

German functionalism possessed tighter links to the practical solution of particular housing problems and of the production of the living space *per se*. The idea of a transformed society by way of the vision of architecture was widely propagated. And yet German architects were building for humans, and those humans, even if they were far from reaching the ideal of the ‘total man’ of the future, were nevertheless seen as people, whose needs were to be fulfilled. It was quite another thing that those were the architects themselves who took on the role of social experts to decide which needs were to be met and which should be disregarded for the purpose of producing rationalised living space. The new living situation was to be inhabitable for imperfect tenants in the ‘here and now’, – these unavoidable ‘transitional men’, referring to Lefebvre. And yet a functionally organised everyday life was to liberate the space for education and, more or less, precipitate the radical transformation of the simple dweller into a ‘man of the future’.

The living space transformations had to meet the standards of a new normativity. The new norms that defined people's needs were developed with minimal participation of those for whom the new apartments were being constructed. The principles of convenience and the affordability of living spaces designed *for* the people were never left unconsidered by the German architects. They had to compromise between, on the one hand, the

idea of a perfect living space that featured functionalist aesthetics, ideology, and the socio-economic reality of the time on the other.

In that sense, contemporary reality as a material for architectural reconstruction was approached differently by Russian constructivists and German functionalists. In the very beginning Russian constructivists could afford to untie their fantasy and partially realise their pure ideas detached from the economic and social reality of the time. In other words, they could afford to build for the future, or at least to get away with paper architecture. But this was not a possibility for their German colleagues. The ability of German architects to move quickly from project design to wall-construction helped them (e.g. Erich Mendelson) receive commissions from the Bolshevik government and become role models for the Russian constructivists.

German architects were solving urgent problem of housing shortage believing they understood the needs of their future tenants better than the tenants did themselves. In order to come to a universal solution – a standard that lies at the core of the functionalist method – the dwellers' needs were to be differentiated and prioritised. Those were the German architects who finally introduced an *existenzminimum* of around nine square metres – the minimal amount of living space per person – adopted by Russian constructivists and later inherited as the Soviet norm. The right of everyone to have nine square metres of living space was constitutionally secured both in Russia and Germany and had become a point of departure for the dimensions of all further living space solutions.

The major difference between the German and Russian modes was in the object of construction – for German architects it was their contemporary 'transitional' man with his real or imagined demands and imperfect traditionalised living practices that were to be improved through the newly offered architectural environment. Russian constructivists, on the other hand, were building for a man who had most likely not been born yet. Peasants' living practices and traditions, which had formed through centuries of 'feudal oppression,' did not deserve to be preserved in the eyes of the Russian avant-gardists; on the contrary, constructivists intended to liberate and educate a peasant and a worker through shaping his body, mind, and social consciousness by forming a new radical but disturbing living environment.

I realise that by theorising in this way I am at risk of drawing too sharp borders between the three interpretations of functionalism with respect to the newly produced living space. But there is an important difference

between the approaches adopted by the German and Swedish functionalists, on the one hand, and Russian constructivists, on the other. While the former allowed their tenants to be contemporaries of their own lives, the latter cast them out to be the contemporaries of their future. It is here precisely, along the intersection of the ideas of sustainability and “spreadability” where the difference crystallises. Whereas these principles were foundational for German functionalism (be it a Bauhaus school or a concept of *siedlungen*) and for the commercial potential of Swedish modernism, Russian constructivism treated them with indifference. The failure of constructivism in Russia in 1932, as well as its further alienation from the ‘masses,’ was born from this neglect.

In Germany, even though the promotion of private life was shattered, the right for private ownership was hardly ever questioned. When building their early experimental *siedlungen*, German architects observed and studied the actual living practices of their dwellers ‘on site’ with the intention to improve living standards at the minimal expenses of cost, comfort, and aesthetics. German architects designed their *siedlungen* for traditional families, trying to provide each family if not with a separate room, then at least with a private corner. German functionalists never rejected the idea of single-family houses within mass housing estates – indeed, there were even villas included into the ensembles of some *siedlungen*. The scarcity of their presence was first of all dictated by construction costs and set goals – to provide as many people with shelter as possible and in the shortest period of time.

Even though projects for individual villas were designed, Russian constructivists had received no possibility of ever including individual cottages into their *zhilmassivs*, not even on an experimental basis. The villa was, after all, seen by the Bolshevik state as a symbol of capitalism, whose last vestiges were to be snuffed out quickly. Former private mansions and palaces were turned into public institutions, and even if high officials owned private *dachas*, they were carefully hidden from the ‘masses.’

The third mode, i.e. Swedish functionalism, brings the object of the functionalist housing experiments – which in the case of Sweden is a tenant – to the closest attention of the architect, at least when compared to the German and Russian modes. In a way, Sweden had become a ‘fitting room’ for European functionalism; real people were allowed to try it on even if they could not avoid buying it later. Consumers of new housing could more or less vividly express their opinions about what they wished to live in. For Swedish functionalists a person remained, even under extended regulation, ‘the measure of all things.’ Swedish functionalism became the one with the

‘human face’, even though that face could be less cheerful and rigorous than those of its German or Russian siblings.

Those little bourgeois pleasures – an opportunity to master a little garden, to enjoy socially non-useful and unpractical activities within a close family circle, an absence or, at least, the invisibility of neighbours, and simply an opportunity to be alone in your home, were not considered by Swedish functionalists as either outdated or inappropriate. The main idea was to provide people with separate dwellings, even if with small and standardised. It was to make the running of a household easier, and, as its principal goal, to improve everyday life to make it more comfortable and pleasant.

The notion of pleasure has always been considered a necessary element of an everyday life within the Swedish mode of functionalism. When IKEA continued spreading functionalist kernels around the world, it kept referring to the category of pleasure as one of the defining qualities of its products. Arne Wahl Iversen, one of the Danish designers who created many IKEA pieces in the 1950s and early 1960s, pointed out, as recorded by Eva Bjarnestam, that “it is the job of the designer to make the furniture pleasing to the eye.”¹

It does not mean that Swedish functionalism was not concerned with the idea of transforming and improving society through the means of architecture, it was just not overemphasised. Swedish modernism tried and realised many of constructivists’ radical ideas – e.g. the spatial separation of household routines that were traditionally practiced within the same living space, through providing living blocks with restaurants, laundries, and nurseries that liberated a housekeeper from many duties or at least eased them. In my thesis, I refer to the constructive experimentation with communal living, such as a series of *kollektivhus* that were built in Sweden in the second half of the 1930s and that were inspired by Soviet *dom-kommunas*, albeit representing its rather ‘posh’ version.

Swedish functionalists address their contemporaries, whose habits, natural, and traditional ways of living did not irritate them much. Yet they were the subjects of change and improvement. Their mission was to provide each tenant living in a flat with personal comfort. The study of appropriate and inappropriate needs involved not only the experts, but the tenants as well, and first of all, housewives, whose opinion was considered the most important.

¹ Bjarnestam, Eva Alte. *IKEA. Design and Identity*, p. 32.

In Sweden, the construction of single-family houses continued into the 1920s and beyond; it was not viewed as contradictory or inappropriate to the concepts of both *Folkhemmet* and the welfare state. Even the fact that the majority of flats built in the 1920s and 1930s in Stockholm were one-room apartments, very often overcrowded, they were nonetheless more likely to be inhabited with people that were members of the same family, relatives, friends, co-workers – e.g. people who had some relation to one another. In case of housing problems leading to the need of co-habiting with a stranger, this would be considered a temporary solution; while in Russia the communal living with strangers was not only a temporary necessity, but something to be actively encouraged by the state, and a way to establish the true classless and family-free society. This led to the normalisation and institutionalisation of communal apartments, the so-called *kommunalkas* – the most common type of housing in the big Russian metropolises until the very late Soviet decades.

The idea of living for one's individual pleasure, and that this is what avant-garde technologies, theories, and aesthetics should serve – this was totally strange to Russian constructivists. Everyday living operations were to leave time not for egoistic immediate pleasures, which would alienate a person from her community, but for one to constantly work on one's self for the sake of all others. Pleasure and the intimacy of private life were understood by Russian constructivists as means of social distraction. Swedish functionalists saw no contradiction in building the society of justice while providing families with rational and affordable homes where they could enjoy their exclusion from publicity, practice things useless for their own personal growth, and yet remain active builders of a welfare state that would become a *Folkhemmet* for all, declaring already in the *Acceptera* manifesto that “private property and the family were unassailable values that no radical revolution could disturb.”²

As today's bearer of functionalist aesthetics, IKEA claims that it contributes to the construction of a caring society through improving average people's homes, offering them solutions to satisfy their needs and to run happier lives. In this thesis, I have turned to IKEA as to an explicit outcome of European functionalism (generally) and, of its Swedish mode, in particular.

Functionalism set the notion of home at the centre of its reforming agenda. The three modes that have been discussed here certainly contri-

² *Acceptera*. In: Creagh, Lucy, Kåberg Helen, & Miller Lane, Barbara (eds.). *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, p. 146.

buted to the transformation of this notion in different ways. Their sensibility towards the home was affected by the extent of their radicalism. Nonetheless all considered the process of reforming the old and of producing the new living space as a crucial point in a struggle for the improvement of people's everyday lives.

In the Russian mode, the notion of home as an enclosed private space, architecturally concealing and protective, was rejected. The home was to dissolve into the living space that extended to the space of the city, the country, the world. A person should be liberated from the home's conventional restrictive and limiting boundaries. She was not to possess an individual living space restricted by the four walls, but she was to expose herself to the whole world, where even the possession of a small personal belonging had lost its value.

The German mode supported the professed values of the Soviet avant-garde on a theoretical level. Yet in practice it proposed not so much of a dissolution, rather a radical modernisation of the notion of the home. The extension of the home into the broader living space included not only a flat designed according to the principles of *existenzminimum* program declared at CIAM Congress of 1929 by Walter Gropius, but the appropriation of the immediate outdoor space that surrounded the apartment as well. The outdoor living space was included in the extended notion of the home, returning a garden to a city dweller. The main ambitions of German architectural practice in the sphere of mass housing production were directed towards the incorporation of gardens and green areas into residential districts, along with fresh air, good lighting, and improved standards of hygiene, which formed the basis for the open house concept, introduced by Sigfried Giedion in his *Befreites Wohnen* manifesto of 1929. The search by German functionalists for the complex urban space development paved the ground for the inclusion of the whole city's infrastructure into an immediate living space of its dwellers, inspiring further post-war reforms on the level of city planning.

In the present thesis, the IKEA catalogues are studied and critically analysed as the archived records of the transformations in the production of living space as well as in the visual representations of everyday life routines. They keep coded records of design trends and fashions as well as of social, economic, and political crises. IKEA catalogues promote the importance of the everyday – an issue that in the 1920s had been incorporated into the aesthetic theory and constructive methods of modernist thinkers and architects alike, and that continued developing after the end of the war in works

by such sociologists and philosophers as, for example, Henri Lefebvre. IKEA catalogues reveal the changing attitudes towards notions of the family and the changing roles of women and children in society. At many points, catalogues can be studied as functionalist manifestoes expounding the ideas of further rationalising and optimising the living space and everyday practices. The company can be seen as promoters of liberal views on gender relations, national minorities, marginalised professionals and social groups. It could be certainly argued that IKEA adds all these features to its commercial furniture catalogues in order to maximise its market appeal and to accumulate as much profit and capital as possible. Yet, these aspects do not matter much for this study; I read the IKEA catalogues first of all as the records of subjects and objects of the everyday, and which have been regarded as the most important in the organisation of modern living space since the second half of the last century, while IKEA has proved always to stand at the forefront of the most recent trends in areas related to housing and everyday life.

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The modernist concept of life-building as an architectural method for improving the conditions of everyday life originated in Europe during the 1920s. This book explores three modes of functionalism by way of a comparative analysis of both the theoretical discourses and architectural practices associated with functionalism in Russia, Germany, and Sweden. These three countries made significant contributions to the application of functionalism within mass housing construction, the overarching purpose of which was to transform the traditional home into a rational living space.

This study provides both close readings of foundational modernist texts as well as an empirical study of the avant-garde heritage in Russia, Germany, and Sweden. As a special case study, a visual analysis of IKEA catalogues is presented, the purpose of which is to provide an illustrated history of modernist aesthetics within mass produced living spaces, from the era of functionalism up to the present day.

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