**Architecture and
Philosophical Ideation: An
analysis of the role of
theoretical ideas in
architectural creation**

© James Gerwin

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Master's Thesis (Professional)

Faculty of Architecture, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis will discuss the relationship between architecture and philosophy, and reflect on what role theoretical ideas on aesthetics have played within the built environment. The primary body of the text will discuss the aesthetic theories of Marx and Engel and how their ideas of the role of the artist influenced architects following the Russian Revolution, focusing on the Narkomfin House, designed by Ginzburg and Milutin in 1928. The second portion of this thesis is a speculation on what contemporary architecture can glean from modern philosophical theories, specifically those of Gilles Deleuze. A brief essay will serve as the bridge between the first section of the thesis and the design component, a proposed expansion to the University Centre at the University of Ottawa.

This thesis is dedicated to the two most important women in my life: First, my mother, Elma Beall Gerwin, whose strength, encouragement and tireless constructive critiques of my writing and designing made possible my academic achievements so far. Second, this thesis is dedicated to my incredible wife, Britta Herrmann Gerwin, who has been and will undoubtedly continue to be in the future, a perpetual source of inspiration and love.

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Part I: Research Thesis

Socialist Realism and the Avant-garde: a Marxist interpretation of artistic production

The task of defining precisely what constitutes "Marxist aesthetics" is inherently a difficult one, and is compounded by the fact that both Marx and Engel wrote comparatively little on aesthetics itself. As a consequence, most writings on Marxist aesthetics tend to become somewhat speculative in nature, and often subject to the particular author's interpretation of Marx's writings. With this in mind, it is still possible to highlight some general consensus about the nature of aesthetics according to Marx, some of which is neatly summed by the author Stefan Morawski:

"The debates among those who write on the topics [of Marxist aesthetics and art] can be sharp, but there is some agreement on a few propositions, and something like consensus on one key formulation which we may state as follows: Aesthetic phenomena are studied in a context of socio-historical processes, and in this way are regarded as part of a broad, 'civilizational' activity by which the species homo sapiens advances slowly to realize an innate potential. Art objects are not isolated phenomena, but are mutually dependant with other cultural activity of predominately social, political, moral, religious, or scientific character." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 8)

What is important to stress from this passage is the inclusive role art (and therefore aesthetics) ought to play within society. Aesthetics was not viewed by Marx or Engel as an autonomous subject, divorced from other aspects of society. Instead aesthetics needed to be understood within the context of all facets of culture, and become informed by them. This suggests a dynamic relationship between art, politics, science, and other disciplines, each offering alternative interpretations on similar social topics, ultimately, of course, towards creating a Communist society. And yet at the same time, Marx felt that the artist still needed a degree of independence in order to pursue artistic creations freely. This seeming contradiction can in some ways be explained through Marx's discussion on Epicurian physics, and in particular, the notion of the atom as representative of 'free' man.

The atom had been viewed by Epicurus as the ultimate demonstration of the notion of an independent or 'free' man. Marx however noted that there was a contradiction inherent to this principle, namely that an atom simply could not remain isolated within a complex body. Lifshitz notes: "The contradiction in the 'atomic principle' is that the independence and unity of the 'indivisible' disappear as soon as the atom partakes of real life." (Lifshitz, 1973: 24) Given the strong connection that Marx held between artistic practice and material production, it seems appropriate to compare the artist to that of an atom: while independent and autonomous as an 'object' or 'person,' the artist simply could not survive without a dynamic between artistic pursuits and other functions of society, be it political, economic, or otherwise. Should the artist isolate himself completely, and thus seemingly be freed from the vulgarities and demands of everyday life, that too would prove fruitless, as noted by Stefen Morawski: "The artist may choose to put up an 'ivory tower' as a rejection of market enticements or demands, and also of involvement with an overtly ideological stance of dissent. The problem is that the context of alienated social conditions creeps into the work anyway, as numerous examples of 'ivory tower' art testify." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 26)

Despite this need to create relations, according to Marx it was imperative that the notion of the atom as 'individual', or 'free' could still exist, for it was through individuation that relations could occur: "the atom manifests self-love, personal interests, but it is only through this deviation that it can meet other atoms in space and form various combinations with them. Mutual repulsion creates the sociality of atoms. 'In the realm of politics this constitutes the social contract, in communal life – friendship.' " (Lifshitz, 1973: 29) It was through Marx's discussion on Epicurean atomism that the idea of the 'artist as individual' could co-exist with the conception of the 'artist as social person.'

Throughout the course of history Marx felt that aesthetics and art were equally subject to the process of external market demands and wages as any other type of material production. According to Morawski, "Marx explained aesthetic sensibility as very gradually taking shape among the specific

formations of concrete historical processes – foremostly as part of the development of human labour.” (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 13) Marx’s emphasis on the role that labour plays within the dynamics of human society can be found in many examples pertaining to politics and economics, and it is interesting to see this focus applied to aesthetics as well. His brief discussions on the nature of aesthetics echoed many of his other observations of material and cultural production, and he attempted to demonstrate how Feudal, Bourgeoisie, and Capitalistic economic systems all played a destructive role within aesthetics, as they did in other cultural aspects of society. This meant that aesthetics too was subject to alienation, consumption and materialism, in a similar, albeit distinct, fashion as found in his writings on politics and economics. A. Zis notes that Marxist aesthetics is “rooted in dialectical and historical materialism, which constitute its theoretical foundation. Closely affiliated to the philosophy of dialectical and historical materialism, Marxist aesthetics gleans from that philosophy its basic methodological premises, but retains its separate identity.” (Zis, 1977: 14) From that, it is possible to highlight several important aspects of Marxist aesthetic theory, notably: alienation in artistic production and consumption, the role of cognition and ideology in art, and finally, the idea of realism within aesthetics.

Due to the intrinsic relationship Marx posited between aesthetics and other modes of material production, it is only natural that for him the alienation he saw between the worker and the object produced could also occur between the artist and his creations as well. According to Marx, the fundamental traits of the alienation process, which could be applied to all aspects of life, including artistic pursuits, were as follows. First, through industrialization, working man had become separated from the product that he produced. Since the results of his labour were not his property, but instead owned by his superior (boss, serf, king...) there became an inherent detachment from the efforts of his time and the corresponding results. Second, due to the structural profit motive built into the economic system, the competition to increase profit as much as possible promoted a tendency towards repetition and uniformity in labour activities. The more ‘efficient’ a labourer became, the higher the profit for the owner. Man thus became enslaved in his labour,

and ideas like initiative, which could undermine the perceived efficiency of the labour practice, were discouraged. An inevitable consequence of these practices was that the human as individual with self-potential becomes distorted. Alienation thus distorts the capabilities of man, and pushes him further and further away from the initial results of his labour. So while the worker had become unnaturally detached, or alienated, from his labour and the results thereof due to the underlying capitalistic structure, or the feudal system in previous epochs, so too had the artist. A natural consequence for Marx was that the results of the artist's labour was bound to be alienated in a fashion similar to that of the common worker.

This alienation applied not only to the artist himself, but also to the majority of mankind, specifically the working or middle class. Marx felt that the process of alienation had created a society that was no longer an "apt audience for retaining the inheritance of art or for welcoming innovations." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 20) So thus when applied to aesthetics, the problem of alienation was twofold: the individual-as-artist, as all men were capable of becoming, was being suppressed and alienated from his true self due to the dominating divisions of labour and class. The creation of truly innovative and 'realistic' art was all but unattainable. Simultaneously, due to the overarching presence of monetary fetishism, which renders the reading of art into a debasement of mere surplus value, man had become incapable of appreciating and recognizing art with its true value to society. Bourgeoisie society had made comprehending art all but impossible.

Marx was thus critical of art produced within these systems, claiming that since this form of socio-economics demands the production of objects (for the purpose of selling them, and thus creating profit, or surplus capital), regardless of whether these objects are needed or not ('production for production's sake'), this can only have a detrimental effect on the production of spiritual objects, namely art. Marx thus concluded that "capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production, such as art and poetry." (Lifshitz, 1973: 98) For Marx, the very idea of producing an artistic object simply for it to produce a 'use-value' ran wholly afoul to the premise of art, that is the creative process itself: not to create an 'object' per

se, but the desire and inspiration to do so, outside of the basic need to sustain oneself.

Furthermore, the fetishistic association of money to value diminishes the capability of man to perceive art as it ought to be seen. In discussing the detrimental effect of money as the determining factor of value, Lifshitz writes that money becomes the radical leveler, a foreign essence that removes the qualitative aspects of all objects and replaces it with a strictly quantitative one: its cash value. A tragic consequence of this is that when viewed from a capitalistic perspective, "the greatest work of art is equal to a certain quantity of manure." (Lifshitz, 1973: 38)

Marx's criticisms of fetishism were not limited to the economic sphere; the fetishistic aspect of religion, which during the eighteenth and nineteenth century was often the primary source of both inspiration and clientele for the artist, also had a detrimental effect on the development of art. This aspect of Marx's theories reflects a strong influence from the writings of Hegel, who had similar sentiments when it came to the development of religious fetishisms. Hegel viewed the Christian monotheistic God as "the monstrous image of an egoistic individual engaged in the satisfaction of his own material wants. And in the realm of sensuousness and greed there is no room for form, beauty and art." (Lifshitz, 1973: 34) Within the fetishistic worship of an external world, there is no room for personal aesthetic contemplation. Man is forced to submit to the will of God, not his own personal vocation.

Marx developed on Hegel's critique of Christianity and its corresponding art, arguing that religion, being based on fear and suppression, functioned in a similar manner to bourgeois economic and political practices in his epoch. In such an oppressive world, how could any art produced within it not reflect this domination? Marx wrote: "Since fear paralyses the mind, people educated and held in fear can never develop and elevate their minds; quite the contrary, the innate ability to imitate and hence acquire artistic feelings, becomes almost completely repressed." (Lifshitz, 1973: 36) Hence Marx's opinion of Christian aesthetics: "Christian architecture sought exaggeration

and loftiness; yet it was lost in barbaric pomp and countless details. 'The whole is overburdened with excess and splendour.' " (Lifshitz, 1973: 37)

In *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, Lifshitz develops on Marx's criticism of both religious fetishism and bourgeois consumerism, arguing that the two were intimately connected, and were manifested with greatest clarity in religious art: "The fetishistic character of religion is demonstrated by the fact that it worships the material aspect of things, endowing them with the qualities of man himself." (Lifshitz, 1973: 38) According to Lifshitz, while it is often thought that the objects within religious art serve as symbols to which meaning is applied and read by worshippers, this is in fact not the case. Rather, these artistic objects are not "symbols but realities, not forms but things." (Lifshitz, 1973: 38) The fetishism lies not within the qualities of the aesthetic quality of the art objects, but in their materiality. This focus on the materiality of the object, its manifestation, shifts the attention not to the artistic merits or aspirations of the object, but to its materiality, and consequentially creating a "predatory attitude toward nature." (Lifshitz, 1973: 38)

Marx commented on this detrimental effect of consumerism with regard to the difference of use-value versus aesthetic-value of certain commodities – in this particular example, diamonds. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx writes: "Suppose we have a commodity whose use-value is that of a diamond. We cannot tell by looking at the diamond that it is a commodity. When it serves as a use-value, aesthetic or mechanical, on the breast of a harlot or in the hand of a glasscutter, it is a diamond and not a commodity." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 52) When this passage is analyzed in conjunction to Marx's position that a dealer sees a diamond as a commodity within the precious stones market, and not for its natural beauty, (1844 Manuscripts) what Marx was implying was that "the aesthetic pleasure afforded by a diamond on a woman's bosom is lacking when the same stone is regarded as a commodity." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 16) In short, the 'diamond as commodity' overwhelms the 'diamond as aesthetic delight,' diminishing the potential to enjoy the object as itself, for it will always be viewed in conjunction with its commodity value.

Another important aspect of Marxist aesthetics is the role of cognition and ideology in art, which in many ways reflects a dialectical mode of thought in Marx, which could be traced back to his earlier research into Hegelian aesthetics. It also reflects the scientific nature of many of Marx's writings, especially when considering cognition in art. In Marxist aesthetics the cognitive potential in art was its ability to reveal a deeper level of understanding of society, in ways that would be impossible to achieve in other forms of investigation, for example the sciences of chemistry and physics, or the study of economics. It was this unique cognitive aspect of art that gave it a level of independence aspect over other cultural spheres, although by no means an autonomous one. Art was still closely involved and affected by other realms of society.

While Marx held that all forms of art have a cognitive function, Zis notes that different forms of art have specific means of employing cognition, and that the cognitive aspect for some art forms will be more important than for others: "There are some forms [of art] in which the cognitive element is more prominent, and other in which the primary principle of artistic creativity founded in labour, the creation of artistically executed utilitarian objects, is paramount." (Zis, 1977: 47) Zis mentions this distinction in order to highlight the danger in focusing simply on the cognitive aspect of art, for this could lead to distorting its overall aesthetic value. So while literature may inherently have a stronger emphasis on cognition than architecture, this difference only reflects the fact that the two forms of art are certainly distinct from each other, and merely reflects that fact that "all art forms are specific means of expressing artistic culture." (Zis, 1977: 47)

It was this cognitive ability to illustrate certain aspects of the world and society that art shared with science. Zis notes "art is always in revelation: even when it comes to familiar aspects of our everyday lives it can spotlight facets of life which enables us to see the familiar in the unfamiliar and the unfamiliar in the familiar." (Zis, 1977: 49) Zis concludes that despite the many differences between art and science, "the fact that art enhances our cognition of the world means that it has something in common with science."

(Zis, 1977: 48) It is this quasi-scientific nature of art, embodied in its cognitive capability to describe phenomena in society in the world that paralleled Marx's scientific study of economics and production.

A reciprocal aspect of Marxist aesthetics was the relationship art had with ideology. It is important at this point to define precisely what is implied by this term. Ideology here will be considered along the definition set out by Morawski, as an expression or manifestation of a perceived pattern of social relations, attitudes and habits. Ideology for Marx was not a fixed, static position or attitude; it was always subject to specific sociological and historical moments. Thus an ideology for one particular period of society (for example the Hellenistic period) ought to be specific for that period alone; any other particular period would have its own specific, unique ideological stance as well.

For Marx it was crucial that art reflect the spiritual and ideological values of the society in which it was created. Since ideology was distinctive for each particular epoch, art ought to correspondingly adapt to their specific cultural and historical conditions; to appropriate or use ideologies that were incongruent with the particular era would only create an alienating effect. If, however, the ideological aspect of art was in concert with its culture, this could only improve the consciousness of both the artist and the viewer. According to Zis, for Marx art "expresses spiritual and aesthetic values which enhance man's awareness of a sense of oneness and common interests uniting certain classes. Art reflects reality through a prism of class interests, it expresses the interests of a class and therein lies its ideological function." (Zis, 1977: 60)

This notion of the ideological aspect for Marx is closely tied to a final crucial portion of Marxian aesthetics: the subject of realism. According to Marx, art ought to express the ideology of a particular cultural and historical class, for it was through art that man could work his way towards an accurate, non-alienating conception of himself, and of his fellow man. When the relationship between art and its ideology were congruent, it could be deemed 'realistic'. As noted by Morawski, realism for Marxian aesthetics was to be "achieved by,

and judged by, the expression of a cognitive equivalent: specifically, the dominant and typical traits of socially conflicted life on a particular place and time.” (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 31) Thus realism for Marx was, like its ideological aspect, specific to a particular cultural and historical situation.

This conception of realism became particularly misinterpreted by many Marxist theorists in the early twentieth century, who looked at Marx’s admiration for Grecian art and architecture as grounds for a reinsertion of Hellenistic aesthetics into modern art and architecture. While Marx freely admitted his admiration of Grecian art, his esteem lay not in its specific form or materiality, but in the fact that it was demonstrative of its particular epoch, and therefore could be considered ‘realistic’. A particularly important passage of his comments on Greek art, written in *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, follows:

1: Aphrodite of Melos, c. 150-100 B.C.
Brace, 1991: 178

Greek art presupposes the existence of Greek mythology, i.e., that nature and even the forms of society itself are worked up in the popular imagination in an unconsciously artistic fashion. That is its material. Not, however, any mythology taken at random, nor any accidental unconsciously artistic elaboration of nature (including with the latter everything objective, hence society too). Egyptian mythology could never be the soil or the womb which would give birth to Greek art. But in any event [there had to be] a mythology. There could be no social development which excludes all mythological relation to nature, all mythologizing relation to it, and which accordingly claims from the artist an imagination free of mythology. (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 137)

It was this intrinsic relationship between art and its social context, its cultural epoch, its ideology or ‘mythology’ that for Marx made Greek art a style to seek inspiration from, that made Greek art ‘realistic’. Realism in Greek art was not for Marx the fact that many of the statues and paintings were realistic in the literal sense of the word – there is little, if any, discussion on the part of Marx about the actual form or style of Greek art. The specific

appearance was of minimal consequence for him, as his interest instead remained on the relationship of art to its society.

There were several other important aspects of realism for Marx that should also be mentioned. One was that the development of art was not inherently restricted to its relationship to the current social milieu of its time. Marx notes certain artists that were able to manage great achievements despite reflecting little of the social context: "It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization. Witness the example of the Greeks as compared with modern art or even Shakespeare." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 136) While Marx was partially stating this as part of his general criticism of 'modern' (i.e. mid nineteenth century) art, he was also trying to emphasize that the development of a society in technical terms did not necessarily imply that a corresponding change in all aspects of society would occur as well. When this was the situation, as he suggests it was in his epoch, the authenticity, or 'realistic' quality of art would suffer, even though other important historical developments of the art (e.g. use of perspective, lighting techniques, etc) could be profound.

The other central aspect of realism in Marxist aesthetics was that the artist was not confined to passive observations of socio-historical processes; they could also be reactionary, critical and, most importantly, revolutionary. While this component of Marxist realism will be discussed further, especially in regards to the role of the artist in Marxist aesthetics, it is useful for us here to contemplate comments that Engel wrote in *The Rapid Progress of Communism in Germany* while discussing a work by the German painter Karl Hübner.

Engel's discussion on *The Silesian Weavers* focused primarily on the competing social classes, namely the bourgeois manufacturer and the female weaver, who is attempting to sell him a piece of her cloth. The striking differences between the two are made painfully clear: the manufacturer holds a strong position of power over the weaver, who has little choice but to

accept whatever meagre compensation the manufacturer may offer. He is well fed and is represented with a face as red and unfeeling as brass, while the woman is desponding and distressed, unable to bear the news that her efforts to support her family are in vain, as he is evidently rejecting the work she has presented. Others within the

2: Karl Hübner, *The Silesian Weavers*.
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hrc/projects/doma/Huber.jpg>. 12 October 2003

painting are similarly represented, for example the son of the manufacturer, who is a young, dandy-like gentleman, and is coolly looking at the distressed weavers, or two other rejected weavers, one of whom is clenching his fist in rage, while the other "points up to heaven, as if saying: be quiet, there is a judge to punish him." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 105)

Engel's admiration of the painting lies in the artist's ability to effectively portray a tragically common aspect of bourgeoisie-worker relations, and to provoke shock and even repulsion on the part of the viewer of the piece. By depicting this class struggle, he in his own words sees this piece as "more effectual Socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets might have done," and has "prepared a good many minds for Social ideas." (Braxandall & Morawski, 1973: 105) The painting is realistic, for it portrays a typical, albeit unfortunate, circumstance in Bourgeoisie-Proletariat relations. In an oft quoted passage by Engel he notes "Realism, to my mind, implies, beside truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." (Lang, 1978: 14) Clearly Hübner's portrayal was realistic in this sense of the word. But it also contained a potential for socialist agitation and revolution, by revealing that which could otherwise go unnoticed, for depicting the contradictions and conflicts between competing social classes, and demonstrating how unbalanced this confrontation clearly was. For Marx the revolutionary potential in art lay in this power to reveal, to provoke, and to agitate.

The revolutionary potential in aesthetics was to be utilized with greater intensity and frequency in Russia following the revolution, however its genealogy can be traced back to as early as the eighteenth century, to the writings of Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon has been credited by some as one of the earliest 'socialist' thinkers, although as noted by Gerhard Rempel, the term did not even exist in his time. Several components of Saint-Simon's teachings became foundational for Marx's criticisms of the class struggle that was occurring during his time, some of which will be outlined here.

A primary concept for Saint-Simon was his call to re-evaluate the conception of man as an autonomous individual, and that it was impossible to imagine man as an individual without also considering his relations with society as a whole. Rempel notes: "It was clear to Saint-Simon that, after Descartes and Kant, after Rousseau and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the cult of individual liberty, of the individual as an end in himself, could go no farther." (Rempel, 1995) Saint-Simon was critical of the feudal organization of labour under modern industrialization, which to him ran counter to the productive potential of the industrial revolution. Furthermore, despite the collapse of feudalism under the French revolution, Saint-Simon was concerned that vestiges of feudalism, notably labour relations, still existed, but these relations were obscured by the conception of 'liberalism' as the antithesis, and therefore the successor, of feudalism, which was currently in vogue in French social theory. (Rempel, 1995)

This critique of the shortcomings of the French revolution by Saint-Simon, in its inability to liberate society not only from a political plane but also a societal one, is later echoed by Marx's own critique of France's revolution. Furthermore, according to Ghita Ionescu, many of Marx's theories owe some influence from the ideas of Saint-Simon: "As he [Marx] himself acknowledged, his ideas, other than his economic ones – i.e. his historical, social and political ideas – were already to be found in embryo in Saint-Simon's work." (Ionescu, 1976: 26) In particular, it was the writings of Saint-Simon that lead Marx towards a critical stance against one of his major tutors, Hegel. Ionescu notes, "Marx's greatest debt to Saint-Simon is for his theory of the separation of civil society from the state – and subsequently of

government from administration – for this lead Marx to the first serious criticism he ever made of the German philosophers.” (Ionescu, 1976: 24) Rose confirms this assessment, and credits Saint-Simon for leading Marx towards an opposition against certain aesthetic theories by Hegel, who had viewed artistic production as something separate from other forms of production, an idea that Marx was to thoroughly denounce. (Rose, 1984: 73)

While these credits to Saint-Simon are certainly noteworthy, it is elsewhere in Rose’s book that our focus must turn. In *Marx’s Lost Aesthetic*, Rose suggests the Saint-Simonian ideology of a society comprised primarily of two distinct, yet co-dependant groups, notably the working class and an intellectual elite comprised of scientists, philosophers and artists, lay the foundation towards Marx’s comprehension of alienation within aesthetic production, and, more significantly, provided the theoretical direction for Marx’s conception of the role of the artist within a Communist society, and the crucial position they would play in the historically inevitable revolution between the proletariat and the ruling Bourgeoisie. While Rose concedes that while this idea of the ‘revolutionary artist’ was not to be fully realized until the founding of the Russian avant-garde, well after Marx’s death, this conception could still be considered ‘Marxist’ in its attempts to create a new industrialized proletariat for post revolutionary Russia, and that these artists functioned in a distinctly ‘Marxist’ manner.

Following the French revolution and the collapse of feudalism in France, Saint-Simon began to formulate his theory for a new political structure that would best incorporate the new industrial revolution. For Saint-Simon, political power as it currently existed was a system of the power of the few ruling over the many, and ran counter to an industrialized society. This was due to the inherent change in power relations: for Saint-Simon, it was the producers, the ‘proletariat’ in Marxist terms, who should now hold the position of authority for not only did they represent the vast majority of the population, it was they who were responsible producing the wealth of the nation (for they, not the politicians, produced the goods), and they who could exercise the best judgment over how to run this new industry, for by their direct involvement in production, they would be better informed and capable of making proper

decisions for an industrial society. Centralized power, according to Saint-Simon, was simply no longer appropriate for an industrialized nation, and the political structures associated with feudalism, which still exercised forceful influence in France at that time, must be abolished. The radical changes occurring in society due to the industrial revolution must be reflected in the political structures as well. Therefore Saint-Simon saw a need for a fundamental change in politics, from the "process of what he called the 'politics of power', to the decision-making processes of what he called the 'politics of abilities'." (Ionescu, 1976: 12) Politics must be separated from power; in fact, the very notion of centralized power in an industrialized society is irrelevant, for now power had become totally de-centralized, and rested in the hands of the worker. Saint-Simon did not, however, conclude that in an industrialized society a political structure is therefore not needed at all. Rather, he turned his attention towards the question of politics without power, and asked what form a political structure would take in an industrialized society.

Saint-Simon felt that industry had created a new relationship between man and nature, but consequentially altered the relations between man and man, which he felt would "end the relations of exploitation and obedience and should lead, logically, to a relations of general co-operation, replacing rule over men by the 'administration of things'." (Ionescu, 1976: 30) This politics of administration, not rule, would be formulated through three classes that Saint-Simon saw developing in an industrialized society: two which were considered 'productive' and comprised of scientists, writers and artists in one and the industrialists or 'workers' in the other, while the third class was deemed 'unproductive' in the industrial conception of the word, and included the unemployed as well as the military and nobility. (Ionescu, 1976: 31) While it may seem that this collection of classes runs counter to the Marxian conception of a classless society, when considered within a socialist interpretation of Saint-Simon, this is not necessarily the case, primarily due to Saint-Simon's tendency to include all those who are useful to society, regardless of what they did, under the term 'productive forces.' (Ionescu, 1976: 32) Within this interpretation, these two classes are in essence

groupings of common-minded individuals within a larger universal class of productive labourers.

It is this avant-garde group of scientists, writers and artists that is the focus of Rose's treatise. According to Rose, this collection of workers would provide the leadership and direction within a Saint-Simonist conception of a new political system in post-revolutionary Russia. Since Saint-Simon viewed that "industrial labour could be emancipated from its outdated feudal controls by an avant-garde consisting of artists, scientists, and engineers," (Rose, 1984: 5) this places the artist within a unique social position: one of societal leader, a person that could provide new ideas and directions for the newly industrialized society. Saint-Simon, writing in 1802, called these professionals the 'vanguard' of society, and appealed to them that they accept their new role in creating an industrialized nation:

Scientists, artists, and all those of you who devote some of your power and resources to the progress of enlightenment: you are the section of humanity with the greatest intellectual energy, the section most able to appreciate a new idea, and most directly interested in the subscription's success. It is up to you to defeat the force of inertia. So mathematicians; as you are the vanguard, begin! (Rose, 1984: 11)

Heinrich Heine, a Saint-Simon follower and influential to Marx, refined this position in the early nineteenth century during his criticisms of the patronage developing between the Prussian monarchy and the Nazarene artists who were attempting to revive the religious aesthetics developed in feudal Germany in the Middle Ages. Heine felt that artists within his native Germany were either falling into place behind the demands of the monarchy, or were being silenced and banned by the ruling aristocracy. Consequentially, neither group of artists were able to obtain the role of social nor industrial leader as espoused by Saint-Simon. Rose notes that Heine chastised the Nazarene aesthetic as attempting to thwart societal progress by reviving a feudal age incompatible with industrialization, and were "denying all the principles of progress defended in Saint-Simonian theory as well as Saint-Simon's concept of the avant-garde." (Rose, 1984: 11) Looking to artists in France immediately following the revolution of 1830, he found in Delacroix's work, *Liberty Guiding the People*, an important example of how the artist might function as a social catalyst, filling his role as a leader in the avant-garde

towards the Saint-Simonist conception of societal progress towards "greater material harmony and well-being." (Rose, 1984: 18)

This position of aesthetic value differed greatly from Heine's teacher, Hegel, who believed that progress in art was to be achieved through the representation of Ideal forms

3: Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Guiding the People*, 1830. Brace, 1991: 879

beyond the everyday, phenomenal world. Hegel had argued that Hellenistic art had been limited by its 'bondage' to the physical world, whereas Romanticism, culminating in Raphael, represented "the culmination of the history of art." (Rose, 1984: 14) Heine rejected this conclusion as reactionary, and instead used Saint-Simon's concept of the artist as an avant-garde critic, claiming that the sensualism in Hellenic art represented a higher form of art than the spiritualistic art of the Romantic and Nazarene period. (Rose, 1984: 16) According to Rose, it was Heine's analysis of Delacroix that lead him beyond a "Hegelian concept of progress as the progress of Reason to greater self-consciousness" into the Saint-Simonian concept of progress as liberation of the senses which translated Idealist and Nazarene theories of human society into materialistic ideas, while the role of the artist was "conceived of as the avant-garde introduction of that progress." (Rose, 1984: 18)

While Marx and Engel were later to dismiss Romantic art as alienating man from his sensuous and materialist essence, they were to follow the Saint-Simonian idea of aesthetics as liberating the senses from religious fetishism and from the Idealist goal of aesthetics as liberating the subject from the senses. Marx's own separation of Hellenist art from Romanticism is strikingly similar to Heine's own distinctions, although for Heine the distinction was primarily political, whereas for Marx it was economic. It was, however, through economics that Marx was to tie the Saint-Simonian idea of an

'unproductive' component in society to the 'unproductive' fetishism of art seen in Romantic and Nazarene art produced under a feudalistic society. (Rose, 1984: 70)

What then, for Marx, would constitute a 'productive' form of art? It was not, first, along the lines of Adam Smith, who tied productivity in art with its production of mercantile value, for this, as has been mentioned previously in this paper, would only alienate the artist from his work. Furthermore, according to Marx, it was impossible to judge aesthetic value according to surplus value and profit. For Marx, productivity in art is instead, according to Rose, to be found in its cognitive ability to show how "we, and our art, have developed as a part of material history." (Rose, 1984: 86) This would help to explain why Greek art was held in such high esteem for Marx, for due to its close association with its society, art helped to explain the cultural and historical milieu, and demonstrated the historical change that was to follow. This idea of art 'showing how' is strikingly different from the Hegelian conception of art as a 'mirror reflection of its age'; the latter is distinctly passive, while the former implies a dynamic capacity of aesthetics to explain historical and material conditions, and to demonstrate the "unequal development of economic and artistic production within society, and, therefore, of production in general." (Rose, 1984: 85)

It was this combination of the Marxist understanding of artistic production as a process and product of the material and economic conditions within which it was created, and the influence of Saint-Simon's theories of a group of avant-garde societal leaders, including artists, that was to be championed by artists and engineers in the years following the Russian revolution. This was to occur only then, according to Rose, due to a combination of several important factors:

- A) Most of the writings of Saint-Simon and his followers were censored throughout nineteenth-century Russia, and thus despite some interest within Russia, access was to a large extent very limited.

- B) The social and industrial revolutions occurring in France were to happen in Russia much later, and thus many of the writings of Saint-Simon were of limited application prior to the revolution.
- C) After the Russian revolution, the dire need for both industrial and societal reform created a fertile ground for the Saint-Simonian union of scientists, writers and artists as a cultural avant-garde.

It was the revolutionary atmosphere in Russia following 1917, coupled with a Marxist-Communist agenda of reform that allowed leaders within Russia to formulate new directions for a Communist society, and to incorporate Saint-Simon's idea of an elite union of an avant-garde. Although there were several groups of artists to emerge in Russia following the revolution, it was the Constructivists who were to champion the new idea of aesthetic productivity, and to incorporate Marxist theories within the Saint-Simonian group of avant-garde artists, working together with scientists and politicians, with the shared goal of creating a new, Communist, society.

The Constructivists as Social Leaders: The Marxist Avant-garde

As has been discussed in the previous section, following the revolution in 1917 several groups from academia, including scientists, philosophers, politicians and artists, began to formulate ways of creating a fertile ground for the development of Communism in Russia.

4: Vladimir Tatlin, *Suspended Corner Relief*, 1916.
Cooke, 1995: 103

While the road to this development was without doubt difficult, and created many disagreements, their goal was common and clear. Given the influence of Saint-Simon within Marxist ideology, it is not surprising to see how these groups were in many ways similar to the avant-garde proposed by Saint-Simon in his writings. It may seem somewhat contradictory to incorporate, let alone encourage, an avant-garde intellectual elite as the leaders in a Communist society, given Marx's call of a classless society, where the leaders would be the proletariat, and the need for a separate class of organizers would be unnecessary. How could an elite possibly exist within a truly Marxist, classless society?

Lenin seemed keenly aware of the apparent contradiction, and he went to lengths to justify this class of intelligentsia as the appropriate leaders of the new society. Lenin emphasized the need for theoretical knowledge, to educate the proletariat of the fundamentals of Marxism, before they could be properly prepared to function within a Communist society. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin highlighted three specific factors that demanded a strong theory to guide the practice of Marxism:

- A) The Communist state was only in its infancy, therefore in order to avoid shortsighted mistakes during the creation of a new society a strong theoretical foundation was crucial.

- B) Since this movement was (in Lenin's eyes) becoming an international one, it was important to absorb and analyze critically the historical experiences of these other countries, so that national chauvinism may be minimized, and the potential of Socialism could reach the broadest possible areas.
- C) The sheer vastness of the task of creating a Socialist society, against the backdrop of bourgeois thinking still prevailing in Russia at that time, demanded a strong vanguard to lead the proletariat into a fully socialist-conscious state. (Lenin, 1963: 57-59)

Lenin sums his justification for an intellectual elite with the conclusion that "the role of the vanguard fighter [the proletariat] can be fulfilled only by a party which is guided by the advanced theory." (Lenin, 1963: 59) It was this Saint-Simonian group of the avant-garde, the 'intelligentsia,' that was given the task of creating a fully conscious, theoretically developed proletariat. Although in later years these groups often found themselves manipulated by the state, forced to conform to specific ideologies not necessarily congruent with their own ideas, it is important to focus not on the Stalinist use of the intelligentsia, but rather on the immediate time following the Russian revolution, when the idea of the intelligentsia was first proposed. Margaret Rose notes:

If we were to see the Constructivists of the 1920s as a part of the 'intelligentsia' of that time, we should, however, have to distinguish their particular combination of mental and manual labour both from the post-Stalinist definition of the intelligentsia as consisting of a group of purely mental labourers, and from its relegation of the intelligentsia to non-working classes. (Rose, 1984: 138)

The Saint-Simonian intelligentsia, therefore, could be considered to be functioning in a Marxist-Leninist manner, although they were seemingly performing as a separate class, above the proletariat. The stress that Lenin placed on having an 'advanced theory,' i.e. that of Marxism, ensured that the ideological goals would remain paramount. The avant-garde class was to become the founders of Soviet socialism, the 'constructors' of society in the most literal sense of the word, and the artists associated with the

Constructivist movement were to take this task as the primary objective of their work.

The history of the Constructivist movement has been well documented by various authors; it is not the task here to provide yet another historical summary. It is prudent, however, to briefly discuss some of the fundamentals of Constructivism, especially in regards to their Marxist interpretation of aesthetics, how they conceived of their role as an avant-garde group of leaders, and what the best manner of disseminating their knowledge to the proletariat could be.

5: Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: Aeroplane Flying*, 1915. Brace, 1991: 994

As mentioned previously, Marx attempted in a very scientific manner to explain the historical processes that led society from one stage to another. For Marx, economics and the process of production was the dominating factor that brought humanity from Hellenism to Feudalism to Capitalism and, ultimately, to the historically inevitable conclusion of Socialism. While his focus was primarily economic, his attention to aesthetics followed a similar scientific method of inquiry, and led him to certain conclusions about the nature and production of aesthetic objects. The Constructivists were to pay great attention to this scientific method of inquiry when it came to the analysis of their own work, and they strove to create an aesthetic that would be based on a scientific, rational analysis of the needs of the proletariat, both from an objective perspective (e.g., in architecture, the programmatic demands of a specific project), and a subjective one (aesthetics as a disseminator of socialist ideology).

Following Marx's criticisms of art created in Feudal and Bourgeoisie societies, most of the Russian avant-garde rejected the aesthetics and techniques of those epochs, and sought a new aesthetic that would reflect the newly industrialized Russian society. Early artists like Tatlin, Kandinsky and Malevich looked to Europe for

6: El Lissitzky, Agitation Poster in front of a factory, 1919. Khan, 1987: 37

influence, and began to incorporate ideas from Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism, all forms that were distinctly non-representational, and focused on composition, juxtaposition and geometry as key elements to creating innovative forms of art.

New technologies were to play an important role in this new aesthetic as well. Many artists argued that a socialist conception of society required new forms of aesthetic communication, notably mass communication, and focused their research into other mediums, notably graphic arts and film. (Lang, 1978: 30) Predictably this group of like-minded individuals formed a group and called themselves The Left Front of Art (LEF). Their emphasis on media like film and graphic arts is significant because they are devices usually viewed within a social gathering, unlike literature or painting, which disseminates its ideas on a one-to-one basis. Artists like Mayakovsky and El Lissitzky were prominent in designing posters for mass demonstrations, while the director Sergei Eisenstein began producing films. In each of these creations, the possibility for them to be experienced communally is significant, and echoes the earlier ideas of Bogdanov and his call for an aesthetic that spoke to the labour collective. This notion of a collectively experienced art could also easily be justified within Marxist theories, while echoing Saint-Simon in their attempt to participate proactively within society, thereby bringing their understanding of Marxist ideology to the greatest possible number of people.

LEF was by no means the only group of artists to emphasize the collectively consumed notion of art as an appropriate manner of disseminating Socialist thought in Russia. As early as 1918, the Proletcult group, headed by A.A. Bogdanov, was already proposing a similar manifesto. Their position on the role of revolutionary art was summed in a key passage within the first Proletcult convention in 1918:

"Art by means of living images organizes social experience not only in the sphere of knowledge, but also in that of the emotions and aspirations. Consequently, it is one of the most powerful implements for the organization of collective and class forces in a class society. A class-art of its own is indispensable to the Proletariat for the organization of its forces for social work, struggle and construction. Labour collectivism – this is the spirit of this art, which ought to reflect the world from the point of view of the labour collective, expressing the complex of its sentiment and its militant and creative will."
(Lang, 1978: 26)

This notion of collectivism, both in the dissemination as well as within the subject of the work itself, would have a profound impact on Constructivist ideologies, not only on the choice of media (poster, film, architecture), but further to the level of the morphology of the Socialist city itself, and the corresponding social condensers within; this fundamental influence will be expanded later.

Russia was not only becoming economically and socially collective however, it was also rapidly becoming industrialized. One of the first tasks of the new Party was to drag Russia out of the Feudalistic and outdated means of production, and into the modern mechanized techniques that were employed (albeit manipulatively, according to Marx) by Capitalism. While the industrialization of Russia was to have profound impacts on the city, the avant-garde artists also began to look towards the machine, in this case as an appropriate source of inspiration for their work. This was of course not entirely new; the 'machine aesthetic' had already begun to flourish in Europe, however in Russia it was to have a distinctly different, and Marxist, perspective. As highlighted by Rose, both Marx's scientific analysis of historical aesthetics and Saint-Simon's avant-garde, coupled with the pressing need to industrialize Russia, produced a fundamental and crucial

understanding of the aesthetics of the machine age, one that was to differ strikingly from other countries:

...only when Russia needed both machines and an avant-garde industrialized proletariat – in the revolutionary year of 1917 and after – was it to develop a 'machine aesthetic' which was not just an

'aestheticisation' of the machine (as it was, for example, for followers of the Italian Futurist, Marinetti) but a programme for the practical, economically productive, and socialism-oriented combination of art and technology. (Rose, 1984: 100)

7: Moisei Ginzburg, Machine Image, *Style and Epoch*. Ginzburg, 1924: 85

Architect Moisei Ginzburg, in his seminal theoretical work *Style and Epoch* (1924), began to create a specifically Russian understanding of what inspirations and influences could be drawn from the machine. For Ginzburg the greatest importance of the machine was in its organization and efficiency, that every component of a machine was crucial in its proper functioning – there were no superfluous objects, no unnecessary elements; every piece was literally 'productive'. Ginzburg writes:

One of the fundamental characteristics of the machine as an independent organism is its extraordinarily well-defined and precise *organization*. Indeed, a more distinctly organized phenomenon can hardly be found in nature or in the products of human effort. There is no part or element of the machine that does not occupy a particular place, position, or role in the overall scheme and that is not a product of absolute necessity. There is not and cannot be anything in the machine that is superfluous, accidental, or "decorative" in the sense conventionally applied to habitation. Nothing can be either added to or taken from it without disrupting the whole. What we encounter in the machine, essentially and primarily, is the clearest expression of the ideal of harmonious creation, which long ago was formulated by the first Italian theoretician, Alberti. (Ginzburg, 1924: 86)

According to Ginzburg, it was this inherent organization of the machine that demanded of its creator equal precision and clarity; the design of a machine

would require a clear and concise goal, clarity of vision, and the precise articulation of that goal in the product itself. Consequentially, not only would the model of the machine prevent the designer from adding components that would be unessential, it would also arrest any impressionistic or fanciful impulses that they may have; the machine thus functioned as a type of mediator between scientific objectives and artistic inspiration. The task of the modern artist and architect was to draw from the lessons learnt in the design of the machine, to harness their creative impulses towards clear and precise goals:

From the machine, the genuine artist will again learn the art of articulating his conception into separate elements, binding them to one another in accordance with the laws of inviolable necessity, and finding an exactly corresponding form for them. Instead of fortuitous, impressionistic impulses, the artist will have to develop an ability to deal with his aspirations and to strengthen them within the bounds of what is possible for each realm of art and for each material – an ability to find the precise limits of his conception. (Ginzburg, 1924: 87)

The significance of the machine for the Constructivists was thus in its efficiency: all components within the machine are functional and essential to its operation, yet no element is redundant; materials are chosen by their best possible and most appropriate use – steel is used for its strength, rubber for its flexibility, etc; and all of these seemingly disparate objects, when combined together in the proper manner, produce something that could be considered greater than the sum of its parts. These fundamental properties of all machines provided the inspiration for the Constructivists in creating their 'machine aesthetic.' If art was to be considered a 'machine' then its primary utility was to create a socially conscious proletariat. For the Constructivists, art therefore had to be 'functional' or 'productive' within society, both in its utilitarian and economic use of materials, and in the larger ideological goals associated with its role within the avant-garde.

The unquestioned goal of Constructivist art was to be 'productive'; indeed, Catherine Cooke notes: "as loyal Soviets, 'social construction', and particularly 'the building of socialism' were the unquestioned *raison d'être* of their work". (Cooke, 1995: 101) Given that, how were the Constructivists to approach aesthetics in design? Following the scientific approach to analysis

Socialist avant-garde began to question the viability of Marxist ideologies within a Bourgeoisie-created city plan. The Narkomfin complex, designed by Ginzburg, was to become an important housing prototype in the creation of the new Socialist city. It was, however, to act in concert with other Socialist-inspired architectural venues; it is thus prudent to briefly discuss these buildings and their roles, in order to see how housing was to fit within the conception of a Socialist city.

The Social Condenser and its spatial and social impacts on architecture and the city

Our work must be based on a close and careful study of the program viewed in the light of our political and social conditions. Its essential goal must be the definition and creation of the SOCIAL CONDENSERS of our age. That is the principle objective of constructivism in architecture.

Moisei Ginzburg, 1928 (Kopp, 1970: 112)

Within the construction of a new socialist society, architecture had been given a pivotal role. Many of the existing structures within Russia were associated with their bourgeois owners; deemed detrimental to the power of the proletariat, these buildings seemed incapable of filling the new demands and requirements of a socialist society. Consequently, new building types were demanded to solve a vast variety of inadequacies: new houses were needed for the workers, factories had to be built, and venues were required to educate the proletariat on their new function in society. Together, all of these structures would create a new city, one based not on the so-called petty interests of the individual, but one that placed emphasis on the community, the proletariat, and Communist Russia.

Termed "Social Condensers", these buildings, and their corresponding architectures, would prove to become fundamental in constructing a socialist society. Architecture was to become a crucial social and pedagogical tool for Marxist theorists in the decades following the October Revolution. The role of communal housing was certainly one of the main topics of investigation; it is important to note, however, that this role could not exist in isolation. Other important venues, from worker's clubs to administrative buildings, from the factories to the morphology of the city itself, were to work in tandem with the housing communes, acting in concert as a socialist machine towards the common Marxist goal of liberating the proletariat from the so-called chains of

capitalist and bourgeois life. It is thus important to reflect briefly on the role of the social condenser in general, before addressing the communal house in particular.

The goals set out for the social condensers were by no means slight. According to Anatole Kopp, through their proposals and built works, architects of the period sought to "create an appropriate environment for the future socialist society; to speed the arrival of that society by influencing man himself through the

9: Vesnin, Kolly, Orlov, Andreyevsky & Korshinsky; The Dneprostroi, 1927-32.
Kopp, 1970: 152

medium of architecture; to find architectural and structural solutions that would enable these goals to be attained despite the slenderness of the available funds and material resources." (Kopp, 1970: 115) They were well aware that simply creating new buildings alone would not suffice in creating a socialist man; a radical restructuring of the means of production was also required. Having said that, they, along with Russian politicians and sociologists, firmly felt that the "the primitivism and ignorance of the Russian people were, in fact, to retard industrial development." (Kopp, 1970: 116) The creation of new social condensers were thus focused on the cultural and social restructuring of man, and were to act in tandem with factories, workshops, and related facilities in shaping the new proletariat.

This is not to suggest that the architect had little to do with the creation of the new factories, or that these factories were not seen as fertile ground for teaching the working class. In fact, the role of the factory was not only economic, but also social: "...the principle "social condenser" of that period [the 1920's] was the factory." (Kopp, 1970: 158) Of note was the fact that architects played an important role in designing these structures, which are usually designed by engineers. Examples include Vensin's collaborative design for the Dneprostroi hydro-electric and industrial complex, and Munts, Pokrovsky and Gundoblin's Volkhov hydroelectric station. Often these structures were located within the regions of the city; they thus played an

important role in the perception of the morphology of the city, and were not relegated to the periphery, as is more commonly the case, especially in Western cities.

The social and political importance of industrial production cannot be understated. Since from a Marxist perspective the productive capabilities of man were to be the cornerstones of society, the corresponding structures were to be of utmost importance. Production and Industry were crucial; this demanded an efficient, collective labor production. The significance of a collective manner of working and living stemmed directly from the industrialization of Russia; a Marxist conception of society inherently rested upon the need for collective working. It was only natural that in order to stimulate collective thinking, cultural and productive aspects of society must also reflect this collective methodology. To do otherwise would seem contradictory, and could potentially undermine the industrialization of Russia.

The importance placed on the collective had direct implications on the structure of the city. Emphasis was to be placed not on the individual, but on large groups, with openness to all levels of society. In order to create an appropriate environment for a collective city, certain methodologies were needed. According to Selim Khan, these tendencies accounted for "certain characteristic features of early designs for public venues: vast open spaces for demonstrations, grand halls for meetings, and monumental flights of stairs." (Khan, 1987: 399) These grand spaces were designed to create zones of political gatherings, stages for propaganda and agitational speeches; spaces in which the proletariat could be informed, and involved in, the creation of a new way of life.

Within the context of non-industrial building, one of the most important types of social condensers was the worker's club. These buildings, often called "People's Houses," were usually associated with certain factories or housing communes (Khan, 1987: 434). The worker's club was to be the principal location for cultural and political teaching, social gatherings, and the primary venue for social life outside of work and home. The socialist notion of "club" must be clarified, for it had specific connotations different from that in

Western society. The club was not intended to be a private one; it strove to break all associations with bourgeoisie culture. Rather, what was crucial to the club was that "the mass of the members must be directly involved. They must not approach it or be channeled into it from the outside as mere entertainment. They themselves must find in it the maximum of self-expression." (Kopp, 1970: 116)

Worker's Clubs were to become "centers for mass propaganda and the development of creativity among the working class." (Khan, 1987: 434) Initially, these clubs were located in former private palaces and residences, but it soon became clear that a new architecture was needed to properly reflect their growing importance. Furthermore, there was a strong desire on the part of politicians and architects alike to break connections from the past bourgeois environment. Since the "mass of the people could not conceive that leisure, recreation, and intellectual development might be possible in surroundings that did not recall those of the privileged circles of the past" (Kopp, 1970: 120), it was important to demonstrate that the new conception of the club, and its corresponding architecture, was indeed valid and fundamental to the development of a socialist way of life.

Functionally, the needs of the worker's club were also proving the old bourgeoisie's opera halls woefully inadequate. As the club became centred on "the idea of member participation" (Kopp, 1970: 120) the need for a more flexible and adaptive space was needed. Furthermore, the typically Italian disjunction between actor and audience was disappearing; since all were both actor and audience, this separation was no longer important. This pattern of development was similar to the trends seen in the Russian theatre, which was increasingly becoming more and more open to the public, and no longer a place for the cultural elite. Given this, the need for a new association between architecture and that of a collective could be drawn. Old architecture was for the elite bourgeois culture; new architecture was for the proletariat.

In all, many worker's clubs designed by Russian Constructivists were proposed and built. Although it is not the goal of this essay to document the

variety of clubs, it is useful to mention some seminal examples of the time, so that general characteristics of these structures may be highlighted.

The Palace of Labour in Moscow, designed in 1923 by the Vesnin brothers, is often praised as one of the first truly Constructivist designs, pointing the way for a new conception of architecture and the city. Designed to house a massive, yet flexible amphitheatre, smaller meeting groups and associated spaces, the building was noted for its logical expression of the various functions on the exterior, its dynamic emphasis on both vertical and horizontal lines, and its incorporation of modern technologies such as radio antennas, information screens and construction techniques. According to Andrei Ikonnikov,

10: Vesnin Brothers; Palace of Labour, 1923. Khan, 1987: 180

this proposal could be seen as "paving the way for the application of new technical forms in architecture." (Ikonnikov, 1988: 89) More importantly, "its chief innovation... lay in the very building technique, rooted in 'constructing' a new social organism." (Ikonnikov, 1988: 88) Both programmatically, in fulfilling the new demand for an appropriate social condenser, and in its architecture, the design sought to create a dynamic venue for the proletariat. The radio masts and information screens were "a symbol of a building-cum-rostrum, whence the voice of the popular masses is beamed around the world." (Ikonnikov, 1988: 88) The emphatic expression of new construction techniques and forms attempted to speak to the newest member of society, the worker. This design, although never built, formed a new direction for Constructivist architects in creating these new social condensers.

Another seminal example is the Ivan Rusakov House of Culture, designed by Konstantin Melnikov in 1927, which was originally designed for public utilities workers. Also located in Moscow, this building contained similar features seen in the earlier design by the Vesnin brothers. The program demanded a large, flexible auditorium which Melnikov provided by splitting the seating area into three distinct volumes. These volumes, clearly and dynamically expressed on the exterior, also allowed the venue to simultaneously hold several gatherings at one time. When the need arose, the three seating areas could be collectively opened to the main stage, creating a location for large spectacles with a seating capacity of 1,200. The clear expression of the flexibility of the building on the exterior, along with its lack of ornament and expression of concrete, was equal to Vesnin's in demonstrating a new conception for architecture and its corresponding social role for Russia. Melnikov chose to include bas-relief slogans on the exterior of the building, which declared "The trade union is the school of Communism" (Cooke, 1995: 61); montages created by Melnikov celebrated "Soviet achievements in 'raising the cultural standards of the population', and particularly literacy across the whole USSR" (Cooke, 1995: 61). This indicates that Melnikov too was profoundly concerned with constructing a socialist Russia, placing an emphasis on collective gatherings for cultural enlightenment.

One last example, the Zuev Worker's Club for employees of the Moscow Communal Economy, designed by I. Golosov and built in 1927, is noteworthy particularly for its internal spaces. Featuring a dramatic

11: Konstantin Melnikov; Rusakov House of Culture, 1927. Kopp, 1970: 118

12: I. Golosov; Zuev Worker's Club, 1927. Exterior view. Khan, 1987: 446

cylindrical glass staircase at the site's principle corner, the building included the now-standard theatre. It is, however, the multipurpose hall that is truly unique. This space was "conceived as a series of interconnecting spaces, overhanging galleries, and staircases whose landings offer choice observation points" (Kopp, 1970: 123). The inherent social flexibility of this design created a venue in which groups of various sizes could gather for cultural

13: I. Golosov; Zuev Worker's Club, 1927.
Multipurpose Hall. Kopp, 1970: 119

enlightenment, in conjunction with the larger-scaled theatre for the more formal activities. This design was thus somewhat unique in its emphasis on the informal exchange of collective ideas, rather than stressing the official pedagogy of the state, most often seen in the massive gatherings of people for special events.

As a whole, several general design principles employed in the Constructivist's Worker's Clubs can be drawn. It is crucial that the building express both its collective function, and also its prescribed flexibility; the composition of forms tends to create an air of dynamic motion, in order to reflect the dramatic social changes that are taking place; also, modern construction techniques are emphasized, including a pronounced use of glass, steel and exposed concrete. According to Ginzburg, these types of buildings were "generally asymmetrical, since it is extremely rare for functional parts of a building to be absolutely identical. They are predominately open and free in their configurations, because this not only better bathes the building ...in fresh air and sunlight, but makes its functional elements more clearly readable and makes it easier to perceive the dynamic life that is unfolding within the building's spaces" (Cooke, 1995: 130). It was crucial that the legibility of the building was eminent, for only in that manner could it become pedagogical.

Most importantly, though, was the role of these buildings to be 'social condensers', to thrust the city towards a Marxist conception of life. From the very beginning of Constructivist thought, this was paramount; Alexei Gan, an early Constructivist artist was "the first to identify ...key ideas of emergent Constructivism not just with 'Revolution', but with Marxism, and to give a clearly materialist rationale for their engagement with architecture and city form. In drawing attention to how the old capitalist buildings were hindering social reorganization, and how 'correct' buildings could conversely help it, he planted the notion of the building as social catalyst that Constructivist architects later formalized, ...as 'the social condenser.' " (Cooke, 1995: 89) Architects such as Vesnin, Melnikov, Ginzburg and Gosolov were to propel these ideas into built form, in attempt to create a fertile ground from which socialism could grow.

As the main centre for activities outside of work, the role of the club had profound implications for what the role of the home would be. Following Marxist ideation on the role of the collective and the home, the club "corresponded to a conception in which the home tended to become merely a place for the individual to rest, while life in all its social and cultural aspects developed in collective centres and collective forms." (Kopp, 1970: 116) The club was envisioned as the centre of culture for the mass, not the elite, and most importantly, as a collective. The role of the home was, on the other hand, rapidly becoming marginalized for its inherent individualist function. Many of the values associated with the nuclear family were increasingly being attacked as harbouring bourgeois attitudes, deemed detrimental to the creation of a socialist society. As one of the main aspects of socialist life (the others being work and social activities), the role of the family and housing was vigorously investigated.

In order to respond to the increasing pressure to provide houses for the proletariat, politicians and architects alike were given a daunting task. Immediately after the Revolution, many families moved into the old bourgeois houses; this often resulted in several families living in a building designed for one. The same was true in many conventional apartments, where multiple families lived together, one for each room, and shared the bathroom and

kitchen. This produced obviously undesirable conditions, whereby families were cramped and new housing solutions were needed. Although a variety of solutions were proposed, with varying levels of adherence to socialist attitudes, one of the most pronounced and greatly implemented was the communal house.

The specific features of the communal house will be expanded on later in this paper; however it is important to mention some of the general characteristics now, so that they may be viewed as part of the entire system of the various social condensers. First, it is important to stress that these houses did not exist as places of rest alone. Many of these buildings did not

14: Asnova Team, Housing Complex, Shabolovka, Moscow, 1927. Khan, 1987: 380

and included facilities for social activities, child raising and communal dining. This created in effect a large family; the idea was that many of the social activities associated with the nuclear family (for example, dinner and light social activities) were to occur instead within a collective. This was envisioned to have a considerable social effect from a Marxist perspective, and would in particular liberate women from their traditional roles as the home-maker: "[Marxist-Leninists] ...treated the housing problem and its solutions under socialism as part of the much wider problem of socialist resettlement, in connection with the resolution of the conflict between town and country and the involvement of women in the social production process" (Khan, 1987: 341).

Lenin wrote extensively on the task of creating new responsibilities for women, so that they could become more productive in a Socialist community. In a discussion on the possible structures Socialist life would take he wrote "...without drawing women into social service... and political life, without drawing them out of their stultifying domestic and kitchen situation, *it is impossible* to ensure genuine freedom, it is impossible to build even democracy, let alone

socialism" (Khan, 1987: 341). Although this would take various forms architecturally, its greatest impact would occur within the house, and in particular in the kitchen. Many of the new housing communities would reduce the kitchen to its barest minimum, if not eliminate it altogether. In replacement, communal dining facilities, daycare centres and large-scale laundries were built in close proximity or as part of the housing complexes.

Asides from the new socialist demands brought onto the household, there was also a pressing need to solve a massive housing shortage. Russia's tattered economic system made it virtually impossible to construct the number of houses required, although progress was occurring: during the decade of the 20's, almost thirty-five million square meters of urban housing was built (Kopp, 1970: 129). Despite these impressive numbers, they still fell well short of the demand. In the end, a unique solution was proposed, that of the 'dom-kommuna'. In so doing, the problem of the lack of sufficient housing for the new industrial worker, combined with the desire to create a new social condition, created an opportunity for planners, politicians and architects alike to "kill two birds with one stone: to reduce the volume of construction while industrializing the building process and to create the essential 'social condenser' " (Kopp, 1970: 129).

With this in mind, in 1926 a group of architects were given the task of creating suitable prototypes for housing. This group was headed by the Association of Contemporary Architects (O.S.A.) and their leader, Moisei Ginzburg. According to Kopp, the Association had two key tasks: "to perfect standard housing units of revolutionary design and to devise the best means of grouping these units around vertical and horizontal service elements to form buildings as original in conception as the units themselves." They were to include elements that previous private owners could not have enjoyed: a series of collective facilities "to make up for savings achieved at the expense of the individual living units" (Kopp, 1970: 129).

What we see here is an official doctrine endorsing, even demanding, a personal sacrifice, (in the individual units) for the common good (collective facilities on the small scale, and affordability for the government and society

as a whole, on the large scale). Even before the initial design process, the structure of collective over individual was clearly ensconced.

Also of note is the fact that these collective houses were almost always closely associated with a particular factory or industry. In much of the literature of the time, the term "collective *workers* housing" is most commonly used; there is an insistent link between "house" and "work." What this implies is that even in the most private of realms, the home, there is an irrefutable connection to your work, and hence, in the socialist conception, your identity. Not only had the state provided you with employment, but it had also given you a place to rest, a personal reprise from the rest of the world. The architecture that housed you thus had an immediate association with the state; your "private" space could not have existed without the collective.

I have attempted to document how a Marxist conception of society could, and in fact did, impact architecture and the morphology of the Socialist city. As highlighted by Ikonnikov, Politicians and Architects of that period "shared a common conviction that architecture was an indispensable vehicle for guiding the social processes. Rather than the pure construction of buildings, the perceived function of architecture was to give form to the new social relations, life style, and industrial activities, and the actual buildings and their complexes were to express this particular message." (Ikonnikov, 1988: 106) The goal of creating a communal, socialist lifestyle was unmistakable, and was implemented at a variety of levels. From the design of the city to public venues for mass agitation, from abolishing private ownership of property to building communal houses, the task was always the same. It was the dom-kommuna that became the main subject of discussion in the mid-twenties, and the design and construction of the Narkomfin house garnished substantial attention. The Narkomfin house was not designed simply as a future home for the employees of the Russian Ministry of Finance; it was destined to be the prototypical example of the third social condenser of the new Socialist city.

Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House

Considering the rational, scientific approach the Constructivists used in design, it is safe to presume that the creation of the Narkomfin Communal House did not occur out of the blue; indeed it was the product of several years of research and experimentation. The premise of the social condenser was without doubt fundamental to the program and form of the complex. There were a total of four proposed buildings for the site: a housing block, a communal block that was connected to the housing block by a enclosed bridge, a separate laundry building, and a children's crèche (un-built).

The influential research leading to the design of Narkomfin were investigations into prototypical dwelling units for the new Socialist family by the Union of Contemporary Architects, or OSA. Initially promoted through a series of articles and publications (they were responsible for the journal *Contemporary Architecture*, or SA) and afterwards through various design experiments and proposals, OSA attempted to create a new Constructivist architecture via what they termed a 'functional method' of design, elaborated by Ginzburg in 1926 SA article. In it he wrote that the architect must first understand all of the 'unknowns' within a given project. These unknowns included conventional issues like program, site, and appropriate materiality, but also broader societal demands, including the requirements of a proletariat state, the specific conditions of the State's economy, and providing a direction for architectural solutions for both the present and the future. Ginzburg notes:

The character of a contemporary architect's work is radically altered by the fact that he recognizes his activity to be the establishing of architectural standards for the organization of new dwellings and towns, rather than the fulfillment of individual commissions. He sees it as his task to be continually advancing and improving those standards, in connection with the larger characteristics of production and with the advancing technological levels both here and internationally. In the conditions through which we are living as we develop socialism, each new solution by the architect, be it a dwelling block, a workers club, or a factory, is conceived by us as the invention of a more advanced model or type, which answers the demands of its brief and is suitable for multiple production in whatever quantities the needs of the state require. ...But in order that these type-solutions may undergo a genuinely radical renewal, in order for them to become genuinely new architectural products, they have to

be thought out, of course, not for some specific individual site, not in accordance with arbitrary whim. On the contrary, they must derive from the general whole, from the new principles of rational urbanism which will satisfy tomorrow's needs as well as today's. (Cooke, 1995: 130)

This passage is significant primarily for this reason: the Constructivists 'functional method' is, first and foremost, rationally holistic. Ginzburg saw every new building acting in concert with all conditions of Socialism, culminating in its relationship to the urban fabric and other social condensers. It would be impossible to consider a building as a unique, autonomous object; in order for it to be productive within society, it had to be envisioned within the entire framework of socialist life. This applied not only to the building itself, but to the architect as well, echoing Ginzburg's comments that science and the new machine aesthetic could serve as a source of inspiration, rationalizing the creative process, and ensuring that individual egoism would not dominate the development of a design. The architect was no longer to be the simple whip of his client, nor merely acting as decorator. Instead, as noted by Kopp, the architect was to become an architect "in the full sense of the term, and a sociologist, political scientist, and technician." (Kopp, 1970: 87)

This conception of a multi-faceted, productive artist is similar in nature to Marx and Engel's famous passage from *The German Ideology* where they proclaim that the Bourgeoisie distinctions of labour (e.g. painter versus farmer) would disappear, claiming that in a communist society "there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities." (Baxandall & Morawski, 1973: 71) While their visions were certainly utopian, it nevertheless emphasizes a whole and encompassing understanding of all aspects of society and culture that would be so crucial to creating a collective environment. To conceive an architect as sociologist, political scientist and technician is similar to the objective to decategorize the Bourgeoisie's divisions of labour, and follows a Marxist conception of a balanced, whole person produced by a socialist society. To view the role of an architect as a societal leader also clearly follows Saint-Simon's ideal of the avant-garde and the pivotal role that artists and architects would play in creating a new social structure.

Another distinctive element of OSA's 'functional method' was its logical, linear process. Upon documenting and dissecting the various 'unknowns' of a given project, they then reconstructed them in a rational order. As noted by Cooke, each factor or unknown would be "taken into account objectively, in an essentially linear process, 'moving from the first priority to the second,' in generating a 'basic spatial organism' and proceeding 'logically' through its technical and formal refinement." (Cooke, 1995: 102) This process also highlights what could be considered their priorities when approaching an architectural solution, a methodology that was succinctly summed in a diagram by Ginzburg for SA in 1927. In short, the four major steps in this process were:

- 1) Spatial Parameters: A study of the basic spatial volumes demanded by the projected program, and the organization and connections thereof; this process was primarily a study of the appropriate interior volumetrics of the design.
- 2) Materiality: A determination of what materials and methods of construction would best suit the building.
- 3) External Relationships: Through the first two processes, the architect then must study the groupings and massing of the collective programs as a volumetric whole.

15: Diagram of OSA's Functional Method, drawn by Catherine Cooke. Cooke, 1995: 127

- 4) Formation of Individual Components: A study of the detailing of elements; window openings, overhangs, etc. (Cooke, 1995: 111)

It is important to stress that my summary is not intended to be comprehensive; rather the intent is to describe how OSA's design process was a formulation of Marxist aesthetic theory. How can one link the idea of a linear, methodological design process to the ideas of Marxism? For one, there is certainly a link simply in that it is a structuralist approach, similar to that of Marxism. A dialectical manner of contemplation structures certain patterns of thought. Given that the primary objective for Constructivists was to re-create society into a Communist one, its inherent dictum would without doubt direct certain approaches in design while discouraging other methods. Indeed, when a structuralist methodology is applied to aesthetic or artistic creations, the results risk becoming quite restrictive or predictable. The Constructivists were walking a tight line: to create a Socialist society in which personal sacrifices are made for the common good on the one hand, and to provide a design forum in which certain individual talents and various design aesthetics could be bread on the other. They recognized that the process of design could not be reduced to a strictly scientific process, yet their Functional Method had unmistakable scientific influences. Even their teaching studios employed terms such as "laboratory investigations" (Cooke, 1995: 102), clearly revealing their fascination with creating a design process that was as scientific as possible without becoming stifling for individual talents.

With this process clearly defined, in 1928 the designers of OSA turned their attention to the study of one the most important and most desperately needed social condenser, the Communal House. One of their main attempts was found in a competition for the conceptual design of Dwelling House, which they hosted. The circumstances which led to the dire need to create appropriate Socialist housing as described earlier inspired OSA's own work on this competition, which would have a direct and significant impact on the Narkomfin building, especially in the housing block.

Following their functional method, Ginzburg and his team first tackled the problem of determining how much volume, and which form would best suit a

Socialist family. The precise definition of what a Socialist family would be was highly debated in Russia at this time. Some argued that the very notion of a nuclear family was completely inappropriate for a Communist society. There would no longer be any need for the bourgeois connection between parents and children, since most, if not all, of the typical duties of raising children would be done collectively; therefore there would be no need to provide rooms for them within an individual unit. This logic would also apply to the single kitchen: since all food preparation and eating would be done communally, there would no longer be a need for food preparation and storage within an individual unit. In short, the individual cubicle would be used strictly for "sleep, and for a portion of the leisure time and intellectual work," and would be designed for, at most, two people. (Ikonnikov, 1988: 122)

16: Ivan Nikolaev, Student Housing Complex, 1929. Khan, 1987: 366

OSA, however, believed that this approach was far too radical, and was unlikely to be fully accepted by the occupants. Instead, they sought a transitional approach to defining a Socialist family, one that would lead the proletariat towards the ultimate goal of full communal life. Ikonnikov notes: "The chief idea common to the most diverse designs was that of a free choice of a particular life style to suit the habits of the individual, with a partial integration with the systems of public or collectivized services." (Ikonnikov, 1988: 127) Ginzburg was concerned that the utopian proposals of others was unrealistic, for one could not simply expect entrenched social

17: OSA, Kitchen Alcove, Plan, Elevations, Axonometric. Khan, 1987: 358

and familial relationships to be willfully forgotten or denied on the part of the inhabitants. Ginzburg instead concluded:

We consider that one of the important points that must be taken into account in building new apartments is the dialectics of human development. We can no longer compel the occupants of a particular building to live collectively, as we have attempted to do in the past, generally with negative results. We must provide for the possibility of a gradual, natural transition to communal utilization in a number of different areas. That is why we have tried to keep each unit isolated from the next, that is why we found it necessary to design the kitchen alcove as a standard element of minimum size that could be removed bodily from the apartment to permit the introduction of canteen catering at any given moment. We considered it absolutely necessary to incorporate certain features that would stimulate the transition to a socially superior mode of life, *stimulate but not dictate*. (Kopp, 1970: 141)

18: OSA, Space studies of unit types graphing volumes to economic efficiency. Khan, 1987: 358

As a result of those concerns, OSA produced six types of prototypical dwelling units, labeled A to F. Many of the units were considered conservative for they permitted the perceived bourgeoisie-inspired nuclear family to remain intact. Despite that, they all incorporated certain common features that were to be implemented in the Narkomfin House, and were documented in their findings to the committee appointed to evaluate their new proposals.

Areas that were to be minimized, or even eliminated in the future, were commonly functions that were to be satisfied in collective facilities: kitchens, laundry, baths, etc. When there were included, they had been reduced to the minimal sizes. OSA spent considerable time investigating the spatial movement of kitchen workers (namely the housewife) and took a highly rational approach to designing the proposed kitchen, analyzing which layout

would promote the least amount of movement, and therefore the least possible volume, necessary to complete the task. Although small, these kitchens still included all the required tools and utilities to be fully self-sufficient; this was to change somewhat in the design of the Narkomfin units. Abundant light and cross ventilation were stressed as crucial to an effective design. This suggested an extensive use of glass, and two sides of exposure for ventilation purposes. Lastly, maximum standardization of building elements and the industrialization of the building process was given paramount importance. A standardized approach would simultaneously respond to the pressing need to produce a vast number of housing units, while minimizing the economic and productive strain on Russia's still fledgling economy.

Given Russia's abhorrent construction industry at the time, this would prove to be no small task. By emphasizing a standardized construction technique, Ginzburg is associating architecture with the construction of the new society: how could people possibly live in a building that did not reflect the newest in thoughts and ideas, including its materials, structure and construction methods? It also was reflective of the Constructivist machine aesthetic as the efficient productivity of the machine was to be echoed in the rational approach to building design and construction. Furthermore, this efficiency in construction and aesthetics would provide a concrete example of the determination and productivity that the new proletariat ought to strive for. Since, according to Marxist social theory, man is a product of his material and social consciousness, it would have indeed been appropriate to promote an efficient form and method of construction in the design and aesthetics of the dwelling unit, so that the unit itself could serve as an exemplar of a Socialist person: strong, bold, efficient.

Of all the dwelling unit types that were designed, it was the F-type unit that was regarded as the most forward-looking and closest to the Socialist conception of the 'new' Communist family. At only 27 M² the F unit was by far the smallest prototype proposed, and was designed for a maximum of two people, suggesting that any children would be raised in the socially provided nursery. Other significant features were the minimal kitchen, designed to be

century pavilion at the rear of the site, which overlooked the surrounding countryside. This path, which was to be accessible by car, was never built. The sequence from entering the site past the aristocratic mansions and along straight efficient paths, which would emphasize the linearity of the main Housing block, was also compromised as ultimately only one main route to the Narkomfin, ending in a plaza by the main entrance, was actually built (Buchli, 1998: 169).

20: Proposed site plan, 1928. (A) Communal block; (B) Living block; (C) Mechanical laundry; (D) Lookout point. Buchli, 1988:171

Not compromised was Ginzburg's insistence that the park was to remain largely intact. The location

of existing trees were meticulously noted prior to construction, and Ginzburg justified the minimal removal of trees as economically sound as well as integral to preserving the integrity of the park (Buchli, 1998: 169). According to Buchli, this was reflective of Ginzburg's intent to create an idyllic Arcadian environment for creating a new Communist person; the Narkomfin served as a type of Constructivist 'folie', an attempt to free man from the contradictions of capitalist life, thereby creating a nurturing environment where the inhabitants could pursue intellectual and social development unencumbered (Buchli, 1998: 168). Indeed Ginzburg defended creating this idealized environment, replying to Le Corbusier's criticism that the proletariat would not be interested in such matters by saying: "You write that the peasant does not appreciate

21: Narkomfin complex, view along entrance path, early 1930's. Buchli, 1998: 170

flowers and does not listen to the songs of larks. Well, of course, he does not have the spirit for such when he is overburdened by work. We want our peasant to enjoy the songs of larks. And we know that for this we must ease the burden of his work and introduce culture into his life." (Buchli, 1998: 168)

This comment is revealing on several levels. Ginzburg's first concern in the preceding passage is for the overworked employee. Through industrialization, increased productivity and collectively organized distribution of resources (as envisioned in Lenin's five-year plan),

this first problem would be alleviated, giving the worker more time away from the demands of work. The second concern, that of a culturally deprived peasant would be addressed in two ways: first via participation in the worker's club immediately after work, and then in the communal housing units, where an environment for collective and personal education would be provided. A park-like setting would be fundamental in granting an escape from the energies and stresses associated with a 'productive' day (collectively and individually). The Narkomfin was thus envisioned as an oasis from the inevitable stress and difficulties of a typical working day. Its greatest potential, however, would only exist in conjunction with the other two forms of social condensers: the worker's club and the factory. This holistic approach to understanding the role of a individual building within the context of the greater morphology of the city is reflective of a socialist conception of society: the individual (man, building, artefact) while autonomous, must always act communally and in concert within the broader sociological understanding of how, and where, a given society is proceeding.

22: Narkomfin Housing block, 1930.
Buchli, 1998: 169

The Narkomfin housing block itself was thus inserted with surgical precision between trees, many reaching to within mere meters of the built structure. The massing of the main block was comprised of two main unit types: the Socialist F-type unit, and the more traditional K-type, which was large enough to accommodate a small family of two parents and as many as two children. Although the K-type unit will be discussed in greater detail shortly, it is useful to note that this unit incorporated a similar spatial strategy found in the F-type unit, encompassing two stories in total height, thereby providing a generous double-height common family room. A small kitchen unit was also provided on the lower level, with two bedrooms and a basic washroom

located on the second floor. Running along the outside of the lower level was a broad corridor (coined a "horizontal artery" by Ginzburg (Cooke, 1995: 120)), which led to the adjoining communal block.

These K-units, which spanned two structural bays wide, were located on the second and third floors of the housing block. Two stacks of F-units were placed above the K-units, and comprised a total of three stories. The middle row of the F-units included the interior corridor, small individual washrooms, and stairs that led either up or down a level into the double-height common room in each unit. Beyond the common room a single bedroom was provided; on the lower F-unit the bedroom was on the same level as the common room, while on the upper F-unit the bedroom overlooked the common room below. Although the common corridors for the F-units were

23: Narkomfin Complex, floor plans.
Kopp, 1970: 121

24: Plan, F-type unit, Narkomfin House. Author's drawing after Khan, 1987: 361

slightly narrower than the K-unit corridor, the F-unit was only one structural bay wide, and thus had substantially less area than its counterpart.

Despite its diminutive proportions (the F-unit was only 3.75 meters wide and 10 meters long, of which 2.5 meters was utilized by the corridor on one level) it had been sufficient in space and volume for up to two inhabitants. As previously mentioned, it was the F-unit that was truly regarded as the most innovative spatial solution for a new socialist 'family' and it was without question the general direction that Soviet planners wished to head. As noted by Buchli, the F-units were "the ultimate expression of collectivized life" and "attempted to diffuse every possible element of the petit-bourgeois hearth, which *byt*¹ reformers characterized as striving as much as possible to sever its connections with the outside world, physically, visually, and socially, outward into the collective spaces of the Narkomfin, and even farther into the sylvan environment of the park surrounding the complex." (Buchli, 1998: 172)

¹ *Byt* is the Russian term for daily life. Buchli notes: "Loosely translated, *byt* encompasses all the following English terms: 'daily life', 'domesticity', 'lifestyle', or 'way of life'." (Buchli, 1999: 23)

Several strategies were employed within the F-unit to minimize, both spatially and visually, the conventional spaces and functions of the pre-revolutionary house that were to be redesigned for the communal spaces in a Socialist society. In the earlier designs by the OSA for the F-unit, space had been provided for a minimal, yet complete, cooking alcove. In the Narkomfin this space had been reduced even further, providing only a simple stovetop for reheating items, and a small counter space with sink. While an alcove could have been inserted if required, the kitchen was instead primarily designed so that this allowance could easily be removed when an even more collectivized life was to evolve (Buchli, 1999: 71). Preparing a full dinner within the F-unit would have been all but impossible. At best, food produced within the collective kitchen could be re-heated, and perhaps a warm drink could be prepared within the private sphere of the individual apartment. This treatment of the kitchen area is reflective of Ginzburg's understanding of how a socialist family ought to function. As it was conceived that virtually all eating and food preparation was to be done collectively, there would be no need to provide a fully functional kitchen within the private realm of the dwelling. That a kitchen area was provided at all reflects the transitional nature of the Narkomfin complex. Earlier designs in the beginning of the 1920's for collective living tended to not include even a kitchenette, opting instead for fully collectivized dining. Narkomfin was designed several years later, when the youthful optimism associated with the possibility of a new Socialist family had begun to be questioned. The specific inclusion of the kitchenette in the design of the F-unit for Narkomfin occurred during this shift from an architecture that was wholly collective and that completely rejected the bourgeois idea of the nuclear family to a more moderate stance, one that was willing to allow some of the luxuries that had been dismissed as counter-socialist only a few years before.

The bathroom had been given a similar minimalist treatment, simply providing a shower niche and toilet. This room was located on the "middle level" of the units, next to the entrance. There appears to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Ginzburg to hide the bathroom as much as possible (it is literally hidden away from the rest of the apartment). While this is a common technique (bathrooms are rarely given much visual presence in any

home design) a more subversive intention can be interpreted. Given the tight dimensions of the bathroom there was insufficient space to provide a sink. It would have been therefore quite awkward to use; one would be forced to travel as if they were about to leave the private unit, and then return into the main room to wash

25: OSA, F-type Interior Perspective looking towards bedroom niche. Khan, 1987: 360

up. Simple hygienic functions like shaving, brushing teeth, applying makeup, etc would also be quite difficult, since the only sink in the dwelling was located in the kitchen. Imagine the difficulties of performing such daily rituals as one prepared in the morning to head to work! Instead it would be much easier to use the communal showers and corresponding facilities provided in the communal block. This deliberate technique demonstrates a latent intention on the part of Ginzburg to force the inhabitants to function in a communal manner. The architecture here was not simply *stimulating*, but in fact *dictating*.

The spatial relationship between the bedroom and the living room also reveals some of the subtle manners in which Ginzburg was attempting to encourage a collective way of life. Since the F-unit was designed to "accommodate only the most basic functions of socialist daily life: sleep in the sleeping niches, personal hygiene in the shower cabin and private intellectual work in the spacious five-metre tall common room," (Buchli, 1999: 71) the relationship between the two primary spaces in the unit became quite significant. The design of the unit (in both variations) ensured that the two rooms were open to one another, both spatially and visually. The pre-revolutionary notion of completely enclosed rooms, especially the bedroom, had been completely removed; here the bedroom either looked over the common room, or was located just beyond it behind a partition which reached only half of the length of the bedroom. In both circumstances the bedroom was always visually and psychologically connected to the common room. There were several practical reasons for this: it would permit a thorough cross-ventilation of breezes, a

point highlighted earlier on by OSA as a fundamental requirement. It also provided an abundance of natural light to enter much of the apartment, which was another important factor in OSA's housing designs. More importantly though, the open design of the unit ensured that "when inside one was not actually cut off from the natural and social world surrounding it." (Buchli, 1999: 72) Furthermore, "the F-unit attempted to diffuse every possible element of the petit-bourgeois 'hearth' outwards into the commune of the Narkomfin with its communal spaces." (Buchli, 1999: 72)

This technique of opening up internal spaces and blurring the distinction between interior and exterior proved to be a commonly used practice with modern architecture, but when viewed within a socialist conception of society specific ramifications can be seen. By opening the private realm towards the exterior, a continuous connection between the proletariat and the state is maintained. The capitalist conception of domesticity as "man's private kingdom," as an individual oasis that is the realm held only by "you" would be totally inappropriate in post revolutionary Russia. The blurring of inside and out, the extensive use of glass, the opening

26: Frank Lloyd Wright, Meyer May House, 1908. Northup, 1991: 19

27: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1933. Gans, 2000: 81

of interior rooms in Western modern architecture was typically predicated on the idea that the house was located on a generous, *privately owned* property. While exterior and interior was loosely defined, they nevertheless remained within the context of the private, the individual.

The open spaces and generous gardens of Wright's Prairie Houses, the combination of exterior and interior volumes of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, were all located on private property. The generous views offered by these, and many other Western examples, served as a reminder of the

accomplishments of the individual owner, while also acting as a status symbol of what they had achieved. In the Narkomfin house a quite different message was at work. While providing the proletariat an environment conducive to individual intellectual improvement, the open views to the garden-like setting and abundant natural light also served as a salient reminder of what the state had provided. As an inhabitant you were not solely responsible for the shelter you enjoyed; it was provided by the state as a reward for the work that you had contributed to the greater whole. That most communal housing blocks were inhabited by workers from a common factory or company only helped to reinforce the notion that personal contributions were always directed towards a common good. So unlike the Western technique of offering views from the private realm to privately owned gardens and decks, the apartments in Narkomfin offered private (yet state provided) views to communal gardens and facilities.

It would have been virtually impossible for most of the intended inhabitants of the Narkomfin, prior to the Communist Party and the creation of the socialist state, to enjoy such a fully equipped and well-designed home. Individual sacrifice in the form of smaller private units and minimal private facilities would have been offset by the generous and extensive communal spaces and amenities that the Narkomfin offered. By providing extensive views towards the grounds of the Narkomfin (which of course were owned by the Bourgeoisie and inaccessible to most prior to the Bolshevik state taking ownership in 1918), the blurred distinction between outside and inside was also a blurring of private space and public ownership, and served as a demonstration of how individual sacrifices would produce greater communal results.

Even though the individual realm was constantly generated within the context of the greater communal whole, the common room and the bedroom were nonetheless considered "private" in the individual sense of the word. Here one was free to pursue individual activities, outside of the context of communal duties and responsibilities. As mentioned before, there were essentially two main functions envisioned for the individual units: sleeping and private intellectual development. Given that the F-unit was designed to

provide only the minimal amount of space needed, it is interesting to compare the volume given for these two rooms; a definite hierarchy of functions can be observed.

The bedroom was just large enough for two small beds and closets, but more importantly was only 2.2 metres in height. Furthermore, while windows did run along the full length of the room, they were only one metre high, and had large exterior shading devices, which doubled as planters, cantilevered above them. The windows were also oriented towards the east, and would thus enjoy direct sunlight only during the morning. Programmatically this would make sense; by facing the bedrooms eastward they would enjoy the greatest amount of natural illumination when one awoke. In the evening, however, the combination of a relatively small ceiling height, equal to the height provided for functions that were destined to be ultimately communal (i.e. the bathroom and kitchenette) and lacking natural illumination due to its eastwardly exposure, the bedroom would appear to be confined and non-conductive to relaxation. Terms used by authors describing the bedroom like a “niche” (Buchli) or “fragmented” (Ikonnikov) from the rest of the unit confirm this notion. Indeed, according to Buchli, colour schemes were proposed that would create an impression of “burrowing” in the low sleeping room as compared to the bright high volumes of the common room (Buchli, 1998: 172). The unit was thus designed to discourage use of the bedroom for all but its basic intended use: sleeping. This is significant for of all the daily functions of life, the one that would be least conducive to a communal environment would be sleep. It was also the one function that could be considered to be the least “productive” – although sleep is without doubt a

28: Typical F & K unit axonometric.
Drawing by author

necessity, it would not inherently contribute to the development of the Soviet state, either economically or intellectually. Thus within the layout of the F-unit the bedroom is subconsciously deemed to contain a lesser value than that of the common room, and is reduced to its bare essentials and given little other embellishment.

By contrast the living room enjoyed a substantial amount of westward glazing, which overlooked the neighbouring countryside, bright interior walls, and an expansive 3.6 metre double-volume ceiling height. Designed for private intellectual reading and development in the evening, this space would be filled with natural illumination, generous in its volume and representative of the more "vigorous activities characteristic of the waking hours." (Buchli, 1998: 172). Given the emphasis of minimizing the spatial allowances for an individual unit, and the inherent added cost of creating such a space, the decision by Ginzburg to design the F-unit this way may seem counter-productive for Russia's economy, or even extravagant. Rather this decision reveals two key items.

First, it demonstrated to the inhabitant the importance of private intellectual development, and the importance that Ginzburg placed upon it. While the first task of Communism was to create an efficient yet non-alienated labourer, the second was to create an intellectually and culturally developed proletariat state. Again, this was to be provided architecturally with two key methods: communally through the worker's clubs and factories, and privately in the dwelling through research, reading and art. The living room was thus not conceived as a passive space for mere relaxation. Instead it was envisioned as a dynamic and energetic space, contrasting boldly from the comparatively cubby-like volume of the sleeping area. The extensive use of glass (an expensive material in Russia at the time), the large ceiling height and the dramatic spatial contrast from the rest of the unit all served to reinforce and reflect the dynamic energies of intellectual development.

Secondly, although the interior space of the living room was designed for individual intellectual development, its extensive inclusion of glass opened the inside towards the exterior, psychologically pushing the central space towards

the environment beyond. As mentioned before, this technique blurred the distinction between the individual environment and the state-owned realm beyond. Even within the private domestic sphere one was perpetually connected to the state, its presence never denied. By incorporating this great wall of glass within the expansive space in the living room, Ginzburg ensured "the maximal integration of the physical and social self inhabiting the F-unit with the socialist commune beyond and a more authentic relationship between the self and nature promised by the socialist revolution." (Buchli, 1999: 72) Furthermore, Ginzburg employed techniques "in lighting, to establish the relationship between the dimensions of rooms and the lighting required for them, and to create the apparent enlargement of interiors by the rationalized distribution of window space", and in colour, "by the differential shading of walls and ceiling to stimulate the perception of interior space." (Khan, 1987: 348) The F-unit thus employed many techniques, some passive and others proactive, that demonstrated how a socialist person ought to function, while simultaneously representing a truly socialist conception of what the communist domestic sphere could become.

While the F-unit's treatment of domestic life was without doubt revolutionary and best resembled what the socialist family would become, the K-unit by contrast was far more conventional, and was essentially self-sufficient. Designed to accommodate a traditional nuclear family, the K-unit had a full kitchen, two bedrooms and a full bath. The K-unit was twice as wide as the F-unit, spanning a distance of 7.5 metres, or two structural bays. The main floor of the unit, located on the second level of the complex itself, comprised the entrance, stairwell, a small kitchen and the living room. The entrance faced a wide internal corridor that ran along the eastern side of the complex and connected to the communal hall via a covered bridge. This "internal street" was thus the main interior communal passageway for a majority of the inhabitants of Narkomfin. By locating the traditional K-units along this route Ginzburg ensured that despite the relative autonomy of these units they would still be closely associated with the rest of the inhabitants, thereby encouraging interaction and an increased sense of comradeship. The inhabitants that were the "least socialist" from a domestic perspective would thus have the greatest opportunity to encounter those who were living in the

progressive F-units; these chance encounters would provide a potential dialogue between fully socialist people and those who were still in a transitional phase. Ginzburg himself had specific intentions with these arteries, commenting that they would make it possible "to link such units organically with a communal dining room and kitchen, recreation rooms, baths, and so on, indeed all the facilities that must

30: Internal corridor, Narkomfin housing block, 1960's. Kopp, 1970: 141

become an inseparable part of our new housing." (Kopp, 1970: 141) These communal corridors thus served an important role in encouraging a sense of collectivism and Socialist harmony, functioning almost as a 'mini social condenser' within the microcosm of the Narkomfin complex.

The living room of the K-unit was spatially similar to the F-unit; it too rose to

29: Plan, K-type unit, Narkomfin house. Author's drawing after Khan, 1987: 361

a total height of 3.6 metres, but was slightly wider, thereby dramatically exposing one of the structural columns along one side. The second level of the unit provided a small yet complete bathroom and two bedrooms. Given the comparatively small width of the second bedroom (less than three metres) and the fact that most drawings of the K-unit (either for the Narkomfin or for the original variations by OSA) showed only one single bed, it seems safe to conclude that this room was designed for two children at most, and would probably comfortably sleep only one. The main bedroom was somewhat larger than its counterpart in the F-unit, measuring approximately six metres by four and a half, but employed the same spatial techniques seen in the socialist unit: a low ceiling height, an impression of "burrowing" into the space, and a direct visual connection towards the common room below. The additional width within the bedroom resulted in exposing two more columns, creating a type of frame within which the bed would be located.

What is most striking about the K-unit is not the differences from the F-unit but rather the similarities between the two main rooms in the K-unit (the main bedroom and living room) and those found in the F-unit: both employed identical passive and proactive techniques that would encourage a socialist pattern of living. The spaces within the K-unit that contradicted or undermined this socialist conception of domestic space (the second bedroom, the full kitchen and shower facilities) were cut off, physically and perceptually, from both the common area and the main bedroom. This demonstrates an attempt on the part of Ginzburg to hide these typically bourgeois rituals as much as possible, providing them out of sheer necessity, while simultaneously discouraging the traditional pattern of the domestic sphere by turning those spaces completely inward, away from the dynamic energies associated with the common room. Buchli notes: "Spaces which accommodated activities which should eventually be socialized, such as

31: K Unit, Interior common room. Kopp, 1970: 141

the separate children's bedrooms and kitchens, were literally hidden from public view." (Buchli, 1999: 73)

Although the K and F units comprised the majority of the units of the Narkomfin House, there were other variants that were included as well. The nine K-units and twenty-four F-units were

32: Plan, 2F-type unit. Buchli, 1999: 73

positioned between the main entrance and the building's core towards the southern edge of the building and a second stairwell at the north. On either side of these shafts variants of the two main units were located. Although not specifically named by Ginzburg, Victor Buchli called these units 2F units and articulated K units; for simplicity I will use the same terms here. There were two types of 2F units: one variation, of which there were three in the entire complex, were split level; the other variation, which also were three in total, only had one level. Both were two structural bays wide. According to Ginzburg these units were based on the original F-type unit (Buchli, 1999: 73), however neither of these units enjoyed the spatial variation and dynamics of the typical F-unit; the units that were split level did not have any full height spaces. Furthermore, although still fairly small in area, both were designed so that a typical nuclear family would be able to reside there. In essence both types of 2F units were traditional and typically bourgeois in their planning: they were completely self sufficient, and more significantly, all rooms were fully enclosed, visually and psychologically separated from one another.

The second variation was the articulated K-units that employed similar spatial strategies found in the K and F units, but were considerably larger than the other units, including sufficient space for a separate dining room and second full bath. Like the typical K units, they were

33: Articulated K-Units, floor plans. Buchli, 1999: Appendix

considered fully independent and could accommodate a traditional bourgeois family. Located on the far southern edge of the building, these two units enjoyed the added bonus of small circular balconies; the lower apartment, which occupied the third and fourth floor had one, while the other had balconies on both of its two floors. These three elements punctuated the elevation in a dramatic and provocative manner; they also highlighted the fact that not all of the units at Narkomfin were identical – a certain hierarchy and privilege was at play here. Indeed, Ginzburg and his

34: Housing block, South elevation, 1930's. Cohen, 1987: 122

family were among the first to reside in the lower articulated K-unit, which doubled as the office for the magazine headed by Ginzburg, S.A. (Kopp, 1970: 139).

It is also interesting to note that all of the 2F type units and the articulated K units were accessed via the stairwell, and not through the common passageways. Their entrances were therefore relatively “private” within a communal building, turning their backs on the interior streets, envisioned by Ginzburg as a dynamic social space that serviced the K and F units within the rest of the building. This would only serve to confirm the impression that these units were unique and intended for an elite, and were therefore not subject to the individual sacrifices for the common good that most inhabitants of the Narkomfin were expected to accept. The Marxist ideology of a truly classless society was already beginning to reveal its inherent difficulties in implementation that would become only more pronounced in Russia in the decades to follow. (For an in-depth discussion on how these difficulties impacted the Narkomfin complex historically, see Victor Buchli’s *An Archaeology of Socialism*).

Of all the units that exposed the contradiction between the State-espoused goal of a classless society and the inclusion of privileged apartments, the unit that was the most revealing was the penthouse unit, which was designed by and was home for

35: Narkomfin house, penthouse unit. Buchli, 1999: Appendix

the commissar of finance, Nikolai Miliutin and his family. Originally the rooftop structure was designed to house a collective solarium and roof garden; initial renderings show this element matching the proportions of the communal entrance and building core of the ground level, punctuating both the ground plane and the sky above. When viewed in combination with the second vertical component, the stairwell on the opposite side, these two elements serve as visual anchors for the communal block, solid cores on which the remainder of the building seemingly hangs. That the remainder of the ground floor was comprised solely of pilotis, "echoing the black trunks of the trees" (Buchli, 1998: 169) enhances the impression that these two vertical cores were supporting the entire building. This relationship between the vertical elements and the horizontality of the remainder of the building, and that the vertical components seem to be structurally integral to the

36: Narkomfin Complex, design perspective. Kopp, 1970: 116

presence of the main housing block, can be viewed as a metaphor for the structure of the socialist state itself. In its initial conception, the two vertical elements were entirely communal – stairwells, elevator, shared washrooms, solarium, etc; they were not owned by a singular person, but rather by the entire community. The horizontal housing block, by contrast, was in essence a state-provided private realm, representing one of the few truly 'personal'

spaces that a socialist person would have: the individual apartment. This private space was therefore being 'held up' and 'supported' figuratively and literally, by the communal elements of the building; i.e. those of the state. The massing of the housing block is thus representative of the relationship of the proletariat to the socialist state: although the individual, represented in the horizontal block, is without doubt the fundamental element in a socialist state, without the structure and guidance provided by the collective, manifested in the vertical cores, it would be incomplete, and 'structurally impossible.'

37: Narkomfin house, pilotis detail, 1930's. Khan, 1987: 363

If the initial design of the housing block can be viewed as the ideological relationship between the proletariat and the state, the penthouse block as it was actually built was indicative of the disparities between the ideal and the actual in Russia at that time. As previously mentioned, a main component of the penthouse was a private apartment, based upon the K-type unit, where the commissar of finance resided. In addition to this unit four dormitory units were built, based on prototypical units of STROIKOM, and included two shared showers and collapsible wall-beds in each unit. At the northern end of this floor a dramatic semi-circular space, primarily enclosed in glass, was provided. Oral histories of Narkomfin have described this space as a communal kitchen and dining room, common room, and at one point an apartment (Buchli, 1999: 74). In addition to the drastic program change, the massing of the penthouse also changed, and no longer echoed the form of its corresponding ground floor element. Although the semi-circular element remained, three planar walls now extended above it, boldly punched out in their centres, and crowned with a trellis-like structure. Photographs show a small spiral staircase leading from the roof below to this outdoor space, presumably intended for communal use. However, it also opened directly from the commissar's penthouse suite; it seems unlikely that it would have been utilized much by the majority of the inhabitants below.

In fact the programmatic changes that occurred in the penthouse significantly undermined the original vision of a communal facility raised above the housing block. Not only was it now primarily composed of individual dwellings, including an essentially privately commissioned custom suite, but these units were completely detached from the building below, not utilizing

38: Narkomfin complex, view from roof garden, 1931. Buchli, 1999: 75

the major arteries provided for the majority of the other units, and were “disengaged from the top circulation spaces designed to encourage inhabitants to mingle and to engender a sense of collectivity.” (Buchli, 1998: 172) The massing of the built penthouse, although still dramatic, also lost its clarity as an impenetrable vertical shaft, extending from the communal ground plane towards the public space on the roof. Instead it read more like an evocative crown, its massive trellis

almost absurd in its gigantic proportions, having lost its delicate metal skeleton as was initially proposed. For the cynic, this may have been indeed appropriate; it did house the only custom-designed unit after all. Nevertheless the

programmatic changes could only undermine the original clarity and Socialist analogy of the first design.

39: Narkomfin Complex, bird's eye view. Rendering by author

Despite these various changes and apparent contradictions, the inclusion of the K-type units and the other variations is significant because the Narkomfin complex, although revolutionary, was envisioned as a *transitional* housing community, one that would lead the way towards a fully collectivized society. It is important to note that by proposing a transitional type of Communal unit Ginzburg was not unsure of the viability of Socialism, or the potential for architecture to transform a person's consciousness, or even that he was unable to produce a satisfactory solution to the Communist family. This

decision echoes Ginzburg's (as well as the OSA's) conviction that architecture should "stimulate but not dictate" one's perception of the environment. While the architecture was firmly dedicated to creating a Socialist environment, Ginzburg recognized the individualistic nature of humanity, and that constructing a Communist society would be a lengthy and challenging task. Narkomfin was but one step towards the ultimate goal.

40: Narkomfin complex, view of West elevation, present state. Ikonnikov, 1988: 130

The apparent contradiction between using two different models of domesticity within one complex is also demonstrative of the greater debates and contradictions occurring within the Socialist state as a whole. Although the ultimate goal of a totally socialist country was commonly held, the best path to take was hotly contested, both within architectural circles as well as political and philosophical ones. These battles, which were becoming pronounced in the late twenties as Stalin began to rise to power, inevitably had ramifications in architecture. Although several of these particular battles were to occur after the completion of the Narkomfin complex, it was clear that during the design and execution of this project, many of these underlying debates were already underway. The inclusion of the traditional types of units, along with the self-indulgent and hierarchical 'special' apartments indicates this. In many ways this was somewhat indicative of the Marxist notion of 'realism': the architecture of Narkomfin was simultaneously posting an ideal of socialist ideology while at the same time accommodating both traditional typologies of domestic dwelling and providing special domestic units for those of particular social and political status. Victor Buchli sums it thus:

[...The different unit types] embodied the contradictions of Soviet social life emerging under Stalinism, from the commissar's plush penthouse to the laborer's compact dormitory room. These contradictions, not easily accommodated and explained in terms of a transition from bourgeois to socialist living patterns, literally provided a 'snapshot' of these conflicts while the dwelling units were being built and the concepts they embodied were being discussed in the pivotal period 1929-1930. (Buchli, 1998: 172)

Although a classless society was the theoretical goal, the inclusion of the various types of apartments within the Narkomfin Complex indicates that this ideology was far from being fulfilled. That these differencing conditions were accommodated indicates a notion of the realism that Marx espoused: the Narkomfin was representative of its social milieu, despite of, or more likely because of, the intense debates and political struggles that were occurring at the time. It was, theoretically and literally, a product of its social and political milieu.

Without doubt, the Narkomfin housing block was subject to, and unfortunately compromised by, the political and social contradictions and debates that were occurring at the time. That said, in virtually every architectural project, especially one so diverse and politically charged, such compromises are basically inevitable. Despite these changes, many elements of the original design were built, and the overarching goal of societal and political stimulation through the built environment, of demonstrating what a socialist society could be, remained intact.

An example of this can be found in Ginzburg's decision to raise the housing block above the ground floor. In his words, the reason was so that "no-one lives at ground level (which is always considered lower value), and the park flows underneath" (Cooke, 1995: 120); according to Ikonnikov, this decision was made "in order not to mar the unity of the garden amid which the house stands," in addition to confirming the architect's dislike of ground floor units. (Ikonnikov, 1988: 129) Victor Buchli interprets the intent further, comparing the black exposed columns to the trunks of the primordial hut on which Classical architecture was based. References to influences from Le Corbusier's treatises on Modern architecture are made as well (Buchli, 1998: 169).

These ideas and reasons notwithstanding, I feel that there was a more fundamental and socialist-inspired influence at play. Certainly the comparison to Le Corbusier could be questioned: although the French architect was without doubt a profound influence on the Constructivists, and Ginzburg himself had read the seminal *Vers une Architecture* in the early twenties, Le Corbusier's penchant of the exposed piloti, raising the building above the ground plane, was grounded on different propositions. In fact, in the case of the Narkomfin the exact opposite could be posited: many comparisons of the Narkomfin to Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, France (Ikonnikov, 1988: 132; Buchli, 1998: 169) have been made when in fact Unité

was not to be built for another twenty years. It is also interesting to note that Le Corbusier brought back blueprints of the Narkomfin House to study in further detail, (Cohen, 1987: 124) while Gans highlights the influence that Narkomfin had on Le Corbusier (Gans, 2000, 251). In essence, for Le Corbusier, the intent behind raising a building above the ground plane was to keep the ground intact, to continue the visual perception of an unbroken plane. He did not, however dogmatically adhere to this proposition, and in fact *Vers une Architecture* did not make specific reference to utilizing this technique. While maintaining a visual connection through the park-like setting of the site was probably a reason for Ginzburg to raise the building above the ground, I suspect that there were latent reasons as well.

41: Le Corbusier, Unité d'Habitation at Marseille, 1945. Gans, 2000: 112

42: Le Corbusier, Mass Produced Housing Proposals, 1922. Le Corbusier, 1931: 239, 240.

If we compare mass-produced individual homes that were proposed by Ginzburg to those proposed by Le Corbusier in *Vers une Architecture*, we see that Le Corbusier had rejected the technique of raising these individual units above the ground. Whereas in one of Ginzburg's desurbanist proposals, the "Green City," a design for the reconstruction of Moscow in 1930, we see a treatment of the ground plane similar to

that of the Narkomfin complex. Despite its seeming disparity from the Narkomfin, the design for these mass-produced individual houses included some similarities to Ginzburg's concepts for the housing commune. One was the importance of having a close proximity to nature, which was seen as important for the health of the community. At Narkomfin, the collections of buildings were created in a sort of idyllic garden in which inhabitants were able to look out towards a heavily treed courtyard. In his proposal for Moscow, residential zones were to snake outwards from the city centre, with plenty of virgin forest between each finger. More notably, however, was Ginzburg's decision to raise these individual units "above the terrace which served as the access to the 'socialized sector' for the residents" (Ikonnokov, 1988: 109); this choice obviously parallels the ground floor at Narkomfin, which contained no individual units and whose footprint was largely composed of columns. Although this can be explained by Ginzburg's conviction that the ground floor was unsuitable for housing, it must be remembered that all private property had been abolished in post-revolutionary Russia: any building or structure was in effect on State land. By raising the building above the publicly owned ground plane, Ginzburg prevented private domestic space from infiltrating the public realm. The housing block at the

43: Competition design for Green City, 1930; Ginzburg & Barshch. Assembly diagram. Khan, 1987: 387

44: Competition design for Green City, 1930; Ginzburg & Barshch. Experimental model. Khan, 1987: 387

Narkomfin was thus literally sandwiched between the state; contained within the state provided site, as well as the designed public space on the roof. It is of interest to note that the other communal facilities, especially the communal block, fully engaged the ground plane – these were public buildings, and thus not subject to this subtle differentiation.

The façades of the Narkomfin housing commune were also built according to the original design. The different treatment between the two principle elevations, East and West, reveal some of the subtle influences of a Marxist

45: Housing Block, east elevation. Rendering by Author

conception of aesthetics. The Eastward elevation, which faced inwards towards the site and was the prominent side, was composed of long horizontal sections of bands of glass and cantilevered concrete planters. Ikonnikov describes this elevation as “forcefully sectionalized by the horizontals, and uplifted by columns.” (Ikonnikov, 1988: 129) This elevation, which greeted inhabitants as they entered the site, is undeniably dramatic, its long lines directing the eye towards the adjoining communal facility. The apparent unity of the elevation, with each level clearly expressed while sharing a nearly identical definition is noteworthy, for it conceals the variety of units and functions beyond. Two of the five main floors contained the main corridors, while the remaining three principle floors comprised the bedrooms of the various units. Despite the variety, and implicit hierarchy of the different units in the Narkomfin, all are harnessed into a unified language, obscuring the latent contradictions that were occurring in the Soviet state at that time. It portrayed a picture of perfect and absolute socialist harmony, delicately stitched within the idyllic park setting, long cantilevered planters containing soft ivy and bushes dripping along the façade. The repetitive and rhythmic nature of this elevation described a society that was truly classless, a housing commune that treated all as equal, regardless of background, education or its corresponding bourgeois status. For an inhabitant that has previously been subjected to the alienation of class and status, the view as one approached the complex must have been inspirational; that a majority of

historical renderings and photographs incorporate this view is indicative of this. Yet this façade hides the variety of units and hierarchies that were contained beyond this elevation; true, there were only

46: Nikolai Miliutin, sketch of a communal housing facility, late 1920's. Buchli, 1998: 168

two main functions that faced East – the horizontal arteries and the bedrooms. However there were far more differences and contradictions beyond then were suggested by the unifying façade. The aesthetic here is one of inspiration, of portraying the ideal of Socialism, designed to convince the inhabitants that the Soviet state was confidentially and truthfully heading towards the Marxist aspiration of a classless society.

The west elevation, although carefully articulated and unified in its language throughout, nevertheless begins to express the character and variety of units within the Narkomfin housing block. This side of the building faced what were at the time the outskirts of Moscow and the countryside beyond; it was thus comparatively unseen, and did not have the same pedagogical task as the eastern façade. Despite only utilizing two main materials, stucco-clad concrete block and glass (as was the entire complex) this elevation revealed the different units that it contained, although in an abstracted manner. It was equally as horizontal as the east elevation, with broad uninterrupted bands of glass running the length of the. The individual character of the two main types of units, the F-type and K-type, however, are allowed to present themselves here. The broad two-storey volumes of the K-type were rhythmically punctuated by solid masses; it was here that the second full baths were placed, and naturally utilized less glazing than the rest of the façade. There were also three broad solid swatches, running the entire length of the building, clearly demarcating the floor levels of the units beyond. Above these were the generous glazing elements of the common rooms of the apartments,

47: Housing block, west elevation. Rendering by Author

fully exposed to the Westward illumination of evening light. The bottom row of K-units and the two levels of F-units above are clearly expressed; their common language represented a cohesive unity, yet individual characteristics were still permitted to be revealed. The articulated K-units were also given a slightly different expression: here Ginzburg reduced the horizontality by breaking the three components that fronted this elevation (bathroom, kitchen and common room) into distinct pieces. The two stairwells and elevator were also expressed, slicing the broad horizontal bands of glass and stucco with dramatic vertical elements. In all, this elevation was far more complex and indicative of the latent complexity of the programme inside, presenting a more 'realistic' picture than the idyllic eastern façade. The west elevation represented the individual – it contained the common rooms, which were designed as the primary place for solitary intellectual development; it expressed the different variations of the apartment designs, which the eastern façade went to great lengths to conceal. More importantly, it did not present itself to the Narkomfin community, especially as one approached from the site entrance, or while one utilized the communal facilities; it thus was not as bound to presenting an ideal Socialist state as the eastern façade.

In many ways these two elevations represented the disparity between the idealism of the Constructivists and politicians of the early twenties on the one hand, and the social and political reality on the other. While Ginzburg and the OSA readily admitted that the road to a socialist state would be long and difficult, they were steadfast in their determination that they were proposing an honest, scientifically researched and thorough solution to the Socialist housing dilemma. It would be difficult to blame them for their enthusiasm; they believed they were participating in the fundamental task of creating a socialist state. They also felt that artists and politicians needed to be the vanguard of this solution; and it was the architects specifically who were asked to provide solutions to the problem of building, literally 'constructing' a built environment favourable to a socialist society. While their aspirations were clearly Marxist inspired, this proactive role that Ginzburg and others took up was clearly Saint-Simonian as well.

While the housing block itself was subjected to many changes and contradictions during its design and execution, the other major building, the connected communal block, was built according to plan. Located at the southern side of the housing block, it was a total of four storeys in height. The ground floor, which enjoyed a double-height main space, was the sports hall, with a mezzanine that doubled as a rest area and observation platform overlooking the primary volume. Underneath the mezzanine communal showers, washrooms, change rooms and storage lockers were provided. The communal dining room was located on the third floor; it too enjoyed a two storey primary volume with a mezzanine above. This fourth floor area

was used for reading and small social conversations. Beneath the mezzanine were the kitchen and food preparation areas. In addition to the various communal spaces within the building, a rooftop patio, intended for summer dining, was provided as well.

THIRD FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR

GROUND FLOOR

48: Communal Block, floor plans.
Kopp, 1970: 121

The building was connected to the housing block via a covered second storey bridge that entered directly from the 'horizontal artery' of the K-units. As mentioned before, it is significant that the transitional K-units were placed on the second level; as this was the sole connection to the communal facilities that was protected from the elements (an important factor in Moscow's harsh climate) the second floor would be a frequently traveled route. It is also interesting to note that upon entering the communal facility from this bridge, one overlooked the sports hall, and not the

49: Communal block, interior view
towards second floor mezzanine
overlooking sports hall. Buchli, 1998:
178

communal dining room. By placing the sports facility in direct visual connection with the inhabitants, both by placing it on the ground floor close to the main entrance to the housing block, and also by providing a visual link as one entered the communal block from the bridge, Ginzburg delicately promoted a key Marxist goal: total physical, and thus psychological, health. It would be unnecessary to promote the use of the dining room: everyone needs to eat, and since this dining would be communal, the type of meals inhabitants had could easily be controlled. Regular, routine exercise on the other hand, a relatively new activity at the time, would need to be encouraged. By participating in these communal exercises, participants were not only actively encouraging others to take part, they were also 'acting' as a complete, fully socialist proletariat. Ginzburg's double-height exercise room, so prominently placed, can thus be viewed as a type of stage, where exceptional Communists could proudly perform to the onlookers on the mezzanine above and the complex's site beyond, in theory persuading them to act in a similar manner.

50: Communal block, exterior view, 1930's. Cooke, 1995: 120

The sports hall and dining room enjoyed one of the most technically extravagant components of the entire complex: a full four storey curtain wall of glass, exposed to the North and filling the communal block with an abundance of diffuse natural light. Ginzburg had wished that this wall would feature detachable and movable sections that would open the facility to the site even more. Budgetary constraints dictated that most of the glazing had to be fixed. Despite this compromise, according to Buchli it nevertheless indicates Ginzburg's intention to "further diffuse the activities of the communal block (like the domestic interiors of the K and F-type units) with its large open spaces out into the Arcadian setting of the park outside, further articulating the concept of a diffused socialist Arcadia where social and economic formations are contained and in harmony with the natural order." (Buchli, 1999: 75)

As previously discussed, Ginzburg indeed used natural light and glazing to emphasise the value of intellectual development in the private dwelling. Here we see this emphasis used to highlight participation in social activities in the communal block. Of note is the contrast between the private kitchen space in the housing block: limited in height, relatively dark, all but hidden in the K-unit, versus the space provided in the communal dining hall, filled with diffuse natural light, and given a spacious height of nearly five metres. What is also interesting to note is that such a large amount of curtain-wall glazing was provided at all. Although many components of the complex were technically innovative, most used cost-effective materials and simple construction techniques. The curtain wall, by contrast, would have been very expensive; glazing units in Russia were extraordinarily costly, and required highly specialized skilled labour, a rare commodity in Russia's tattered economic state at the time. Thus despite the elimination of movable glazed portions, the northern elevation of the communal facility was quite an extravagance. This generous treatment was in a sense a 'reward' for the sacrifices made by the individual, who were living in quite minimal dwellings only a few dozen metres away, and reflects the socialist conception of the community as a whole. These personal sacrifices for the common good, when multiplied by the large number of dwelling units in total, would provide rewards unachievable through the savings of only one family dwelling. The glazed northern wall of the communal block, prominently facing towards the housing block and visually accessible to all, thus represented what Socialism could provide that Capitalism could not: beautiful facilities, the height of technological innovation, and most importantly, they were designed and created *for the proletariat*.

51: Communal block, interior view from dining facility. Cooke, 1995: 135

The glazed wall of the communal facility was not the only technological innovation in the Narkomfin House, although it was by far the most visually

prominent. Several advances in building technology were achieved in the housing block as well, and in fact was a primary objective for the architects. Ginzburg notes that the intent behind the use of certain materials and construction techniques was to serve as "an experiment in the possibilities of using concrete and reinforced concrete within an industrialized, mass-production system of housing construction; in using new materials; and in examining the possibilities and cost-effectiveness of pre-casting components, by factory methods." (Cooke, 1995: 136)

The most visible and appreciable would have been the glazing units, which employed similar techniques used in the communal block: double-glazed units, with sliding portions to permit natural ventilation, with improvements made on draught proofing and space savings in the glazing units. (Cooke, 1995: 136) The structure of the building itself was a combination of innovative technologies and familiar construction techniques. The building employed reinforced concrete columns and floor slabs, a comparatively new material in Russia at that time, with implemented standardization of units such

52: Communal block, curtain wall detail. Khan, 1987: 163

as girders, pillars and panels and rhythmic spacing of columns to facilitate economy and fast construction. Many of these standardized units were constructed on-site, a new technique in building technology (Khan, 1987: 348). The exterior walls were a combination of old and new technologies: they were constructed of slag-concrete blocks, already known at the time as "the Peasant system." (Cooke, 1995: 136) Innovation was found in the use of a rigid insulation exterior layer, which was then covered with stucco (Khan, 1987: 348). The interior partitions also employed a similar combination of old and new building technologies; although built of concrete blocks, hardly a new method, the blocks were hollow, permitting services like plumbing and electricity to pass through, a previously unseen construction technique.

The combination of new and familiar building technologies, both in the choice of material and construction technique, is significant for it serves as a demonstrative example of how Ginzburg used his methodology of 'stimulation, not dictation' as the best method for teaching an un-trained proletariat. Concrete block was a common material in Russia and did not require the specialized labour needed in the construction of steel frames or reinforced concrete. Although the Narkomfin building utilized a technologically complicated detail in the concrete block (by housing the plumbing and pipes inside the hollow brick), the material itself was common and relatively comfortable to install for a typical Russian construction worker. This familiar material was built on a new one: reinforced concrete. The construction of the floor slabs would have required specialized, skilled workers. Similarly, the glazing systems, both in the housing block and the curtain wall in the communal facility also demanded new technologies and skilled (or newly taught) workers. What we see in Narkomfin is a unique combination of new and familiar construction techniques; by using both reinforced concrete and concrete block, Ginzburg acquaints the construction worker with the two forms of construction. Physiologically, the floor slabs served as the "foundation" for a new society; they would serve as the base in which the "historical" (the concrete block walls) could be incorporated into. The "construction" of socialism is thus both familiar and new. Innovative skills were required, to be sure, however the skills and knowledge acquired from the past had an important role to play as well.

53: Wall section showing window detail. Cooke, 1995: 135

54: Construction photograph of concrete floor slabs. Cooke, 1995: 135

The thrill that Ginzburg and his colleagues enjoyed while building the Narkomfin, in the excitement of the experimental nature of their technologies,

can be seen in the comments and documentations of the construction process and the lessons learnt upon the completion of the building. Cooke notes that although "they admitted learning much about the brittleness, heaviness and handling problems of precast elements; of exposure problems in stuccoed walls without protecting cornices, ...in these discussions of their technical experiments, the avant-garde's excitement as their principles

55: Construction photograph showing hollow concrete block and pipework. Cooke. 1995: 135

become materialized is palpably real." (Cooke, 1995: 136) The excitement of constructing a new society was manifested in the excitement and innovation of constructing a new building, a building that was envisioned as a prototype for future social condensers. Not only when inhabited was it to stimulate a new socialist-minded proletariat, but its materials and construction methodology would also prove to be beneficial for Communist Russia. By employing cost-saving methods of standardization, by utilizing familiar and innovative construction techniques, and through the use of modern materials, the construction of the complex would prove beneficial, providing workers with the much-needed skills to continue creating a new Socialist built environment, while creating valuable cost and time-saving techniques that would facilitate the rapid and affordable creation of a Socialist state.

This holistic conception of the design and building process is a direct product of the functional method that the Constructivists and OSA were espousing, and is also reflective of Ginzburg's understanding of what a machine aesthetic could be. Every component of the design process: initial studies of functional needs, conceptual design, adjusting the program and form to suit programmatic and client changes, choice of materials and construction technique; all were understood and approached in a linear, scientific manner, following many of the principles and techniques of Marxist aesthetics. Ginzburg's own understanding of the machine aesthetic is revealed here as well. The design of the housing and communal blocks both employed machine-like efficiency: specific choice of materials, minimizing spatial

requirements of corridors, studies and implementation of spatial diagrams, utilization of minimalist volumes for individual needs; these and many other aspects of Narkomfin were mediated through his particular interpretation of what could be learnt from mechanization and the innovative forms being produced by engineers in Europe and North America.

As mentioned previously, there were two other buildings proposed for the complex: the laundry facility and the un-built children's crèche. Relatively little has been written on these buildings; in fact the crèche never went beyond a circular form drawn on various site plans. The intended goal of the crèche was to provide an environment where children would be taken care of by professionally trained staff, day and night. This would free their parents, especially the mothers, to pursue work and intellectual development without the daily tasks associated with childcare. Indeed, one of the primary goals of Lenin and the implementation of Socialism was to free women from the bourgeois chains associated with childcare and domestic tasks like food preparation and household cleaning. The domestic sphere thus garnished significant attention during the early twenties; if the proletariat was to become fully socialized then the home must be socialized as well. Buchli notes: "*byt* was central to the development of a worker's political and social consciousness. If workers' consciousness, predicated on the conditions of daily life, were not attuned to collectivist values they could not be developed elsewhere, particularly in economic and political life." (Buchli, 1999: 24) This goal had been significantly achieved in the units at Narkomfin: kitchens had all but been eliminated, and the clean unadorned and smooth surfaces of the interiors, along with minimal furnishings, would have greatly reduced the time devoted to cleaning. The well-utilized laundry building would reduce the domestic workload for women as well. The remaining task was childcare, a topic that had already been subject to significant debate, with extreme opinions ranging from a total dismantling of the traditional family, to keeping that realm completely intact.

The children's crèche, like the complex itself, would have taken a compromising position, providing childcare facilities for those who lived in the Socialist F-units. According to Buchli, the crèche received little attention from

56: Mechanical Laundry building; (A) East elevation (B) West elevation (C) South elevation (D) Section. Buchli, 1998: 165

either Ginzburg and Milinis, nor their client Miliutin; the communal facility paid the price for this, as by 1932 much of the free space there, notably the sports hall and rest area, had been converted into space for the raising of the inhabitants children. (Buchli, 1998: 174) Although it is unclear why the crèche was not built, Buchli may shed some light on this:

Ideally the dismantling of the 'hearth' would involve the total emancipation of women from their exploited positions within the patriarchal petit-bourgeois family, just as the proletariat would be emancipated from the oppression of capitalism. Women could then join men as the equal citizens of a new socialist egalitarian society. ...Soviet Marxist theoreticians emphasised an industrializing economic base that predicated all other aspects of social and cultural life. This claim was underlined by the rather obvious fact that most Bolsheviks and Party members were male, conspiring for a hierarchy of concerns in the grand scheme of socialist construction. This state of affairs tended to place *byt*, the emancipation of women and the dismantling of the 'hearth' rather low on the list of priorities. Despite the fact that *byt* determined social consciousness, it was ultimately determined by economic structure; therefore large-scale economic matters such as industrialization had priority. (Buchli, 1999: 26)

It is possible to draw from this observation that male-oriented programmatic hierarchies determined that it was not as important to build the crèche as some of the other components, including the laundry facility (ironically also a program that would reduce typically female associated labour) and the communal block. Despite the fact that the crèche was not built and thus compromised the communal facility, Buchli still concludes that the incorporation of a childcare service at all "affirmed the continued importance of communal childcare for *byt* reform." (Buchli, 1998: 174)

The laundry building was one of the few facilities that was not compromised by programmatic changes and was built according to plan and remained in use until the 1960's (Buchli, 1998: 174). Again, relatively little has been written or documented about this building; however, its design and prominent position on the site does raise some interesting questions. The elevations show a similar language to that of the other buildings on the site: long horizontal ribbons of windows comprise the majority of the building, and cladding that was the same as the housing block, utilizing a stucco-clad smooth concrete block. Its aesthetics are unabashedly modern – no adornment, flat roofs and a structural bravado, as Ginzburg elevated a portion of the building on pilotis, providing a gateway to the site as well as a passage for vehicles to travel beneath.

57: Site plan, 1933, showing (A) communal block; (B) housing block; (C) Laundry facility; (D) Leontovich's proposed second phase of housing; and (E) nineteenth-century pavilion. Buchli, 1998: 167

It is difficult to say precisely why the laundry facility was given such a prominent position within the site, and why it was treated as a gate or archway for the entire complex. Certainly one possible reason was to firmly establish the Narkomfin as a permanent fixture on the grounds, which were highly charged as a previously bourgeois realm. As such it would seem reasonable to locate one clearly modern building immediately as one entered the complex. The decision to raise a portion of the building above the ground, forcing everyone to drive underneath the building, would also serve as a precursor to certain strategies employed by the housing block, especially had Ginzburg's original proposal for the site, which would have had roads travel towards and under the communal housing, been built according to plan (although perhaps undermining the conception of maintaining the ground plane for Socialist purposes alone, as was done for the housing facility). Another possible explanation could be that it was built anticipating the second

phase of the complex, in which another communal housing block was to be built; this could help to explain its seemingly generous size for a commune that would house less than one hundred inhabitants.

That said, the simple fact that few, if any photographs exist of the laundry facility, and that it is barely mentioned in most historical accounts seems to belie any importance that Ginzburg apparently gave to this building. Nevertheless, its execution, despite the various contradictions and changes that most of the buildings were subjected to, does indicate that it was an important component in creating a Socialist commune, especially considering that it would prove to be most beneficial for the housewife, who would stand to gain the greatest amount of saved time with its completion. Obviously many of the reasons listed above could easily be applied to justify the building of the children's crèche. That one was built and the other was not could perhaps be understood within the contentious and contradictory environment in which the Narkomfin was built.

This environment was to become quite hostile in the years following Stalin's rise to power, and was well underway during the construction of the complex itself. The consequences of these changes to the Narkomfin complex during design and construction have already been discussed; however a brief history of the changes that took

58: Narkomfin Site, 1949, looking towards Leontovich's building; Ginzburg's communal block is at the right. Buchli, 1999: 101

place after its completion, including changes to the site, and changes to Ginzburg's Housing block, both in its designation as a prototype of Socialist housing, as well as physical changes to the building itself, may serve to improve our understanding of how the built environment was utilized in a much different manner under a Stalinist interpretation of Marxism and aesthetics. Under Stalin, an increased emphasis on individuation and personal taste was held as the proper direction to creating a Socialist domestic sphere. An immediate consequence was a return to the previously

dismissed interiorization of spaces; this produced more traditional patterns of housing design, which were independent and employed fully enclosed interiors.

A direct consequence of this was manifested in the second phase of the Narkomfin complex, which was to provide a second housing social condenser, similar to that of Ginzburg's design. Instead a traditional type of apartment was proposed, and was "distinctly bourgeois, composed of rather luxurious individual D-units designed to accommodate nuclear families with separate kitchens." (Buchli, 1999: 76) Although sharing a similar aesthetic vocabulary to that of the existing complex, these lavish individual units ran counter to the initial Marxist-Leninist vision of a classless society and of opening the individual apartment into the socially communal spaces beyond. What was actually built in 1933, only a few years after the completion of the first phase, was an even further departure from the original

vision of the site. Many of the trees, so meticulously preserved by Ginzburg were removed, and a far more classically influenced and formal garden was built in its place. The new apartment building utilized a classically inspired façade, outright rejecting the aesthetics of the so-called 'prototype' only a few metres away. Several changes were made to Ginzburg's building as well, notably on the ground floor, which was converted into apartments, destroying the architects' initial vision of an uninterrupted ground plane, and the inherent socialist implications discussed earlier. Buchli observes that this addition "articulated a return to pre-Revolution bourgeois spatial patterns" and "entirely undermined the position of the building." (Buchli, 1999: 123) Furthermore, the design of the fenestration patterns were not arranged as horizontal ribbons of glass that would have maximized "the hygienic

59: Narkomfin complex, ground floor plan showing additional apartments; note changes to communal block as well. Buchli, 1999: Appendix

penetration of light within," (Buchli, 1999: 123) reflecting a departure from Ginzburg's treatment of light as a means of emphasizing certain socialist functions over others. The covered bridge, linking the building to the communal facility was altered as well, and was converted into a bathroom and dormitory, thereby destroying the communal and catalytic nature of Ginzburg's horizontal arteries. The potential success and proper use of the F-units as envisioned through Ginzburg's and Lenin's conception of aesthetics and domestic space was also compromised, as many of these units were subjected to a fragmentation of the original dynamic volumes, breaking the visually and psychologically connected common area and bedroom niche into as many as three distinct rooms, a requirement, according to Buchli, "for the Stalinist sense of *uiut*: moving away from the public realm of socialist action inwards." (Buchli, 1999: 126)

Although some of the alterations to Ginzburg's design could be attributed to the simple fact that there was still a drastic housing shortage in Moscow (ironically aggravated by the return to designing larger, private dwelling units), it was more a manifestation of a different conception of Marxist aesthetics as envisioned by the Stalinist state. The implication for the domestic sphere was a new emphasis on "the

60: Housing complex, Leningrad 1936-1940, Architect Malaya Okhta. Ikonnikov, 1988: 193

interiorization of social life over its exteriorization earlier." (Buchli, 1999: 77) On a broader level, it meant a return to classically inspired architecture, bourgeoisie influenced material consumption and fetishism, and a paternalistically motivated system of rewards and punishments based on the State's determination of what a Socialist person ought to be. The most notorious of these policies were the 'purges' implemented by Stalin in the late thirties, of which many inhabitants of the Narkomfin were subjected to. It is also interesting to note that one portion of the complex that was not changed during Stalin's reign was the comparatively bourgeois rooftop unit (Buchli, 1999: 102); this only serves to underscore the dramatic change in aesthetics

and the domestic sphere that were occurring in the 1930's, and that those who were spared already reflected this new ideology. Ultimately, the Narkomfin complex, initially envisioned as a radical progression towards a Socialist society, was by 1932 "relegated to the dustbin of history as a peculiar and archaic manifestation of a bygone era." (Buchli, 1999: 76)

Ginzburg himself began to criticize the policy of treating the dwelling unit as a social condenser, and turned to 'deurbanist' proposals that spread individual units along broad highways and industrial nodes. He also critiqued his own previous designs, saying that Communal Housing forgot that "the battle with animalistic individualism and the petit-bourgeois family is the battle for the liberation of the new socialist self, for the preconditions of that self's utmost and thorough development," and that these designs were a product of:

"the universal normalization of the order of life; [where] everyone without exception lives the same, there is no plurality, either in economic conditions, or in the conditions of daily life. All difficulties related to daily life appear already resolved and brought to conform to a standard. The forms of socialist life are not understood in dialectic terms, in movement, but in some sort of uniform and unchanging order ...only in the sleeping cabins is the self allowed to develop." (Buchli, 1998: 175)

Although this could appear as an honest self-critical analysis of previous explorations, Buchli notes that Ginzburg also slyly attributed some of these changes to the rise of the Stalinist state and wrote, "the scale of problems has changed, as well as the organization of their solutions," (Buchli, 1998: 176) implying the scale of these problems were far larger than simply a re-conception of the domestic sphere. That this dramatic turnaround on the part of Ginzburg, a change shared by many other Constructivists, occurred within

61: Competition design for Green City, 1930; Ginzburg & Barshch.

Settlement axonometric and detail of individual housing units, alone and in blocks. Khan, 1987: 321

a period of less than two years also suggests that he and others were aware that their avant-garde ideas were no longer shared by the new state's official policies. The increasing frequency of purges and the notoriety of Stalin's gulags could only serve as an additional oppressive incentive. The unfortunate consequence for the Narkomfin complex was its political and social out-casting, and its subsequent deterioration over the following decades. Fortunately, over the last few years increased awareness and appreciation for the complex has risen, and it is now highly attractive to the new capitalistic economy of Russia, with many interests vying for ownership.

62: Narkomfin housing block, South elevation, 1992. Buchli, 1999: 199

That yet another chapter is starting for the complex is reflective of the nature of the ever-changing social consciousness of the country, as poetically summed by Buchli:

Indeed, the fragmented ownership and the uncertain and contested future of the site reiterate its history, where competing concepts of social and material relations contentiously engaged in an effort to realize the promise of the good life. (Buchli, 1998: 178)

What further alterations and renovations may happen to Ginzburg's influential work is naturally unclear at this time. It is equally difficult to speculate how a Marxist-Leninist aesthetically inspired complex may be interpreted within what is a radically different societal structure today; its historical importance notwithstanding, time may prove that this building may become another victim of the wrecking ball. The communally motivated design may prove incompatible with Capitalism, despite the bourgeois modifications to the buildings during the Stalinist era. Nevertheless, the Narkomfin complex represents a historically and culturally unique period of Russia's history. That so much may be inferred and interpreted from the conceptual design, the actual constructed work, and the subsequent alterations thereafter, is

demonstrative of the fact that this architectural artefact was truly a seminal example of what a Marxist and Saint-Simonian idea of aesthetics and society could be.

Summary

Man's social and physical environment determines his consciousness: this is the fundamental tenet of Marxist theory, both political and aesthetic. That an avant-garde of artists, engineers and writers could help liberate the working class from the oppression and tyranny associated with feudal labour systems: this is the revolutionary tenet of Saint-Simon. When these ideas are considered together, a particular conception of a Marxist and catalytic aesthetic, as well as a specific understanding of what 'Marxist aesthetics' may be, is created: one that could serve a proactive role within the creation of a new society and become pivotal in developing a socially inspired consciousness for the proletariat.

For Marx the value and importance of aesthetic production was in its ability to produce a specific form of cognition; artistic creations could reveal characteristics and essences of societal and cultural epochs. When this was created in an unalienated and supportive environment, following the ideology of its social milieu, the corresponding art would become 'productive,' similar to other forms of social productivity like industry or politics. Through the influence of Saint-Simon and his call for a vanguard of an intellectual elite to lead society beyond the corruptive nature of feudalism, Marx and Engel felt that artistic creativity had the power and ability to not only reveal the contradictions and alienation associated with bourgeois consumerism, as seen for example in *The Silesian Weavers*, but that aesthetics could provide a powerful technique in disseminating a new social theory, notably Socialism. It was the years following the revolution in Russia that provided a fertile ground for creating not only a wholly new social order, but also an opportunity to utilize this conception of aesthetic production as a means of creating a Socialist proletariat.

I have attempted to show that the Constructivists, and in particular Moisei Ginzburg, were not only actively participating within society in a Saint-Simonian conception of an avant-garde, but that their approach to design was directly influenced by a Marxist manner of analysis and thought. Many of the early texts written by Constructivists like Gan referred to the writings of Marx

frequently. Although Ginzburg himself rarely quoted Marx specifically, his scientific manner of documenting the historical processes of architectural design in *Style and Epoch* was clearly similar to the style of historical analysis that Marx used. Ginzburg's conclusion that Constructivism was the historically inevitable process of aesthetic theory is also similar to Marx's conclusion that Socialism would become the predictable replacement to Capitalism. Furthermore, Ginzburg's particular view of what influence should be drawn from the machine, and his corresponding 'Functional Method' of design is also clearly Marxist in nature, not simply in its rational, linear approach, but in its holistic understanding of society. For Ginzburg, designing a building meant understanding its relationship to the entire Socialist framework, from the architectural programme to the building's massing and materiality. Any given building had to strive to be as 'productive' to the common good as was possible.

It was this particular Marxist perspective and understanding of the future role for architecture that created the notion of the social condenser, and the pedagogical task that the factories, worker's clubs and dom-kommunas would need to fulfill in creating a socially conscious proletariat. Consequentially, this implied certain characteristics for each condenser-type; for the communal home a combination of collective facilities, like the dining hall, kitchen, laundry, crèche, etc were provided in conjunction with small apartments for individual families. It is therefore possible to conclude that the Marxist-inspired vision for the Socialist city in many ways pre-determined the architecture, at least programmatically; yet despite this, there can be no questioning the innovations and variety of solutions that were proposed by the Russian Constructivists. For Ginzburg in particular this apparent paradox was manifested in his Functional Method: creativity was demanded, yet it was held closely in check by its methodology, and was consistently guided by an overarching ideology: Marxism, and the creation of a Socialist state.

In the Narkomfin Complex, this Marxist-inspired aesthetic was implemented by Ginzburg in a variety of manners, some boldly and others that were more subtle. Lighting and spatial volumetrics were used to emphasise certain functions over others (recall the contrasts between the well-lit and spacious

main rooms in the apartment units versus the niche-like quality of the bedrooms). Functions that ran counter to a collective society were hidden away, or greatly minimized: the alcove kitchens, the sparse bathrooms and the second bedroom, elements that were all Bourgeoisie-inspired, were clearly treated in a secondary manner. Both the F-type and K-type units employed strategies that would promote a Marxist way of life, while clearly discouraging traditional patterns of domestic activity.

This theme of emphasising Marxist conceptions of domestic life continued throughout the entire complex, and Ginzburg used several different strategies here as well. Ginzburg's uses of economic building techniques, along with innovative technologies and the standardization of elements were employed not simply for the benefit of the complex, but also as an experiment and lesson for future Communist buildings. The extensive use of glass on the Communal building demonstrated to the users that their individual sacrifice provided the means for such a generous use of an expensive and technologically innovative material. Views from the apartments and adjacent buildings were of the state-provided countryside and communal grounds, perpetually reminding the inhabitants of who they were within the context of the Communist state. The East elevation of the Communal block, by far the most visually dominant, portrayed a picture of a truly classless society, obscuring the fact that there were far more differences and contradictions in Communism than met the eye.

Indeed, even the items that ran counter to a truly egalitarian Socialist society can be viewed as aesthetically Marxist in nature: the plush penthouse suite, the articulated K-units, and the un-built children's crèche were all 'realistic' in that they revealed the contentions and difficulties of creating a classless society. To recall Buchli's phrase, they provided a literal "snapshot" of the Communist state at that time. The changes to the complex upon the rise of Stalin, although beyond the scope of this paper and thus only briefly discussed, is not only demonstrative of the latent relationship that this building had with the underlying philosophies utilized by subsequent governments, but also reveals how Marx's aesthetic and economic theories were subjected to such wide and different interpretations.

In short, I have attempted to demonstrate that both Ginzburg's system for the creative process, manifested in the OSA's 'Functional Method,' and the corresponding architecture as seen in the Narkomfin complex was closely related to, and essentially determined by, a Marxist interpretation of aesthetics and the role the artist could play within society. It is hoped that this paper will broaden not only our understanding of how Marxism and aesthetic theories were interpreted and implemented in the early years of the Russian revolution, but also emphasize the importance of our relationship between aesthetics, specifically architecture, and social and political philosophies. Whether one considers oneself Marxist or not, it seems reasonable to concede that humankind's social and personal consciousness is at least partially determined by the world in which we live; here Marx can be considered accurate in his analysis. In a society that is rapidly becoming more and more urban, the role that architecture will play is ever increasing. It is imperative that we as artists fully understand and appreciate the social and cultural milieu that our buildings inhabit; philosophical and sociological studies can continue to prove to be an invaluable asset in all artistic pursuits.

Part II: Research Thesis

The Social Condenser in a Post-Modern society

Modern day society is obviously quite different from that of post Revolutionary Russia, however many of the key issues then are still of concern today. Despite the seemingly individuated nature of Modern life, there remains a pressing need to satisfy social demands. Humans are, by nature, social beings; from the interactions within the family to the associations created in work, cultural and social life, these communal groupings inevitably still occur. Today, however, we are no longer afforded the advantage of a cultural unifier that a Socialist ideology enjoyed. In fact, the very notion of ideology has been all but dismissed, and is now seen as an impossibility. In his essay on the various types of utopian cities designed in the early twentieth century, Robert Fishman highlights this issue: "To appeal to everyone on the basis of universal principles is to appeal to no one in particular. The more glorious the plans are in theory, the more remote they are from the concrete issues that actually motivate action. With each elaboration and clarification, the ideal cities move closer to pure fantasy. Can imagination alone change the world? Or, as Friedrich Engel phrased the question: 'How can the isolated individual hope to *impose his idea* on history?'" (Fishman, 1977: 30)

The danger of imposing ones ideas onto a society that may be resistant is not a new question; Ginzburg himself was keenly aware of this, and wrote on it frequently. When commenting on some of the issues pertaining to the design the Narkomfin complex, he wrote, "we can no longer compel the occupants of a particular building to live collectively, as we have attempted to do in the past, generally with negative results. ...We considered it absolutely necessary to incorporate certain features that would stimulate the transition to a socially superior mode of life, *stimulate but not dictate*." (Kopp, 1970: 141) Having said this, there still was an overarching goal, both on a social and architectural level of creating a Communist way of life. Today I would suggest that this is no longer the case, there is no common, or perhaps singular, goal to achieve.

It has been documented that the Social Condenser played a pivotal role in creating an environment suited to a Marxist conception of the city and society. While in North American society today the rights of the individual are paramount over the needs of the collective, the need for venues of collective activity are still there. Some obvious examples immediately come to mind: sporting arenas, opera halls and churches all play important roles in creating a notion of a collective. These venues are all, however, highly structured; the events that occur within these walls are pre-meditated, often quite elitist (from an economic perspective especially), and are therefore closed to others from the outside. The "collective," in this sense, is limited to a specific few, and does little to encourage a notion of a collective on a much broader scale.

My concern is not that these micro-collectives should not exist, for they play an important role in creating identities for various individuals. In the case of sporting venues, for example, the collective group can be quite large, and include participants from a broad cultural and economic range. England's Football Fan Club for Manchester United, one of the largest in the world, includes fans from dozens of countries in all levels of society. The spaces for these fans, however, clearly impose restrictions on who may enter. The number of people who may actually enjoy their favourite team in person is severely restricted to the elite few who a) can afford a ticket and b) are lucky enough to obtain an often rare ticket, requiring a well-connected source or contact. Other venues for viewing the team - pubs, neighbours' dens, etc, will have different rules of formation, usually on a more social level. But there is nothing inherently wrong with that, and to attempt to force these barriers away is in all likelihood a fruitless task, and one that would encounter severe resistance from those within these groups.

My concern lies elsewhere: while these micro-collectives exist, they tend to exist in isolation from other groups. The collective of the football fan is unlikely to encounter the collective of Catholic Nuns; it is doubtful that a group of architects will have many discussions with a chorus of singers. Should these unlikely associations occur, it would normally be under the umbrella of a larger collective: a charity event perhaps, or some other special

event. But even within the parameter of this larger collective, it too would exist in isolation, housed in some Convention Centre, oblivious to the events occurring only twenty meters down the street. What is required is places where multiple collectives co-exist, offering zones of interaction, friction, and conflict. By creating these spaces, incalculable relations might take place. This would allow for new associations, increased awareness of different modes of thought and new potential social structures. The original collectives might remain intact, however bringing together collective 'A' and 'B' might create a new subset collective 'C'. What is important, though, is that collective 'C' is not coerced into forming a group; the role of architecture is simply to provide the potential, to serve as a social *catalyst*, not a social determinate. The difference from this goal from those of the Constructivists is in its negation of an overarching social ideology.

What would this create? What would the impact be on the morphology of the city if architecture were designed primarily to provide moments of unforeseen associations, and random groupings? Is a structure, a framework of some sort needed? If so, what?

At first, it might be thought that the "neutral grid," a device commonly used by many architects and planners could point us in the right direction. By placing axis in a perpendicular manner, a series of intersections at regular intervals is created, in a non-hierarchical manner. The Cartesian grid is an extremely efficient, and theoretically non-deterministic structuring device. Its neutrality, however, has been subject to criticism.

In his essay *The Neutral City*, Richard Sennett documents some of the negative impacts the neutral grid has had on the city, despite the best of intentions planners were associating with it. Sennett demarcates the shifting symbolism of this grid: "Grids, like any design, can become whatever particular societies make them represent. If the Romans saw the grid as an emotionally charged design, the Americans were the first to use it for a different purpose: to deny that complexity and difference existed in the environment. The grid has been used in modern times as a plan that neutralizes the environment. It is a Protestant sign for the neutral city."

(Sennett, 1990: 126) Although Sennett recognizes the potential for meaning to shift, what is significant for us is how the American perception of the grid was one of control, to deny other potential influences or references. Existing Native populations, natural geography and public centres became subjected to the goals of economic efficiency and the "Protestant ethic of space." (Sennett, 1990: 129, 130, 132) Sennett expands on the suppressive nature of gridded space, commenting that "it subdues those who must live in the space, by disorienting their ability to see and to evaluate relationships. In that sense, the planning of neutral space is an act of dominating and subduing others." (Sennett, 1990: 135)

According to Sennett, it is this dominating nature of the neutral grid that creates a hostile environment for those living within it; consequentially the American individual has withdrawn from society, limiting interactions to but the smallest of spheres:

The famous American 'individual,' rather than being an adventurer, is in reality most often a man or woman whose circle of reality is drawn no larger than family and friends. The individual has little interest, indeed little energy outside that circle. The American individual is a passive person, and monotonous space is what a society of passive individuals builds for itself. A bland environment assures people that nothing disturbing or demanding is happening 'out there'. You build neutrally in order to legitimate withdrawal. (Sennett, 1990: 138)

Sennett's observations describe a vicious cycle: the implementation of the neutral grid, itself a manifestation of a Protestant ethic, creating a dominated and withdrawn individual. In order to accommodate this withdrawal, the neutral grid is employed yet again; the process has thus come full circle.

If the neutral grid is used by Americans to deny that complexity and difference exists within the environment, this denial can be viewed as a process of abstraction, a reductive logic taken to almost nihilistic proportions. The neutral grid abstracts its space and all that it encompasses, reducing everything into a series of Cartesian equals. It denies what is different: topography, irregularity, context. The author John Rajchman discusses the notion of what abstraction means in aesthetics, and his criticisms of the 'modern' (i.e. the early part of the twentieth century) use of abstraction parallels the concerns of the neutral grid as noted by Sennett.

For Rajchman, abstraction in art is a nihilistic affair, a process of denial and reduction; specifically, abstraction could be considered as a series of 'nots'. Rajchman notes that abstraction is "what is *not* figurative, not narrative, not illusionist, not literary, and so on, to the point where one arrives at a sanctifying negative theology in which 'art' (or 'painting') takes the place of 'God' as That to which no predicate is ever adequate and can only be attained via the *via negativa*." (Rajchman, 1998: 57) According to Rajchman, abstraction is haunted by the blank canvas, perpetually striving to reduce all figure and content to its 'essence': the closest point to the 'blank' or 'neutral' image as is possible (Rajchman, 1998: 57). Its so-called 'death' or end is ironically the ultimate goal, reaching a nearly religious concept of sublimation. For Rajchman, this end, a fetishistic obsession with nothing, accounts for the feelings associated with modern abstract art: "...the strange things we call art objects incorporate an emptiness surrounded by affects of anxiety, melancholy, mania, or mourning; it is why the fame that accrues to creators of such objects is so odd, rooted in envy." (Rajchman, 1998: 58)

Post-modernism, hailed as the answer to the nihilism associated with modern art for Rajchman simply continues the errors:

...one can argue that post-modern art remains, as it were, haunted by the spirit of the abstract painting; it only repeats this game as farce, through quotation, parody, irony, alternating between main and melancholia. ...In short, it is as though first in modernism, and then in postmodernism, the tale of abstraction were a long, sad illustration of Nietzsche's thesis linking asceticism and nihilism: that one would prefer to will nothing than not to will at all. (Rajchman, 1998: 59)

The terms and feelings described by Sennett and Rajchman are strikingly similar; in both circumstances they conclude that this particular conception of abstraction, be it through the neutral grid or via abstract aesthetics, is inherently alienating, and advocates a philosophy of limitation while attempting to deny difference, complexity and confrontation. Abstraction becomes a process of turning inwards, rejecting difference and instead forever seeks the 'pure' or 'essence' of an object. While Sennett does not attempt to provide any alternative to this situation, Rajchman, by contrast, does. He finds in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze a different and radically

innovative view of abstraction, one that can lead it out of its nihilistic paternity.

According to Rajchman, Deleuze rejects the notion of abstraction as reduction, of the fetishistic process of achieving the 'virgin' or 'blank' canvas, whose ultimate goal can only mean an inevitable death for art. Instead of conceiving abstraction as a search or a yearning for what is 'not,' Deleuze views abstraction as a process of mixing and mixing up, a reassemblage that moves outwards rather than in, highlighting difference instead of seeking the pure or Ideal. (Rajchman, 1998: 56) Following the writings of Spinoza, Leibnitz and especially Foucault's view of modernism as the "untimely forces that announce other new outside possibilities," (Rajchman, 1998: 60), Deleuze views abstraction not as purification, but instead as a means of pushing aesthetics outside of itself, allowing for interruptions from other, previously unseen forces, causing reinterpretations, interference, connections. Abstraction is not reduction, the process of 'not;' on the contrary it is stuttering, an impregnated 'and... and... and.' (Rajchman, 1998: 61)

Deleuze's criticisms of modern concepts of abstraction and neutrality and the solutions that he and Guattari proposed are first formulated in the differences they describe between what they term 'smooth space' versus 'striated space'. Using several typological examples to clarify these differences, in *A Thousand Plateaus* they define the striated as that "which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organizes horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 478) This organization, or striation, has implications on different levels for inhabiting and crossing space, both social and physical. The arrangement of space in this manner determines that one travel from point to point, rather than via trajectory. Striation closes off spaces from one another, allocating in determined breaks, rather than allowing for individual distribution and opposition (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 478, 481). For them, this striation is manifested irrefutably in the city: "the city is the striated space par excellence; ...the city is the force of striation that reimparts smooth space, puts it back into operations everywhere, on earth and in the other elements, outside but also inside itself." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 481)

Ultimately, striated space is for them a controlled space, one that determines, defines, restricts. Striation is essentially a form of the Cartesian neutral space that Sennett and Rajchman both condemned, a neutrality that denies difference and creates homogeneity. While describing striated space in their physical model they note:

The various models confirm a certain idea of striation: two series of parallels that intersect perpendicularly, some of which, the verticals, are more in the role of fixed elements or constants, whereas the others, the horizontals, are more in the role of variables. ...The more regular the intersection, the tighter the striation, the more homogeneous the space tends to become; it is for this reason that from the beginning homogeneity did not seem to us to be a characteristic of smooth space, but on the contrary, the extreme result of striation, or the limit-form of a space striated everywhere and in all directions. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 488)

Although they do not specifically use the terms Cartesian or neutral grid, it is clear that this is precisely what is being discussed; furthermore, it is clear that for them striated space contains the same dangers associated with Sennett's and Rajchman's neutral grid. Their concerns are developed to an even greater extent, noting that the striation found in Greek architecture lead to the treatment of the State as a striated apparatus, while concluding that "geometry [striation] lies at the crossroads of a physics problem and an affair of the State." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 489) In fact their critiques of a striated State, notably its tendency to view work not only as a social necessity but also a predicable and determinable process rather than a free decision (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 489, 490), highlights many of the problems attributed to the rise of the Soviet State, particularly under Stalin. According to Deleuze, to employ the striated State is to "impose the Work-model upon every activity, translate every act into possible or virtual work, discipline free action, or else (which amounts to the same thing) relegate it to 'leisure,' which exists only by reference to work." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 490)

Although these comments are without question compelling, it is their segment on the aesthetic model for striated and smooth space that is of particular interest, and is primarily where the potential of abstraction for Rajchman was derived. In sum, according to Deleuze the distinction between striated and

smooth space in aesthetics is two fold: first, that striated space is primarily distanced, as opposed to 'close-ranged' smooth space; second is that striation is optical versus the tactile or haptic nature of the smooth. Striated aesthetics, for Deleuze, is as equally confining and fixed as the other examples of striated space. This optically biased space is defined by the requirements of long-distance vision: constant orientation, invariable distance, and determination of central perspective (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 494); he concludes that this form of aesthetics makes it "less easy to evaluate the creative potentialities of striated space, and how it can simultaneously emerge from the smooth and give everything a whole new impetus." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 494) Much like abstraction-as-reduction defined earlier, striated space closes upon itself, rejecting interpretation, interruption, involvement.

By contrast, smooth space, by definition haptic and multi-sensory, opens itself up to interpretation, forever changing in its orientation, location and linkage, nomadic in its

63: Jackson Pollock, *Lucifer*, 1947. Brace, 1991: 1033

nature, rather than defined, fixed. They find this haptic aesthetic in the art of the nomads and the Goths, and also in the lines and contours of Jackson Pollock; smooth space is a free space, comparable to the free actions associated with the smooth State as opposed to the restrictions connected to the striated State. It is within the smooth space of aesthetics that they turn to the notion of abstraction, to viewing art as an 'abstract machine'. Similar to the critiques and distinctions between striated and smooth space in other models, especially in the Cartesian grid discussed earlier, they deem striated abstraction as linear, determinate, predictable. Contesting the ideas of Worrigner, who viewed the first instance of the abstract line in the geometries of the Egyptians, they instead claim that abstract line is altogether something different:

For us, on the other hand, the abstract line is fundamentally 'Gothic,' or rather, nomadic, not rectilinear. ...Whereas the rectilinear (or 'regularly' rounded) Egyptian line is negatively motivated by anxiety in the face of all that passes, flows or varies, and erects the consistency and eternity of an In-Itself, the nomad line is abstract in an entirely different sense, precisely because it has a multiple orientation and passes *between* points, figures, and contours: it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, not by any striation it might perform to ward off anxiety and subordinate the smooth. The abstract line is the affect of smooth spaces, not a feeling of anxiety that calls forth striation." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 497)

Abstraction, therefore, is a process of discovery, of opening up outside sources and inspirations, drawn through the abstract line that seeks multiple paths and in-betweens rather than seeking a seemingly forced or a-priori goal or truth. Rajchman concludes that "one can then see abstraction not as elimination of figure or story but rather as an invention of other spaces with original sorts of mixture of assemblage – a prodigious 'and' that departs from classical illusionism and eventually even from the figure/ground principles of composition." (Rajchman, 1998: 61)

If one were to view abstraction in this manner the ramifications for aesthetics and art are profound, for now according to Deleuze, "the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained." (Rajchman, 1998: 64) According to Rajchman, in order to explain these abstractions and how they are realized or extracted from the world, one must reinsert them into this 'pluralistic' world, thereby altering their connections with other things. In so doing, the question is no longer 'how are Forms extracted from things?' but instead 'what new things can be produced outside of these things?' This, according to Rajchman, produces an entirely different conception of abstraction, one that passes from the first, critical sense of abstraction to an affirmative one that "involves a change in seeing: rather than seeing the Forms that the sun illuminates above, or the ideas that the natural light illuminates within, one must learn to see this prior, immanent condition that illuminates through multiple paths outside, 'ceaselessly bifurcating and diverging,' like one of [Jackson] Pollock's lines." (Rajchman, 1998: 66)

It is my belief that this call for using abstraction in such a manner echoes the first chapter or 'plateau' in *A Thousand Plateaus* in which Deleuze and Guattari describe what could be deemed their structural logic. This logic is compared to a rhizome, and is critically opposed to what they call a 'root-tree' or overly structured system, and is applied not only to the book itself but also serves as a metaphor for how they see all aspects of society, be it political, scientific, economic or aesthetic. To abstract aesthetically, to create haptic or smooth spaces is thus to think and create rhizomatically, to allow for numerous inspirations, unpredictable groupings, multiple paths and interpretations. In many ways it is a non-structured structure, capable of adapting to any possible conditions, but is also inherently local, contextual and responsive.

By contrast the neutral grid attempts to be all things to all conditions, while inevitably denying difference, complexity and unpredictable events. As noted by Sennett, its desired 'neutrality' is what makes it so oppressing; Rajchman highlighted that the supposed 'abstract' or 'pure' nature of the grid is precisely what makes it so alienating and disengaging. It is perhaps impossible, or at the very least imprudent, to even call this Cartesian grid 'neutral'; that in fact may be its greatest danger. Regardless it seems clear that it is wholly unsuitable for our society today, a society that is only beginning to learn that oppression and denial of complexity merely pushes the suppressed underground, only to be later revealed in what can sometimes be catastrophic ways. Deleuze and Guattari's call for the rhizome was to be applied to all forms and levels of society; although architecture is but one small component thereof, it is nevertheless an important one, and one that can serve as a societal catalyst, to encourage unpredictable encounters, to seek multiple events. If the built environment is to be more than simply a mirror of our society, if it is to become more productive and active in our daily lives, then perhaps we too as designers need to think and create more 'rhizomatically.'

Project Brief & Design Intentions

The project chosen for my research thesis is a proposal to expand the University Centre (UCU) at the University of Ottawa. Although there were several reasons for this choice, the most significant were as follows:

- 1) A campus environment, although a somewhat closed social group, is nevertheless composed of a great variety of people, cultures and backgrounds. Furthermore, it is an environment in which new ideas, ways of looking at society and ourselves, and discovering new friendships, mentors and peers is intrinsic, although perhaps latent, to the functioning of a University.
- 2) The existing University Centre at the University of Ottawa, similar to most campuses, hosts a vast variety of programmes and events; consequentially it contains a virtually infinite number of possible social groupings and encounters. More significantly, however, is the fact that this particular building acts as an important physical link to several other buildings on the campus, including the Library, a student residence, and the Athletic Facilities. It could thus be considered as the 'heart' of the University as a whole, serving a crucial, although non-academic, role for the campus.

In many ways I believe that the University Centre could be considered as a modern type of 'social condenser,' a place where people gather, meet and interact. It is, however, distinctly different from the Constructivists interpretation of the Socialist social condenser, for two significant reasons. First, the Socialist type had three distinct classifications: the factory, the worker's club, and the communal house. These categories determined, a priori, not only the programme or event, but also predetermined the occupants of the various social condensers. With few exceptions, these inhabitants were already closely related, specifically through their work and employer; the social relations and interactions would therefore be significantly skewed and limited. Within a University Centre, although the probable users will be closely related to the University in one manner or another, this 'common ground' is far less confined or predetermined.

The second important distinction, and perhaps the most significant of the two, is that the three types of social condensers in Russia were designed to create a specific manner of thought and social action: the ultimate goal of these buildings was to produce a Socialist, and specifically Communist inhabitant. This goal had very specific ramifications for the aesthetics, the spatial layout and the programmes for each building. By contrast, a modern-day University Centre, despite some common or expected programme (for example a cafeteria, space for administrative functions, areas for social gatherings) does not have a similar Ideological goal or *raison d'être*; as a result the layout and programmatic relationships are not as pre-determined as they were in post-revolutionary Russia. Consequentially, the social patterns and groupings are more fluid and changing, and the possibilities for unpredictable inhabitation are far greater.

As discussed previously, I believe that a variety of programmes, multiple connections and the potential for unpredictable interactions can create a condition that could be considered an example of a modern social condenser; it is without doubt that this situation presents itself at the University Centre at the University of Ottawa. The problem, however, is that this variety is comparatively hidden and insufficiently presented or described. The various events that take place here are disjointed, and there is little space provided for public discourse and social interactions. The one space that could be described as designated for that type of use, the so-called Agora, is hidden away, far removed from key entrances, and is comparatively small. More importantly, the architecture does not display the incredible variety of events that occur here, each within close proximity of each other.

No more is this present than in an external space that runs between the UCU and the University Library. My proposed expansion is thus intentionally positioned between these two existing buildings. There are two primary reasons for this: first, the current space serves primarily as a relatively underused exterior corridor – shaded in the summer, wind-swept and uninhabitable in the winter. The wasted character of this location, in a relatively compact and constrained urban campus, demands that it's potential be realized.

64: University of Ottawa, proposed expansion space, existing condition. Photo by Author

More significantly, however, is that this current space reveals little of the vast programmatic and spatial variety that surrounds and encompasses it: lecture halls, study carols, bookstores, cafeterias, student services, pubs, to name but a few – these spaces are all within moments away, yet little exists to reflect this.

Reflecting on the lessons from Deleuze and his call for a haptic or smooth space that would better reflect the contradictions and multiplicities of our modern society, there will be two key intentions in my design proposal. First, it will be an exploration of what it could mean to 'abstract' this space in the Deleuzian sense of the word – to reveal the complexity and variety that is currently latent, undetected. By abstracting the space in this manner, I hope to enhance the character and allow the site to open up what was previously concealed, to provide an opportunity for the existing programmes to engage with one another while clarifying and enhancing the differences that exist between.

The second key intention will be to explore what additional programmatic events would help augment the diversity and multiple natures that are inherent to a University Centre. It is a location such as this which permits an opportunity to provide spaces that simultaneously revel in the complex nature

and differences that exist within a university campus, while creating the potential to interact, engage and conflict with one another. A university is primarily an environment where people come to learn new things, and to discover multiple ideas. Perhaps more significantly though, it is also a place where students and faculty alike find not only new friends, colleagues, and rivals, but also themselves. By enhancing the multiplicities, by encouraging social and programmatic interactions and mixings, I hope to create a catalytic architecture that provides opportunities for the users to engage with unpredictable people, with unforeseen results.

Site Plan NTS

Figure 65

EXISTING FLOOR PLAN

EXISTING FLOOR PLANS

Figure 66

Ground Floor

EXISTING FLOOR PLANS

Figure 67

EXISTING FLOOR PLANS

Figure 68

Level 02

EXISTING FLOOR PLANS

Figure 69

Level 03

EXISTING FLOOR PLANS

Figure 70

Figure 71

Figure 71

Figure 72

Figure 73

Figure 74

Figure 75

Figure 76

Figure 77

Figure 78

Event Collage 1

Event Collage 2

Ground Floor

Figure 82

1st Floor

Figure 83

2nd Floor

Figure 84

3rd Floor

Figure 85

Proposed Sections

Figure 86

Figure 88

Figure 89

Figure 90

Figure 91

Conclusions

Throughout the course of this thesis I have attempted to describe how certain philosophical ideas were, or could be, translated into architectural forms. The intention behind this was to investigate the value and benefits of using philosophical ideation as a potential 'starting point' or initial 'lens' as a guide for proposing responses to architectural problems. It was recognized from the beginning that in any architectural proposal many factors would exert significant influence upon design decisions, aesthetic or otherwise. Some of these influences could include site constraints, programme, budget, to list but a few; these factors were recognized, however they were not the primary focus of this thesis, and thus given comparatively little analysis and discussion.

My approach instead could have been considered similar to a scientific experiment, in which a single factor (in this case philosophical ideation) was to be analysed and considered paramount above all other possible influences. Although the very real and valuable role of these outside factors within the whole was not denied, similar to an actual 'scientific experiment,' I found it prudent and appropriate to focus on how philosophy has inspired, and could continue to inspire, architectural ideas. My specific interest in this thesis was to investigate how conceptual and primary aesthetic decisions made by an architect in addressing the various important factors to any architectural project (programme, site, etc) were shaped by an overarching philosophy or 'guide.' Would this 'guide' prove to provide innovative and new manners of perceiving space and programmatic arrangements? Could it be determined that a particular philosophical idea was more of a constraint or pre-determining factor rather than a useful inspiration? What value or benefit for architecture could be gained by referring to philosophy?

My first investigation, Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin House, was created during a unique period in history, where a precise and specific ideology was being considered: the implementation of Marx's ideas on economics, politics and their corresponding social and physical forms. Consequentially, this project

was invariably going to be designed with these goals and ideas in mind; despite that, the particular responses to each specific issue (massing, programmatic arrangements, fenestration, etc) would have been subject to personal and unique interpretations of Marxist ideologies, specifically those of the design architect, Ginzburg. It was his unique perspective of Marxist aesthetics that was the generator of the design of the Narkomfin.

This perspective was generated partially through his particular understanding of the role the machine could play within aesthetics, and also through his own design process, which paralleled Marx's own method of investigation and analysis. Similar to Marx's premise that Socialism was the predictable conclusion to the historical processes of economic policies, Ginzburg too concluded that Constructivism was the historically inevitable aesthetic for a modern Russia, particularly one that was to become a Socialist state. Likewise, Ginzburg's Functional Method of design, in which specific 'unknowns' were analysed, prioritized, and then given architectural form, echoed Marx's scientifically inspired method of sociological and economic studies. Although Ginzburg and his fellow Constructivists were certainly 'Marxist,' this common perspective did not impede or restrict their creativity: in fact it became a crucial source of inspiration, and the metaphorical foundation on which their designs were to be critiqued. Without doubt, there were many other important influences that helped to create the intense and innovative ideas and forms from this unique group of architects – the excitement of creating a new society, the rapid technological innovations in the Western world, new architectural ideas from Europe – however it was the unique philosophical and political currents in Russia that permitted such a brilliant explosion of new ideas and designs to rise in their country.

It was at that point that I turned my attention to what role philosophical ideas could have today. In many ways it would be impossible to compare post-revolutionary Russia to our current world, yet despite this there is an increasing amount of interest in the architectural world around the Constructivists, and many of their ideas are being re-investigated. It is not without significance that a seminal book on Deconstruction in architecture included a lengthy discussion on the Russian Constructivists, within which

Cooke notes the similarities between these two architectural aesthetics went well beyond the phonetic. (Cooke, 1989: 11) There are certainly many reasons why there is a new interest in the Constructivists. No doubt this renewed fascination is exaggerated by the tense relations between Russia and the Western World after the Second World War and beyond, which prevented many of the drawings and photographs of the Constructivists to reach beyond the confines of the Soviet State. There is, I suspect, a more deep-seated reason as well: the Russian Constructivists were unique in their close association with a specific political system and, more importantly, with its corresponding philosophical ideology. This distinctive relationship between aesthetic production and philosophy has not since seen a scale or depth equal to those experiments in Russia, and thus provides a rare example of these seemingly disparate professions acting in concert. This was a major reason as to why I chose to discuss the Constructivists at all.

In my initial discussion on the validity of attempting to apply certain philosophical ideas onto today's society, I raised the issue of if it is even possible, let alone prudent, to attempt to act in such a manner. Politicians and artists found a unique situation in Russia after the revolution, when it was possible to thoroughly reconstruct an entire country, from its political, economic and social core. We certainly do not enjoy that luxury today. While Marx's theories demanded a corresponding change in a society's political and economic structure, conditions possible in only rare instances (e.g. post revolutionary Russia), if we are to realistically consider philosophical theories in architectural practice today, we need to consider not only whether any particular philosophical theory is congruent with our current political and economic structure, but how it could be applied.

Deleuze's call for rhizome-like structure, an open network of dissimilar nodes, connected in multiple directions and on multiple levels, is a methodology that is seemingly capable of applying to almost any system, political, economic or otherwise, simply because of its openness and inherent flexibility. It would nevertheless be equally subjected to the 'acceptance' by the society as was Marx's controversial and radical theories. Ginzburg's concern that architecture must therefore 'stimulate but not dictate' is as relevant today as

it was then. Furthermore, the dissemination of any theory would be an interpretation, which can produce strikingly dissimilar views, despite the common theoretical base – the vast disparity between Lenin's interpretation of Marx and those of Stalin's is well known. When creating a socially and politically involved art such as architecture, one must therefore use caution implementing philosophical ideas.

Despite these concerns, it nevertheless seemed appropriate to turn to Deleuze as a potential source of ideas and reflection for the chosen design project, Ottawa University's University Centre. Several of those reasons have already been noted, however it is useful here to note a few others, especially concerning the problem of implementation and acceptance of a given philosophical ideology.

A university environment contains a particularly unique form of society, and in many ways operates outside of current political and economic systems (although not completely). Without question there is a common aim within a university: the search for, and dissemination of, knowledge and ideas. This definition is admittedly broad, however it does imply certain characteristics and attitudes of its 'citizens.' Although there are various categories and specializations, manifested in the numerous faculties and schools, it is essential for each specialty to seek out and discuss information between departments. Students are required to take electives and courses from outside of their chosen specialty, in order to establish a balanced and thorough education. In many instances, majors are changed to accommodate a student's changing interests, changes that may have been caused or encouraged by participating in a variety of electives. This exchange of knowledge between different departments is crucial to the healthy functioning of a university.

What is significant about this 'city-network of ideas' is the manner in which it functions. Similar to Deleuze's conception of a system of rhizomes, a university functions best when the opportunity to exchange ideas freely, from various departments is present. To envision the university's overarching 'system' as a rhizome-like structure does not seem like an irrational analogy;

furthermore, although this system may already be implicitly in place or functioning, an attempt to highlight or enhance this system would augment these connections, with corresponding beneficial results. The administrative structure of the university with its corresponding departments, faculties, etc., would ensure that even within a system that functioned best with multiple connections and unpredictable associations, these important 'nodes' would remain intact. Implementation of Deleuze, therefore, seems possible within the university as a whole.

The question of whether this system of rhizomes would actually be accepted by the 'citizens' is of course highly speculative in nature, and therefore very subjective. It is even possible to estimate a response to a specific ideology? Although difficult, it seems possible to hypothesize that a majority of students and staff would be open to a system that would encourage multiple associations and connections. This form of idea-exchanging is tacitly functioning within the student body already – as mentioned before it is crucial that all students participate in a variety of courses and departments, especially within the earlier years of their studies. Furthermore, there is an implicit approval of conflict or 'rupture' within Deleuze's theories on the rhizome. Deleuze notes: "Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and torturous of lines of n dimensions and broken directions." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 11) This rupture, according to Deleuze, is crucial in the functioning of a rhizome, for it is through these unpredictable breaks that new directions and ideas can be found. Any attempt to prevent these ruptures would prove fruitless, for they cannot be predicted, nor located.

A university can often be a zone of conflict, where competing ideas clash for attention and dissemination. History has demonstrated that frequently political or social upheavals and battles began at, or in association with, universities and their students. Often, attempts to suppress or quell these heated debates only aggravate an already contentious environment, and eventually new zones of conflict are found to continue the argument. Although I would not condone the use of violence, there is nevertheless a

value in these conflicts, and often new perspectives and unheard voices can be found.

It therefore seems possible to conclude that from both the realm of implementation and acceptance, the use of Deleuze's conception of the rhizome seems acceptable within a university environment. Indeed, in many ways a university already functions like a rhizome; certainly this is the case at the University Centre in Ottawa. It may be questioned, that if in fact a university already functions in a rhizome-like manner, would it not be redundant and unnecessary to 'impose' a system over an existing and similar arrangement? What could be gained from referring to Deleuze?

It was through Deleuze's conception of abstraction that provided the initial opportunity to implement his theories regarding the rhizome. Although it was reasonable to compare his system to those already functioning within the university, architecturally this potential was distorted, hidden. By utilizing the revealing capabilities of Deleuze's abstraction, I attempted to demonstrate that the potential within the University Centre to function rhizomatically needed to be explored and brought to the forefront. The axonometric studies of the existing conditions within the investigated spaces were an attempt to show not only the spatial variety, but also the programmatic diversity. Further studies of the potential routes of exploration described the capacity of the building to permit a 'smooth' inhabitation of the building, despite its striated nature.

By abstracting the space in this manner, I sought to reveal the complex nature of the University Centre, a complexity that was suppressed by the architecture. My corresponding investigations thus sought to provide a space that could enhance, not reduce, this complexity. Volumes and programme that were proposed were intentionally located beside existing zones of interaction (lecture hall, cafeteria, agora...) that could augment the inherent open and random groupings of students, faculty, and staff. By opening both these new and existing programmes outwards, I sought to provide a better and more profound understanding of the complex and unpredictable nature that is latent within a university structure.

Naturally, it would be nearly impossible to predict how users would actually function within this proposed space. This is a problem that is unavoidable for all architectural propositions, and thus a certain degree of faith and prediction is demanded with all architects. It is my belief, however, that architecture can provide an impetus for societal exchange and debate, and within a university this type of sharing is fundamental to its proper functioning. Thus while the theories of Deleuze may not be suitable in all instances, and for all architectural projects, within this specific context I believe it is an appropriate match.

A broader question thus remains: How does one determine when a particular philosophical ideation is suitable for a given context and programme? My particular analysis of existing conditions, combined with my impressions of how a university functioned, lead me to determine that the theories of Deleuze were appropriate in this specific instance. Specifically, it was the capacity to view abstraction in a different manner, as a process of revealing rather than an attempt to distil to an inner 'essence' or 'truth' that lead me to approach this project in a particular direction. To 'abstract' a home similarly may not necessarily be the best choice; perhaps it would depend upon other constraints, like the client or the site. Nevertheless, the work and ideas of Deleuze provided without question a useful and fruitful 'foundation' for my analysis and proposed expansion of the University Centre. Perhaps it is thus possible to conclude that although philosophical ideas are certainly beneficial to architecture, those ideas must be considered within the context of the specific environment to which they would be implemented. As the lessons of the experiments of the Russians have taught us, both from an architectural and a political and societal perspective, it is both fruitless and possibly dangerous to simply impose and assume the users will adapt correspondingly. The benefit and potential in architecture lies in its ability to act as a catalyst, to *'stimulate but not dictate.'*

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