INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS WITHIN THE SOVIET ESTONIAN DESIGN IDEOLOGY OF THE LATE SOCIALIST PERIOD, 1965-1988

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Abstract

This thesis argues that a unique design ideology manifested in Soviet Estonia during the Late Socialist period. It was a combination of broader Soviet design ideologies concerned with material practices and the control of production, and Western design influences that were more apparent in Estonia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union and provided aesthetic guidance in a vacuum of Soviet style. This research allows for the first time a determination of the characterising qualities of Estonia's Late Socialist industrial design, as well as provision of a new contextual framework for considering Soviet design ideas more broadly.

To date, studies of Soviet design have focused on object aesthetics, leaving authors who are then faced with the absence of a consistent Soviet style to assume an equally absent Soviet design ideology. However, while it is not necessarily visible in the appearance of products, a tangible Soviet design ideology existed in bureaucratic apparatuses, material practices and accompanying textual materials. This thesis uses oral history and archival research to provide a detailed analysis of the Soviet ideology operating within one cultural monad of the wider USSR. In doing so it breaks away from the emphasis on Russia as the totality of 20th century Soviet socialism to make a first important step toward a more substantial history of Soviet production. Estonia can be understood as a meeting point between two major world design cultures, and from its example we can better understand the characteristics, functioning, and impact of different design ideologies.

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Abbreviations

ARS   Art Products Factory

CP   Communist Party

ERKI   Estonian State Art Institute

ERA   Estonian State Archives

ESSR   Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic

ETDM   Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design

GOST   State Standard for Products

TLÜ   Tallinn University

UCCI   USSR Chamber of Commerce and Industry

USSR   United Soviet Socialist Republics or Soviet Union

VNIITE   All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics

Acknowledgements

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

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1. Introduction

> In the late 1970s, Leonid Brezhnev gave a public talk in a small town. At the end, he asks if anyone in the audience has any questions. An older gentleman raises his hand: "Thank you, tovarisch Brezhnev. I would like to ask: was communism invented by scientists or communists?" Brezhnev is slightly puzzled. After thinking for a moment, he replies that it was probably invented by communists. The elderly man sighs: "I thought so. Scientists would have experimented on dogs first."

This dissident joke, popular in Soviet Estonia during the period of Late Socialism, illustrates prevailing feelings toward the Soviet power. Late Socialism, period situated between the Thaw and the perestroika, was characterised by increasing bureaucracy and centralisation, as well as a growing alienation from Soviet power. This era also marked the foundation of industrial design as a defined discipline in the Socialist Bloc. It thus led to the development of a specific Soviet design economy, consisting not only of mass production and the material practices relating to the profession of industrial design, but also of an intricate control system established by the state and, as a reaction to the latter, an extensive second, hidden economy. Through an analysis of these factors, this thesis studies Estonian industrial designers' position between Eastern and Western influences in order to identify the characteristics of a local design ideology.

After Nikita Khrushchev was removed from his position and the relative freedom of the Thaw was once again replaced by a centralised regime, people's illusions were shattered. Many aspects of Soviet life were perceived as a failing experiment, especially since easier contact with the Western world had provided a glimpse at the living standards and functioning of the West. Design was one of the fields that did not compare well, as consumption was one of the key differences between the Soviet Bloc

and the West. Light industry had barely recovered from the Second World War and had not reached the standards of the pre-war Estonian economy. Besides the obvious problem of deficit, there were also issues with the goods present in stores. Consumers were constantly disappointed that the quality and appearance of everyday objects were much poorer than those of Western-made commodities. Factories struggled to meet the unrealistic targets set by a centralised power unfamiliar with local conditions, and technological disadvantages compromised designers' choices. Despite these issues, Estonian-made products continued to be popular across the Soviet Union. This thesis researches the Soviet Estonian design ideology of this period, focusing on the designers' perspective and their position in relation to what was considered a failing political experiment.

The Soviet design economy, especially the management and operation of design within industry, has not received substantial exploration, yet is an interesting subject that will contribute to better analysis of Soviet culture, economics, politics and society as a whole, offering a case study of a design system alternative to capitalism. Studying the role of a designer provides fascinating insight into the Soviet economy from an individual's point of view, and the use of oral history adds more personalised information to the otherwise anonymous history. Estonia, as one of the smallest former Soviet states with only 1.5 million inhabitants, is well-suited for a case study on defining the Soviet design scene, as the processes that took place in different areas were quite similar in many respects. However, there are interesting side-factors about Soviet Estonian industrial design that gave it a unique nature, such as the close cultural relationship to Finland. Because of this closeness, Western influences are more apparent in Estonia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Additionally, understanding the

processes that took place in the design world in the past will help to better tackle the problems of the present and future.

On the one hand, most designers were employed by factories and subjected to a strict control structure. At the same time, daily life also involved acts of resistance. Rather than adopting a dualistic point of view by contrasting bureaucracy and industrial designers, this thesis studies the aims and practices of both sides in their similarities and conflicts. The research defines the extent to which industrial designers were autonomous in Soviet Estonia and how they depended on political organisations, factory boards and the general public. By no means should this thesis be seen as an attempt to cover all the material practices of Soviet Estonian industrial designers, as the range varies too greatly to be fully describable. However, this research does aim to cover the wider tendencies of the Soviet Estonian design economy.

1.1 Research questions

This thesis explores the relationship between Estonian industrial designers and the Soviet power during the Late Socialist period in order to determine the ideological qualities of Soviet Estonian factory design. The purpose is twofold: to map the overall state of the Estonian design economy in itself and in relation to Soviet and Western contexts, and to identify the relationships between Estonian designers and state interests, both in the context of their mutual dependency and in 'counter aspirations'. The objects produced in Soviet Estonian factories often resembled or even imitated those from Western countries, but they were made in very different conditions. Soviet

Estonian designs were submitted to various bureaucratic structures, all of which sought to make design compatible with official ideology.

1. How were Estonian industrial designers positioned within the Late Socialist political economy?

Firstly, this thesis contextualises the position of Estonian industrial designers within the Late Socialist political economy, determining how exactly they functioned within the design ideology. To achieve this, the research explores and compares the different roles and practices of designers in Soviet Estonia. The main elements analysed are the functioning of design education, the role of designers within factories, more important design exhibitions and the second economy of industrial design. Through this exploration the thesis draws out the characteristics of the profession of industrial design in Soviet Estonia and its position between different ideological influences.

2. How was Soviet Estonian industrial economy structured?

Secondly, this research defines the relationship between the Soviet power and Soviet Estonian industrial design by mapping the different apparatuses in charge. To broadly sketch out the situation, there was a high level of bureaucracy in Soviet production, everything had to be approved by appointed authorities. Each design that received approval from the board of the factory had to pass review by the Art Council of the Ministry of Local Industry.[1] However, as this thesis shows, the overall bureaucratic

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[1] A.-M. Laev, "Klaasi Ajaloost Ja Klaasikunstnikest [About the History of Glass and Glass Artists]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: Information series] 1974-11 (1974): 14.

structure and process was much more complicated and subject to the oppressive systems of control by the Communist Party.

3. Which influences and ideologies was Soviet Estonian industrial design mostly shaped by?

Thirdly, this thesis identifies the different influences and ideologies present Soviet Estonian industrial design, both in terms of aesthetics and material practices. An important aspect of this is linking Estonian industrial design with the timelines and geographies of global design trends, which greatly influenced designers. By the late 1960s, Estonia had re-established connections to the Western world and although the flow of information was still filtered and censored by the authorities, the West was less of a mystery. Western design magazines and other sources were also distributed via the Ministry of Local Industry and the factories themselves. An interesting subject is the question of ideology and how exactly design mirrored it. This thesis argues that while the aesthetic appearance of Estonian products was similar to Western goods, the practices of production and distribution still add a different ideological dimension. Estonian designers were constantly mediating between three different influences, Soviet ideology, Western culture, and the changing construct of Estonian national identity. This thesis studies how these different conflicts and relations manifested in design and design ideology.

4. Is it possible to identify 'socialist design' as a style?

Stemming from these aims, the thesis inquires into the qualities of 'socialist design' in

the post-Thaw period, as seen from the Estonian context. What exactly adds a 'socialist' dimension to design, and how did it manifest in the borderline socialism of Estonia? Located between East and West, Estonia constitutes an interesting case study. Historically, Estonia did not become part of the Russian Empire until 1710 and even then its culture was mostly shaped by the local German élite. However, Moscow's control added a new set of influences. This thesis proves that while aesthetically it is impossible to identify 'Soviet design' as a style, it is possible to view it through modes of production and general context.

1.2 The scope of the thesis

Despite its small size, Estonia generated a variety of local industrial produce during the Soviet era. This thesis is limited to researching industrial design produced in factories, generally the smaller everyday objects that were present in most households, such as kitchenware, decorative objects and souvenirs. The reason is that smaller objects were mass-produced in larger quantities and thus played a larger role in everyday Soviet life. Also, since they depended less on economic or technical considerations than larger apparatuses, designers had more liberty in their creation. The key problem addressed in here is the relationship between Soviet power and the designer, irrespective of the specific factory, which is why the technical process of mass production itself is discussed only briefly.

Most factories considered in this thesis are located in Tallinn, Estonia's capital. There were also manufacturers in smaller towns who mostly produced textiles or building

materials – Keila, a small town with approximately 10,000 inhabitants, manufactured both. However, the designers and products of smaller towns do not often feature in contemporaneous publications, unlike the larger factories in Tallinn. Thus, their contribution to the wider scene of Soviet Estonia was arguably not as notable. Here, the small size of Estonia facilitated this research. As there was only one clearly defined centre of industrial design, where most of the factories and the Estonian National Institute of Art were located, this thesis does not include any comparative analysis between the different centres.

The study begins in the year 1965, which marked the start of a new period in the Estonian political economy. In 1965, Brezhnev re-established centralised control over the economies of different Soviet states. During Khrushchev's Thaw, each Soviet state had, albeit limited, control of all its factories. During the new system, a number of Soviet Estonian factories were submitted under the control of the Ministry of Local Industry, while others were under the direction of Union-wide ministries. Therefore, 1965 can be seen as the beginning of a new industrial system.[2] 1988 was chosen as the end of the period under discussion as it was a year of large reorganisations in Estonia's economy. The factories managed by Soviet Estonian ministries were centralised under a newly founded establishment called 'Estonian Industry'. While 1988 does not yet mark independence for the Estonian economy, it was certainly a step away from Soviet rule and the beginning of a new era that brought new problems. It is also the year the Ministry of Local Industry ceased to exist.

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[2] The diagram for the system is in section 4.3.

1.3 Motivation

I first became interested in the subject of design ideology and the designer's role within it as I was researching Soviet Estonian factory glass for my undergraduate dissertation at the Estonian Academy of Art. My main sources were interviews, as they offered unique insight to an otherwise censored system. My Master's thesis at the University of Brighton was written on the relations between Soviet Estonian and Finnish factory glass in the 1960s, also focusing on designers' roles. As it often is when researching Soviet material culture, politics was always in the background, shaping more or less every process that took place in the factory. While I tried to outline the basic hierarchy of power in my Master's thesis, the actual schematics were much too complicated and diverse to be treated as a secondary subject, hence it became the idea for my Doctoral thesis.

As it has been over twenty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideological stigmas surrounding Soviet socialism have alleviated, facilitating research and analysis. At the same time, Estonia and other former Soviet states are still being defined by their Soviet past. For example, in June 2014, British newspaper *The Guardian* formed a new global news network called 'New East', grouping all former Soviet states under a common denominator. Soviet design objects are being collected both within the former Socialist Bloc and in the West, demonstrating a general interest in the subject. Researching Soviet industrial design is important for understanding current processes in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia, both in design and in everyday life.

This thesis acts as both a history of Soviet Estonian design and as a history of Soviet industrial design, using Estonia as a case study. Histories of the industrial design of the Soviet Union in general risk overlooking nuances within the bloc, due to the large scope of the subject. During Late Socialism, the Soviet Union extended from the Baltic countries to the Far East and had a quarter of a billion inhabitants. Thus, choosing one former state as an exemplary case study and comparing it to other Soviet republics offers better possibilities for analysing the Soviet system and the local variations within it. This method also helps avoid the russocentric point of view, better focusing on the relationship between Russia, other Soviet states, and the West. Estonia is well suited for a case study due to its small size, as the different processes of politics and design are easier to grasp and analyse. As a country with strong geographical and cultural relations to Northern and Western Europe, Estonia offers valuable material for researching Western influences in the Soviet Union. As the Russian government's ban on Western goods in August 2014 proves, the ideological tension between Western products and those manufactured in the former Soviet Union still exists. Thus, researching Soviet design and production ideologies provides additional methods for analysing contemporary politics and culture.

1.4 Sources

Oral history is the central method of this research as it allows information to be acquired that is otherwise not available in censored Soviet publications. Certain details on the daily practices of industrial designers would have been unavailable through any other source, and ideology is in its nature a sensitive subject, especially in a totalitarian society. Most interviewees were active industrial designers during Late Socialism and a

few had roles in the administrative system. Thus, this research is able to combine different viewpoints. As the Soviet Estonian design economy and the role of Soviet industrial designers in general is an almost unresearched subject, all interviewees were very helpful and willing to share their story. To verify information obtained from interviews, archival research is also used. In addition to studying contemporaneous administrative documents, research also involves products and promotional materials. Thus, strategies used in deciphering different archives and other written and material sources range from interpreting bureaucratic letter exchanges to examining products. As industrial designers rarely feature in written sources, archival research offers mostly contextual information necessary to fully unravel the interviews.

As supporting sources, this research uses contemporaneous magazines and newspapers, most importantly the magazine of Ministry of Local Industry and art magazines and newspapers such as *Kunst* [Art], *Kunst ja kodu* [Art and home] and *Sirp ja Vasar* [Sickle and hammer]. All of these publications were censored by the Soviet power and therefore require a critical approach; important facts and claims were verified during interviews. However, while the information regarding ideology was naturally sensitive, other facts were accurate and presented in an objective manner. Thus, a lot of important details were acquired from these publications.

1.5 Chapter outline

This thesis is divided into ten chapters, moving from the concept of design ideology onto the wider design economy and finishing with an overview of Soviet design in the

post-Soviet context. The literature review in the second chapter analyses the evolution of studies into Soviet Estonian design. The collapse of the Soviet Union is used as a breaking point in discourses from both sides of the Iron Curtain. As the subject of Soviet industrial designers has not been studied more extensively, the literature reviewed here mainly focuses on the wider problems of industrial design. The sources include both materials on the production of Soviet industrial design in general and on Soviet Estonian design.

The third chapter analyses the methodologies used in this thesis. The main method was oral history. Daily practices of industrial designers would have not been sufficiently described in other sources and totalitarian politics as a subject was censored in written sources. For verification, this thesis employs archival research as a second primary source. In addition to studying contemporaneous administrative documents, research also involved products and product catalogues. Conceptually, this thesis relies on Foucault's theories on history and power to study the complexities of relationships between individuals, objects, and the administrative power in Soviet Estonia.

The fourth chapter proves that during Late Socialism, the role of Soviet ideology in Estonia had been reduced to a habit, while information about the West was increasingly available. The chapter opens up the theoretical framework of the thesis, exploring everyday life in Soviet Estonia, introducing Estonia's history during Late Socialism, and positioning it between Soviet and Western influences. Finally, the chapter studies the chronology of industrial design as a specifically Late Socialist phenomenon in Soviet and Estonian contexts.

The fifth chapter argues that the textual aspects of Soviet Estonian design ideology was poorly defined. As the role of Communist ideas in general diminished, Western influences were important in forming Soviet Estonian industrial design. The discussion of design ideology itself is twofold. Firstly, the chapter introduces the concept of design ideology and the theory around it in Soviet Estonia, with special attention given to the language used in Soviet industrial philosophies and the relationships to Western design theories. Secondly, the chapter explores the actual functioning of the design system and its consequences, explaining the poor organisation of both the administrative and ideological aspects of Soviet industrial design.

The sixth chapter argues that while the factory was an ideologically charged location during Late Socialism, new products were assessed mostly on an economic basis. Besides theoretical debate on the subject, the chapter presents the factories functioning in Soviet Estonia and their inner mechanics. It introduces the history mass production in Soviet Estonia and overviews the main light industry factories functioning there. A separate section introduces the administrative process of taking new designs into production. In order to position factory designers within the Soviet factory context, the chapter includes a discussion on the everyday life at a factory and the ideologies manifested in a Soviet factory as a symbol.

The seventh chapter demonstrates that the control imposed on designers was mainly economic. Secondly, it claims that there was an inherent clash in the roles taught to industrial designers at the State Art Institute and propagated through exhibitions, and those imposed upon them by the Soviet power through factories. While designers had great financial possibilities for executing projects for exhibitions, their work in factories

was bound by economic considerations. The chapter overviews design education in Soviet Estonia, and studies the designer's role within the factory setting and in relationship to the Estonian public. Besides the official aspects of design as an occupation, the chapter also explores some side-activities, such as different exhibitions and the functioning of the second economy in Soviet Estonia.

The eighth chapter demonstrates three clashing ideologies manifesting simultaneously in Soviet Estonian industrial design, where Soviet influences were mostly located in power and production systems, and the other two – Western influences and constructions of national identity – mainly in visual aspects. The chapter analyses the different ideologies as they manifested in the aesthetics and material practices of design. The aim is not to make sharp distinctions between ideologies, but rather introduce them through their role in the Soviet system. Soviet Estonian industrial design is presented as a meeting point of several different ideologies that occasionally overlap, occasionally complement each other, and occasionally contradict each other.

The ninth chapter argues that the assessment of Soviet Estonian design largely depended on whatever point of comparison was chosen by the spectator. Thus, Estonians, who tended to compare Estonian design to Western products, were more critical than Westerners or visitors from other Soviet republics. However, in the contemporary context, viewpoints are altered by nostalgia. Finally, the research demonstrates that this new type of post-socialist nostalgia should not be seen as a desire to return to the past, but rather as a mechanism for making peace with history.

Ultimately, this thesis provides a first analysis of the relationships between industrial

designers and Soviet power, using Estonia as a case study. Its small size and unique proximity to Scandinavia set Estonia apart from most other Soviet states, and thus the Western influences in design are even more noticeable than in the majority of the Soviet Bloc. Therefore, the study of Soviet Estonian industrial designers offers not only an understanding of the profession within this difficult ideological situation, but also of the wider ideological influences present in local design.

2. Literature review

Design history outside of developed Western culture is largely in the process of establishing itself. While Soviet visual arts have been a relatively popular subject, especially where dissident art is concerned, the more collaborative and less romantic Soviet industrial design has so far failed to draw similar attention. Within Socialist design history, other parts of the Eastern Bloc, especially Hungary, Poland and East Germany, have been researched more extensively. One of the main reasons for this inequality is accessibility: only a small number of former Soviet states are considered democratic according to Western values. Another issue is the accessibility and existence of the sources themselves, as Soviet censorship raises additional issues in interpreting information. Especially the interrelationship between politics and industrial design is a difficult subject and has not been studied extensively.

The political economy of design in the Soviet Union has not been thoroughly researched, although certain authors have touched on the subject, for example Raymond Hutchings.[3] Politics and design are often treated separately, especially when it comes to matters of economy and production. The literature reviewed has been divided into four categories: materials published during the Cold War and after, both on the general subject of the Socialist Bloc and literature on Estonia specifically. The reasons for chronological division are access to materials, as most Western scholars gained access to Soviet archives only after the Soviet Union's collapse, and the ideological charge of the environment, as at least Soviet contemporaneous authors were arguably censored.

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[3] Raymond Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence (London: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs by Oxford University Press, 1976).

2.1 Western sources during the Cold War

As the Cold War made access to Soviet industrial designers and their objects difficult for Western scholars, few Western design historians studied Soviet design history during that period. However, some economists and political scientists published books and articles on the Soviet system, mostly in the late 1980s. While these authors did not discuss design history, their accounts are still valuable for this thesis in terms of understanding historical context and politics. Industrial design was a relatively new subject in the Soviet context and thus publications on that subject were mostly limited to journal articles and essays. Although not very sizeable, they still provide interesting accounts of Soviet Estonian industrial design. However, as the Cold War was highly politicised on both sides, all literature, both Western and Soviet, must be treated with caution.

Raymond Hutchings has produced a number of significant publications on the Soviet design system, but he is often overlooked in recent publications. Originally specialising in economics, his perspective is occasionally different from authors specialising in design or social history; however, Hutchings's detailed accounts of Soviet industry and industrial design were valuable in this research. He is one of the authors who discussed the notion of Soviet design ideology the most thoroughly, as well as the status of design in Soviet society. Hutchings focuses on the role of bureaucracy in producing design, emphasising that one of the main reasons for the poor state of Soviet design was a lack of interest from above. According to him: "In a centralised system, inertia or deliberate oversight at the top can be almost as effective in retarding processes as more active

obstruction."[4] Although Hutchings's theories on Soviet industrial design have been criticised, most notably by Anatole Senkevitch Jr, most criticism is directed towards his definitions of industrial design rather than his discussion of Soviet design ideology.[5] It should also be noted that the criticism is mostly directed towards his articles, which due to their smaller scope overlooked certain problems analysed in books.

An example of Western authors studying Soviet politics and economy is *From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: domestic affairs and Soviet foreign policy*, edited by Hans-Joachim Veen and published in 1987.[6] The book features several articles on different subjects ranging from industrial development to literature. Most articles present comparative data between the Soviet Union and different parts of the Western world, focusing on questions of economy. Certain essays on politics made some exaggerated claims, for example Wolfgang Kasack declares that Soviet power was inherently hostile towards literature, as the author is always searching for multiple points of view, but the Soviet system only tolerated one.[7] In that generalising claim, Kasack fails to acknowledge the apolitical genres of Soviet literature.

Certain articles by economists tend to judge the Soviet economy by Western values. For example, Maria Elisabeth Ruban points out that Khrushchev did not want to see private motorisation on a Western scale and hoped that an optimal public transport network and

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[4] Ibid., 145.

[5] Anatole Senkevitch, Jr., "Art, Architecture, and Design: A Commentary," Slavic Review 37, no. 4 (1978).

[6] Hans-Joachim Veen, From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987).

[7] Wolfgang Kasack, "Literature between State and Opposition," in From Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Hamburg: Berg, 1987). 163

efficient taxi system would have made private cars unnecessary.[8] However, in spite of

emphasising this fact, Ruban still states:

> "The current annual production of 1.3 million private cars, which is to rise to 1.5 million by 1985, is not nearly enough to meet demand, and the waiting lists are many years long, despite extremely high prices. A small Moskvich car costs nearly 7,500 rubles after the latest price increases in 1981, or forty-three gross months' wages for an average blue or white collar worker."[9]

In the Soviet Union, 6% of all private households had a car, whereas in GDR and

Czechoslovakia it was 40%.[10] However, Ruban herself points out earlier that by

Communist standards, owning a private car was not considered a necessity.

Nevertheless, although some conclusions and criticisms may be unfair, these articles

still provide valuable data.

2.2 Contemporaneous Soviet Estonian sources

As mentioned, contemporaneous Soviet Estonian sources on industrial design were

mostly limited to journal articles. Information on industrial design can be found in

different types of journals, depending on whether the article emphasises artistic design

or the production of goods. As few articles focus on the relations between design and

mass production, the scope of materials further emphasises conflict between designers

and industry. During most of the period in question, articles published in art magazines

examined almost solely the aesthetic qualities of design products, without paying

attention to problems of mass production. A good example is an article on Soviet

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[8] Maria Elisabeth Ruban, "The Consumer Economy," in From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), 17.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

Estonian glass written in 1971 by Eda Liin. Although providing detailed information on contemporary Estonian glass artists and designers, the author compares unique art objects and mass production in the same text and only briefly mentions the poor conditions of factory glass production in Estonia in general.[11] Debates on economic and social aspects of industrial design became more frequent only in the 1980s, as the discipline had established itself more securely. Meanwhile, magazines focusing on economic issues stress the number of new goods or details relating to bureaucracy of the process of production, minimising the role of industrial designers.

The magazine most involved with questions of mass production was that of the Ministry of Local Industry, *Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooni-seeria* [Local industry: information series]. It was intended, above all, for people directly involved in production. The magazine was mostly circulated in factories and the general public rarely read it; nor was it actually intended for wider circulation, as it mostly contained specialist knowledge about new technologies, relevant to a small number of people. Therefore, it contained a lot of information that would not have been found suitable for mainstream media: even direct criticism against factories and occasionally even mild reproach towards the system itself. Besides that, the magazine proved valuable for its detailed technical descriptions, presented with surprisingly little Soviet propaganda. J. Vaher, the head constructor of the Norma factory, wrote a particularly interesting account on Soviet mass production in 1967.[12] In it, Vaher defines the different strategies of creating new designs for mass production, accusing Soviet Estonian factories for copying Western products and not involving industrial designers in the process. As the magazine

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[11] Eda Liin, "Kaasaja Eesti Klaasist [on Contemporary Estonian Glass]," Kunst 1 (1971): 34.
[12] J. Vaher, "Kunstilise Konstrueerimise Probleemidest [About the Problems of Artistic Construction]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1967-2 (1967).

was not intended for the general public, it occasionally published such sensitive materials, offering valuable insight for the research of bureaucracy.

The two art magazines that included industrial art in their range of topics were *Kunst* [Art] and *Kunst ja kodu* [Art and home]. *Kunst* was mainly an art magazine, but also included information on design, albeit often treated as a subcategory of applied arts. However, especially in the 1980s, *Kunst* also published several theoretical texts on the essence and purpose of design. *Kunst ja kodu* was a do-it-yourself magazine, but its main purpose was educating the public aesthetically. It published instructions for do-it-yourself projects designed by leading artists and designers, combined with texts on aesthetics. Especially starting from the 1970s the magazine featured extensive picture material on the latest trends in interiors as well as texts on mass production and industrial design. All in all, the magazine offers a good overview of aesthetic theories circulating in the Western parts of the Socialist Bloc.

Besides magazines, a valuable source of information on Soviet Estonian industrial design was the weekly newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* [Sickle and hammer], which discussed all forms of culture, from film and theatre to design. According to Estonian media historians Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, censorship allowed culture journalism more freedom than other journalistic fields.[13] Thus, the newspaper occasionally explored more sensitive subjects than other publications. *Sirp ja Vasar* was extremely popular and circulated widely. As a study conducted in 1976–77 by the Tartu University demonstrated, approximately 60% of Estonians with secondary education regularly read

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[13] Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, "Sirp Enne Ja Nüüd [Sirp Then and Now]," Sirp, 30/09/2010.

Sirp ja Vasar.[14] The popularity of the newspaper was consistent: in 1984 approximately half of Estonians with secondary education were regular readers.[15] A third of readers managed to get a subscription, the others either bought issues separately or acquired the newspaper elsewhere.[16] For example, it was possible to either borrow *Sirp ja Vasar* from neighbours or read it at a library.

Sirp ja Vasar published various philosophical and aesthetic texts on matters of design and material culture, both by Soviet and Western authors. The newspaper also hosted several lengthy debates between representatives of different fields on various issues of design, mass production and consumption. One particularly interesting debate on contemporaneous ideas of industrial design was organised in April 1976 with the participation of the head editor Eduard Tinn, professor Bruno Tomberg and several artists, interior designers and industrial designers.[17] The range of subjects varied from the general concept of design to the more specific Soviet Estonian context, considering both production and consumption. Because of the large number of participants and wide scope of questions, the debate presents an excellent panorama of different ideas within Soviet Estonian industrial design.

2.3 Post-Cold War sources on Socialist design

In the post-Cold War period, the scope and variety of literature on Soviet industrial design has diversified. The relations between Soviet industrial design and Soviet politics

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "Disain [Design]," Sirp ja Vasar, 14/05/1976.

along with Communist ideology are, nonetheless, unresearched. Additionally, the position of industrial designers in Soviet factories has not been studied thoroughly. There has been thorough research into Soviet consumption, most notably by David Crowley, who studies socialist style and consumption.[18] However, most sources focus on either Central European Socialism or Russia, other Soviet states having received less attention. More specifically, Soviet Estonian industrial design has not been researched extensively. However, a few historians such as Andres Kurg and Kai Lobjakas have published works on this subject in recent years, expanding knowledge on different practices and influences both within Soviet Estonian design and decorative arts and the relating discourses.

One author who has looked deeply into Soviet consumption is Victor Buchli, most notably in his book *An archaeology of socialism*.[19] The book is remarkable already with regard to its methodology: Buchli applies archaeology, a method usually reserved for earlier periods, to researching 20th century history. Buchli's strength lies in a thorough analysis of the discussions and problems of everyday Soviet philosophy. While he mostly deals with buildings and environments, his ideas and observations on material culture in general are applicable to other fields of design. *An archaeology of socialism* provides interesting accounts on the relationships between people and Soviet power. While concentrating mostly on consumption as the aspect of design that involves the most people, Buchli offers a fascinating insight to Soviet life. The main notion that sets his research apart from others is his attention to detail in treating different ideologies

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[18] David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970 (London: V&A, 2008).
[19] Victor Buchli, An Archaeology of Socialism (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

and Soviet aesthetics.

The East-West polarity is the most common approach employed, with Western capitalism as the main point of comparison to Soviet communism. David F. Crew focuses on the relationship between East and West Germany as one of the main meeting points of the two systems.[20] Crew emphasises West Germany's influence over East Germany and argues that not only did the former provide the most important standard by which the latter measured the quality of material life, elements of West German capitalism also penetrated the socialism of East Germany.[21] As the extent of influence the West had on the Eastern Bloc has often been neglected, Crew's research helps to fill a void in the discourse.

David Crowley has also researched the East-West polarity, but by balancing production and consumption and focusing on broader aesthetic and political contexts.[22] His main focus lies, however, not with the Soviet Union but rather with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Crowley mainly concentrates on examples of modernist style. Rather than finding ways in which the Soviet Union differed from the West, as is often the approach amongst scholars, Crowley analyses the similarities in style and consumption. In his view, since the Thaw, the Western parts of the Eastern Bloc, such as Poland, were classifiable as mass consumer societies, although differing from the West.[23] However,

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[20] David F. Crew, "Consuming Germany in the Cold War: Consumption and National Identity in East and West Germany, 1949–1989," in Consuming Germany in the Cold War, ed. David F. Crew (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

[21] Ibid., 15.

[22] Crowley and Pavitt, Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970.

[23] David Crowley, "Warsaw's Shops, Stalinism and the Thaw," in Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 44.

while Crowley focuses on the consumer's point of view, my research mainly concentrates on that of designers. Therefore, my conclusions are occasionally somewhat different, as Soviet effects on production was not always the same as those on consumption. The project that brought the most public attention to David Crowley's work was the exhibition Cold War Modern at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008, for which an extensive catalogue was published. Earlier, in 2000, David Crowley and Susan E. Reid had also co-edited a book on a similar subject, *Style and socialism: Modernity and material culture in post-war Eastern Europe*, which included several authors discussing different Eastern Bloc countries.

Iurii Gerchuk tackles aesthetics in the Soviet Union, focusing on the era of Khrushchev's reign.[24] He, much like Crowley, also treats the question of modernism, but he emphasises the role of Soviet and Socialist ideology in the propagation of the new style. Gerchuk's experience of living in the Soviet Union sets him apart from other authors. Mainly, Gerchuk acknowledges and emphasises the variations between different regions of the Soviet Union, drawing attention to their interrelations and the influences they had on each other. Amongst other ideas, he addresses the peculiar status the Baltic States had within the Soviet Union as the bearers of European cultural values.[25] One of his main theories this thesis adopts is the relation between modernism and Soviet ideology: while usually a style is developed according to ideology, Gerchuk emphasises that in the Soviet context it was the opposite. Modernism already existed; all that was necessary was to mould socialist design theories according to it.

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[24] Iurii Gerchuk, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the Ussr (1954–64)," Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 82.

One of the most detailed articles written about the Soviet design system is "VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design" by Dmitry Azrikan, published in *Design Issues*.[26] As Azrikan has lived and worked in the system he describes, the general writing style is quite intimate and there are personal accounts that could not be found in official archives. Besides looking at the general scene, Azrikan also emphasises the role of individual people working in VNIITE. The main focus is on a young designer, Yuri Soloviev, who played a large role in founding and developing VNIITE and subsequently the entire Soviet industrial design system. Azrikan differentiates between the initial intentions and the final outcome, juxtaposing the forward-thinking designers to the backwards politics of the Communist Party. However, he has managed to avoid falling into the clichés of 'heroes versus villains', so common in histories of totalitarian states. The aim of the article is rather to provide possibilities for improving design economies in the contemporary capitalist world. Or, as written by Azrikan himself: "We really need to create something which will allow us to change the rules. We should learn from VNIITE."[27] The article is extremely valuable because of its honest account of the functioning of a Soviet bureaucratic design institution, combining personal histories with detailed research and facts and precisely mapping the structure and intentions of VNIITE.

While most authors discuss socialism by employing the same criteria as for assessing contemporary capitalist societies, mostly focusing on the consumer, Boris Groys in his book *The Communist Postscript* proposes a different approach, concentrating on the

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[26] Dmitry Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," Design Issues 15, no. 3 (1999).
[27] Ibid.: 77.

philosophy behind politics.[28] Instead of employing the usual paradigms for assessing the Soviet Union as a political system, Groys looks at it with an interesting mixture of nostalgia and leftism, finding new angles to old problems. As explained by his translator, Thomas H. Ford, the book is "both a revision of standard accounts of the history of the Soviet Union and a philosophical renewal of the idea of communism."[29] Groys's importance in the context of this thesis is his willingness to see communism in a different light and use new criteria for assessing it. Instead of plainly observing how well contemporary capitalist values were represented in the Soviet system, Groys acknowledges that one of its peculiarities was not simply trying to apply a new political system, but also a new moral system, a new set of values. This question is important also in terms of this thesis: the relation between ideology and design, which 'came first', and how they influenced one another.

In addition to the already published literature, a number of interesting doctoral theses are emerging in various universities. Yulia Karpova is writing a thesis titled "Designers' socialism: The aesthetic turn in post-Stalinist Russia" at the Central European University. She has also published an article on a similar subject as this thesis, but set in Post-Stalinist Russia: "Accommodating 'design': Introducing the Western concept into Soviet art theory in the 1950s–60s."[30] Tom Cubbin at the University of Sheffield is exploring how experimental Soviet design practice was introduced in the early 1960s and adapted to the new realities of the 1970s. Besides the above-mentioned Soviet-centred theses, others are researching Central European Socialist countries. At

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[28] Groys, The Communist Postscript (London: Verso, 2009).

[29] Ibid., vii.

[30] Yulia Karpova, "Accommodating 'Design': Introducing the Western Concept into Soviet Art Theory in the 1950s–60s," European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire 20, no. 4 (2013).

the Royal College of Art, Rebecca Bell's thesis explores craft and design production in Czechoslovakia from the 1940s to 1960s, focusing on practices located in state institutional contexts. Katarzyna Jeżowska at the University of Oxford researches the exhibition politics in late socialist Poland.

While there are a number of interesting studies published on the subject of Soviet and Socialist design, they still represent relatively few aspects of Soviet and socialist industrial design. So far, Central European Socialist countries, most notably Hungary, East Germany and Poland, have been researched the most thoroughly. Studies on the Soviet Union have mostly either concentrated on Russia or tried to embrace the entire Soviet Bloc. However, the latter approach still risks being centred on Russia as the largest and most dominant Soviet state. The other, more peripheral states have not received equal attention, nor has their relationship to Russia been studied in depth. In contemporary history of Soviet industrial design, there is also an absence of an exhaustive analysis of the design economy. Few authors have attempted to systematically map the design system, where bureaucracy and ideological control played an important role.

2.4 Contemporary sources on Soviet Estonian history

One of the main factors distinguishing this thesis from other contemporary research on Soviet Estonian design and industry is the use of oral history as a main methodology. There have been some books employing oral history for introducing different aspects of Soviet Estonian life, but they present collected stories without comments and make no

claim to academic contribution. Two examples relevant to this study stand out, *Nõukogude aeg ja Eesti inimene* [Soviet time and Estonians][31] and *Kui kergetööstus oli suur tööstus* [When light industry was large industry].[32] The first is a collection of stories about Soviet Estonian everyday life, sent in response to a request in a major newspaper *Postimees* in 2004. The second is more specific in its nature, presenting accounts from various people who were active in the textile industry during the Soviet period. Although both books qualify as pastime reading rather than academic history, they also contain a good amount of valuable picture material collected from archives.

While Soviet Estonian industrial design economy has not been researched thoroughly, it is no exception in the wider field of Soviet Estonian studies. Soviet Estonian administrative systems, especially where politics are involved, have in general not been studied to a greater extent. One exception is the research body of Kaljo-Olev Veskimägi, whose specialty is the study of censorship. His main work is *Nõukogude unelaadne elu: tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed* [the Soviet dreamlike life: censorship in Soviet Estonia and its masters].[33] This research stands out because of its incredibly detailed presentation of archival research and clever conclusions. As Veskimägi was briefly active in control over libraries, he himself had inside experience of the subject.

Soviet Estonian design is only now beginning to be researched. More extensive work

[31] Enno Tammer, Nõukogude Aeg Ja Eesti Inimene [Soviet Time and Estonians] (Tallinn: Tammerraamat, 2012).

[32] Karl Kello and Mati Laos, Kui Kergetööstus Oli Suur Tööstus [When Light Industry Was Large Industry] (Tallinn: Majandusühenduste Liit, 2011).

[33] Kaljo-Olev Veskimägi, Nõukogude Unelaadne Elu: Tsensuur Eesti Nsv-S Ja Tema Peremehed [the Soviet Dreamlike Life: Censorship in Soviet Estonia and Its Masters] (Tallinn: Tallinna Raamatutrükikoda, 1996).

has been done on the history of architecture, mainly by Andres Kurg, who has also touched the subject of interior design.[34] In his research, he parallels architecture, art and design, observing their links and common denominators. Kurg's main focus lies in the 1970s, the first notions of the decline of modernism and the emergence of postmodernism. He mostly considers interiors and their design as a symbolic privatisation of the machine-made mass housing.[35] As his attention is mostly on the interior as an entity with symbolic connotations, he concentrates on broader problems, not product analysis. In 2014, Kurg presented his doctoral thesis, Boundary disruptions: Late-Soviet transformations in art, space and subjectivity in Tallinn 1968–1979 at the Estonian Academy of Arts. As explained by Kurg himself:

> "Revisiting the notion of unofficial art and its association with the private sphere in the Soviet period, my work has argued for an alternative model for understanding the practices of the artists and architects in the 1970s. I have questioned the relationship between the separate spheres in the context of modernizing Soviet society and proposed the border between the private and the public to be porous and unstable."[36]

Thus, Andres Kurg's thesis researches the relationship of public and private spheres in Soviet Estonian society. While, similarly to this thesis, Kurg explores the notion of modernisation and the material practices, he mostly concentrates on private practices outside of the controlled factory space.

Karin Paulus has studied the extent of copying Western designs in Soviet Estonian factories, a practice that this thesis refers to. Her dissertation, presented at the Estonian Academy of Arts in 2001, concentrates on the case of Eero Aarnio's cult chair

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[34] Andres Kurg, "Empty White Space: Home as a Total Work of Art During the Late-Soviet Period," Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture 2 (2011).

[35] Ibid.: 50.

[36] Andres Kurg, Boundary Disruptions: Late-Soviet Transformations in Art, Space and Subjectivity in Tallinn 1968–1979 [Segilöödud Piirid: Hilisnõukogude Muutused Kunstis, Ruumis Ja Subjektsuses Tallinnas Aastatel 1968–1979] (Ph.D. diss: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2014), 80.

"V.S.O.P." and its copy produced in the Soviet Estonian factory Kooperaator.[37] Her focus is thus to an extent similar to this thesis, the ideological aspects of Western stylistics in Soviet Estonian context and the scope of cultural contacts between Estonia and Scandinavia. However, while this research studies the role of designers within this ideological process, Paulus writes about the opposite, the exclusion of designers in the interest of conveying a propagandistic message.

The Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design, especially their current director Kai Lobjakas, have also researched Soviet Estonian industrial design, mostly in connection to their exhibitions. The latest publication during the time of finishing this thesis was *Between art and industry: The Art Products Factory*. [38] As an exhibition catalogue one of the important contributions the publication makes to Soviet Estonian design history is an extensive picture archive, including photos of both the objects and the production process. Secondly, the book contains thorough research into archives of written materials, compiled into histories of different studios of the Art Products Factory. As the catalogue studies, amongst other subjects, the administrative issues of Soviet Estonian industrial design, it was a valuable resource of information for this thesis. However, the scope and emphasis of the catalogue are different, focusing on the relations between art and industry.

In addition to these more specific studies, Estonian design has also been included in works on wider subjects. Krista Kodres has compiled an extensive history of

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[37] Karin Paulus, "Eero Aarnio Karikatool Ja Nõukogude Eesti [Eero Aarnio's Chair and Soviet Estonia]" (Estonian Academy of Art, 2001).

[38] Kai Lobjakas, ed. Between Art and Industry. The Art Products Factory (Tallinn: Eesti Tarbekunsti- ja Disainimuuseum, 2014).

architecture and interior design, *Ilus maja, kaunis ruum*.[39] Although her book is mostly intended as a world history, Kodres has included a local history, thus establishing a dialogue between Estonian and global styles. Another ambitious project, currently in process, is the compilation of a complete Estonian art history, of which certain volumes have already been published, including Part I of Volume 6, which is dedicated to the Soviet period.[40] In addition to different fields in the fine arts, the anthology also comprises architecture, interior design, fine arts, and in modern times, also product design. In spite of the large amount of research presented within those studies, they still include interesting fieldwork on Soviet Estonian industrial design.

Conclusions

In the systematisation of different literature on Socialist design, an important dividing moment is the collapse of the Soviet Union. Books and articles published before 1991 tend to have a propagandistic message relevant to the country of origin. Literature originating from the Soviet Union has naturally passed a thorough censorship and thus should be treated with wariness. Naturally, not all Soviet sources provide false information, as censorship largely depends on the exact subject on hand and its ideological and political charge. However, in the political context where this thesis operates, caution in handling sources and literature is necessary. Contemporaneous Western sources, on the other hand, often tend to exaggerate the deficiencies caused by

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[39] Krista Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space] (Tallinn: Prisma Prindi Kirjastus, 2001).

[40] Jaak Kangilaski, Krista Kodres, and Eneken Helme, *Eesti kunsti ajalugu. 6, I osa, 1940-1991 = History of Estonian Art. 6, Part I, 1940-1991* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2013).

the system and make generalisations throughout the Soviet Bloc. Also, as the Soviet Union was not completely accessible to Western researchers, not all information is fully accurate. After 1991, the contrast between Eastern and Western literature virtually disappears. Therefore, the divide in post-Cold War literature rather serves as overview of the research carried out by two formerly opposing sides, not a suggestion as if the two different categories should be approached differently.

Due to the political charge of the subject, this research had to carefully evaluate literature based on its provenance. In addition to the developments in methodologies all research is subject to, the assessment of the Soviet Union varied according to time and place. During this research, this evolution of political judgment was both hindering and helping, where Cold War literature was concerned. The ideological war between the two sides, combined with both deliberate and accidental misinformation, demanded that all literature and claims were verified even more thoroughly than a politically less charged research might demand. At the same time, developments in the politics within literature provided a fascinating extra layer for understanding the subject and its value.

3. Methodologies

The sources on Soviet Estonian industrial design are diverse, but incomplete. Due to censorship, written materials do not offer a complete picture of the practices of industrial designers or their relationship with state ideology. Hence, this thesis uses oral history to research topics censored in the contemporaneous sources. Even in a society with less censorship, oral history provides additional possibilities for studying industrial design, as a large portion of daily practices are not discussed in any sources. Using oral history demands thorough archival research to verify dates and other specific information, where human memory tends to be less reliable. However, for more subjective questions, the different accounts collected for this research mostly coincided.

The functioning of the design economy was difficult to research and analyse, as there are few sources available. Soviet bureaucracy was secretive, surrounding most aspects of life, but still remaining enigmatic in its details. This description is pieced together from elements found in interviews, archives and contemporaneous written sources, but nowhere is it possible to find a complete map of the system. The secretive nature is perhaps explained by the fact that, as this thesis demonstrates, the Soviet Estonian design system was planned inefficiently, obstructing the functioning of industrial designers and industrial design in several ways.

3.1 Oral history

During Late Socialism, the period discussed in this thesis, industrial design was only emerging and design history did not exist as a separate discipline. Very few written sources offer insight into the material practices of industrial designers, and due to censorship in Soviet Estonia and the Soviet Union in general their veracity is often questionable. As the subject of this thesis is the relationship between industrial designers and different ideologies, such details were even more prone to censorship than information concerning material practices. Therefore, as a large number of contemporaneous Soviet Estonian industrial designers are still alive and many even still active in their profession, oral history proved a valuable method for acquiring information otherwise absent from official records.

In choosing interviewees, different areas of interest involved in industrial design were taken into account. This research tried to avoid conforming to a "canonical list of 'important' designers", as phrased by Clive Dilnot.[41] Although Soviet Estonian design history has not been studied extensively, certain designers have nonetheless featured in exhibitions and publications more often than others. In many cases, they managed to continue successfully after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Adhering to the list of better-known designers would have facilitated selecting interviewees, but would have also risked the quality of research. Not all fields of industrial design are evenly represented in media or exhibitions, thus certain designers are more likely to be 'canonised', due to their medium of work and their ability to participate in experimental

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[41] Clive Dilnot, "The State of Design History, Part I: Problems and Possibilities," Design Issues 1, no. 2 (1984): 5.

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exhibitions. Thus, for example, furniture designers who kept up their visibility through exhibitions are significantly better known than designers working for plastics factories. While a large part of the designers interviewed were quite known during the period in question, as well as later, fame or presence in media were not key factors in selection.

An important aim was to try to find a balance between two sides – the representatives of Soviet control, such as members of the Art Council, and the designers. While these two groups should not be seen as opposing, especially as some of the interviewees could actually be categorised under either group, their views and focus points still somewhat differ. The number of designers interviewed was still larger, mostly to include as many different factories and areas of design as possible. Additionally, as this thesis demonstrates, industrial design as a discipline belonged to the jurisdiction of many different state apparatuses, thus there were not that many officials specialising in design. Only one interviewee was active solely as an administrator, three worked both within administration and as industrial designers, and five were designers.

One of the main tasks for setting up interviews was to position myself as ideologically neutral and to emphasise my willingness to accept all positions and beliefs, in order to get people to open up fully. As the contemporary attitude towards the different aspects of the Soviet system tends to be quite inflexible and strict, several interviewees immediately assumed that I would share the same views as expressed in mainstream media. However, as I started every interview by introducing my aims, stressing my neutrality and previous involvement in researching factory design, interviewees were convinced of my impartiality. After that, they were willing to open up and share details concerning their life and work. Several of the interviewees actually started by

inadvertently repeating official paradigms concerning the Soviet époque, but after a while switched to a more open-minded and ambivalent approach. As a few of my interviewees were themselves teaching at universities, their accounts provided an interesting combination of personal narrative and critical reflexion on the system and their own actions.

A brief introduction to interviews is presented in this section, although detailed biographical information regarding the participants and other key figures of this thesis can be found in the appendix. Only one interviewee, Eduard Tinn, was active solely as a bureaucrat and theoretician, not an industrial designer. The main reason for choosing him was his role as editor of the Soviet Estonian cultural journal *Sirp ja Vasar* (Sickle and Hammer) in 1975–78, a period during which the journal published an exceptionally large number of thorough debates on industrial design and its ideological significance for the Soviet system. Often, he was also amongst the participants of debates, most notably in "Disain" ["Design"] in 1976.[42] Having been behind the scenes of the Soviet system, Eduard Tinn was able to provide valuable insight to Soviet Estonian bureaucracy.

When searching interviewees from different periods of Late Socialism, it was natural that practitioners beginning their careers in the later part of the period, the late 1970s and 1980s, were easier to locate. Most information regarding the beginning of my time frame, the late 1960s and early 1970s, is owed to two people: Maie-Ann Raun and Peeter Kuutma. Maie-Ann Raun, whom I met already during research for my undergraduate thesis on the Soviet Estonian glass factory Tarbeklaas, did not actually

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[42] "Disain [Design]."

work for the factory itself, but as a lecturer for the Estonian National Art Institute. However, as she was active at the Art Councils overlooking the products of the glass factory and has researched the history of Tarbeklaas for several decades, she has detailed knowledge about different aspects of factory life.

Peeter Kuutma was exceptionally productive, as he worked in a textile factory called Punane Koit, or Red Dawn, as well as for the Art Products Factory. Additionally, he belonged to the Art Council of the textile industry and participated in numerous exhibitions, therefore being familiar with many different aspects of the Soviet Estonian design economy. I cross-referenced Kuutma's accounts to those of another interviewee, Saima Priks, who worked for a different textile factory, Marat, in the 1980s, but who belonged to the same Art Council. Through these two people, it was also noticed how different the working conditions of two designers doing similar work for different factories were: while Kuutma was allowed to work for two employers and do some of his work away from the factory, Priks was working in very strict factory conditions and disciplined every time she was even slightly late.[43] Another interviewee who had an exceptionally long and prolific career was Maile Grünberg. Her full-time occupation was as furniture designer for the factory Standard from the early 1970s until the late 1980s, but additionally she executed different interior designs and presented her objects in many exhibitions. She also worked for another furniture factory in the 1990s, whereas due to many factories closing after independence, most factory designers had to reorient to other kinds of employment. Therefore, she was able to provide her personal comparison of these two contexts.

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[43] Further information on this topic is in section 6.2.

In some cases, where it was possible, interviewees with similar backgrounds were chosen to verify findings and better reflect on the possibilities and limitations of oral history as a methodology. One such pair was two industrial designers working for the plastics factory Salvo in the 1980s, Raimo Sau and Tõnu Lillemets. As Salvo was ahead of its time and place as an employer, the designers working there corresponded more to the contemporary idea of industrial designers. Designers were included in all stages of the creation of new products and had no additional propaganda tasks. The accounts of both designers, who were only told about the interview of the other one afterwards, were very similar and therefore helped to verify understanding of that aspect of research. Tõnu Lillemets continued to work for Salvo after the collapse of the Soviet Union, so he was also able to provide a better insight to the aftermath of the period of interest.

The other pair that complemented each other's accounts was Matti Õunapuu and Leonardo Meigas. Both were successful designers active in the late 1970s and 1980s, working for the design studio of Art Products Factory. Matti Õunapuu had also been the head of the design group and participated in several public debates concerning the status of industrial design. Leonardo Meigas was mostly active in graphic and interior design, Matti Õunapuu focused more on urban planning and industrial design, but both executed projects in Russia as well as in Estonia. Therefore, because of the large variety of different projects they worked on, they were able to reflect on the profession of industrial designers on a larger scale.

In the Soviet context, oral history has not been used in combination with design history, instead being used mostly to research Soviet daily life, such as Alexei Yurchak in "Soviet hegemony of form: everything was forever, until it was no more"[44] or repressions, for example Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck in Gulag voices: oral histories of Soviet incarceration and exile.[45] Most of these study the relationship of daily material practices and Soviet ideology. This thesis concentrates on a smaller and more specific group, Soviet Estonian industrial designers, instead of a larger community, focusing solely on their work practices in lieu of the whole spectrum of Soviet life.

The timing of this research for applying oral history is suitable, as it is still possible to locate people who worked in factories or were active in the process of political control itself. One of the key factors that defined the interview technique was the relatively long time that has passed since the period in question. On the one hand, this makes conducting interviews easier, as designers have had time to reflect on their practices and actions. At the same time, it also makes the acquired information less direct. As the period in question has later been re-evaluated several times, the interviewees also tend to re-evaluate and sometimes involuntarily distort their recollections of past ideas and even actions. Therefore, it was important to collect interviews from people who used to work in different structures and environments.

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[44] Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More," Comparative Studies in Society and History 45, no. 3 (2003).

[45] Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck, Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile, 1st Ed, Palgrave Studies in Oral History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

The re-evaluation of history often present in interviews should not be seen as a weakness or liability, but rather as a helping to research the political and cultural processes in past and present. As Alessandro Portelli wrote in 1979:

> "The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events than about their meaning […] Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."[46]

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people no longer knew how to treat the objects and processes of the Soviet era. As time passed, people's views on that period opened up. All in all, only one interviewee positioned the Soviet period as completely negative and violent; the others, while finding aspects to criticise, saw it rather as a generally neutral or even positive experience.

This research does not arrive at any kind of objective universal truth, as the subject matter is rather sensitive and politically charged. In finding the right method in oral history, this research draws on the observations described by Czech historian Miroslav Vanek in "Those who prevailed and those who were replaced: interviewing on both sides of a conflict", published in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* in 2011.[47] Vanek defines the importance of oral history: "Oral history should not be seen as the opposite of written sources in archives but as two sides of the same coin. A coin, to be valid, needs to be minted on both sides."[48] By that, Vanek is saying that neither oral nor written history should be used as a single unique method, but research needs to incorporate both, if possible. This is the same method that this research uses – combining oral and written history in order to arrive to a more complete picture.

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[46] qtd. in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, The Oral History Reader (London: Routledge, 1998), 67.

[47] Donald A. Ritchie, The Oxford Handbook of Oral History (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[48] Ibid., 37.

In this essay Vanek recounts his experiences interviewing ex-Communist functionaries, especially his methods in gaining their trust and interpreting his findings. One of the key aspects of his methods is allowing the interviewee to speak as freely as possible and not to reduce their personality to a single side of their life: not to see them simply as ex-Communists, but as members of society with an ordinary personal life and a unique set of beliefs. And, as Vanek stresses, it is important to never judge an interviewee based on their past or present beliefs or actions. These ideas, while important in any kind of oral history project, are especially crucial when it comes to an ideologically complex era or subject. However, the experiences from this thesis differed from Vanek's in one important aspect: Vanek stresses that none of his interviewees had renounced their ideological beliefs, whereas the people interviewed for this research mostly tried to downplay their ideological commitment during the Soviet period. The main reason for this difference is probably the hierarchical status of interviewees: while Vanek focused on higher-level functionaries, only one of the interviewees for this research had a higher position within the Communist Party. Therefore, most of them were more likely to see themselves as acting according to the system, rather than making decisions, and had no need to feel responsible for the system itself.

When interviewing, subjects were allowed to create their own narrative, rather than subjecting them to rigid questions. Although a list of questions was prepared for consistency, it was usually saved for the last, after letting the interviewee finish the story they themselves wanted to tell. The precise methodology depended on the specific person: there were also people who preferred to simply answer questions, although as the interview progressed, they opened up and started talking more freely, adding details

outside of the questionnaire. Surprisingly, more than once, people answered several questions within their story before they were even asked. By allowing the person to talk more freely, they were more susceptible to telling personal stories in greater detail. Often, the most interesting discoveries actually came from outside of the prepared questionnaire, thereby further developing it.

3.2 Archives

Besides interviews, Estonian State Archives, Tallinn City Archives, and archives of the Estonian Museum of Design and Applied Arts, National Library of Estonia and Tallinn City Museum were used. The archives at the Estonian Museum of Design and Applied Arts were especially useful, as they included documents saved from factory archives, mostly rare photographs and promotional materials. Due to difficulties in locating preserved factory archives from the Soviet period, their collections mostly consist of materials people have either found from their homes or managed to save from demolished or restructured factories. Therefore, these archives contain virtually everything, from tape recordings of meetings and personal photographs to design sketches and official certificates. The museum archive is a good illustration of the hectic fate of Soviet Estonian factories: the amount of material available varies greatly according to the factory in question. For example, the Tarbeklaas factory had managed to even save some of the designers' notes, while a few other factories have absolutely no documents left of them. Hence, the archive was valuable for information concerning the objects produced in factories, for dating the products and, in Tarbeklaas's case, researching different stages of designing objects.

The National Library of Estonia had a large collection of promotional catalogues from various companies, as well as various other materials from factories. Particularly beneficial documents were diagrams of the work process regarding the introduction of new products at factories Salvo and Standard.[49] Both of these plans, especially in comparison to each other, provided a good detailed overview of the introduction process of products in different factories from an administrative point of view. This particular aspect of factory work would have been difficult to research otherwise, as written sources tend to overlook administrative details and oral history would not be reliable enough in such specifics. The promotional catalogues proved useful as well, as they served as a good source for product and factory histories.

Both the Estonian State Archives and the Tallinn City Archives house rare legal documents and correspondence between different state officials and the factories. The first one has documents concerning various factories and institutions and the latter has material from the Art Products Factory. Many of these documents provide beneficial details about the relations between different institutions. Although several of them offered different possibilities for interpretation, these documents still present fascinating nuances of Soviet bureaucracy. Additionally, these archives include the constitutions of various organisations, valuable in dating different events and understanding the connections between different Soviet institutions.

In spite of the numerous archives consulted, the actual amount of preserved sources is relatively small and leaves many questions regarding industrial design unanswered.

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[49] These diagrams are discussed in 6.3

Some sources have been destroyed or lost over time, while certain spheres of industrial design were never considered in written materials. One of the main reasons for that is arguably the relative lack of importance of industrial design within Soviet Estonian society, as well as the absence of a centralised design system.[50] In 1998, Jeffrey L. Meikle described the ideal situations faced by many researchers working within the traditional fields of design history:

> "When investigating the twentieth century, we often have the full written record of a design office – its correspondence, memoranda, drawings, photographs, memoirs, maybe even oral histories and interviews. From such records we can discover how designers evolved alternate solutions to a particular problem, how they evaluated them in terms of economic costs, manufacturing technology, qualities of materials, and market research."[51]

In the Soviet context, most of these types of records are absent. At best, it is possible to find information in official archives of political institutions such as the Ministry of Culture. Thus, most of the archival materials and their selection are mediated through a political prism. One of the problems was arguably the absence of design offices in the Western sense – there was only one institution within the field of industrial design that could be called a design office, the design studio of the Art Products Factory.[52] The majority of industrial designers were employed by specific factories, which did not necessarily keep an archive on the history of factory design. Even if a collection of records existed, it was not always managed well. For example, Saima Priks, a designer of the textile factory Marat, remembers that while the factory collected examples of products, higher-level factory officials often stole the more popular objects.[53] Most Soviet Estonian factories either changed ownership or ceased to exist in the 1990s and

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[50] More on this subject can be found in section 5.4.

[51] Jeffrey L. Meikle, "Material Virtues: On the Ideal and the Real in Design History," Journal of Design History 11, no. 3 (1998): 194.

[52] More information on the design studio is in section 7.2.

[53] Saima Priks, 01/09/2012.

thus the fate of many factory design archives remains unknown. The records of the glass factory Tarbeklaas, for example, were saved by the designers themselves, but it is rather an exception than a rule.[54]

Recently, the Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design received a donation of several cassette tapes, which serve as a good illustration to the ephemerality of Soviet Estonian archival sources, as well as to the problems linked to the preservation of information. The tapes contained audio recordings of the first assemblies of the Estonian Association of Designers in 1989 and 1990. Due to the shortage of blank cassettes in stores, the assemblies are taped on previous recordings of different Western pop songs. Sadly, making several recordings on the same tape in combination with poor preservation conditions has rendered most of the tapes almost unlistenable. Assembly recordings fade and the previous recordings of Western artists occasionally emerge. It remains to be seen whether professional technology is able to salvage these tapes or if time has damaged them irreparably.

The archives at the Tallinn City Museum contained several factory chronicles, which, much like oral history, are excellent sources of unofficial and often uncensored direct information. Chronicles were intended as histories of a specific factory, written by the workers themselves. Depending on the specific chronicle, they could have been either written as a narrative or simply composed of newspaper cut-outs. Keeping them was widely encouraged by the Soviet system. As written in the chronicle of the factory Norma, keeping chronicles had a social and pedagogical purpose. It was supposed to improve the workers' morale and help build a feeling of belonging in a collective.

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[54] Maie-Ann Raun, 17/05/2007.

Composing a factory chronicle was supposed to grow politically and ideologically not only those directly involved, but also the entire collective.[55] Not all chronicles used for this research were official factory records, several of them were also autobiographical writings. Their writing style varies greatly: some of them are written from a single perspective and rather directed towards personal experiences, others are mostly collections of newspaper articles and other pieces of information from the media. Therefore, it depends on the chronicle in question how to classify them exactly: the first type could be seen as oral history in a different medium, while the latter is rather a small archive in itself. Naturally, these chronicles have to be treated with caution and necessary suspicion, especially where hearsay or first-hand experience is involved, but at the very least they provide good illustration of general life in the factory.

While most of the chronicles were located at the archives of the Tallinn City Museum, two of the most detailed ones were at the Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design. The most useful was written by a former employee of Estoplast, V. Kajak, in 1989.[56] He had managed to compose a quite extensive history of the factory, relying on archival materials. In addition, he also collected different newspaper articles about the factory and photographs. This way, the chronicle serves not only as the story of one particular Soviet factory, but a case study applicable as a generalisation. Another curious example, usable mostly as an exemplification of the Soviet factory and everyday life, was a chronicle of the 1960s from the Salvo factory, written in 1990 by a former employee, Endel Liive.[57] This work is set aside from the others, as it is not an official factory chronicle ordered by the factory board and showcased to other employees, but written as

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[55] "Norma: Chronicle 1891–1975," (Tallinn: Tallinn City Museum, 1975), 5.
[56] V. Kajak, "Estoplast 1934–1989," (Estonian Applied Art and Design Museum, 1989).
[57] Endel Liive, "Salvo in the 1960s," (Tallinn: Estonian Applied Art and Design Museum, 1990).

a memoir of a specific aspect of the author's life. Thus, the style is more personal and anecdotal, often referring to second economy practices. Despite the time that passed between the era discussed and the actual writing of the chronicle, Endel Liive demonstrates a phenomenal memory in describing people and events. The chronicle is written in a first-person narrative, concentrating on the events that took place in the author's life, both personal and work-related. The detailed accounts of even the most intimate affairs act as a wonderful illustration to the 1960s in Soviet Estonia.
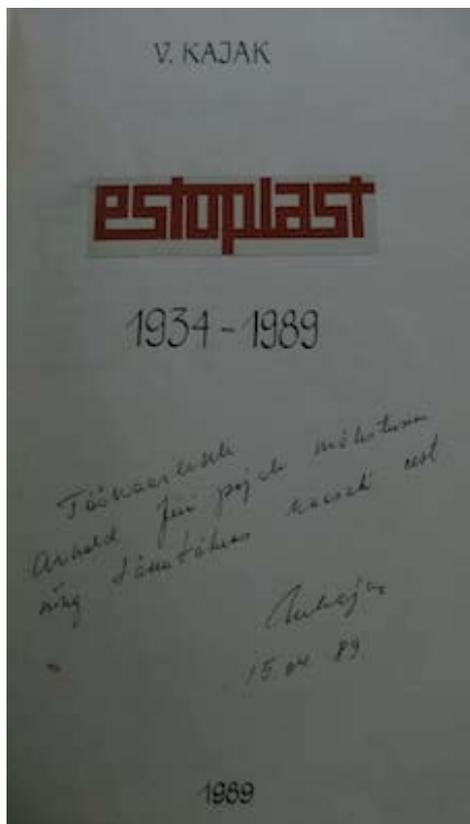
Left: 3.2.1. V. Kajak. Estoplast chronicle, 1989. Handwritten is a dedication to a co-worker, Arnold, for his help. Credits: ETDM

Right: 3.2.2. Two sides of a cassette used to record the initial meetings of the Estonian Designers Union. Credits: ETDM

3.3 Conceptual framework

Although located in Europe, Estonia is not included in canonical Western design history. As evident in the previous chapter, Soviet design economy is a relatively new subject. Nonetheless, it provides valuable details for a further analysis of political, social and economical aspects of Soviet life. While the main aim of this research is positioning Soviet Estonian industrial designers within an intricate system of different ideologies and regulations, its findings are relevant to other disciplines besides design history as well. Thus, the use of design history in this thesis could perhaps be best summarised with the last paragraph of Victor Margolin's article "A world history of design and the history of world", written in 2005:

> "Writing a world history of design as a history of how empires, nations and other political entities have used it to advance their political and economic agendas, while also showing how designed objects and images have contributed to the formation of national and global sensibilities, links design to the larger problems of world history that Bruce Mazlish and other theorists are concerned with. This is a worthy objective and its pursuit will help to confirm design's central role in the development of human culture."[58]

In spite of recent advancements in the study of industrial design in the former Socialist Bloc, the individual design systems of many states, including the former Soviet Republic of Estonia, have not been thoroughly researched. Instead, Soviet industrial design is often represented through Russian examples originating from Moscow or other larger cities. However, a key element to emphasise is the extent of variations and similarities throughout the socialist system. Therefore, the current state of Soviet design history risks making generalisations throughout the entire region and overlooking the key specificities of individual design systems. At the same time, for arriving to a 'design

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[58] Victor Margolin, "A World History of Design and the History of the World," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 3 (2005): 242..

history of the world', it is important to remember the existence of other, different design systems outside of the polarisation of Western Europe and the United States against the Soviet Union. While this thesis mostly draws parallels between Estonia, other Soviet states and the Central European Socialist countries, many other countries throughout the world had their own versions of socialism and communism. As stated by Margolin, analysing the different systems of industrial design is crucial for a better understanding of 'the larger problems of world history'.

Although writing a local design history is not the primary aim of this thesis, it is nonetheless one of its main outcomes. As such, positioning the subject of Late Socialist Estonian industrial design within a global design history was another methodological issue to address during the process of writing this thesis. Anna Calvera identifies two emerging directions amongst local historians:

> "The first one deals with the differences existing among Design cultures trying to establish identities of Design, grasping peculiarities and national oddities. […] The second research direction aims at finding points and aspects to be compared between different local, or rather national, identities notable for their differences."[59]

As she specifies, the first approach works from the general to the particular, whereas the other approach functions the opposite way. Between those two tendencies, this thesis employs the first method in its attempt to analyse the identities and systems of Soviet Estonian industrial design. On another level, the aim of this research is also a detailed analysis on a smaller Soviet state in order to achieve a more diverse understanding of the Soviet system as a whole. Jonathan Woodham has proposed that local design history can be used to form a better view of society as a whole:

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[59] Anna Calvera, "Local, Regional, National, Global and Feedback: Several Issues to Be Faced with Constructing Regional Narratives," Ibid., no. 4: 2

"A greater understanding of professional design activities in countries where they have not previously been well documented – 'lost' or invisible histories – will provide a platform for further investigation of the ways in which specific visual and material cultures reflect the wider economic, social and political contexts in which they are framed."[60]

While Soviet Estonia, as this thesis proves, partially belonged to the Western cultural space, many problems faced by design history are still different, most notably the structure of the design economy in a totalitarian society. Thus, a methodologically different model is needed.

Constructing a model for analysing the Soviet Estonian design economy posed a challenge during this research. As the Soviet economy was built after a more disparate model than the economies of capitalist countries, its functioning should be analysed differently. By its nature, industrial design is firmly tied to the general economic system and thus Soviet design history should be constructed according to different paradigms as well. In the construction of a new model, this thesis relied on two existing design models. The first, created by Guy Julier, is essentially a triangulated system of design, production and consumption, in the centre of which lies the object/space/image.[61] Grace Lees-Maffei has constructed the 'production-consumption-mediation' paradigm.[62] As both are fashioned for the Western capitalist system, this research needed to make some adjustments for a balanced analysis of the Soviet Estonian system. The main concern was the inclusion of political factors in the design process.

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[60] Jonathan M. Woodham, "Local, National and Global: Redrawing the Design Historical Map," Ibid., no. 3: 265.

[61] Guy Julier, The Culture of Design (London: Sage, 2000), 4.

[62] Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production—Consumption—Mediation Paradigm," Journal of Design History 22, no. 4 (2009).
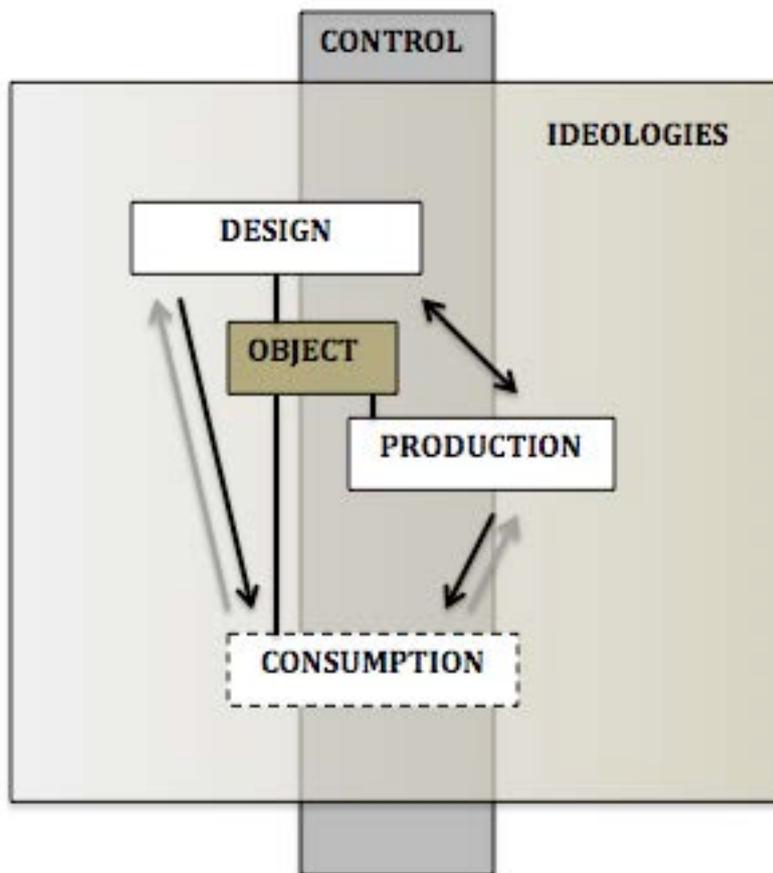
PRIMARY FACTORS:

DESIGN	PRODUCTION	OBJECT	CONSUMPTION
Education	Technology	Style	Needs
Taste	Economics	Purpose	Desires
Professional skills	Factory setting		Semiology
Aesthetics			

BACKGROUND FACTORS:

IDEOLOGIES	CONTROL
Soviet ideology	Bureaucratic system
Western trends	Censorship
National aspirations	

3.3.1 The scheme for studying Soviet Estonian design system, as composed by the author of this thesis

In Julier's treatment, the design system consists of an equilateral triangle, where design is at the top and the base is formed of production and consumption. Object, text or space is located at the centre and all of these nexuses have reciprocal effects on each other. As Julier further states:

> "None of these three nexuses of production, designers and consumption exists in isolation. They constantly inform each other in an endless cycle of exchange. Equally, they all individually have some influence to play on the form of objects, spaces and images. But these in turn are not neutral: they play an active part in influencing or making sense of the systems of their provision."[63]

This thesis adopts the same triangular scheme, with object as the intersection of these factors. However, while Julier's model is constructed for the capitalist economy, where demand creates production and consumption affects design, in Soviet Estonia the production was more determined by regulations and standards than consumers.[64] Instead of an equilateral triangle, where the designer is at the top and consumption holds an equal status to that of production, in this scheme the consumer is positioned at the end, below production. The other two factors, production and consumption, have retained their mutually dependant relationship, as advancements in design influenced technological possibilities, while designers constantly had to bear in mind the limitations of mass production in Soviet Estonian factories. The effect of consumption on other factors was weaker, as signalled by the lighter arrows, since consumers had limited means to influence design or production. Within this triumvirate, this thesis mostly deals with the relationship of design and production, and the position of consumption is simply indicative of the general system.

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[63] Julier, The Culture of Design, 5.

[64] Design system in planned economy is further explained in section 5.4.

Grace Lees-Maffei chose a different triumvirate of paradigms, 'production-consumption-mediation'. As she emphasises, the model is fashioned especially for analysing the design of Great Britain.[65] Lees-Maffei states with regard to mediation in her theory:

> "[…] First, the mediation emphasis continues the consumption turn within design history by exploring the role of channels such as television, magazines, corporate literature, advice literature and so on in mediating between producers and consumers, forming consumption practices and ideas about design; second, the mediation emphasis examines the extent to which mediating channels are themselves designed and therefore open to design historical analysis—indeed, these channels have increasingly constituted the design historian's object of study; third, the mediation emphasis investigates the role of designed goods themselves as mediating devices."[66]

However, in a Soviet Estonian context, mediation does not seem like a suitable inclusion, at least where the general public is concerned. As industrial design was going through a process of institutionalisation, the materials on design were diverse and it is difficult to identify any specific trends in mediation. Especially as this thesis identifies consumption as tendencies amongst the general public, not simply a specialist circle, written materials on design were uncommon. In spite of a variety of articles dedicated to problems of design, production and consumption, there is little evidence of a specific design mediation shaping wider consumption practices. Rather than a factor within the general system, mediation should be seen as one of the ways design influences consumption outside of production.

The other problem with Lees-Maffei's model is the equalisation of designer and production, while they are two separate factors. Especially in Soviet Estonian context the poor economic possibilities and strict regulations often changed the appearance of

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[65] Lees-Maffei, "The Production—Consumption—Mediation Paradigm," 351.
[66] Ibid.

the initial design after it was introduced to mass production. This specificity is also the reason for the long distance between design and consumption in the scheme: in Soviet Estonian industry, design was mostly mediated through production. Here, it is necessary to emphasise that this system is created to analyse industrial design. One-off objects manufactured for exhibitions defied this rule, as in the Soviet Bloc (and other European Socialist countries) the state funded both the production of objects and the organisation of the exhibition itself.[67] There were other curious examples of connections between design and consumption without the involvement of production: for example, the magazine *Kunst ja Kodu* [Art and Home], which published do-it-yourself projects of various levels of difficulty, designed by renowned Estonian designers and applied artists. However, in the Soviet Estonian industrial design system, where shortage of materials prevailed, production often distorted the initial ideas of designers before reaching the end consumers.[68]

As the entire design system in Late Socialist Estonia had a high political charge, the model introduced here involves two background factors as well, ideologies and control, to indicate their permanent presence in all processes within the society. It is important to emphasise that 'ideologies' does not solely refer to the official Soviet ideology, but rather to the whole intricate system of different philosophical influences both from the West and from Moscow, hence the use of the word in plural. 'Control', on the other hand, refers to the political and economic control set by the various Soviet state apparatuses. These two factors are located outside of the general scheme, to indicate their superior status within bureaucracy. The relationship between ideologies and the

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[67] Design exhibitions are further discussed in 7.3.

[68] The problems of production are analysed in chapters 6 and 7.

different components of the design system is of an inclusive nature: rather than a reciprocal effect, the design system acted as part of the general Soviet Estonian ideology, pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet in its various forms.[69] Thus, the four primary factors were constantly influenced by different ideologies and their interrelations. Control, on the other hand, impacted on certain aspects of the primary factors, but there were exceptions, such as the above-mentioned one-off objects and guidelines for do-it-yourself projects. This scheme omits the specifications and categorisation of different ideologies and control sets, as they are dependent on time and place.[70]

In defining history, this thesis draws upon the writings of French poststructuralist Michel Foucault, whose views on the nature of history are well suited for understanding political processes. He writes:

> "Obviously, history in this sense is not to be understood as the compilation of factual successions or sequences as they may have occurred; it is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise."[71]

Power for Foucault is omnipresent and manifests in any aspect of everyday life: a view that has also greatly influenced the choice of this topic. Foucault states further:

> "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."[72]

Thus, not all aspects of Soviet power should be seen as negative. The post-Thaw Soviet power should actually be rather blamed for what it failed to do, rather than for what it

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[69] The question of ideology and design is discussed in chapters 5 and 8.
[70] A further analysis of different ideologies is found in chapter 8.
[71] Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 219.
[72] Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, The Foucault Reader (London: Penguin, 1991), 61.

did. Soviet system was unsuccessful in providing people with an equal living standard to that of the West. However, certain strategies of the Soviet design economy were beneficial to culture, for example the funding of exhibitions.[73]

This thesis uses the term 'ideology' in a neutral sense, as the aim is not to argue for the existence of a universal truth or the superiority of one regime over another, but rather just to observe and analyse historical processes in their own context. Therefore, this study adopts Foucault's method for treating the problem of ideology – "[...] it consists in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses that, in themselves, are neither true nor false."[74] Foucault links the notions of truth, power and knowledge to explain the processes that take place in any society, in order to submit its members to the necessary values and beliefs. This thesis treats design as one of the ways of imposing 'truth' in order to maintain power.

Foucault considers the modern state to be not an entity that was developed above individuals, but rather "a sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns."[75] While in a Socialist state these patterns were somewhat different than in the Western world and, de facto, Estonia was an occupied country, its functioning should be seen as a system integrating individuals and making compromises in order to form a state, rather than an obscure and immaterial

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[73] Exhibition economy is further discussed in 7.3

[74] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984. Volume 3 ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2000), 119.

[75] "The Subject and Power," in Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984. Volume 3 ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2000), 334.

state ruling over all. It is also why this thesis focuses mostly on history as told by individuals as small but important parts of the larger mechanism.

This research places great importance on the ideologies embodied within material practices. The factory as a location held an important role in Soviet doctrine, thus the relating practices are essential for analysis. Herbert Marcuse claims that the growing importance of ideology within different practices, most notably mass production, is a defining characteristic of contemporary society:

> "This absorption of ideology into reality does not, however, signify 'the end of ideology'. On the contrary, in a specific sense advanced industrial culture is more ideological than its predecessor, inasmuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself."[76]

The same idea is mirrored by Nicos Poulantzas:

> "Ideology does not consist merely in a system of ideas or representations: it also involves a series of material practices, embracing the customs and life-style of the agents and setting like cement in the totality of social (including political and economic) practices."[77]

As this thesis uses Foucauldian methods, it is leaning towards what Eric Hobsbawm, as the leading contemporary Marxist historian, has referred to as 'anti-universalism'. In his view, it means "identity-group history, for which the central issue of history is not what happened, but how it concerns the members of a particular group."[78] Anti-universalism in Hobsbawm's opinion is "the major immediate political danger to historiography today" and should be avoided as a possible public danger.[79] As this thesis deals, among other problems, with questions of nationalism, colonialism and post-colonialism, it aims

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[76] Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 2nd ed]. ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 13.

[77] Nicos Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism (London: New Left Books, 1978), 28.

[78] Chris Wickham, Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 184.

[79] Ibid.

to find a balance between different views, instead of claiming the absolute truth Marxist historiography believes in.

The thesis does not refer to feminist studies, which has been a deliberate choice in the Soviet context. As visible from the selection of interviewees, industrial design was not solely a male profession. Naturally, as Dr Renja Suominen-Kokkonen noted in 2014 during a conversation at the Artefacta conference in Helsinki, the role of gender cannot be completely avoided in the context of Soviet Estonian industrial design. Certain factories and product types seem to be more popular amongst women: for example, almost all the designers of the glass factory Tarbeklaas were female. However, as a directed gender politics did not reveal anywhere throughout the interviews or archival research, statistical facts were not sufficient to make more substantial conclusions. Another reason for avoiding feminist studies as a methodology is that most of the products considered in this thesis fall under similar categories and relate to, above all, domesticity. As Grace Lees-Maffei writes:

> "Interior design has historically occupied a marginal place within the cultural hierarchy, as a feminized sphere of activity, playing a secondary role in relation to architecture."[80]

As the majority of products requiring input from designers in Soviet Estonia fall under the category of interior design, or at least fashion as another "traditionally feminised sphere of activity", it is difficult to draw any clear distinctions between factories based on traditional gender divisions. Thus, gender politics did not play an important role in this study.

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[80] Grace Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History," Journal of Design History 21, no. 1 (2008): 7.

In terms of conceptual framework, this thesis constructs a local design history in order to tackle wider problems of industrial design and ideology. Although located within the discipline of design history, the problems treated here are also pertinent in other disciplines as well and thus serve a purpose within the wider context of Soviet studies. While concentrating on the identities and systems of Soviet Estonian industrial design, this research acts as a focused analysis of a specific Soviet state in order to achieve a more thorough understanding of the Soviet system. To better analyse a design system with a high political charge, the model constructed as the methodological basis of this study had to employ several additional factors besides those used in exploring capitalist design systems. Employing Michel Foucault as a key author in the construction of a methodological approach allowed this research to reach a balance between different viewpoints, important in the multitude of ideologies present in the former Soviet Union.

Conclusions

In spite of the relatively large number of books, journals, magazines, pamphlets and other published materials on the subject of Soviet Estonian mass production, in certain details their credibility had to be questioned. As this thesis treats the problems of ideologies and political systems, in the censored and controlled Soviet economy all relevant information had to be treated with distrust. Thus, to both verify the published materials and acquire information not present in printed matter, oral history proved to be a valuable source. As a third possible source, this research located different archival materials, eclectic in their nature, content and medium, for a more thorough attestation of facts and figures. The research was then positioned within a wider Foucauldian

framework to permit a more flexible approach to concepts and avoid strict assessments of the politically complicated subject.

A combination of different methodologies was required to tackle the relative secrecy involved in the mechanics of the subject matter. Already the functioning of the political system proved challenging. Published materials omitted depicting complete schemes of the political systems and instead only included fragmented references to the relations between different state apparatuses and institutions. The inefficiency of the political structure further complicated the research, as ministries and apparatuses could belong to the jurisdiction of several other political bodies simultaneously. The same approach had to be used when positioning industrial designers within the factory system or the procedural system of introducing new commodities into production. Discovering actual schemes or detailed information was rare and thus even the simplest systematisations resembled solving jigsaw puzzles.

4. Late Socialism in Soviet Estonia

Estonia and the other Baltic States had a special status in the Soviet Union. In 1944, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were the only parts of the Soviet Union which had, however briefly, experienced an independent national life and a modernisation not patterned on the Soviet model.[81] All three countries had gained their first independence in 1918 after the fall of the Russian Empire, which they kept until 1940 when all were occupied by the Soviet Union. During the Second World War, the Baltic States suffered a brief period of Nazi occupation, but in 1944, when Hitler was forced out of Eastern and Central Europe, a new Soviet occupation began that lasted until 1991. An important fact must be emphasised: the Baltic States became parts of the Soviet Union, whereas other previously independent countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, East Germany and Romania became Socialist Republics, meaning that they became 'puppet states'. They were formally independent countries, though under Soviet influence: all serious political decisions were controlled by Moscow. For the Baltic States this meant a higher degree of sovietisation and less independence.

Estonia was officially referred to as the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. Even though it had its own anthem, flag and higher authorities, its dependence on Moscow means that Soviet Estonia is better compared to a county within the Union rather than a puppet state. The previous experience of independence played a major role in the future existence of Soviet Estonia. By 1940 Soviet terror was beginning to calm. Horrors such as the holodomor, the Ukrainian famine in the 1930s, were over, as were the more

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[81] Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940–1990 (University of California Press, 1993), 1.

forceful attacks against minority cultures. Nevertheless, during Stalin's reign, Estonia and other Baltic States were subject to cultural repression and deportations, which were mostly directed against the cultural elite, politicians and wealthier landowners. Political dissidents were imprisoned and either deported or executed.[82] Just a couple of decades later, the situation was different. Although the Soviet Union was far from being democratic, by Late Socialism the Stalinist horrors were gone. Instead, a different state had emerged, not completely closed, but not sufficiently open to the rest of the world either.

This chapter explains the conditions of Estonia during Late Socialism, and identifies key points in the development of Estonia's industrial design at this time, which will be expanded upon in later chapters. The chapter argues that Estonia and the Baltic States became mediators between East and West, and Western culture bore a great influence in the local context. While both the earlier Thaw and the following perestroika bore hope for change, Late Socialism instilled a gradually deepening feeling of deception. Brezhnev's reign was one of the longest periods in Soviet history, evoking perestroika and thus sealing the fate of Soviet communism. The first part of this chapter deals with Estonia's problems during Late Socialism, providing a brief overview of everyday life and exploring relations to the Western world. The chapter then arrives at the evolution of Estonian industrial design as a phenomenon connected to Western modernism.

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[82] Seppo Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia] (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2009), 534.

4.1 Historical context

Soviet Estonia, and the Soviet Union in general, did not experience many clearly definable political events during most of the Late Socialist era. The period is characterised by a gradual rather than sudden change. While individual Soviet states had previously enjoyed some economic liberties, the new system once again prioritised central power. Many Soviet Estonian factories fell under the jurisdiction of the newly founded Ministry of Local Industry, whereas Union-wide ministries ordered the others. Textile factories belonged to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Light Industry, further complicating the bureaucracy. The violent repression of the 1968 uprisings in Prague added to the feelings of stagnation that came to define the era.
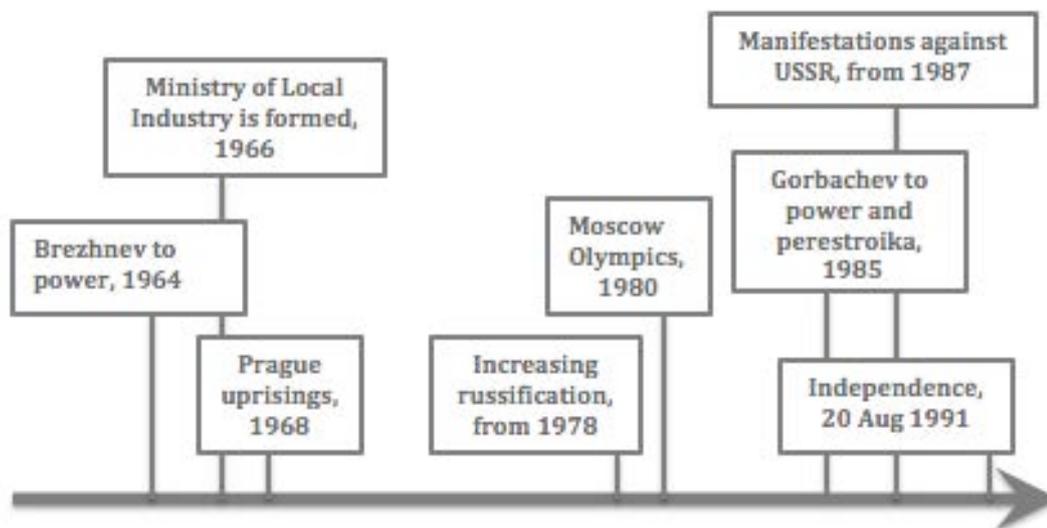
4.1.1 Timeline of the history of Estonia during Late Socialism

Some of the liberties of the Thaw lasted slightly longer in Estonia than in the rest of the Soviet Union. This can largely be attributed to the first secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party, Johannes Käbin, who had held that post since Stalin's reign.

Käbin understood that securing his position required him to please not only Moscow but also local citizens. Thus, as a rational leader, Käbin managed to challenge some of Moscow's more exaggerated orders.[83] However, in 1978, Käbin was finally removed from his post, when the Central Committee of the Communist Party claimed that he was "incapable to oppose the nationalism rising in Estonia."[84] He was replaced by Karl Vaino, born in Russia and unfamiliar with local conditions, who declared the interests of the Soviet Union superior to those of Estonia.[85] Thus, Vaino's period in office is known as an era of russification. In terms of changes shaping the entire Soviet Union, Katherine Verdery points out that by the mid-1970s it had become clear world economy was unable to absorb all products Socialist Bloc had to offer.[86] In 1979-80 world banks made the decision to stop lending money to socialist countries. Consequently, as Verdery puts it, the latter were "thrown into complete disarray."[87] Economic situation declined. Meanwhile, the increasing contacts to the Western world brought a growing awareness of the situation outside the Soviet Union.[88] This combination increased the feeling of deception in late 1980s.

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he attempted to reorganise the system, admitting:

> "At some stage – this became particularly clear in the latter half of the seventies – something happened that was at first sight inexplicable. The country began to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent. Difficulties began to accumulate and deteriorate, and unresolved problems to multiply. Elements of what we call stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism began to appear in the

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[83] Ibid., 548.

[84] Ibid., 549.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Katherine Verdery. What was Socialism, and what comes next? (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). 32

[87] Ibid.

[88] As described in section 4.2.

life of society. A kind of "braking mechanism" affecting social and economic development formed."[89]

This quote illustrates the gravity of the situation in mid-1980s through the fact that the Communist Party saw a need for admitting and resolving the economic difficulties. Gorbachev's aim was to complete rearrange the Soviet politics. However, the politics of glasnost, intended to rejuvenate the Soviet Union, led to various manifestations against Soviet rule and the weakening of the empire. On 20 August 1991 Estonia regained its independence.

The latter years of Late Socialism are the most important for this study, as industrial design was only developing as a discipline during late 1960s and early 1970s.[90] By that era, Communist ideology had lost its initial meaning, becoming to an extent an empty ritual or tradition. However, this did not mean that ideology became redundant. Jacques Rupnik lists three aspects in which ideology was still an essential instrument of Soviet power:

1) intellectual sterility does not prevent the official ideology from remaining the prime source of legitimacy of Communist rule;

2) an essential function of the ideology is to hold together the ruling Party élite. And since it embodies the only available discourse it can also provide keys to the internal political debates within that elite;

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[89] Mikhail Gorbachev. Perestroika. New Thinking for Our Country and the World (London: William Collins Sons & Co, 1987), 18-19

[90] As demonstrated in section 4.3.

3) the ideological discourse remains the prime form of communication between rulers and ruled. Hence the double dimension of ideology as a ritual and as an instrument of social control.[91]

Therefore, by the end of the Late Socialist period, ideology was in a way the raison d'etre of the Soviet Union. Even if it was just a tradition, it was still necessary for the existence of the state. Khrushchev's granting of more freedoms to the Soviet states had led to internal problems, thus the spirit of Late Socialism was to try to maintain the status quo at all costs.

After the Thaw, Soviet ideology was little more than a habit for people. Gone were the horrors of Stalinism, as well as the initial optimism of a better future. Even in the Communist Party doctrines, the role of communism was becoming less important.[92] Stalin himself had said that the Soviet Union would have to either exceed the living standard and power of Western capitalism or go under, and it seemed that he had been right. All that was left of Soviet ideology was the shell.[93] As written by Alexey Yurchak:

> "The acts of copying the precise forms of ideological representations became more meaningfully constitutive of everyday life than the adherence to the literal ('semantic') meanings inscribed in those representations."[94]

Communist propaganda was upheld mostly because it had become part of a strange ritual and mythology - yet these rituals were still integral to maintaining the Soviet

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[91] Jacques Rupnik, "Soviet Ideology: From the End of Utopia to 'Real Socialism'," in From Brezhnev to Gorbachev: Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), 199.

[92] Mark Sandle, Communism (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), 107.

[93] Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Cars, Cars, and More Cars: The Faustian Bargain of the Brezhnev Era," in Borders of Socialism : Private Spheres of Soviet Russia, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 83.

[94] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More," 481.

system. The Communist Party still had memories of what had happened in Prague, during the relative ideological freedom of the Thaw. And, as the perestroika later proved, the socialist system indeed needed these ritualistic acts of copying. As soon as they were gone, the Soviet Union crumbled as well.

However, in spite of keeping up appearances in public settings, the Soviet power increasingly became the object of private ridicule. Leonid Brezhnev's reign lasted from 1964 until 1982. Towards the end of the Late Socialist period, his deteriorating health damaged his image as a leader. Brezhnev often made mishaps in public appearances, making himself the subject of many jokes. Yurchak refers to one popular joke that well describes prevalent feelings in the Soviet Union:

> "The General Secretary Brezhnev, surrounded by the members of the CC, is shown around a Soviet art exhibition. After the tour, the CC members cautiously gather around Brezhnev to hear what he thinks. Brezhnev waits for a minute, then declares: 'Very interesting. But let us hear what they think at the top.'"[95]

This joke illustrates several general feelings together, besides its obvious lack of respect towards the Soviet power. Firstly, it is a joke on Brezhnev's poor public speaking skills. Secondly, it shows that he was perceived as just a public figure, or a puppet, not an actual political leader. Thirdly, and most important, it illustrates the distrust towards the public image of Soviet bureaucracy and the Soviet power in general. During Late Socialism it was acknowledged that the Soviet bureaucracy was mostly not what it seemed to be and the actual power relations were different from how the regime depicted them. In interview, Eduard Tinn summarised well the general feelings amongst Estonians towards the Soviet state:

> "But we [all Soviet citizens – TJ] had a common enemy, this idiotic state. I cannot say that the old men existing there in Kremlin would have been hated so much that people wanted to kill them, there was none of that. But simply, as they were

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[95] Ibid., 490.

so stupid, such funny old men, outdated, screwing up the entire country. There was an attitude towards them, everyone was telling jokes, no sane person… Everyone criticised them and that order."[96]

As written by Lewis Siegelbaum, the Brezhnev administration founded its legitimacy on social contracts. According to one version, "Brezhnev provided the guarantee of stability, secure and undemanding jobs, and a slowly improving standard of living in return for acquiescence to authoritarian, oligarchic rule."[97] According to the other version, called the 'Little Deal', the Soviet state allowed its citizens different semi-legal and illegal activities "in exchange for restraint on managerial discretion, and the repression of overt political dissent."[98] Therefore, the role of ideology was mostly symbolic in the Soviet system during this era. In exchange for a lack of dissent, the state offered relative social guarantees, a stable living standard (not too high, not too low) and seeming ignorance of certain illegal activities. The entire 'contract' was built on both parties keeping up appearances, as an exchange achieving more rights "behind the scenes".[99]

It would be an easy mistake to divide Soviet citizens into two categories: pro-Soviet and counter-Soviet. But especially in terms of 'social contract' and 'keeping up appearances', it has to be emphasised that most people actually lacked any definite opinion of the Soviet system, even in Soviet Estonia, where most people had no recollection of the times before the Soviet era. Despite a fairly good understanding of Western life, people still saw the Soviet Union as a reality to be accepted or as a current situation that would soon turn for the better. As Jukka Gronow says:

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[96] Tinn 15/08/12

[97] Siegelbaum, "Cars, Cars, and More Cars: The Faustian Bargain of the Brezhnev Era", 88.

[98] Ibid.

[99] The role of industrial designers within that 'contract' is discussed in 7.2.

"Most Soviets were neither naïve communist believers nor cynical citizens who either blindly believed everything that was said or had totally lost their faith in all the promises of the authorities. They willingly enjoyed the delights offered to them in their daily lives and endured the hardships in an expectation of a better future to come – or in the absence of any alternatives."[100]

Rather than being divided between definite polarities, most people were just trying to survive the Soviet system in any way they could. As written by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman: "Rather than any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public', there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories."[101] They go on to suggest that: "Everyone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated," and often even "intimates, family members and friends informed on each other."[102] While the first half of this claim is more or less true, the second half is probably a bit exaggerated in the context of this thesis. This is not to say it did not happen, but claiming it to be a frequent occurrence would suggest a greater amount of fear than there actually was. As already quoted from Alexei Yurchak's article, by the period in question Soviet ideology was more a ritual than an actual substance.[103]

In the Soviet context, the concept of industrial design was relatively new. It remained an interdisciplinary phenomenon balanced between different fields and jurisdictions, and the faith of Soviet Estonian industrial design largely depended on individuals instead of the institution of the Communist Party. It is therefore important that instead of being

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[100] Jukka Gronow, Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia, Leisure, Consumption, and Culture (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 152.

[101] Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form".

cast as thoroughly Soviet bureaucrats or brave rebels, the people working in the Soviet system should not always be judged on a political or ideological basis.

To better understand the question of design and ideology, it is first necessary to analyse the political system itself, starting from definitions. Different authors have adopted disparate classifications for the political system, thus mirroring their background, political climate and personal preferences. The Soviet leaders themselves never labelled their system as communist. Communism was a goal; the whole existence of the Soviet Union was built on an aspiration towards this utopia. Officially the regime defined itself as socialist. During Brezhnev's reign, the phrase 'developed socialism' was used to mark the imaginary point between socialism and communism that the country had supposedly reached.[104] Some contemporaneous Western Marxist authors also adopted similar terminology: for example, French economist Charles Bettelheim used 'transition period' to maintain hope towards a better version of Socialism or Communism.[105] Some contemporary authors have used a similar approach, such as Boris Groys who has questioned whether the Soviet Union should be labelled a communist or socialist regime, or neither.[106]

Contrastingly, other authors are convinced that there should not be any attempts to distinguish between the ideals and the reality of a political ideology. The most common expression seems to be 'Soviet socialism', employed by different authors of various disciplines both during and after the Cold War: from economist Alec Nove[107] to

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[104] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 546.

[105] Charles Bettelheim. The Transition to Socialist Economy. (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975)

[106] Groys, The Communist Postscript, xviii.

[107] Alec Nove. Political Economy and Soviet Socialism. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979)

anthropologist Victor Buchli.[108] Janos Kornai is more precise in his terminology, using 'classical socialism' to discern Late Socialism from other periods in the history of the Soviet Union.[109] Importantly, left-wing versus right-wing disparity between terminologies is not always crucial: for example, renowned Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse has also chosen 'Soviet Marxism' as the title of his book.[110] Some authors, such as Katherine Verdery, have also invented ways to compromise between the different terminologies: she has adopted 'real socialism' in order to distinguish between ideals and reality, but still maintaining the idea that the regime should be defined as socialist.[111] This study agrees with the second school of thought, using 'Soviet socialism' to characterize the political system in question.

There are different reasons why the communism of the Soviet Union is brought into question. Among right-wing theoreticians are those who claim that communism is a utopia that could never be realised fully. One of these, Richard Pipes, maintains that communism will never be able to overcome the inherent selfishness of human nature.[112] This point of view suggests that capitalism is the only possible way of life and any alternative ideology would end up as a violation of human rights. This theory, however, only takes Western societies into consideration and either fails to acknowledge non-capitalist societies or sees capitalism as their inevitable future. It is also an over-simplification of human nature, reducing it to one single goal instead of different contradicting desires. Mark Sandle has proposed another angle on the same theory: "It is

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[108] Victor Buchli, An Archaeology of Socialism.
[109] János Kornai. From Socialism to Capitalism. (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2008)
[110] Herbert Marcuse. Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis [in English]. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958)
[111] Katherine Verdery. What was Socialism, and what comes next?
[112] Richard Pipes, History of Communism (Washington D.C.: Phoenix Press, 2002), 160–61.

equally possible to make a case that human beings are inherently sociable and always find collaborative forms to express themselves, to solve problems and cooperative in achieving collective goals."[113]

Often, Western left-wing authors try to attack the idea that the failure of the Soviet Union somehow signified the failure of communism as an ideology. To an extent, this tendency could be defined as a contemporary utopianism, as it suggests that there is a possibility of a perfect society, although no country has managed to accomplish it. Michel Foucault confronted this idea, saying: "Actually the only socialism which deserves these scornful scare-quotes is the one which leads the dreamy life of ideality in our heads."[114] Boris Groys provides a very interesting view on the collapse of the Soviet Union, based on dialectical materialism as the official philosophy of communism:

> "Passing from the project to its context is a necessity for anyone who seeks to grasp the whole. And because the context of Soviet communism was capitalism, the next step in the realisation of communism had to be the transition from communism to capitalism."[115]

He claims further that, especially in the early Soviet period, socialism was seen as the inevitable future for the entire world.[116] Groys's approach hints that instead of seeing the collapse of the Soviet Union as its failure, it could be seen as the inescapable result of the failure of the rest of the world. While this may be a bit too radical, it is true that while there can be no doubt of the communism of the Soviet Union, it would be wrong to overemphasise the role of the ideology or assess its morality. Communist ideology is one thing and the state that interprets it is another. It should be stressed that despite its

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[113] Sandle, Communism, 186.

[114] Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977, ed. Colin Gordon (Vintage, 1980), 132.

[115] Groys, The Communist Postscript, 103.

[116] Ibid., 104.

importance, ideology does not determine everything about a society – it is a joint effort between convictions and the actual individuals applying them to reality.

4.2 Relations with the Western world

It is a popular belief that the Soviet Union was a closed community and its inhabitants had little idea of what was happening in the outside world. In reality, with the exception of brief periods such as after the Second World War, inhabitants of the western parts of the Soviet Union were always able to maintain connections with the outside world. As these contacts were not as strong as those between democratic countries, many Estonians tended to form an idealised image of Western culture. All prevalent artistic styles in the West were also present in Soviet Estonia, albeit watered down with Socialist Realism. This section explains the scope of Western influence in Estonian everyday life, explaining both the cultural environment in which industrial designers were brought up, and the general context of production.

Western and Nordic influences have been so present in Estonian culture that even the Soviet power could not eliminate them. Russian culture was never dominant, due to differences in religion and language – the Estonian language was based on German and written in Latin letters. During the Russian occupation (1721–1918) Estonia had a different order to other parts of Czarist Russia; the local German nobility was relatively autonomous, so German influence remained prevalent despite attempts at russification. This, combined with a general dislike for their occupiers, meant that during the Soviet order Slavonic culture was more often rejected than embraced by Estonians. During the

Soviet period, Estonia managed to preserve the connections to Scandinavia. Many Estonians settled in Sweden. Unlike Finland, Sweden had been neutral during the war and did not send fugitives back. Although having relatives or friends flee the Soviet Union was enough to label one a 'degenerate bourgeois', it was still possible to communicate via letters, even if all letters and parcels were thoroughly examined by the authorities and dangerous information was confiscated.

According to Kaljo-Olev Veskimägi, all mail from abroad was marked on arrival to the central post office with a code 'Tallinn. Post box 21', signifying that the delivery was going to be sent directly to the Central Committee.[117] If anything potentially dangerous was uncovered, it was burnt and the names of both the sender and addressee were written down.[118] Nevertheless, not all publications were destroyed: for example, in 1973 1,573 publications (books, journals and newspapers) were sent, of which just 307 were forbidden. However, as Veskimägi notes, many of these allowed publications were sent to higher officials of the Communist Party and thus were never controlled or censored.[119] Therefore, these figures do not actually reflect the state of censorship. In numbers, censorship seems to alleviate with time until reaching its end in 1990, but Veskimägi theorises that this has more to do with the general public becoming increasingly skilled in hiding illegal activities from the Soviet power than the censorship weakening.[120]

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[117] Veskimägi, Nõukogude Unelaadne Elu: Tsensuur Eesti Nsv-S Ja Tema Peremehed [the Soviet Dreamlike Life: Censorship in Soviet Estonia and Its Masters], 280.
[118] Ibid., 281.
[119] Ibid., 286.
[120] Ibid., 281.

A professor of ERKI, Miralda Kangilaski, recalled that all publications brought from trips or sent via mail were translated and distributed. In the Estonian Art Academy there was even a secret club dedicated to translating all the information they managed to acquire and distributing it among reliable students. These were mostly books and articles about new developments in aesthetic theories and young artists. Kangilaski says: "The fact that it was forbidden only made us want it more."[121] She herself was able to spend several months in the United Kingdom. Even people who did not belong to the Communist Party were sometimes allowed to visit Western countries and, when they returned, they brought books and other information with them. Additionally, many Western books were officially translated to Estonian and even some movies made it to cinemas, such as The Sound of Music.[122] Naturally, foreign movies and especially books were subjected to a careful, centralised censorship; every book that came to Estonia (except for those bought privately abroad or sent by friends) had to gain approval from the central office in Moscow.[123]

For Estonia, Late Socialism was also the era of strengthening contacts with the world outside the Soviet Bloc. Already during the Thaw, Nikita Khruschev had, in Toivo U. Raun's words, "embraced the notion of peaceful competition with the capitalist world."[124] However, it was after the Thaw that communication with the West became more frequent. In 1965, the seaway between Helsinki and Tallinn reopened. Interaction between Finnish tourists and Estonians was not encouraged, but it was impossible to

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[121] Miralda Kangilaski, 30/08/2010.

[122] Jaan Ruus, "Rabedavõitu 'Helisev Muusika' Linna Suurküünis [Slightly Crumbling 'The Sound of Music' In the Giant Town Barn]," Eesti Päevaleht [Estonia Daily], 11/03/2003.

[123] Veskimägi, Nõukogude Unelaadne Elu: Tsensuur Eesti Nsv-S Ja Tema Peremehed [the Soviet Dreamlike Life: Censorship in Soviet Estonia and Its Masters], 278.

[124] Toivo U. Raun, Estonia and the Estonians: Updated Second Edition (Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 189.

completely prevent it. Especially since in the mid-1970s, locals would try to find ways to buy Western products from the tourists. Clothing items were most popular: tights for women, jeans and t-shirts. According to Raun, the number of tourists from outside the Soviet Bloc increased tenfold: in 1965, there were 9,400, but in 1977 it was already 94,100.[125] Estonians could also visit Western and Nordic Europe, although the Soviet bureaucracy complicated the procedure and thus few Estonians had the opportunity.

For many Estonians, Finland was a key source of knowledge about Western everyday life, mostly because of the strong cultural link between the two countries. Owing to the similarities between the Finnish and Estonian languages, communication was easy and Estonians benefited from Finnish media accessible in Northern Estonia. The connection had been maintained in the post-war period through radio. According to Mati Graf and Heikki Roikko-Jokela, thousands of Estonians listened to Finnish radio, because popular music was not tolerated in the Soviet Union.[126] While pop music was the thriving force behind the popularity of Finnish radio, news programs were also popular since they provided a different account to Soviet propaganda. This link was acknowledged and supported by Finland, as proven by the fact that they broadcast some shows in Estonian; on Estonia's Independence Day, Estonian choir music was put on the air.[127] The Soviet Union also tried to take advantage of this geographical proximity and on 14 March 1947, Estonian radio started broadcasting programs in Finnish. They were obviously intended as propaganda and did not find popularity in Finland.[128]

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Mati Graf and Heikki Roiko-Jokela, Vaarallinen Suomi: Suomi Eestin Kommunistisen Puolueen Ja Neuvosto-Viron KGBn Silmin [Dangerous Finland: Finland in the eyes of Estonian Communist Party and the KGB](Jyväskylä: Minerva, 2004), 29.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

First television channels were set up in Finland in the 1960s.[129] Despite the efforts of Soviet authorities, they were viewable in most of northern Estonia, including Tallinn. Due to its popularity amongst Estonians, Finnish television has been named as one of the main factors shaping Late Socialism in Estonia.[130] As it helped most Estonians learn about everyday life in the rest of Europe, Finnish television contributed to increasing the feelings of deception and stagnation. It was hard to believe in the superiority of the socialist system, when images on the television showed the marvels of the consumer society. Kari Alenius even goes as far as suggesting that Finnish television turned Finland into an ideal that Estonians were trying to pursue.[131] No matter how hard Soviet authorities tried, they could not beat this mostly unintentional, but highly effective Western propaganda.

The acquisition of Western information was not always a counter-Soviet act. The Soviet Union had economic ties to the capitalist world and thus much technical information was available through the USSR's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UCCI), a mediator between the East and West.[132] This institution mediated capitalist information, arranging commercial and industrial connections with other Socialist countries, most notably Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany.[133] Therefore, the aim of UCCI was not solely to acquire technical information for home industry, but also to attract the

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[129] Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space], 290.

[130] Kari Alenius, "Veljeskansojen Kahdet Kasvot. [Two Faces of the Brother Nations]" in Suomen Ja Viron Suhteiden Käännekohtia 1860–1991 [Turning Points in Relations between Finland and Estonia, 1860–1991], ed. Heikki Roiko-Jokela (Jyväskylä: Atena Kustannus, 1997), 29.

[131] Heikki Roiko-Jokela, Suomen Ja Viron Suhteiden Käännekohtia 1860–1991 [Turning Points in Relations between Finland and Estonia, 1860–1991] (Jyväskylä: Atena Kustannus, 1997), 29.

[132] The acceptance of Western design is explained in chapter 5 and section 8.2.

[133] ERA.R-2082.1.244

attention of foreign companies. This task was visible in the official letterhead, which included the name of the institution not only in Russian, but also in English, French, German and Spanish.[134] In comparison, UCCI's local branches were supposed to interact with the West under the surveillance of the main office and their letterheads only included the name of the institution in the local language and Russian.[135]

4.2.1 Director of factory Norma visiting USA. Pictured on a cruise past Natez on the river Mississipi. 1988. Credits: Tallinn City Museum

UCCI operated in two ways: organising foreign trade shows in the Soviet Union and vice versa, and mediating foreign information and products for the Soviet Union. The latter were mostly collected by bureaucrats on business trips to Western Europe or other

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[134] ERA.R-2082.1.244
[135] ERA.R-2082.1.244

Socialist countries.[136] Later, the objects were kept in a showroom in Tallinn, where designers and other specialists were able to study them more thoroughly. As Peeter Kuutma, a former textile designer, claims, the professionalism of these bureaucrats meant that most products brought to Estonia had excellent design and were made of quality materials.[137] In a similar manner, high quality design magazines were chosen, such as the British *Industrial Design* or West German *Schöner Wohnen*.[138] In 1988, even six issues of *Domus* were translated into Russian, censored and published in Moscow.[139] Thus, for Soviet Estonian industrial designers there existed an interesting and mostly accidental aesthetic censorship, which removed works of lower quality and showed mostly the better examples of Western design.[140]

Most trade shows organised in Estonia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union were arguably dedicated to specialist equipment, not everyday commodities. A good example is the trade show organised in Tallinn on 1–31 March 1977 dedicated to oceanographic instruments, with companies from eight capitalist countries: Finland, USA, France, Austria, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Japan.[141] The organisational committee consisted of specialists from throughout the Soviet Union, Estonian specialists having only two seats.[142] Therefore, the exhibition appears to have been mostly controlled by Moscow and UCCI, not its local Estonian branch. The list of represented companies, in the table below, is quite extensive.

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[136] Peeter Kuutma, 16/04/2013.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Meigas.
[139] Õunapuu, Matti. 19/06/2012
[140] The relationship between Western design and Soviet design ideology is further discussed in 5.1.
[141] ERA.R-2082.1.267, p. 34.
[142] Ibid.

Country	Companies	Floor space
Finland Represented by Suomen Messut LC	Hydro-Tekno AB Nokia AB E. Sarlin AB Tampella Valmet YIT Sähköliikeiden LC	45 m^2
USA	Hewlett Packard Magnawoks (in cooperation with Summi Tomo)	30 m^2 27 m^2
France Represented by Codewintec	Ametek Straza AMF Sea-Link Benthos EGG Environmental Division General Oceanics Neil Brown Instrument Systems Burnett Electronics Lab Teledyne Geotech Mar Kony Boston Insulated Wires Soris	160 m^2
Austria	Technicon	15 m^2
Germany	Hydro Bios Hagenuk Impulsphysik Brucker Physik	45 m^2 13.5 m^2 18 m^2
Norway	Anderaa Instrumenti	13.5 m^2
Sweden	Perkin Elmer	10 m^2
Japan	Marubeni Cannon	28 m^2

4.2.2 List and details of the companies represented at the trade show of oceanographic instruments in Tallinn, 1-31 March 1977.[143]

It is unknown if the trade show was open to the public, but due to the specificity of the instruments shown it was unlikely to attract wider attention. Nonetheless, the size of the exhibition still demonstrates the scope of connections between the Soviet Union and the Western world. As the exhibition took place in 1977, it shows how the approaching

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[143] Ibid., 36.

Olympic games played a role growing perceptions of the Soviet Union as an attractive business contact – not only between governments, but also individual enterprises. This hypothesis is supported by other trade shows organised in Tallinn and elsewhere in the Soviet Union around the same time. For example, in 1977 the Finnish consulate in Leningrad proposed a trade show of Finnish water sport equipment in Tallinn. While the event was initially intended to take place in August 1977, the Estonian branch of the organisational committee for the Olympics decided to reschedule it to August 1978, as a trade show of general sport equipment was organised in Moscow at the same time.[144] Finland, besides being an unofficial cultural contact, was also an important trade partner for the Soviet Union, Estonia in particular. A specific institution even existed to develop business contacts between the USSR and Finland, the Finnish-Soviet Chamber of Commerce. Their knowledge of the Soviet market is demonstrated in their use of local language: letters directed to the general UCCI are written in Russian[145] and correspondence with the Estonian branch is in Estonian.[146]

Especially towards the end of the period in question, certain economic contacts were even pursued through local initiative. There is an exchange of letters found in the Tallinn City Archives. From the letters it is understood that on 4 January 1983 a Finnish delegation from the town of Kotka, located on the south-eastern coast of Finland, visited the Art Products Factory in Tallinn. [147] The visitors gave positive feedback to the enterprise and even requested that during a Tallinn-Kotka twin town festival in Kotka, ARS would organise an exhibition-sale of applied arts and craft objects. Already on 19

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[144] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 59
[145] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 81
[146] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 130
[147] Art Products Factory or ARS was not that much of a factory, but rather an enterprise uniting Soviet Estonian artists, applied artists and craftsmen. Further information can be found in 6.2.

January the director of ARS, K. Arusoo, and the head artist, M. Plees, wrote to J. Sandrak, the head of the department of international relations of the State Plan of the Soviet Estonian Council of Ministers, requesting permission to take part in the exhibition:

> "The members of the visiting delegation showed a serious interest towards the production of applied arts and artist editions and requested planning an exhibition-sale in the town of Kotka during the Tallinn-Kotka twin town festival. We are gladly willing to introduce our applied arts products based on our folk art traditions to the twin town. To receive an acceptance to participate in the exhibition, we will prepare the materials of the exhibition and manufacture special souvenirs and designs that would introduce our folk art and simultaneously depict the subject of twin towns. According to our knowledge there is a company in Finland, which mediates the introduction of Soviet art in Finland, Soviet ART GALLERY Ltd. […] We ask for your benevolent attitude and support to the organisation of an exhibition-sale introducing Estonian art and applied art, according to a request from the heads of the twin town."[148]

As illustrated by the letter, contact with the West required formal permission from the state. One can also find a slightly rebellious self-defining in the letter: in describing the possible approaches to the future exhibition, the director mentions introducing Estonian folk art and the subject of the twin towns, but nothing about Soviet art traditions in general or socialism as an ideology. Furthermore, there is a telling peculiarity in the last sentence: instead of talking about introducing Soviet Estonian art, he simply writes "Estonian art". Within the archives there are neither replies to this letter nor any documents regarding further organisation of the exhibition-sale. It can be assumed that for some reason the exhibition never took place, as otherwise some record would have been preserved. To be fair, one cannot be certain that this means it was rejected by the Council of Ministers, as the failure of the exhibition could have also been caused by problems within ARS or a lack of funds. Nevertheless, the absence of an accepting reply from the Council of Ministers is telling.

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[148] Tallinn City Archive R-144.1.607, 1983.

There is, however, another letter, from director Arusoo to Mr Kaj Niemi, one of the members of the visiting delegation from Kotka. Presumably, this letter is further proof of the failure of the planned exhibition, as otherwise director Arusoo would have been able to search for contacts while in Kotka and would have also met Mr Niemi there personally:

> "Of the brief, but very pleasant conversation we got the impression that the domain in question also provides a certain commercial interest. We dare to address you with a request to continue searching for possibilities with a company from the Republic of Finland, as your mediation would be both a great honour and great help to us. Of the brief connections that we have acquired, those most worth mentioning are the department house of Stockmann and Soviet ART. Gallery Ltd. […] There have been one-time encounters with others. However, sadly we have not found a permanent business partner so far.

> "We are always willing to host the representatives of Finnish enterprises and introduce them to the best of our production. Every spring, there are group exhibitions of Estonian artists, of which the exhibition of visual arts opened on April 13 and will remain open until May 15. On May 27, the exhibition of applied arts will open, which would give a thorough overview of the possibilities of our applied arts. We would gladly receive primarily you with your wife or anyone else sent by you."[149]

It should be mentioned that the Stockmann department store was and still is one of the most prestigious shops in Helsinki. There was no evidence that the Art Products Factory succeeded in pursuing these business contacts, nor was there a reply letter from Mr Kaj Niemi in the archives. However, this exchange of letters is a good example of the possibilities for Western contacts for Soviet Estonian enterprises, as well as the bureaucracy involved. It is true that certain products were exported to Western countries. According to an interview with a professor emeritus in glass art, Maie-Ann Raun, Estonian glass products manufactured in the factory Tarbeklaas were quite popular in Finland in the late 1960s and onwards. However, she emphasises that this

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[149] Ibid.

was mostly due to their cheap price compared to more expensive Scandinavian glass, rather than their quality.[150]

The chief aim of these trade shows was not to inspire designers or inform the general public about Western industry, but to acquire specialist equipment needed for local purposes. Thus, each was carefully assessed. For example, in October 1977 a trade show of Olivetti was planned to take place in Tallinn,[151] but the event was cancelled by UCCI.[152] The reason being that most electronic equipment used in the Soviet Union came from the USA, Japan and West Germany. Already the maintenance of products coming from those three countries was deemed problematic and so the purchase of Italian equipment was not considered, hence the trade show was cancelled altogether.[153] This incident illustrates the economic struggles faced by the Soviet Union. As it lacked the capability of producing necessary specialist equipment, especially under the conditions of fast technological progress, USSR depended on the capitalist world.

Left: 4.2.3 Head engineer of Estoplast, Heino Kalda, with the permanent representative of the Japanese company Kioho Tsuho Kaisho within Soviet Union. 1975. Credits: ETDM

Right: 4.2.4 Factory Norma receiving a delegation of company Plauen from GDR. June 1981. Credits: Tallinn City Museum

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[150] Raun.
[151] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 79
[152] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 80
[153] ERA.R-2082.1.267. p 80

Occasionally, Western design and applied arts exhibitions were also organised for the Estonian public. Similar shows had been hosted already during the Thaw, such as the 1961 exhibition on Finnish industrial art at Tallinn Art Hall. The range of objects varied from electric tools to wallpaper to glassware, and many renowned contemporaneous Finnish designers were included, such as Alvar Aalto, Ilmari Tapiovaara, Maija Isola, Tapio Wirkkala and Antti Nurmesniemi.[154] Western, especially Finnish, design exhibitions took place throughout the Soviet era.

Stylistic information on Western life was also acquired through Soviet propaganda. In 1971, the KGB commissioned a propaganda film, White Ship, directed by Kalju Komissarov, which was partially filmed in Stockholm.[155] The main characters are a young Estonian couple influenced by Western youth culture: they belong to a motorcycle gang and wear Western-style clothes. Eventually, they flee across the water to Stockholm, where they meet an émigré Estonian officer who deceives them, seduces the girl and tortures the boy. The aim of the film was to criticise Western ways of life and the mentality of émigré Estonians, but it also provided Soviet Estonian viewers with shots of Swedish everyday life. The number of filming locations in Stockholm was relatively small, only one private apartment, one restaurant, and some street views mostly filmed from a balcony or a moving car. Most street shots were dirty alleyways or large housing estates, although it is unclear whether this was a propagandistic choice or difficulty in achieving filming permissions. However, the camera does pass the window

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[154] "Soome Tööstusliku Tarbekunsti Näitus [the Exhibition of Finnish Industrial Art]," ed. Tallinn Art Hall (Tallinn: Kommunist, 1961).

[155] Kristiina Davidjants, "KGB Tellimus – Valge Laev [KGB Commission – White Ship]," Maaleht, 27/11/2011.

displays of clothing stores H&M and KappAhl. The film employs scenes of Swedes likely oblivious to being filmed from afar: a crowd listening to street performers and an anti-Vietnam demonstration. The demonstration, where many participants belonged to the hippy subculture, offered Soviet viewers ample information on Western trends.

Left: 4.2.5 Still from White ship. On the background, the logo of Hennes, an earlier name of H&M, is visible.

Right: 4.2.6 Still from White ship

After the Thaw, people commonly considered both the economy and society to be in a standstill. The Thaw had given hope that everyday life would improve and more liberties would be granted, but the new centralisation destroyed that dream. As contact with the West increased thanks to media and tourists, the chance to compare Estonia's living conditions to those in the West further added to discontent with Soviet power. The continuing presence of Finnish television played a large part in this. Through this medium, Estonians were given an impression of Finnish life and were able to see Western films and television programs. In spite of the formal and ritualistic repetition of Communist slogans in the media, the ideological substance was disappearing from Soviet Estonian politics.

4.3 A chronology of industrial design in Soviet Estonia

Industrial design was a relatively novel and vague concept in the Soviet Union during Late Socialism. While there had been some experiments during the Revolutionary era, industrial design as a whole was still subject to many questions and problems. This section studies the formation and evolution of the concept of industrial design in the Soviet Union and Soviet Estonia, concentrating on the conflicts between different forces. While it would be easy to divide the factors shaping industrial design into two clear categories, where bureaucrats represent stagnation and designers mark progress, it would also be far too simplistic. After all, both bureaucracy and the design economy are combined of individuals.

The status of industrial design was unclear in Soviet ideology. After the war, factories were in a difficult state, and providing appealing appearances was not a priority in the production of commodities. As Raymond Hutchings notes, Soviet design resources were mostly used for areas where "rapid progress was sought while foreign prototypes or techniques were not readily, if at all, available."[156] While in Western capitalism the progress of industrial design was largely incited by companies to ensure commercial profit, this was not necessary under Soviet conditions. As put by Hutchings:

> "Unlike designers working in a competitive market, Soviet designers of consumer goods were not obliged to keep on designing something new, since in conditions of acute shortage whatever was offered for sale would be purchased."[157]

Also, in Western capitalism companies were in charge of their own production. In the conditions of centralised planning, the improvement of industrial design had to come

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[156] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence, 145.
[157] Ibid.

from the government. No single factory would have had the means or authority to pay more attention to design. The uncertainty regarding design actually often proved beneficial to local designers and other people working with design. Eduard Tinn, the former editor of Sirp ja Vasar, proposed in interview that the reason design ideology was less regulated and more flexible than art or architecture ideology was twofold. Firstly, as most people working with design were relatively young, they were exposed more to Western ideas and less to the Stalinist regime. Secondly, it was thanks to the lack of a previously defined design ideology that it was possible to develop a new, less regulated ideology.[158]

The propagation of industrial design as a separate discipline, however, was questionable in the context of communist ideology. Dmitry Azrikan claims, referring to the ideas prevalent during Late Socialism:

> "It might be a terrible mistake if design promotion were based on the immanent value of design. Design, having an obvious Western face, nature, and genesis, could be accepted as only a tool and not as an autonomous phenomenon with its own place and role in Soviet culture."[159]

Thus, it was necessary for Soviet design to have a clear purpose distinguishing it from its Western counterpart. Soviet design had to be a tool to influence and educate people and help spread socialist ideas. This is simply a propagandistic point of view, which did not need to be preeminent amongst Soviet bureaucrats. As already discussed in previous sections, the Soviet bureaucracy and government consisted of individuals whose stimuli were not necessarily identical to those of the Soviet ideology as a textual utopia. Therefore, it is impossible to divide Soviet history into Communist or Anti-Communist actions and ideas, as the actual causes were much more complicated. By the 1970s,

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[158] Eduard Tinn, 15/08/2012.

[159] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 48.

most people had started to accept the Soviet regime as an inevitable part of life and had no stronger feelings either against or towards it.

The same mentality was also prevalent among Soviet bureaucrats. Many, if not most, had other motivations besides loyalty towards the Soviet regime to be working in higher positions. Alexei Yurchak has conducted a number of interviews with higher Soviet officials to define their relationship with Soviet ideology. One of them, referred to as Andrei, made a clear distinction between the different aspects of his work:

> "He distinguished between two types of Komsomol practice. The first he called 'formality' (proforma) and 'ideological shell' (ideologicheskaia shelukha) – it consisted of the production of pragmatic markers (well-formed reports, textual blocks, etc.) that simply signaled unavoidable ideological contexts. The second type of ideological work Andrei called 'work with meaning' (rabotaso smyslom), and this he found important and enjoyable, and often organised on his own initiative."[160]

Yurchak goes on to explain:

> "In practice, the two types of work – 'pure formality' and 'work with meaning' – were in a mutually constitutive relationship: fulfilling some 'formality' was a necessary prerequisite for being able to perform 'work with meaning.' To put this differently, performing the unavoidable and ritualized 'formality' helped to outline the ideological space (what Andrei calls 'shell') within which other, 'meaningful' forms of ideological work and socialist life could proceed."[161]

The same principle also held true when it came to the Soviet and Estonian design scene and ideology. The ideological aspects, or 'shell', were often added later to justify the 'work with meaning'. It is necessary to remember that in Soviet Estonia after the Thaw, the fall of the Soviet Union was not seen as inevitable. Eduard Tinn, who was active in the formation of design ideology, emphasised during an interview:

> "But of course we did not have one knowledge, which they all [the younger generation of Estonian historians – TJ] lie today, that they all knew the Soviet Union was going to collapse. Americans, all of these specialists, none of them

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[160] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form", 498.
[161] Ibid.

knew there it would collapse. It was a miracle it did, it was thanks to Gorbachev's stupidity it collapsed. He didn't understand it even himself, what he was doing."[162]

In this context, it was important to make the best of the situation. Again quoting Tinn: "The cynical approach that it couldn't be done in our conditions, it annoyed us. It could be done, everything could be done!"[163] Making the best of the given situation was one of the key ideas of Soviet Estonian industrial design. While the material and bureaucratic conditions were not always favourable, designers still somehow managed.

Usually, the birth of Late Socialist industrial design as a discipline is considered to be marked by the foundation of VNIITE, the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics (Vsesoyuznyy nauchno-issldovatel'skiy institute tekhnicheskoy estetiki) in October 1962.[164] As Raymond Hutchings observed, when it came to industrial design, by the 1960s the Soviet Union had actually fallen behind several other countries in the Socialist Bloc: Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany and Hungary all had strong design traditions and had founded design institutions.[165] VNIITE was subordinate to the State Committee for Science and Technology, therefore a governmental rather than academic authority.[166] According to Dmitry Azrikan, the aim of VNIITE was to:

> "integrate creativity, design education, and powerful ideological influence into society. The aesthetic mission of VNIITE also was intensely important, as well as a forcible focus on design propaganda and promotion throughout the fifteen Soviet republics with their diverse histories, cultures and levels of industrial development."[167]

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[162] Tinn.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design, 147.

[165] Ibid., 150–51.

[166] Ibid., 155.

[167] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 49–50.

Therefore, VNIITE was a strongly ideological institution, as well as an idealistic one. Although Communist propaganda played a role in it, VNIITE's aim was still mostly to pursue higher aesthetic standards.

As Azrikan notes, the founder and director of VNIITE, Yuri Soloviev, organised numerous international design exhibitions in the Soviet Union. Soloviev "made VNIITE probably the most globally-open Soviet institution behind the Iron Curtain, except for the Bolshoy Ballet."[168] It can be assumed that this also helped shape the future of Soviet Estonian industrial design. As VNIITE made Western industrial design acceptable and information concerning it available throughout the Soviet Union, the individual Soviet states also had a bit more liberty. Estonians in general had better access to Western information than many other parts of the Soviet Union. While industrial design might have been an ideologically difficult subject, the stimulus behind it was mostly the will to improve Soviet life.[169]

Unlike most other Soviet states, Estonia did not have a separate branch of VNIITE. Hutchings assumed that Estonian and Latvian design were supposed to be subordinate to the branch of VNIITE located in Vilnius,[170] though there are no sources to back up his theory and he himself admits that it is based on the fact that the official title uses 'Vilnius', not 'Lithuanian'. Dmitry Azrikan, who does not mention anything about the Estonian design system being dependent of Vilnius, simply calls it "a VNIITE fortress

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[168] Ibid.: 63.

[169] The different factors that came to play later on in shaping the combination of ideologies are discussed in chapter 8.

[170] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design, 156.

in the Baltic Republics, which ignored this state design empire and correctly assumed that they could survive without Moscow's supervision."[171]

One organisation in Estonia was subordinate to VNIITE, this was the Industrial Art Committee, founded in 1962. It was much less complex than the elaborate system of the actual branches of VNIITE, as described by Dmitry Azrikan; the committee had no governmental tasks, but was rather intended for distributing information.[172] Therefore, its role in the formation of industrial design in Soviet Estonia was not as crucial as the foundation of VNIITE for the general Soviet industrial design economy. In the Soviet Estonian context, one of the most significant events was the foundation of the industrial art department at the Estonian State Art Institute (ERKI) in 1966 by Professor Bruno Tomberg.[173] The establishment of this department could arguably be defined as the first time industrial design was acknowledged as a discipline in Estonia.

A remarkable milestone for the development of Soviet Estonian industrial design was the exhibition series *Space and Form*, which helped bring design closer to the general public and was also connected to ERKI. Although there were only four exhibitions in the series (1969, 1972, 1976–77 and 1984) they helped incite public discussion on the role of design.[174] While the first helped to establish the concept of industrial design for the wider public, the second exhibition questioned the role and purpose of design quite

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[171] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 61.

[172] Ibid.

[173] His role and the role of ERKI will be further discussed in 7.1.

[174] Krista Kodres and Kai Lobjakas, "Disainiutoopia Sünd Ja Areng [the Birth and Development of a Design Utopia]," in Eesti Kunsti Ajalugu 6. I Osa [History of Estonian Art 6. Part I], ed. Krista Kodres (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2013), 411–13.

courageously, thus presenting a leap in design paradigms in just a few years.[175] Despite their popularity, these exhibitions mostly influenced the avant-garde, rather than the everyday material culture.

In the development of mass-produced industrial design, the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games was an important milestone, and its sailing regatta was held in Tallinn. To cater for the many Western tourists expected to visit the event, improvements were needed in various fields, mostly urban, interior and souvenir design. In 1972, an urban design group led by Matti Õunapuu was formed at the Art Products Factory to redesign the urban landscape of Tallinn.[176] After the Olympic games, the group also became active in industrial design, as they started to execute orders for serial production in different factories in both Estonia and other Soviet republics.[177] Around the same time, discussions on industrial design became more frequent in the media. In 1975, Eduard Tinn was appointed head editor of the culture newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*. Within the Communist Party, Tinn was involved in the debates on industrial design politics, an interest that soon became apparent in his newspaper as well. *Sirp ja Vasar* started publishing texts on design and design philosophy from Estonia, the Soviet Union and the West, as well as organising debates on industrial design.

By the 1980s, the gap between design and industry had increased. Contacts between Soviet Estonia and Western Europe had strengthened further and thus, as visible in exhibition objects and design magazines, industrial designers and other specialists of the

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[175] Soviet Estonian design exhibitions are further discussed in 7.3.

[176] Kai Lobjakas, "Design Studio," in Between Art and Industry. The Art Products Factory, ed. Kai Lobjakas (Tallinn: Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design, 2014), 356.

[177] ARS design group is discussed further in 7.2.

field were familiar with the latest debates and trends in the Western world.[178] However, slow economic and technological advancement combined with bureaucratic difficulties hindered the progress of factory design. While exhibition designs and design theories in Soviet Estonia were often creative, of good quality, and connected to global trends, not all factory production managed to achieve a similar standard. Even the gaps between different factories were often quite significant, and dependent on individual factory management.[179] Therefore, this thesis avoids dividing the period in question into strictly dated stylistic sub-periods.

The evolution of industrial design in Soviet Estonia is a good example of the increasing globalisation of creative disciplines during the second half of the 20th century. While industrial design as a defined discipline emerged later in Estonia and the Soviet Union than in most of the Western capitalist world, the gradual increase in contacts with the Western world, as well as the amelioration of living standards, caused an acceleration in the evolution of design theory in the 1960s. Still, the timeline below demonstrates that most of the faster progress, especially in design institutions, happened during the more liberal period of late 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, during the period of greater centralised Soviet control and economic difficulties, the differences between designs and actual objects produced in factories grew. There are at least three possible reasons. Firstly, as centralised control required a greater amount of bureaucracy, the time period between the initial design and the final product reaching consumers grew even more. The outdated appearance of a number of consumer goods, however, had already

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[178] More on this subject in 8.2.
[179] Further information on the different positions of industrial designers in 7.2.

previously been one of the main problems faced by Soviet Estonian industry.[180] Secondly, by the late 1970s industrial design had more or less succeeded in establishing its position as a discipline. Quite significantly, the year 1978, Vaino's first year in office, also marks the publishing of the first Estonian book dedicated to the problems of industrial design.[181] Finally, the rise of postmodern tendencies favoured different approaches to design outside of institutional control. As Estonian postmodernism in design was largely influenced by Italy and the Memphis group, a certain amount of anti-institutionalism was natural.[182]
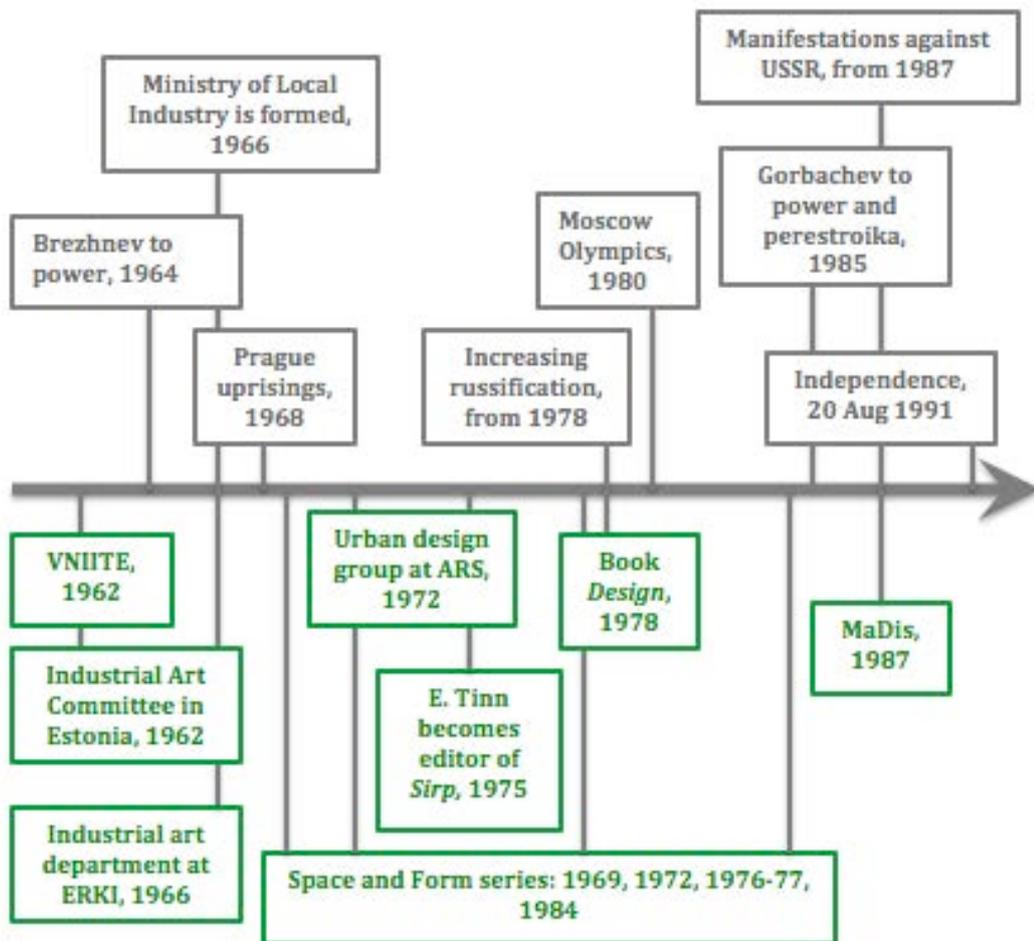
4.3.1 Chronology of the history of industrial design in Soviet Estonia

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[180] As chapters 5–8 will discuss

[181] More information on that publication in 7.1.

[182] More on this subject in 8.2.

As the production system in the conditions of a planned economy did not allow design to emerge without a direct state order, the industrial design system only began to be created in the 1960s. From the beginning, the status of design was ideologically difficult due to the Western origin of influences behind the design system and its styles. Even choosing the correct terminology was not easy, either in Russian or in Estonian. The beginning of the Soviet design system is often considered to be in October 1962, as VNIITE, All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics, was founded. Although it was not directly in charge of Estonian design, its information and tendencies shaped the local design. While Soviet Estonian industrial design progressed quite rapidly until the late 1970s, during the 1980s the development was slowed by increasing bureaucracy and centralisation.

Conclusions

After the Thaw, life in Soviet Estonia somewhat improved. Estonia and the other Baltic states had become part of the Soviet Union several decades after most other states, and so their living standard was higher, contributing to their relative economic success within the Soviet Union. However, the improvement of living standards was not as fast as people had expected, and the new centralisation of power brought discontent with the Soviet regime. In the 1960s, it became easier to get information about life in the West through tourist contacts, Finnish media and Western sources. As comparison between Eastern and Western Blocs became easier, dissatisfaction grew rapidly.

As Soviet industry lagged behind Western industry and bureaucratic processes took more time owing to the rigid nature of Soviet ideology, it was only in the 1960s that industrial design formed as a discipline. The beginning of the Soviet design system is considered as the 1962 founding of VNIITE, and while it did not have a separate branch in Soviet Estonia, its existence still shaped design processes throughout the Union, legitimising industrial design as a profession. There was one institution in Estonia that was subordinate to VNIITE: the Industrial Art Committee, also founded in 1962. However, the committee had no legal rights or tasks, but was rather intended for distributing information. In the local context, the defining moments in the evolution of industrial design were the foundation of the new department of industrial art at ERKI and the exhibition series *Space and Form*, both of which helped create critical debate on the subject of local design.

5. Industrial design

"Certain commodities were produced in the Soviet Union, not because they sold well on the market, but because they conformed to an ideological vision of the communist future. And on the other hand, those commodities that could not be legitimated ideologically were not produced. This was true of all commodities, not just the texts or images of official propaganda. In Soviet communism, every commodity became an ideologically relevant statement, just as in capitalism every statement becomes a commodity. One could eat communistically, house and dress oneself communistically – or likewise non-communistically, or even anti-communistically. This meant that in the Soviet Union it was in theory just as possible to protest against the shoes or eggs or sausage then available in the stores as it was to protest against the official doctrines of historical materialism. They could be criticized in the same terms because these doctrines had the same original source as the shoes, eggs and sausage – namely, the relevant decisions of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Everything in communist existence was the way it was because someone had said that it should be thus and not otherwise."[183]

This quote from Boris Groys illustrates the omnipresence of communist ideology in every field of Soviet life. Communist theories and doctrines were used to justify everything, and design was no exception. The quote also demonstrates how all elements of everyday life were interconnected in the Soviet regime. Rebellion against one aspect consequently meant fighting the entire system. All products were considered carriers of communist ideology, although in certain areas of life applying a communist ideology was actually a question of inventing one in the first place. Design was one of them. Applying communist ideology to design meant that the Soviet regime first had to develop a control system that would correspond to the idea of communism as closely as possible. This fifth chapter aims to map and analyse this control system in relation to industrial design in order to allow a better understanding of the position of designers.

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[183] Groys, The Communist Postscript, xx.

This chapter argues that the visual side of Soviet Estonian design should be seen as aspiring towards the Western world and not Moscow, despite the latter being the centre of political power. While Soviet tendencies influenced the design economy and ideology in terms of material practices, Western influences manifested in stylistics. The will of Estonian industrial designers to follow Western trends was partially caused by the idea of Western Europe as the global centre, and the Soviet Union as a periphery. However, the lack of a clearly defined visual ideology in Soviet industrial design contributed to the popularity of Western trends. Also, as demonstrated previously, the Soviet design economy was already fashioned after Western ideas.

The chapter introduces the interrelations between industrial design and Soviet ideology, and the problems of terminology provide illustration of the conflicts between Soviet and Western influences in Estonian design. From these issues the chapter moves on to position Estonian industrial design in the meeting point of Western and Soviet powers and identifies the characteristics of local design ideology. This approach helps to map the Estonian system and analyse the position of its industrial designers within the Soviet power structures.

5.1 Design and ideology in Soviet Estonia

Discussing design ideology, we must not only consider texts about design but also practices related to it. The reason it is possible to talk about a design ideology in Soviet Estonia is not just the existence of texts considering it, but also the fact that the Soviet government tried to cover every aspect of life with ideology. While there is no one body

governing design under capitalism, allowing greater heterogeneity, the centralised nature of Soviet design permitted state apparatuses to apply a uniform design ideology. It was unthinkable that any detail in everyday life would be ideologically neutral, as by Marxist-Leninist standards everything was ideologically charged. As said by Herbert Dubin, a Latvian design philosopher:

> "The object as a materialised representative of certain social relations does not exist outside of our contemporary ideological life. Therefore the designer is also an active warrior on the ideological front."[184]

Designers were carriers of Soviet ideas, much like everyone else in the cultural field. It must be stressed that in the Soviet context, the word 'ideology' had no negative connotations, the same as the word 'propaganda', which was widely used. It was considered necessary that everything conveyed socialist values. As Paul Roth writes, the task of propaganda was two-fold: firstly, to justify the political leadership, and secondly, to create a 'new man' by proclaiming the 'science' and 'truth' of Marxism-Leninism.[185] As the Soviet system sought to politicise every aspect of public and private life, propaganda had to be omnipresent.[186]

The first attempts at a defined textual design ideology in the Soviet Union may be traced back to the beginning of Khrushchev's era. As Khrushchev set out to condemn the cult of personality, he also aimed to make the Soviet living environment more modern and more comfortable.[187] As interiors are an important part of people's lives, it

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[184] Herbert Dubin, "Disain Sotsialistliku Nüüdiskultuuri Süsteemis [Design in the System of Contemporary Socialist Culture]," Sirp ja Vasar, 15/04/1977.

[185] Paul Roth, "Propaganda as an Instrument of Power," in From Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), 221.

[186] Ibid., 223.

[187] Iurii Gerchuk, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954–64)" in Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 89.

was essential that they should mirror socialist ideals in some way. As Ingi Vaher, an

Estonian glass designer, stated in 1964:

> "Educating people in aesthetic matters is an important part of the Communist educational system. [...] Only industry can duplicate applied arts products to the extent of being able to influence the taste of the wider public."[188]

This quote is a good illustration of design practitioners and theoreticians trying to

position design in the Soviet ideological system. It was agreed that the appeal of design

should be its ability to reach the masses. Besides ideological education, it was also a

question of aesthetic education. Design was supposed to be on an equally high level for

everyone, another strategy for marginalising class differences in society.

To analyse the notions of power and ideology in the Soviet system and design economy,

this thesis refers to Foucauldian philosophy. Addressing the problems of state and

power, Foucault has written:

> "I don't want to say that the state isn't important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state – in two senses. First of all, because the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations; and, further, because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already-existing power relations."[189]

This statement also holds true in the case of the Soviet Union. Despite increasing the

scope of political control, the system itself was hardly innovative. Further quoting

Foucault on that subject:

> "I'd like to mention only two 'pathological forms' – those two 'diseases of power' – fascism and Stalinism. One of the numerous reasons why they are so puzzling for us is that, in spite of their historical uniqueness, they are not quite original. They used and extended mechanisms already present in most other societies. More than that: in spite of their own internal madness, they used, to a large extent, the ideas and the devices of our political rationality."[190]

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[188] Ingi Vaher, "Mõtisklusi Tööstuskunstist [Thoughts on Industrial Art]," Kunst 1964, 29.
[189] Foucault, "Truth and Power," 122–23.
[190] "The Subject and Power," 328.

Several aspects of the Soviet design economy were largely based on Western examples: the existence of industrial design as an occupation, the design group of the Art Products Factory as an alternative to freelance designers, and even modern aesthetics. Although several layers of control and bureaucracy were added to better impose Soviet power on design, the basic structure of the design system is not that different from its Western counterpart. In fact, as already mentioned, it is visibly taken over from the West, but adapted to better suit the Soviet system. In the western parts of the Eastern Bloc, this kind of design system had already started to form before Soviet power, and thus in a Foucauldian sense, state power was imposed on existing power relations.

The main problem of Soviet Estonian design ideology was its relation to Western design. While in every other aspect of culture the official propaganda demanded that Soviet ways be considered superior, design was one field where it was allowed to admit that the West was better advanced. Articles praised Western design, even in major daily newspapers. Mostly, they were presented as drawing on an example, either from an exhibition or a trip to the West, suggesting that local factories follow the example. For example, on 31 May 1974, two Estonian designers Toivo Gans and Mait Summatavet visited EXPO'74 in the USA and the American exhibition was the one they praised most.[191] Still, it must be emphasised that while authors were allowed to point to the shortcomings of Soviet design, criticism could never be directed against the system as a whole. It was always against the production of a certain factory, poor selection in a certain store, bad quality of a certain object – never phrased in a way that could be considered hostile against the system as such.

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[191] Jaak Mamers, "Maailmanäituse Ja Ameerika Juttu Meie Sisearhitektidega [Discussing Expo and USA with Our Interior Architects]," Sirp ja Vasar, 31/05/1974, 8.

5.1.1 Promotional photograph for Standard. 1984. Credits: ETDM

Admitting Western superiority was not enough; as Western design was considered 'better', copying it was politically encouraged. The local department of UCCI, which belonged under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Industry, had a special information department that, along with other tasks, circulated visual and textual materials on Western industry in factories.[192] These objects were collected by local bureaucrats on business trips to Western countries. Mostly, they were higher officials working for a Ministry or some other higher structure.[193] Exemplary objects were kept in special exhibition rooms where designers could see them. Not only libraries, but also larger factories themselves subscribed to more important Western design magazines. Alongside *Domus*, the British *Industrial Design* was quite common, as well as the West German *Schöner Wohnen*.[194] The Soviet system expected designers to learn from this information and, if necessary, copy Western design; while it was not publicly talked

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[192] The functions of UCCI were explained in 4.2.

[193] Maie-Ann Raun, 30/03/2013.

[194] Õunapuu, Matti. 19/06/2012

about, it was not a secret either. Repetition was not considered a vice in the Soviet Union, as long as the content was ideologically and morally correct.[195]

Copying Western design was especially common at the beginning of Late Socialism, when factories employed industrial designers less frequently. In 1967, the head constructor of the electronics factory Norma, J. Vaher, wrote about the creative process in Estonian factories. His role as a head constructor in a factory was to make new designs suitable for mass production. According to his experience, the main sources for creating new objects were foreign designs (meaning coming from outside the Soviet Union), acquired either through organisations specialising in distributing foreign objects, or by any other means. In Vaher's words, there were three design methods for taking over foreign objects: either blueprints were made based on the example, the object was taken straight to production without any interference by the local designer, or minor changes were made to adapt the product to the factory's possibilities. Vaher by no means approved of this practice, claiming that objects created by this mere act of copying were morally aged, since they were based on products designed several years earlier, and did not satisfy consumer needs.[196] This tendency to copy Western objects remained in several factories until the perestroika; it was definitely not the main strategy for creating new design, but quite common.

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[195] Paulus, "Eero Aarnio Karikatool Ja Nõukogude Eesti [Eero Aarnio's Chair and Soviet Estonia]", 32.
[196] Vaher, "Kunstilise Konstrueerimise Probleemidest [About the Problems of Artistic Construction]," 6.

Left: 5.1.2 Ingi Vaher. Glasses for Tarbeklaas, 1970s. Tarbeklaas was an example of strong modern influences from Scandinavia. Credits: Maie-Ann Raun

Right: 5.1.3 Mirjam Maasikas. Bowls for Tarbeklaas, late 1960s or early 1970s. Credits: Maie-Ann Raun

An important reason for the acceptance of Western design was the fact that modernism as a style was still influential in the global context. Both its ideas and appearance went very well with Soviet ideology: it was simple, functional, and easy to produce in factory conditions. Some philosophers even claimed that, in fact, modernism clashed with capitalist ideology; Karl Kantor argued that modernism was caused by a protest against private property and "bourgeois individualism".[197] Several of the pioneers of modernism in the interwar period were driven by socialist aspirations. These included, for example, key figures of the Bauhaus school. Walter Gropius had tried to keep politics out of the school, saying somewhat prophetically: "If the Bauhaus becomes a playground for political games, it will collapse like a pack of cards,"[198] yet the political charge of the era made it impossible to avoid politics. Bauhaus's design ideas were already leftist, and by opposing Nazism the school became inadvertently linked to

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[197] Karl Kantor, "Ilu Ja Tulu [Beauty and Benefit]," Sirp ja Vasar, 16/07/1976, 11.

[198] Gillian Naylor, The Bauhaus Reassessed: Sources and Design Theory (London: Herbert, 1985), 60.

socialism. Hannes Meyer, who openly encouraged communism, strengthened these links even further, especially as he fled to the Soviet Union in 1930. And although Meyer also escaped the Soviet Union a few years later, the association of Bauhaus and socialism remained. These links made the whole Bauhaus school ideologically acceptable and, as the substance of the idea was ideologically appropriate, so was the façade of the idea. Modernism in general corresponded to socialist ideas and in the absence of a clear Soviet design style it was adopted by Soviet Estonian industrial designers.[199]

Design ideology is not only made of texts about design, but also through design itself and the different processes relating to its production and reception. Citing Nicos Poulantzas:

> "Ideology does not consist merely in a system of ideas or representations: it also involves a series of material practices, embracing the customs and life-style of the agents and setting like cement in the totality of social (including political and economic) practices."[200]

Therefore, in order to fully understand design ideology, it is necessary to also look at the ways design is produced. In Soviet Estonia, these material practices differed greatly from those in the West, adding to the different layers of ideology. Section 7.2 discusses these material practices in further detail.

Design was already ideologically correct because of the way it was produced. Art or craft is the product of a single person and therefore includes a certain moment of rebellion against the system that was built on mass participation. There were even moments when artists collaborated only to make their creations more acceptable to the

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[199] This idea is further explained in chapter 8.
[200] Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, 28.

system. Mass-produced design, however, already involves numerous people; it is also produced in a factory that, in the USSR, belongs to the state itself. Accusing design of going against the ideology would have been equal to attacking the factory that produced it and thus criticising the state. As already shown through the work of Boris Groys, it was impossible to fight one aspect of the Soviet system and be in accordance with the others. At most, one could accuse one person or a department of a factory, but never an entire factory. The participation of such a large number of people, especially as many of them were probably members of the Communist Party, validated the object itself. Therefore, the fact that something was produced in a factory already demonstrated its accordance with the system.

While design ideology was a lot more liberal than many other forms of ideology, it was still necessary to find at least some aspect in which the Soviet way was better than the West's. As it could not be quality or aesthetic appearance, Soviet propaganda relied on the cultural significance of objects. As said by Eduard Tinn, editor of *Sirp ja Vasar*:

> "Although on the outside the achievements of design may be similar here and in a capitalist society, it is not this similarity that defines their status in society. Status, place and part are defined by whether design depends on private capital like in a capitalist society or it belongs to the sphere of material and intellectual culture like in socialism. This principal difference gives our design as a cultural factor the opportunity to lose the fetishism and chaos of objects and to stimulate the creation of a harmonic material environment."[201]

It was officially maintained that people in the West liked the right things, but for the wrong reasons. As stated in the previous section, this treatment is due to the complex nature of ideology as such. It consisted not only of the object, but also of its production, reception and textual justification. If some of the elements vary, the outcome of the ideology itself is different. The same discourse on the fundamental differences between

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[201] "Disain [Design]," 8.

socialist and capitalist design can be found throughout the Western areas of the Socialist Bloc. Fedja Vukiç has referred to debates on the social significance of design that took place in Yugoslavia already as early as in 1950s. For example, Bernardo Bernardini claimed in 1959 that "industrial formgiving in the socialist economy acquires a completely different meaning from the one in the capitalist world."[202] Thus, the relationship between capitalist and socialist design and their ideological distinction was a problem tackled by many writers from various parts of the Socialist Bloc.

Western design was used as an example not simply because it seemed to 'fit in'; it also acted as a visual landmark. It was often stressed that soon, Soviet lifestyle would catch up with the West and surpass it; therefore, it was useful to have a kind of a visual example of the awaiting utopia. As it was inevitable that people would see images of Western material culture anyway, it was better that at least some of this information came through the government. Showing people that this kind of living was, at least in exterior aspects, tolerated by the government, gave them a visual of the reality towards which the system was reaching. Imitating Western objects showed that some progress was already being made in that direction.

Senkevitch adds another explanation to the copying of Western design:

> "Although the aim of such improvements admittedly has been to satisfy domestic consumer preferences, the likelihood of a corresponding desire to impress and seek acceptance by the growing number of Western businessmen and tourists in the Soviet Union should not be overlooked."[203]

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[202] Fedja Vukiç. "The Concept of Formgiving as a Critique of Mass Production." Design Issues, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2007). 65
[203] Senkevitch, "Art, Architecture, and Design: A Commentary," 591.

The aim of Soviet design ideology was not solely to keep inhabitants content, but also to keep the visual quality of Soviet material life on the same level as that in the West. Tourism was becoming more and more important for the Soviet economy, as can be seen from the attention paid to improving the souvenir market. To add to Senkevitch's idea, not only was it important to keep tourists happy, but also to try and make Soviet objects succeed in various international exhibitions. Besides trying to make Soviet citizens believe that their life quality was on the same level as Westerners, the attempt to improve everyday objects in the Soviet Union also served to make the regime more acceptable to foreign eyes.

However, the waiting period was simply too long for people. Propaganda images were everywhere, depicting a high quality of Soviet life, yet people could see that the reality was different. Caroline Humphrey refers to this situation as a "feeling of being involved in a gigantic deception."[204] By the period in question people lacked the optimism for a better future as they were simply tired of waiting. Although the Soviet system tried to copy Western material culture, they were beaten in availability, variety and quality. The aspiration to copy Western design at all costs actually diverted attention from socialist ideology and gave a signal that the perfect socialist society would still be a variation of capitalist society. Competing with the West in consumerism did not end well for the Soviet Union. The inability to find a unique form for socialist ideas in design served as an inadvertent metaphor for the inability to realise socialism in politics. While an opposition in design would have indicated potential for a completely different way of life, poor copies of Western design made the entire Soviet system seem more like a

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[204] Caroline Humphrey, "A Culture of Disillusionment," in Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 55.

poorly executed version of the West. It is impossible to speculate about the outcome of the Soviet system under different conditions, but the indecisive design ideology definitely contributed to its demise.

5.2 Design language

With close aesthetic connections between Western and Soviet design it was extremely important to justify the Socialist qualities and ideological importance of industrial design and thus it was crucial to invent a precise terminology. As previously discussed, by the era of Late Socialism the debates on the nature and future of communism had been substituted by endless repetition of ideological slogans. Where the slogans and terminology did not yet exist, it was extremely important to invent words that sounded ideologically correct. As shrewdly phrased by Dmitry Azrikan: "If they could not ban something, they at least gave it another name."[205]

On the matter of linguistic issues, different authors have different opinions. Victor Buchli states that in the Russian language, the word 'dizain' was used and propagated already during the Thaw.[206] However, Dmitry Azrikan remarks that for bureaucratic purposes, the word 'artistic engineering' was adopted. In his words: "For design to be accepted by Soviet authorities, the word 'design' could not be used".[207] Raymond

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[205] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 48-49.

[206] Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight Against "Petit-Bourgeois" Consciousness in the Soviet Home," Journal of Design History 10, no. 2 (1997): 162.

[207] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 48-49.

Hutchings sees the problem from a different angle, claiming that the English words 'design' and 'designer' were imported to fill a void, as the Russian words 'constructor', 'form-giver' and 'artistic modelling' were not clear enough.[208] The variation in different theories allows us to assume that different institutions and contexts had different stimuli for influencing the terminology. The adaptation of English words could in different contexts signify either cosmopolitanism or familiarity with international design trends.

The problems in the Russian language were also present in Estonian. The contemporary word 'disain', which derived directly from Western sources, was only officially used from the late 1970s, though in specialist circles it had been used already since the late 1960s.[209] Up to that moment, the most common word was 'tööstuskunst', the Estonian translation of 'industrial art'. Another alternative, which was used for a while, was 'kujundama', a rough Estonian translation of the verb 'to design'. Designers were referred to in different sources either as industrial artists, artists, or later designers. However, in the introduction to an Estonian translation of Yuri Somov's *Artistic construction of industrial products* in 1971, the translator Uno Kammal proposed that in spite of the Russian terminology, in Estonian the word 'disain' should be preferred.[210] Still, according to Krista Kodres and Kai Lobjakas, the word was initially ideologically questionable; in 1969, when the industrial art department of ERKI wanted to call their student exhibition ERKIDISAIN, it was not allowed and the posters were torn down.[211] The industrial art department at ERKI was only renamed a 'design' department in 1989.

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[208] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design : Interaction and Convergence, 145-47.

[209] Meigas.

[210] Yuri Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]," (Tallinn: Valgus, 1971), 5.

[211] Kodres and Lobjakas, "Disainiutoopia Sünd Ja Areng [the Birth and Development of a Design Utopia]," 409.

5.3 Positioning Soviet Estonia's design ideology

Both the textual design ideology and reality of production in Soviet Estonia were a curious combinations of Western and Soviet tendencies, influenced by the contemporaneous constructions of a traditional Estonian culture and identity. Here, not only design but also other aspects of society should be considered as a rivalry between two possible centres for the local peripheral culture to align itself after, as the small size of Estonia prevented it from becoming a local centre. However, both centres, the Soviet and Western, had different methods for imposing their supremacy. While Soviet tendencies were mostly inflicted through bureaucracy and state apparatuses, Western influences came through culture. In this context, Western influences are treated as an entity, although Northern and Western Europe and the United States by no means formed a culturally homogeneous area. Yet, as information about the industrial design of different countries was not very easily accessible, information was acquired through any means possible. The main source was, as mentioned previously, Scandinavia, but the United States of America, United Kingdom and Italy as large industrial producers also played important roles.

Piotr Piotrowski has referred to the appropriation of Western symbols and methods as 'self-colonisation'.[212] 'Self-', as it was a voluntary process, unlike the forced Soviet colonisation. Therefore, Soviet Estonia was actually colonised by two different powers.

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[212] Piotr Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989 (London: Reaktion, 2009), 166-67.

Although Western colonisation did not manifest politically, as it was voluntary, it was rooted even more deeply in everyday life. According to Piotrowski:

> "It is likely that this dynamic is connected to a certain idealisation of culture, which was perceived as a field of resistance against the regime and expression of social and national aspirations."[213]

As he suggested, the appropriation of Western culture was initially an act of resistance against Soviet power. However, Piotrowski's idea is pertinent to the avant-garde of culture and the idealists. As declared by Djurdja Bartlett, for the average consumer, the appropriation was not a conscious act of resistance, but rather a simple act of communication with their fellow class members.[214] While Bartlett focuses on consumers, it is also true that not all designers should be considered avant-garde rebels. Most were rather trying to keep up with design trends than to actively rebel against the system. The same idea was reinforced by interviews conducted for this research.

As Michel Foucault has stated:

> "[…]The state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations."[215]

Thus, based on Foucault's theory, one of the problems that the Soviet power faced in Estonia was the existence of previous power relations and the state's inability to alter them. The Soviet Union tried to apply the same power relations to all of its states, regardless of their previous structures, which differed at the beginning. As already mentioned, Russia, as well as most other parts of the Soviet Bloc, transferred from imperial rule straight to totalitarian rule. In the Baltic States, however, a middle class had already evolved after Western examples. Therefore, initial power relations were

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[213] Ibid., 127.

[214] Djurdja Bartlett, Fashioneast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism (London: MIT Press, 2010), 271.

[215] Foucault and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 64.

different and the new Soviet power relations were incompatible with the old ones. This problem manifested at two different levels. Firstly, the spread of second economy practices, for which Estonia was not unique as these were common in Russia and other Soviet states as well. [216] Secondly, in the wider cultural context Estonian culture was oriented towards Scandinavia and Western Europe. Soviet power was unable to change that tendency.

As the focus of this thesis is industrial designers and their practices, the question of self-defining is crucial. As mentioned earlier, Estonia is historically, culturally and geographically located on the border between Russia and the West. As those two traditions were historically very different, there arises the question of centre to position oneself in relation to. While in certain bigger countries one could talk about different areas positioning themselves to different centres, Estonia is too small for competing schools of thought. Most artists and designers working for factories had studied at the same university, the Estonian State Art Institute, and therefore had similar influences to begin with. It should be emphasised that as designers were unable to control all aspects of their practice due to the final product depending on many variables, this section solely focuses on the initial set of thoughts and ideas.

The framework of political and cultural centres can pose certain challenges. In her study on the Swedish Cooperative Union's new consumer policy of 1970, Helena Mattsson justified a wary approach towards adopting regional/periphery dialectics too lightly:

> "Out of these microhistories, multiple modernities are continuously constructed. I choose not to use the concepts 'regional' or periphery' because these terms

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[216] These practices are further discussed in 7.4

presuppose that a global centre exists from where theories and forms are diffused, thus consolidating the hierarchic view of modernism."[217]

Thus, it is important to stress that within this research, the concept of a 'centre' is employed to indicate cultural influences and self-positioning, not a mystical construction dating from modernism, where styles created in a centre trickle down to peripheries. While Estonia certainly had its own unique version of modernity, it was largely defined by a specific mixture of various Western and Soviet influences acting as different centres.

To draw a comparison amongst other Soviet states, Gennady Nesvetailov positioned the science and technology of Belarus as peripheral to the centre of Moscow.[218] Although his research concentrates on problems of science, some of the conclusions can be generalised to characterise the general economy of scientific-technological information in Soviet Belarus, including industrial design. Nesvetailov also underlines the importance of the local Belorussian network next to Moscow as a centre, claiming that there also existed a local scientific infrastructure, albeit not comparable to the central system.[219] Thus, Soviet Belarus could be characterised as a semi-periphery, or buffer zone, similar to the examples of Spain and Hungary, as identified as by Guy Julier.[220] Nesvetailov's focus on the administrative system of Soviet Belarus means that his article does not directly explain the extent everyday practices and preferences were

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[217] Helena Mattsson, "Designing the 'Consumer in Infinity': The Swedish Cooperative Union's New Consumer Policy, C. 1970," in Scandinavian Design: Alternative Histories, ed. Kjetil Fallan (London: Berg, 2012), 66.

[218] Gennady Nesvetailov, "Changing Centre-Periphery Relations in the Former Soviet Republics: The Case of Belarus," Social Studies of Science 25, no. 4 (1995): 858.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Guy Julier, "Re-Drawing the Geography of European Design: The Case of Transitional Countries," in 2nd European Academy of Design Conference, 'Contextual Design - Design in Context' (Stockholm 1997).

aligned after Moscow as a centre or whether the influence of Western trends had a similar significance. However, his approach to Western Europe as a new set of information and influences for Belarus suggests a limited contact during the Soviet period.

Yet, it should be stressed that Western Europe and Moscow cannot be treated as simple centres of an equal importance during the Cold War period. Djurdja Bartlett defined the position of Moscow as simultaneously peripheral and central.[221] Gennady Nesvetailov shared this view.[222] Thus, the global design economy was even more complicated during the Cold War period, comprising various levels of central and peripheral practices. As the case of Soviet Estonia shows, it is possible to simultaneously follow several centres. A simplistic view on Estonia would suggest that administrative aspects of the design economy were positioned after Moscow while Western Europe influenced everyday practices, but the actual system was more complex. The Soviet administrative design system had been adopted from the West with certain modifications. Even in the case of employing Western styles, the existence of Moscow as a secondary centre and the rigid Soviet administrative system determined the influences that were adopted.

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[221] Djurdja Bartlett, "Moscow on the Fashion Map: Between Periphery and Centre," Studies in East European Thought 63, no. 2 (2011).

[222] Nesvetailov, "Changing Centre-Periphery Relations in the Former Soviet Republics: The Case of Belarus," 858.

5.4 Mapping the design system

Mapping the design system was one of the most difficult tasks this research faced. Censorship in archival material combined with the unreliable nature of written sources impeded defining the specific power relations. Only a synthesis of oral history and archival research finally allowed the completion of the map below. As this subchapter along with the visualisation of the system demonstrate, the Soviet Estonian design economy was complicated and inefficient, further complicating the profession of industrial design. As stressed earlier, Soviet political system in its hierarchies and connections was rarely introduced in written media. Thus, mapping out this system was one of the most complicated tasks faced by this research, requiring a mixture of various methodologies and sources.

One of the main characteristics of the Soviet economy was its regulatory system. Design was no exception; Gosplan, the State Committee for Planning, directed the main tendencies in production. Gosplan was directly responsible for creating the Five-Year Plans for the Soviet economy. As explained by Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos:

> "Typically, Gosplan determines the scope and quality of new products demand. The research institutes of the ministries make calculations of customer demand and give them to Gosplan. The research institutes may also design prototypes and pass them on to the enterprise. These are then issued as production orders to the enterprise, where engineers and designers plan the manufacturing introduction of the new product."[223]

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[223] Paul R. Lawrence and Charalambos Vlachoutsicos, Behind the Factory Walls : Decision Making in Soviet and Us Enterprises (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1990), 248.

Each new product had to be mandated from above by a formal document called a prikaz (order), which announced a decision.[224] Thus, it should be noted that the aim of Gosplan was to determine what was designed where, not how it was designed.

The appearance of Soviet industrial design was mostly determined by VNIITE. While there was no official cell of VNIITE in Estonia, there was still one organisation that united designers from different fields – the Industrial Art Committee, founded in 1962, which belonged both to the Estonian State Council of Scientific-Technological Societies and was subordinate to VNIITE. To become a member, applicants had to either work in a factory as a designer or work in a ministry and be directly involved in problems of industrial art.[225] As its areas of interest greatly varied, the committee mostly dealt with general problems and themes. The main objectives were to improve the general education of industrial artists, to inform on new trends in design, to research contemporary problems in art theory and aesthetics and, interestingly, to explore new possibilities in designing souvenirs.[226] Different lectures and excursions were organised, both on historical and contemporary subjects: for example, in 1974, lectures were held on symbolism, Picasso, Surrealism, new art movements, clothing design and souvenir design.[227] Besides that, the committee also had a separate library, which designers could visit.

[224] Ibid., 258.
[225] ERA.2343.2.264, (1962).
[226] ERA.1906.1.593, (1974).
[227] Ibid.
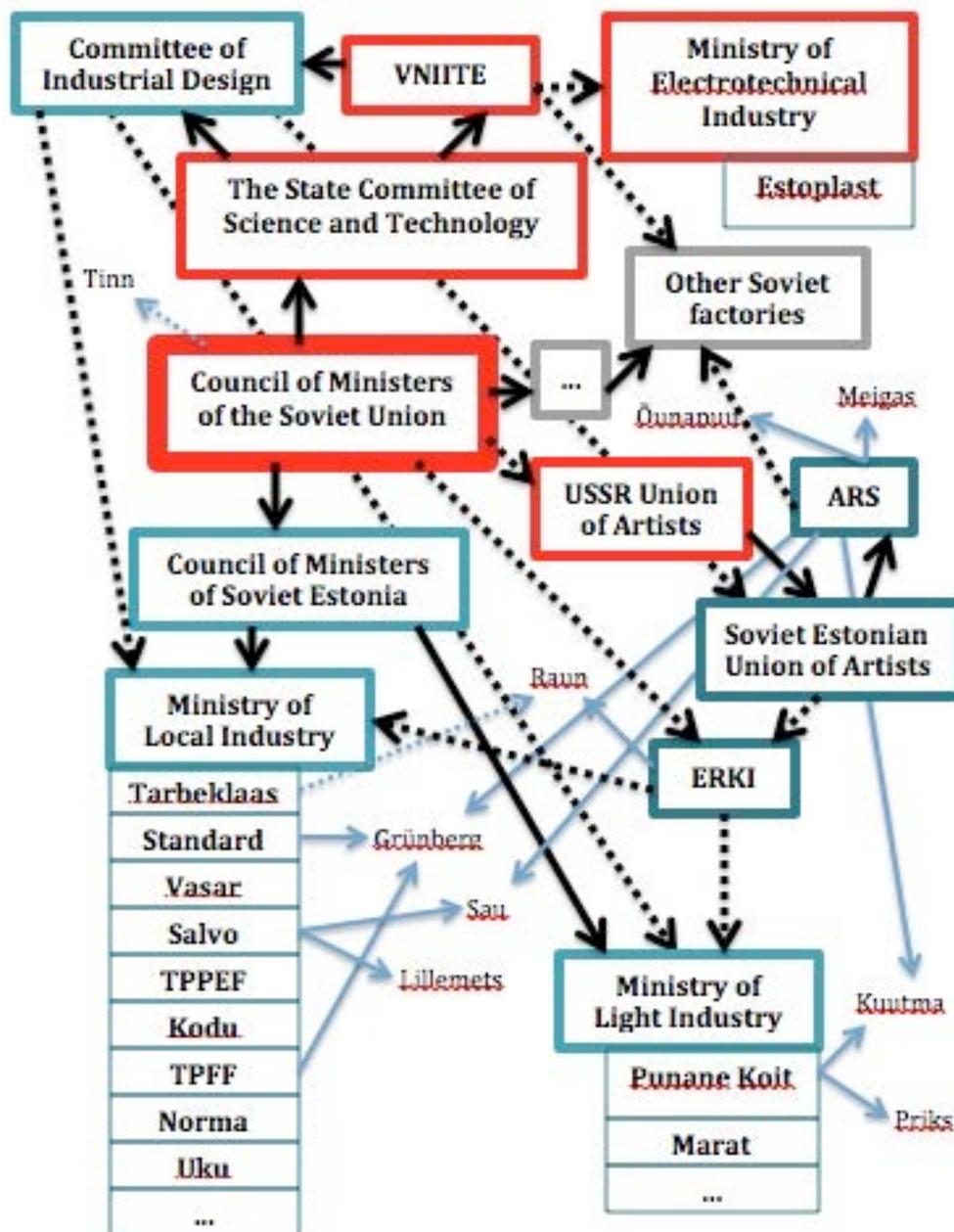
5.4.1 A map of Soviet Estonian design system. Soviet institutions are indicated with red and the locally managed establishments with blue. To illustrate the research, interviewees have been added to the map.

As with everything else, the distribution of scientific-technological information in all parts of the Soviet Union was centralised under Moscow's orders, organised by the State Committee for Science and Technology of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union. Additionally, other ministries and committees had control over information

relevant to their field of production.[228] Most factories discussed in this thesis were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Industry. There were general regulations set to control the treatment of information within each factory. For that, it was necessary to employ a specialist in charge of technical information. According to state guidelines, every factory with 300–1,000 employees had to have one specialist, and larger factories had to employ more. Factories with less than 300 people working there could assign extra responsibilities to another employee, preferably an engineer.[229]

Each factory also had a small library that workers could visit in order to get information. Usually, it had journals and books from the Soviet Union; however, there were often some publications from Poland, Hungary and East Germany, of which the Polish *Projekt* was especially valued.[230] There were also some specialist materials from capitalist countries. Since 1974, the official library at the Institute of Engineering, Technology and Design showcased "original magazines from capitalist countries" and it was suggested that enterprises showed more interest in those. The institute sent out a list of all magazines to the factories, after which the factories had to inform the institute of which magazines they subscribed to.[231] As an example, in 1970 the factory library at Norma subscribed to 94 magazines, 26 of which were foreign. Of those, four came from the West: *Das Spielzeug* from West Germany, *Toys International* from the United Kingdom, *American Aircraft Modeller* from the USA, and *Kameralehti* from Finland. In total, the Norma library included 12,531 materials that year, 3,037 of which were

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[228] E. Lageda, "Uue Tehnika Rakendamisest Eesti Nsv Kohaliku Tööstuse Ministeeriumi Ettevõtetes [About Employing New Technology in the Enterprises of Essr Ministry of Local Industry]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1967-2 (1967): 8.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Meigas.

[231] R. Lauk, "PTKI Infotalituselt Ettevõtetele [from the IETD to the Enterprises]," *Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series]* 1975-2 (1975): 2.

books, the rest mostly brochures, catalogues and magazines.[232] This lenient and even encouraging attitude towards Western design information is curious, considering the generally suspicious or at least ambiguous stance towards most things originating from capitalist countries.

5.4.2 Library in factory Norma. Early 1970s. Credits: Tallinn City Museum

However, design belonged to the scientific-technological sphere, which since the very beginning of the Soviet Union had been more accepting towards technological information than other sorts of data. In the interwar period, V. I. Lenin suggested that capitalist technology would provide the base for socialist production.[233] As the Cold War started, the position of technology within the economy strengthened even further.

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[232] "Factory "Norma": Chronicle 1970," (Tallinn: Tallinn City Museum, 1973).

[233] Michael Burawoy, The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism (Verso, 1985), 51.

According to Estonian historian Kaljo-Olev Veskimägi, in 1949 a law stated that scientific-technological or otherwise professional reasons were the only excuses for ordering foreign literature (foreign describing publications originating from outside the Communist Bloc).[234] As time passed, the rules became more lenient: from 1968, everyone with permission from the Security Service was allowed to publicly order any kind of foreign literature.[235] Therefore, scientific-technological literature had always had a special status and design was no exception.

Most Soviet factories did not have a separate design department. The creation of new products was left to the artists, who therefore had two tasks – performing more skill-demanding decoration tasks and designing objects for mass production. Propaganda was another important aspect of the artist's work: they painted banners, and designed reports and halls of fame. Art objects were exhibited in annual applied arts exhibitions, which were an important part of artists' careers. Successful party figures visited these exhibitions and bought the objects they liked; in the Socialist economy, it was one of the few ways a factory artist could make a little extra money.[236] Of course, not every factory employed an art department. Alternatively, factories could also get designs from artists employed at the Institute of Engineering, Technology and Design, or at the artists' cooperative ARS, which were Soviet versions of organisations of freelance designers. Section 7.2 explains further both ARS and the practices of factory designers.

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[234] Veskimägi, Nõukogude Unelaadne Elu: Tsensuur Eesti Nsv-S Ja Tema Peremehed [the Soviet Dreamlike Life: Censorship in Soviet Estonia and Its Masters], 275.
[235] Ibid., 278.
[236] Kuutma.

Soviet architectural historian, Anatoly Senkevitch, has argued in his critique of Raymond Hutchings's theories that in fact, the basic aspirations and model of Soviet industrial design are "strikingly in accord with those espoused by Soviet artists and designers in the 1920s".[237] Leaving aside practical considerations and the difficult relationship between East and West, this is mostly true. Although Senkevitch does not actually state it clearly, this productionist heritage was also one of the reasons why Soviet factories employed 'artists', not 'designers'. The design ideals of the 1920s were shaped by the legendary Soviet art school Vkhutemas. They advocated a larger collaboration between artists and factories in the interest of a better-designed human environment. Having an 'artist' in the factory whose tasks included improving the factory work environment was consistent with those ideas, although lagging behind factory design practices common in the Western world.

Soviet factory production was also submitted to all kinds of rules and standards. In industry, there were four different kinds of standards: state standard (GOST), republican (RST), sectorial (OST) and factory standard (STP). Although they may seem at first glance as another case of Soviet bureaucracy, standards were initially mostly set by design professionals and served to improve the quality of design. GOST was set by VNIITE, to make sure that most Soviet products would achieve quality design. As explained by Dmitry Azrikan:

> "The state standard (GOST) was the second vehicle after the state plan to control the centralised fashion economy. Designers and Department No. 3's standard experts tried to legitimise design concepts as a standard for a particular field of industry. If it were not possible to do so one hundred percent, it was possible for a few parts of features: materials, finishes, colors, textures, controls, graphics, elements of shape, ergonomics requirements and restrictions, etc."[238]

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[237] Senkevitch, "Art, Architecture, and Design: A Commentary," 590.

[238] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 53.

However, Azrikan admits that under Soviet bureaucracy this initially noble idea was misused. The rules and regulations were seen as a way to remove industrial designers from the system so that engineers could put new objects into production based on VNIITE guidelines.[239] However, as the evolution of industrial design suggests, the goal of excluding designers from the process was never reached.

5.4.3 Manhole cover in Tallinn. The writing on the cover informs of the GOST standard that was used on production. Author's photo

Each design that received the approval of the factory board had to pass by the Art Council of the Ministry of Local Industry, formed in 1966 – although different Art Councils had existed since the establishment of the Soviet regime. For presentation, an initial prototype was made by hand; production was set up only after the approval of the

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[239] Ibid.: 66.

Art Council.[240] The Art Council was comprised of specialists, artists and the representatives of commercial organisations; the meetings were normally held every month.[241] Evaluation was given on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 and 2 meaning failure and usually just noted as "rejected", 3 meaning "satisfactory", 4 "good" and 5 "excellent". Art Councils existed not only in the Soviet Union, but also in other areas of the Socialist Bloc. The role of Art Councils within the industrial design system can be seen differently. On one hand, one of their functions was definitely acting within the larger control mechanism: as testified by a former member, Saima Priks, councils often included representatives from the Communist Party.[242] At the same time, the majority of interviewees testified that the main function of Art Councils was rather to uphold aesthetic standards. The same idea is mirrored by Eli Rubin's research on East German design system, where he found the attempts to control and assess the production to be an initiative that came from the designers, rather than from the control structures, in order to reduce the popularity of kitsch amongst local consumers.[243] Thus, the elements of control structures often serve complex functions.

Not only industrial products had to pass by the Art Council. Even public greeting cards sent by factories and political organs had to pass the same procedure. The majority of designs still passed and went into production. For example, in the 1970s around 600–

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[240] Laev, "Klaasi Ajaloost Ja Klaasikunstnikest [About the History of Glass and Glass Artists]," 11.

[241] E. Tartlan and L. Konts, "Ensv Kohaliku Tööstuse Ministeeriumi Kunstinõukogu Ja Ettevõtete Kunstnike Tööst [About the Work of the Art Council of the Ministry of Local Industry of Estonian Ssr and the Artists of Enterprises]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1975-3 (1975): 23.

[242] Priks.

[243] Eli Rubin. "The Form of Socialism without Ornament: Consumption, Ideology, and the Fall and Rise of Modernist Design in the German Democratic Republic" Journal of Design History, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2006). 163

800 new products gained the approval of the Art Council.[244] It must be stressed that if a product did not pass the examination by the Art Council, it was not automatically removed from production. In 1976, a renowned art critic Jaak Olep criticised an electrical fireplace that had been in production for years despite not receiving approval because of its poorly designed appearance. The head of the design department of the Estonian Art Academy, Bruno Tomberg, responded as follows: "If the Art Councils had more saying in this, maybe instead of electrical boots for one foot we would see actually useful objects in production."[245] However, it was very rare for a product not to pass examination and still go into production.

5.4.4 Art Council examining new products by leather factory Linda, March 1974. Credits: archives of Estonian National Television

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[244] R. Uuemõis, "Kultuuri- Ja Tarbekaupade Sortimendi Laiendamisest Ja Nende Kvaliteedist Ensv Kohaliku Tööstuse Ministeeriumi Ettevõtetes [About Widening the Variety of Culture Products and Commodities and Their Quality in the Enterprises of Essr Ministry of Local Industry]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1975-1 (1975): 2.

[245] "Disain [Design]," 9.

Interestingly, this research failed to identify an end date for the Art Councils. As Vello Lillemets suggests, the tradition slowly faded away.[246] Already in the late 1980s ideological control seemed to loosen gradually. Two badges manufactured by Norma in 1986 and 1989 provide an interesting case analysis. The first is a commemorative badge for the summer gathering of kolkhoz Raadna in 1986. The colour scheme uses white, bright blue and dark navy blue, but seen from a distance the navy seems almost black and thus resembles the Estonian flag. As the combination of blue, black and white had been prohibited,[247] the Art Council that let this badge pass seems to have had a more lenient attitude.

Left: 5.4.5 Badge produced by Norma in 1986. Front view.

Right: 5.4.6 Badge produced by Norma in 1986. Back view.

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[246] Vello Lillemets, 08/04/2014.

[247] Margus Kruut, "Estoplasti Kadunud Valgust Meenutades [Remembering the Lost Light of Estoplast]," Postimees, 08/05/2011.

Left: 5.4.7 Badge produced by Norma in 1989. Front view.

Right: 5.4.8 Badge produced by Norma in 1989. Back view.

The other badge dates from 1989. 23 August MRP 50 signifies the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, an infamous secret agreement between the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany. This day was commemorated in the Baltic States with a mass demonstration involving approximately two million people, later named as the Baltic Way and condemned by the Central Committee of the Communist Party as a manifestation of national hysteria.[248] A badge manufactured for a mass demonstration condemning the Soviet power in one of the largest factories in Estonia in 1989 proves that either the Art Council had broken all connections to state power or, more likely, the Art Council was no longer involved in the introduction of this product. Significantly, the back of the badge lacks the printed price present on the Raadna badge and on other badges of late 1980s. Thus, it is likely that no price assessment was completed in the factory. In that case, the badge probably did not have to pass evaluation of the Art Council either.

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[248] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 583.

As can be understood from this chapter, the problem of the Soviet Estonian design system was not high centralisation, but rather that it centralised in an inefficient manner. The only industrial design organisation, the Industrial Art Committee mostly served informative purposes. As written by Dmitry Azrikan:

> "The Soviet system did not support any horizontal links between different fields. Horizontal connections could ruin the whole pyramid. Design had one boss, the Science and Technology Committee; education had another one, the Ministry of Education. VNIITE had no influence in that realm."[249]

The same idea, but concerning different branches of Soviet Estonian industry, was also phrased by a glass designer of Tarbeklaas, Ingi Vaher, in 1983:

> "The question, why the artists designing interiors and their work cannot be integrated to an entity, is very difficult, as the artists from different branches of industry who all design interiors are in the jurisdiction of different ministries. So far, there is no legal ground to coordinate their work."[250]

This scattered nature of the system made it difficult for its different parts to cooperate. Different fields and aspects of design were scattered between different officials, some of them regional, others directly answering to Moscow. There was no bureaucratic institution directly responsible for design, instead its different aspects were distributed around. As Katherine Verdery has so aptly phrased: "Socialism's fragility begins with the system of 'centralized planning', which the centre neither adequately planned nor controlled."[251]

However, the Soviet Union should not be contrasted to the West in terms of mismanaging design. As Patrick Maguire writes on the subject of post-war British design:

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[249] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 73.

[250] Ene Vool, "Konjunktuurist, Maitsest, Tööstuskunstist [About Conjuncture, Taste, Industrial Art]," Sirp ja Vasar, 09/09/1983 1983, 7.

[251] Katherine Verdery. What was Socialism, and what comes next?, 20

> "In the absence of a fully centralised economic structure, or even a central planning staff, the government relied on a rough and ready cocktail of controls, often acting in profound ignorance, in an attempt to prioritise particular areas of production and particular markets for that production."[252]

Thus, certain Western countries were struggling with ineffective systems as well. However, the rigidity of the Soviet system and economic problems resulted in an even greater retardation of mass production.

The main characteristic of the Soviet design system was the high involvement of the state at every level of production. There were many different ways for the Soviet government to impose control over industrial design and influence its progress, but in reality the different bureaucratic institutions often failed to cooperate properly. On one hand, this became a way for local designers to achieve more independence; but on another, it also hindered the progress of industrial design as the bureaucracy failed to serve its purpose. Instead of collaboration, VNIITE, ministries and Art Councils often impeded each other. In the Soviet system, design remained an outsider, balancing between different disciplines, never really belonging.

Conclusions

In Soviet Estonia, the main task of design was supposed to be ideological education, however it was unclear how this educative aspect should be applied. The Soviet power encouraged copying Western design, meanwhile maintaining that the aim of Soviet design was radically different. Even the terminology was unclear: in the 1960s and the

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[252] Jonathan M. Woodham and Patrick J. Maguire, Design and Cultural Politics in Post-War Britain: The 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946 (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 37.

beginning of the 1970s, it was maintained that the words used to mark industrial design should be of Russian or Estonian origin. It was not until the late 1970s and in some areas even early 1980s that variations of the international word 'design' became acceptable. It must be stressed that design ideology consists not only of the object, but also of its production, reception and textual justification. When the elements vary, the outcome of the ideology itself is different. Therefore, design ideology is not just the texts concerning design, but also design itself and processes relating to it. Besides the factual, Soviet colonisation, Soviet Estonia was also colonised by Western power, which rooted itself in everyday life in an act that Piotr Piotrowski refers to as self-colonisation. Culturally, Estonian was oriented towards Scandinavia and Western Europe and Soviet power was unable to change that tendency. For designers, self-colonisation manifested as the will to follow Western trends, seen as the universal culture to aspire towards.

All in all, both the textual and bureaucratic parts of Soviet design ideology were still poorly planned. The Soviet design system, although centralised to an extent, was still scattered between different institutions and fields, partly due to design and design ideology being new phenomena in the Soviet system. Designers enjoyed more freedom than many other cultural fields, such as cinematography, but most aspects of their work were still submitted to more forms of control than Western industrial design. This uncertainty hindered the work of industrial designers and contributed to the retardation of Soviet Estonian design compared to its Western counterparts. In combination with the other defining factors, their failure increased dissatisfaction with Soviet power during.

6. The factory

Since in theory the Soviet system was founded on the power of the proletariat, industrialisation and factory held an important position. Larger factories had small cells of the Communist Party, extracurricular activities, and almost everything necessary for workers' everyday lives. Thus, factories can be understood as microcosms of Soviet Estonian society. While the previous chapter introduced the structure of the Soviet Estonian industrial design system, the study of the factory as the main location of production is important in better understanding the daily lives of industrial designers. This chapter argues that while the Soviet factory was an ideologically charged location, new products were assessed mostly on an economic basis rather than an ideological one.

As there were constant shortages of everyday commodities, industrialisation was one of the main goals of the Soviet system. This chapter begins by explaining the importance that Soviet power placed on mass production and industrialisation and their reality in Estonia. The next section introduces the main light industry factories functioning in Estonia, their history and characteristics, and the types of products made there. The third section explains the bureaucratic cycle behind new designs going into production. The last section examines the characteristics of Soviet Estonian factory life. Through introducing the essential qualities of the Soviet Estonian factory as a system this section analyses the ideological charge of the factory setting and determines the position of designers within the systems of production.

6.1 Mass production in the Soviet Union and Estonia

Industrialisation was the cornerstone of the Soviet system since the very beginning until the collapse of the regime. Before the Soviet occupation, Estonia's economy had been mostly based on agriculture; at the beginning of the 20th century, factories only had a secondary role in the economy.[253] Between the World Wars, most Estonians still lived in the countryside: in 1934, two thirds of the working population earned their living through agriculture.[254] Hence, one of the key tasks of the post-war Soviet Estonian regime was to modernise ways of living. In order to accelerate the process, Moscow put a lot of capital into the Estonian economy; many factories were founded or expanded, and their products were made available to the entire Soviet market.

Khrushchev had shifted official ideology towards regionalisation, a new policy that included taking the needs of individual states more into account. Misiunas and Taagepera write:

> "In 1956, Aleksei Müürisepp, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, criticised the policy of economic interdependence for having prevented Estonian industry from using local raw materials, for having mandated export of output before the republic's own needs had been met, and for the dispersal of Estonian specialists throughout the USSR and the influx of Russians to replace them."[255]

The same problems were also prevalent in other states besides Estonia. In 1957, Khrushchev started a new system: Sovnarkhoz. It meant that the economy was managed locally and the use of local raw material was encouraged. Under the new arrangement, 80% of Estonia's industry passed under the control of the Regional Economic Council, while previously three quarters of enterprises had been in the jurisdiction of sectorial

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[253] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 439.
[254] Ibid., 440.
[255] Misiunas and Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990, 134.

ministries in Moscow.[256] However, the economy had still barely recovered from the Second World War.

Under Brezhnev's reign, the Sovnarkhoz system was abolished and production was once again subjected to Moscow's control. Two new ministries were founded: the Ministry of Light Industry and the Ministry of Local Industry. The Ministry of Light Industry involved the production of textile products, as in the Soviet context the term 'light industry' only applied to clothing, textiles, footwear and accessories. The production of other household objects was not classified under a certain name, but rather divided according to material. Therefore, they were often caught in the middle, not really falling into a definite category. In Estonia, they were mostly overshadowed by the textile industry. For example, two of the most comprehensive propaganda books on the subject of Estonian industry during stagnation, *The industry of Estonian SSR during the Ninth Five-Year Plan* and *The industry of Estonian SSR during the Tenth Five-Year Plan*, published in 1972 and 1978, both include chapters entitled "Light industry", which discuss textiles without even mentioning any other fields of consumer goods.

The reason for this was mostly the centralisation of Soviet industry and the relatively small size of Estonia: the population was 1,197,000 in 1959 and 1,566,000 in 1989.[257] The whole population of the Soviet Union in 1989 extended to 262,436,000 inhabitants. Estonia was the smallest of all the Soviet states, and even the largest Estonian factories had an insignificant role in the economy of the entire Soviet Union, especially as most of the products were intended for the local market. The only exception was the textile

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[256] David J. Smith. Estonia: Independence and European Integration (Postcommunist States and Nations) (London: Routledge, 2002), 39.

[257] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 601.

industry. In 1975, Estonia produced 2.5% of all cotton in the Soviet Union and 87% of it went for export.[258] At the same time, Estonia had the largest amount of cotton produced per capita in the entire Soviet Union. It also held second place in wool production, 83% of it leaving the home market.[259] Therefore, of all subcategories of light industry, the textile industry had the largest significance to the economy of the Soviet Union in general.

The Ministry of Local Industry of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was in charge of most Soviet Estonian factories, was founded on 20 October 1965 and subject to the Estonian Council of Ministers.[260] Compared to the Ministry of Light Industry, its jurisdiction was less clear. It did not comprise all the factories in Estonia, nor were the factories under it similar in their production areas: the Ministry was also in charge of several peat factories and knitting manufactures. As the factories were so different in their profile, their boards gained the right for more freedom in decisions over their product range: for example, Flora, the only chemistry factory in Estonia, had better equipment than the ministry itself.[261] However, they were still subjected to controls. In a decree sent out by the Ministry on 27 December 1984 it was pointed out that no factory had the right to discontinue or reduce production of a product range without the consent of trade organisations and the Ministry. In the list, this was one of the few provisions that were highlighted.[262]

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[258] L. Aader, "Kergetööstus [Light Industry]," in Eesti Nsv Tööstus Üheksandal Viisaastakul [the Industry of Essr During the Ninth Five-Year Plan] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1972), 91.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Era.R-1945.1.441, 3.
[261] Era.R-18.3.90, 3.
[262] Era-4997.1.204, 2.

Otherwise, a lot of the Ministry's work was related to workers' wellbeing and everyday factory life. Ministry sessions typically involved higher officials from the Ministry (the Minister himself included), directors or other representatives from factories, and occasionally representatives of other relevant institutions such as trade unions. The topics raised in sessions varied from the general quality of the products available[263] to improving the role of sport in factory workers' lives.[264] Not all issues raised in the sessions actually involved all factories: for example, on 14 October 1966, the problem of negligence towards equipment at the Tarbeklaas factory was discussed in a general session.[265] On 1 October 1988, The Ministry of Local Industry was liquidated and a new institution called the Estonian Territorial Production Association was formed.

As described by Ray Batchelor:

> "On the one hand, there is a strong, collective moral and a social thread, which argues that Modernism is desirable because it will liberate and thus redeem the masses. Yet, from Morris onwards, there is an almost unmitigated horror of the vulgar."[266]

In the Soviet Union, the attitude towards mass production was radically different. The glorification of the proletariat meant that the masses were not considered vulgar. If anything, their taste was uneducated; but this was the aim of culture, to educate people. Commodities were not made to accord with the taste of the masses; ideally, the masses were supposed to start liking the commodities that were produced.

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[263] Era.T-52.5-1.86, 2.
[264] Era.T-52.5-1.99, 2.
[265] Era.R-2022.1.729, 39.
[266] Ray Batchelor, Henry Ford: Mass Production, Modernism and Design (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

6.1.1 Factory Salvo. Early 1980s. Credits: ETDM

Mass production was ideologically more suitable to Soviet conditions, as ideologically everyone was entitled to similar quality goods. In the Western world, although the rights and living conditions of the working class had evolved since Karl Marx, they were still a somewhat invisible class. In the Soviet context, however, they were the ruling class, at least in theory. Therefore, the whole process of mass production was not as candid as in the capitalist world, but rather something noble. Factories were often discussed in the media; some of the more productive workers were introduced in newspapers – especially if they were also active in the Communist Party.

The very nature of Soviet mass production was in a way accordant to dialectical materialism, the official philosophy of the Soviet Union. Every aspect was subjected to rules and scientific treatment; every step in a factory was, at least in principle, carefully calculated. As written by Richard C. Gripp:

> "Because Marxists have believed that socialist economics can be organised and operated scientifically, they have assumed that efficient supply, production, and distribution of commodities is a simple matter of technological relationships – one organisation properly arranged alongside another."[267]

Paradoxically, this attitude made Soviet production very similar to the United States. When thinking about dialectical materialism, one cannot help but think about Frederick Taylor's famous quote: "Every single act of every workman can be reduced to science."[268] In this way, production in the Soviet Union was arguably closer to Taylorism than to Marxism, and the attitude towards workers was still very much the same as in the dreaded, alienated capitalist environment. The glorification of the factory as a mythical space is in ways similar to the process that had taken place in many parts of the Western Europe already in the 18th century, as the emergence of factories was one of the defining factors of modernity.[269] Kevin Hetherington has argued that in the early modern period, factories transformed communities, cities, regions and nations both geographically and mythically.[270] The Soviet system caused the same transformation in Eastern Europe and Western Asia more than a hundred years later.

Ray Batchelor has noted that besides better living standards, glorifying the industrial revolution also "provided intellectuals with a potent symbol of the rational, the Modern,

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[267] Richard Carl Gripp, The Political System of Communism (London: Nelson, 1973), 75.

[268] Carma Gorman, The Industrial Design Reader (New York: Allworth, 2003), 84.

[269] Kevin Hetherington, The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering (London: Routledge, 1997), 110.

[270] Ibid., 111.

the progressive and the technological, entirely congruent with the aspirations of the political experiment in hand."[271] Here, one can draw a parallel to the Italian Futurist movement, as Constructivism in Russia also employed industrial aesthetics as a positive symbol. This, interestingly, even led to the admiration of American capitalists, such as Henry Ford.[272] Industrial design was seen as transcending social boundaries and independent from the political order. Lenin himself had claimed that in its advanced form, capitalist technology provides the basis for socialism. In his opinion, socialist relations of production needed to be grafted onto capitalist forces of production.[273] Therefore, according to Lenin, advanced capitalism was on the right track, just a bit behind.

In principle, the very essence and definition of a communist state is the absence of private property. However, in practice this principle made little difference to most people. According to many communist economists, the key difference between communism and capitalism was not the ownership of the means of production, but the organisation of the economy.[274] The main feature shaping factory work was the degree of central planning. Most decisions were made in central institutions instead of the actual factory. As stated by Herbert Marcuse:

> "In the Soviet system, the organisation of the productive process certainly separates the 'immediate producers' (the labourers) from control over the means of production and thus makes for class distinctions at the very base of the system."[275]

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[271] Batchelor, Henry Ford: Mass Production, Modernism and Design, 98.

[272] Ibid.

[273] Burawoy, The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism, 51.

[274] Leslie Holmes, Post-Communism: An Introduction (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), 198.

[275] Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 46.

The Soviet system, which was supposed to be founded on Marx's teachings and improve the lives of the proletariat, mostly factory workers, did not actually differ significantly from the capitalist system. Soviet workers had some extra rights and their everyday lives involved more bureaucracy and rituals, yet, the core system was relatively similar to Western capitalism, just less efficient.

While in theory Soviet workers were more connected to their work, in reality the additional bureaucracy distanced them further. There were means to give workers more deciding power, but they were mostly cosmetic and bore little real significance. Interestingly, in a country claiming to be founded on Marx's teachings, the evidence of Marx's critique became especially clear. Workers became increasingly alienated from their work. Combined with a constant deficit, it is hardly surprising that much of Soviet life involved stealing from one's workplace. Many factories even involved body searches at the end of the working day, but people still managed to find ways to hide objects underneath their clothes.[276] There were also problems on higher levels – management often made reckless decisions, as they did not feel closely connected or responsible for the factory. Some feeble attempts were made to reduce this tendency, for example, at the end of the 1960s, a new law was passed and factories gained the right to make their own choices about the use of profit.[277]

Of the larger factories, Estoplast was in the most difficult situation. Instead of being under the rule of the Ministry of Local Industry of Soviet Estonia, Estoplast answered to the Ministry of Electrotechnical Industry of Soviet Union. Factory had to discuss even

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[276] Raun.

[277] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 552.

the smallest details with a Ministry located in Moscow, and occasionally there were problems with the local authorities. In 1980, when the Council of Ministers of Estonia released a list of factories allowed to produce plastic badges, Estoplast was not one of them, although various scraps of organic glass left from other products would have been completely suitable for the task and the factory had requested permission in 1976. Only after the head engineer sent a second personal letter to the Council of Ministers could Estoplast finally start producing badges.[278]

There is another good example from Estoplast regarding the poor economical planning in the Soviet Union. Of all the glass lamp globes the factory needed, two thirds, or 700,000 were imported from Moldova, Belarus or Kyrgyzstan. These places are up to 5000 km from Estonia and around 3% of the globes broke during transport; however, as the ministry had ordered the globes from these specific locations, it was impossible to buy them from other nearby factories.[279] Occasionally the local authorities would also make bad decisions. For instance, Estoplast had been producing and selling drinking straws for a while, when suddenly, people could not find them in stores anymore. As the packaging of straws was expensive, it was easier for the factory to make a deal with distribution establishments so that more straws would be taken to restaurants and canteens where the people could take them, instead of selling them in stores.[280]

In the Soviet system, management was much less interested in the actual revenues and gross margins than in capitalist enterprises. Occasionally, this negligence manifested as laziness and a lack of flexibility in relations between different factory departments and

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[278] ERA.1.17.2685, (1982).
[279] Kajak, "Estoplast 1934-1989," 120.
[280] Ibid.

consumers. An almost anecdotal story illustrates well the shortcomings of the Soviet distribution system. In 1964, the main daily newspaper *Rahva Hääl* complained that people were unable to purchase certain products from the leather factory Linda, although these had been sitting in the factory warehouse for a while. The problem was simple: stores did not sell unpriced products, but the person who was in charge of pricing had left work and the factory board had not yet found anyone to fill the position. Therefore, no new products by Linda could be sold anywhere.[281]

Despite a huge emphasis on promoting mass production, technological quality stayed at a low level. The entire Soviet Union had no notable production plant that could mass-produce high technology goods.[282] In some fields, the technology was marginally better, but the general quality of objects was still poorer than that of their Western counterparts. This was mostly due to different priorities. While the Western economy concentrated on producing consumer goods, the Soviet Union focused on military needs. The capital absorbed by the arms industry greatly reduced the possibilities for modernising the economy.[283] Quoting Herbert Marcuse:

> "The historical backwardness not only enables but compels Soviet industrialisation to proceed without planned waste and obsolescence, without the restrictions on productivity imposed by the interests of private profit, and with planned satisfaction of still unfulfilled vital needs after, and perhaps even simultaneously with, the priorities of military and political needs."[284]

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[281] Uuemõis, "Kultuuri- Ja Tarbekaupade Sortimendi Laiendamisest Ja Nende Kvaliteedist Ensv Kohaliku Tööstuse Ministeeriumi Ettevõtetes [About Widening the Variety of Culture Products and Commodities and Their Quality in the Enterprises of Essr Ministry of Local Industry]," 2.

[282] Claus-Dieter Kernig, "Technology Transfer and Economic Development," in From Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Domestic Affairs and Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), 81.

[283] Ibid., 83.

[284] Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 43.

It is true that in the Soviet context, primary needs and consumers' needs in general were seen very differently than in the West. Certain products needed to be either produced at home or acquired through illegal means.

The scope of Soviet mass-production has caused pollution and great damage in former Soviet states, as the central power was never very concerned with the economy's effects on the ecosystem. As the aim was economic growth at all cost, sacrifices had to be made, and the impact on nature was often the first to be overlooked. As the technology used in Soviet factories was often older, it was also more polluting than that used in the West.[285] Due to ecological issues, environmental activism was one of the main movements against Soviet power in the 1980s. In late 1986, it was revealed that the Soviet authorities were planning to found a new phosphorite mine in North-Eastern Estonia. In the spring of 1987, public discontent against that decision resulted in the first joint demonstration.[286] The news coverage of the catastrophe in Chernobyl was one of the main signs of glasnost, as some time earlier that kind of an environmental disaster would have been kept a classified secret. Yet, the pollution continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in many cases, also under post-communist conditions.

Mass production was encouraged in every field, as it corresponded to Soviet ideals. Factories were often discussed in the media and their role in Soviet life was greatly emphasised. Factory production was considered almost a science, every step being rationalised and submitted to scientific rules and theories. However, the twisted nature of the reality of Soviet mass production rather caused alienation. The actual system of

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[285] Holmes, Post-Communism: An Introduction, 224.
[286] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 579.

production was still based on the capitalist system, with some changes in bureaucracy. Out-dated equipment and a lack of environmental consideration caused a great degree of pollution both in Estonia and other parts of the former Soviet Union, something many areas have not been able to overcome even by the 21st century. The actual quality of products, especially in light industry, remained lower than in the West. However, the variety of different objects was large, as demonstrated in the next section.

6.2 Light industry factories and object typology in Soviet Estonia

Compared to heavy industry, light industry was considered less important in the Soviet Union, including Soviet Estonia. Especially during the Cold War, the war industry was often privileged over people's everyday needs. As in the West, plastics were considered the material of the future and their production was favoured by the state. Discussing the production of plastics, Raymond G. Stokes has said: "For a vast number of people around the world in those decades, plastics represented the modern. For some in Eastern Europe, they represented the ultimate socialist material."[287] Stokes also refers to an East German author, Horst Redeker, who claimed that plastics "represent a revolution in technology that contradicts in every way the conservative capitalistic relations of production."[288] Plastics were suitable to act as a symbol to the industrial revolution and factories as mythological places of transformation, a symbol much needed in Soviet propaganda. While Soviet Estonian plastics production was not technologically equal to

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[287] Raymond G. Stokes, "Plastics and the New Society: The German Democratic Republic in the 1950s and 1960s," in Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 65.
[288] Ibid., 74.

that of, for example, East Germany, there were still several factories producing a diverse range of products.

One of Estonia's most prolific factories in means of export was a plastics factory, Estoplast. Through most of the Soviet period, it was the leading producer of lamps, but also other plastic materials and packaging. Estoplast grew out of two smaller private companies, Presto and Elektrometall [Electrometal], who united in 1959.[289] At the time of the birth of Estoplast, it was supposed to become the main producer of plastic building materials. In 1960, it was stipulated that by 1965, the use of plastics in Estonia would grow four times and by 1975 fifteen times.[290] However, the prognosis was false and Estoplast became mostly known for lamps and other lighting products. The lamps were mostly made of plastic, as was fashionable at the time; the glass and metal details used in some of the models were ordered in from other factories. In general, the production was quite similar to Western trends; however, the out-dated technology left the quality of the objects lacking. In the 1960s there were still several complaints about factory production. The shape of the lamps was considered primitive, due to the limited range of shapes in which Estoplast could produce their lamp bowls. Most bowls were simply spherical, composed of two hemispherical halves.[291] The other problem was colour selection: the excessive use of pink and other bright colours was referred to as distasteful.[292] In 1969, Estoplast started producing plastic bags and drinking straws;[293] however, the factory was unable to satisfy even local needs for these products.

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[289] Kajak, "Estoplast 1934-1989," 4.

[290] Ibid., 59.

[291] Ibid., 81

[292] Ibid., 81.

[293] Ibid., 88.

Left: 6.2.1 Lamp for Estoplast, created in collaboration with designers from Leningrad. 1976. Credits: ETDM

Right: 6.2.2 Promotional photograph for Estoplast, 1988. Credits: ETDM

By 1987, 80% of the lamps produced in the factory (approximately 1.2 million lamps) were exported from Estonia, mostly to other parts of the Soviet Union.[294] This was due to Estoplast's position under the jurisdiction of Moscow's Ministry of Electrotechnical Industry instead of the Estonian Ministry of Local Industry. While being subjected to an all-Union Ministry facilitated export, there were also problems: because of its small size, Estoplast was often overlooked by the Ministry. Many plans were unrealistic and the production was badly organised. It was not until 1988 that the factory was handed over to the local Ministry, thanks to a petition organised by factory workers and sent to Mikhail Gorbachev.[295] After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estoplast was privatised, but kept the same name. The 1990s were financially difficult, as with other factories, but by the end of the decade the Estonian economy was slowly improving. Currently, Estoplast produces mostly metal and wooden lamps. It is one of the few Soviet Estonian

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[294] Ibid., 119

[295] Ibid., 131.

factories that is still not only active, but also has an export market – mostly Scandinavia and Russia.

The other larger plastics factory was called Salvo. Its origin differs from other larger factories: instead of being based on nationalised pre-Soviet workshops or factories, Salvo was founded in 1948 as a cooperative artel of handicapped people with only 15 workers. Initially, the range of products was limited to bread and household chemistry such as soap.[296] However, the next year baking bread was cancelled, as the Soviet government made stocking up agricultural products illegal.[297] During the following years, several smaller enterprises were united to Salvo; in 1959, Salvo became an official factory. By 1961, the factory already employed 492 workers.[298] In the same year, the production of plastics started. After that, plastics and wood became the main materials used at the factory. Already from that time, Salvo concentrated on making souvenirs influenced by pre-Soviet traditions – for example, in 1965 even a souvenir spinning wheel was in production.[299] The most iconic Salvo objects were little wooden dolls in different national costumes. They were meant to be cheap and light souvenirs for tourists from outside of Estonia.[300] One reason for their popularity compared to other wooden souvenirs was that the poor quality of wooden materials demanded a heavy layer of paint. Most of the wood used was actually discarded from spade handles,

[296] "Salvo," ed. Salvo (Tallinn1983).

[297] Aigi Viira, "Mäng, Mäng, Mäng - Oli Väikese Inimese Töö Ka Nõukaajal [Play, Play, Play - Was a Child's Work Also in the Soviet Times]," Õhtuleht, 5/10/2006.

[298] "Salvo."

[299] "Saagem Tuttavaks: Plastmasstoodete Vabrik "Salvo" [Let's Meet Plastics Factory Salvo].", ed. Salvo (Tallinn: Kommunist, 1965).

[300] I. Glik, ""Salvo" Suveniir 20-Aastane! [Salvo Souvenirs 20 Years Old!]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1984-2 (1984): 25.

brought from another factory called Vasar.[301] Salvo's main plastic objects were tableware, small household objects and toys, and it was also the first factory in the Soviet Union to produce motorcycle helmets.[302] By 1980, factory profit was 13.88 million rubles, 11.1 million of which came from plastic objects.[303] After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Salvo lost its market and, after several rearrangements, was closed.

6.2.3 Factory Salvo. Late 1970s or 1980s. Credits: ETDM

While these two plastics factories were located in Tallinn, the third largest plastics producer, Tartu Kammivabrik [Tartu Comb Factory], was based in the second largest

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[301] Ibid.

[302] "Salvo," ed. Salvo (Tallinn1981).

[303] "Salvo."

city, Tartu. Like the majority of larger factories, Tartu Kammivabrik had also been founded in the pre-Soviet period as Eesti Kammivabrik [Estonian Comb Factory, short as Estico], in around 1917, and had only produced combs until its nationalisation in 1940. The same year production of other small objects, for example hair accessories and pens, was launched. Unlike many other factories, the name was changed only slightly. In 1969, the factory started producing plastic bags and packaging, which soon became their most important article. As the importance of comb manufacture declined, the factory was renamed Tartu Plastmasstoodete Katsetehas [Tartu Plastic Products Experimental Factory] in 1972. Although the range of products constantly increased, the emphasis remained on plastic packaging. In 1991, after the factory was privatised and renamed Estiko-Plastar, packaging materials became its sole product and have remained so to this day.

As the most notable production article in Soviet Estonia was textiles, there were numerous textile factories, both in Tallinn and in smaller towns. One of the most renowned in terms of fashion was the sewing factory Marat, named after the famous French revolutionary. Marat was established in 1926 and renamed in 1940. By the end of the 1970s, the factory had over 3,000 workers and was exporting to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Finland.[304] Among other textile factories was Sangar, Estonian for 'hero', which specialised in men's clothing, Virulane, which mostly made coats and outerwear, and Võit, Estonian for 'victory', which manufactured women's underwear. Textile factories either had their own design department, commissioned new models from the Tallinn Fashion House, or used a combination of these two strategies.

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[304] T. Bykova, "Marat," ed. Marat (Tallinn1977).

Left: 6.2.4 Corset for Võit, designed by H. Kruusa. Promotional catalogue, 1965. Credits: Academic Library of TLÜ

Right: 6.2.5 T-shirt for Olympics, designed by Saima Priks for Marat in late 1970s. Credits: Saima Priks

Despite the propagandistic value of plastic materials, the strength of Estonian industry lay with traditional materials: furniture (wood) and glass. Estonia had several strong enterprises from pre- and interwar periods, which were transformed into factories. Among the products Estonia was most known for within the Soviet Union was glassware. In fact, Estonia had been famous for both everyday and art glass already before the Soviet period, mostly due to the Lorup factory, a direct descendant of a workshop founded in the 18th century.[305] In 1934, Lorup was supplying the entire Estonia with glassware and also exported to Egypt, Lithuania, Sweden, Palestine and

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[305] Anne Ruussaar, "Eesti Klaasitööstused Ja -Disain 1920.-1930. Aastatel [Estonian Glass Factories and Design in the 1920s and the 1930s]" (Estonian Academy of Art, 2004), 55.

Germany.[306] When the Soviet rule began, Lorup was nationalised and joined with two other factories – Melesk LLC and the Tartu glass factory. This large socialist, state-owned new enterprise was named Tarbeklaas, which roughly translates as 'utility glass'. An archival document at the Tallinn University Library, dating from 1941, shows that the idea of relocating the factory was considered. Tallinn, Tartu, Rakvere, Pärnu and Petseri were all named as possible new locations. Tallinn or Rakvere were thought to be the most practical. Tallinn was favoured, as the old Lorup factory buildings survived and transportation was more convenient. In 1941, it was proposed that at least 90% of production was to remain in Estonia and of that, 70–72% would be marketed in Tallinn. Rakvere, however, was to become the location of large natural oil shale industry that would attract more workers than the glass industry. In 1941, the average monthly salary of a skilled worker in Tarbeklaas was 294.50 rubles, whereas in the oil shale industry it was 470 rubles.[307] This was also the main reason why there were no larger factories in Eastern Estonia. To keep transport costs low, larger factories were in Tallinn, with a few exceptions in Tartu.

The first Estonian glass artist in the factory was Helga Teltma, later Kõrge, who was employed in 1953. Before that, all of the factory's designs came from Russia, and were also used across the Soviet Union. As these Stalinist designs were stylistically quite different from traditional Estonian glass, the difference between the two schools was quite visible at first glance. As a reaction, Tarbeklaas designs created by Estonian designers in the following decade were extremely minimalist – up to 1964 when, due to

[306] Võsaklaasist Kristallini [from Poor Quality Glass to Crystal] (Tallinn: Estonian History Museum, 2006), 27-29.
[307] "Klaasivabrik 'Tarbeklaas' Asukoha Küsimus [the Question of the Location of the Glass Factory 'Tarbeklaas']," in Baltika Collection (Tallinn: Tallinn University Library, 1941?).

'public demand', the factory started using engraving and increasing the amount of décor.[308] However, Tarbeklaas remained closely connected to the Scandinavian glass traditions, a practice that will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

6.2.6 Vase "Kuljus" [Sleighbell], designed by Pilvi Ojamaa for Tarbeklaas. 1969. Credits: Maie-Ann Raun

Throughout the Soviet period, Tarbeklaas was one of the most well-known factories in Estonia. Their objects were popular not only in the Soviet Union, but also abroad: for example, Finnish people would often buy Soviet glass objects, because, although of poorer quality, they were also cheaper.[309] Stylistically, they did not differ much from

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[308] Raun.

[309] Ibid.

Finnish glass design. However, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Tarbeklaas suffered the same fate as other Soviet Estonian factories, falling into financial difficulty. Energy costs rose, the factory lost its state subsidies and exports were problematic. In 1994, a Swedish company called Skankristalli LLC bought the factory and changed its name to Skankristall. Of over 800 workers, less than a hundred remained.[310] After years of slowly moving towards bankruptcy and changing owners and names, Tarbeklaas closed its doors permanently in 2007.

Most of Estonia's smaller electronic objects were produced at the factory Norma. The original factory had been founded in 1931, although on the basis of different earlier metal workshops, the earliest of which dated from 1891. It produced different metal objects and packaging.[311] When the factory was nationalised in 1941, it was also based on an earlier factory with the same name, which was united with other smaller metal factories and workshops. In addition to electronics, Norma maintained the production of different metal objects, mostly small household objects such as tins or kitchenware, and metal badges for young people to collect. Additionally, Norma was the producer of different electronic toy models of racing cars, spaceships and other contemporary machinery. Although Norma's photography equipment was not one their main areas of production, it was used quite widely in the Soviet Union. Norma cameras were even used in space by Soviet astronauts Gorbatko and Rukavishnikov.[312] As seat belts became increasingly popular, Norma became an important producer for both Estonian and Soviet markets. By 1975, the production of seat belts formed more than 50% of the

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[310] Peeter Kuutma, "Tarbeklaasi' Lõpuvalss Tarbekunstimuuseumis [the Final Waltz of 'Tarbeklaas' in the Design Museum]," Rahva Hääl, 12/03/1994.
[311] "Norma : Chronicle 1891-1975," 15.
[312] "Factory Norma: Chronicle 1978/79," (Tallinn: Tallinn City Museum, 1980).

production – previously, toys had occupied the main part.[313] By 1980, Norma was making more than 25 different seat belts, 15 of them complied with international demands.[314] After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Norma managed to retain the manufacture of seat belts and is still active in this area.

The other larger metal company was Vasar, the name meaning 'hammer' in Estonian. It was an ambiguous name, referring to both the main product range of the factory, metal tools, and the hammer as one of the main symbols on the Soviet flag. Unlike most other factories that were either formed or nationalised shortly after the Second World War, Vasar was founded in 1969. Still, as most other factories, Vasar was the outcome of unifying several smaller workshops with the Tartu Aluminium Factory, the main manufacturer of pots and pans. The Vasar trademark became famous for producing locks. From the 1970s, the range of products was complemented by skin packaging and electrical tools. Today Vasar still functions, though it specialises in electroplating.

One of the two main furniture factories in Soviet Estonia was Standard. It had been established in 1944 as a brand new artel of seven people. In 1960, Standard combined with some other smaller artels into a factory. What set Standard aside from most other factories was their scientific approach to designing furniture. In a way, this was very suitable to the Soviet lifestyle. As living spaces were small and every square metre had to be optimised, it was necessary to do research in those areas. Standard not only produced furniture, but also made designs for the other Soviet Estonian furniture factories. By 1984, 90% of all furniture produced in Estonia had been designed in

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[313] "Factory Norma: Chronicle 1975," (Tallinn: Tallinn City Museum, 1977), 10.

[314] "Factory Norma," ed. Norma (Tallinn1980).

Standard.[315] Because of the need to optimise space, a large part of Standard's product range consisted of different shelving units. It was possible to assemble them in different ways to best suit each space; in the Soviet spirit of do-it-yourself (and, naturally, to cut production costs), a lot of the objects were untreated, so every customer could paint or polish them, as they liked. Around half of Standard's production went to furnish offices and public spaces.[316] Standard is still active and has stores in several countries.

The other larger furniture producer was Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory. Originating from a family merchant firm established in 1742, the factory, initially named A. M. Luther Company after its owner, was founded in 1877.[317] Besides manufacturing furniture, the factory also produced plywood. While the Luther factory had been famous for its innovative techniques and stylish design, Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory never quite reached its pre-war fame or production quality. It still managed to survive and continue production even after the collapse of the Soviet system.

Besides traditional factories, the Soviet Estonian production system also included alternative, less industrial modes of production that also employed traditional, in some aspects even historical, working arrangements. In 1966, The Association of Estonian Craftsmen, Uku, was established. The idea was very simple: craftspeople were able to work from home and make national souvenirs according to designs by professional artists. As written in the official brochure:

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[315] "Tallinna Teaduslik Mööblitootmiskoondis Standard [Tallinn Scientific Furniture Factory Standard]," ed. Standard (Tallinn: Valgus, 1984).

[316] Ibid.

[317] Jüri Kermik, Lutheri Vabrik: Vineer Ja Mööbel: 1877-1940: Plywood and Furniture: 1877-1940 (Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuuseum, 2004), 7.

> "The Association of Estonian Craftsmen 'Uku' is a specific organisation whose members are engaged in the production of national souvenirs and implements. The aim of the association is to revive and to develop traditions of our folk art that have been formed during centuries and handed down from generation to generation. The Association has drawn together craftsmen from all those Estonian towns and villages where skilful hands and the love for our cultural heritage are to be found."[318]

Despite its focus on Estonian traditional culture, Uku was by its nature a propagandistic organisation. As written in 1975, Uku was supposed to demonstrate the scope and perspectives of Estonian national culture to the entire world, disproving claims by some emigrant groups that everything national was doomed in Soviet Estonia.[319] Therefore, the purpose of Uku and its counterparts in other Soviet countries was to validate Soviet power. This argument is further developed in section 8.3. At the same time, it was also a social project, employing many handicapped people or others who were simply more comfortable working from home.[320]

Left: 6.2.7 Woven baskets produced at Uku. Designed by H. Vogelberg. 1967. Credits: Kohalik Tööstus 1967-1

Right: 6.2.8 A tool for reeling yarn, produced by Kodu since 1970. Credits: Academic Library of TLÜ

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[318] "Uku," ed. Uku (Tallinn1968).

[319] R. Uuemõis, "Kodutöönduse Organiseerimisest Vabariigis [About Organising Home Industry in the Republic] " Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1975-9 (1975): 2.

[320] H. Vask, "Rahvakunstimeistrite Koondise "Uku" Tegevusest [About the Work of Uku]," Ibid.1967-5/6 (1967): 8.

Besides Uku, there was another similar association employing home-based workers. It was established in 1970 and it was called Kodu, Estonian for 'home'. However, unlike Uku, Kodu concentrated on producing objects that were aimed to be practical and contemporary.[321] The initial reason for establishing it was to employ people who were unable to find other kinds of work. At first, there was a network of stations where people could drop off their objects, but later these were turned into production spaces.[322] Unlike Uku, Kodu did not claim to produce craft objects. The initial designs were also done by professional artists, but a lot of production was based on prefabricated details which made work faster and easier.[323] The scope of objects produced in Kodu was extremely wide, ranging from stickers to cookie-cutters to sweaters.

In addition to these larger and better-known enterprises, there were some smaller and more specialised factories. Overall, the state of Estonian factories was quite average in the Soviet Union. As the local factories were small, they were often overlooked by the Soviet authorities and thereby were sometimes in a worse situation than their larger counterparts in the other parts of the Soviet Union; however, many of them benefitted from their proximity to the West. Thanks to Western influences in design, Estonian products were popular in the Eastern Bloc, having almost the same status as Czech or East German commodities. While plastics were very popular in the Soviet context, Estonian industry still mostly employed traditional materials.

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[321] R. Uuemõis, "Kodutöönduse Organiseerimisest Vabariigis [About Organising Home Industry in the Republic] " Ibid.1975-9 (1975): 6.

[322] Ü. Veskla, "Töö- Ja Olmetingimuste Parendamisest Rahvatööndusettevõttes "Kodu" [About Improving Work and Life Environment in the Factory "Home"]," Ibid.1980-7 (1980): 1.

[323] S. Riismantel, "Uusi Rahvatarbekaupu Rte "Kodult" [New Commodities by Kodu]," Ibid.1973-5 (1973): 20.

6.3 New products

This section explores the creation of a new product from the bureaucratic point of view. Every new design had to pass several stages before it finally became a product. Some of these stages related to the structure of factory production, but others were specific to the Soviet context. This thesis explains the process, while concentrating on the desired qualities of a Soviet product and the role of designers. As rationalism was valued over aesthetic appearances, designers were in a difficult position. In spite of the gradual legitimisation of industrial design as a field, economic considerations continued marginalising designers and their ambitions.

Every new product in Soviet Estonia had to be ordered by the Ministry. Unless there was a clear and direct order, a new type of object could not be introduced to production. One illustration of the impact of this bureaucratic rule is the case of Estoplast in 1980, which, as described in the previous section, was submitted to very rigorous rules. However, for example at the glass factory Tarbeklaas, which was already designated to produce vases, occasionally new products were permitted quite easily. Sometimes even quite random experimentations by the glass blowers were taken on as new vases, if they were easy to produce. To determine the necessary products, conjuncture research was carried out; however, a deficit of household products remained throughout the Soviet period

Judgment on the range of objects available in the Soviet Union should not be based on contemporary Western lifestyles. One good example is the question of private cars, which were so common in the Western world by the second half of the 20th century. In

the Soviet Union, this was not the case. According to Maria Elisabeth Ruban, Khrushchev had not wanted to see private motorisation on the Western scale and had hoped that an optimal public transport network and efficient taxi system would have made private cars unnecessary.[324] However, in spite of emphasising this fact, Ruban still goes on to declare:

> "The current annual production of 1.3 million private cars, which is to rise to 1.5 million by 1985, is not nearly enough to meet demand, and the waiting lists are many years long, despite extremely high prices. A small Moskvich car costs nearly 7,500 rubles after the latest price increases in 1981, or forty-three gross months' wages for an average blue or white collar worker."[325]

She points out that in the Soviet Union, 6% of all private households have a car, whereas in GDR and Czechoslovakia this is 40%.[326] By Communist standards, owning a private car was not considered a necessity and therefore this kind of criticism is actually not completely fair and shows an example of criticising a society by the wrong set of rules.

As already discussed in Chapter Five, different regulations or GOSTs were imposed on design in order to make designers obsolete. This strategy did not function as intended, as designers continued to be involved in the process. However, different design analysts tried to apply similar tactics to the evaluation of design. One interesting example is given by Juri Somov, who presented the different characteristics of a product in a circular scheme, where each is graded on a five- or ten-point scale and the results graphically depicted.[327] The suggested use of the scheme was to compare different objects of the same category, for example vacuum cleaners. The proposed

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[324] Ruban, "The Consumer Economy," 17.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]," 142.

characteristics, however, serve as a perfect illustration for the pragmatism of Soviet design. Most are related to the production of the object; the aesthetic side is just one sector, quite unimportant next to the others. However, this research did not uncover any evidence of factories actually employing this evaluation system.
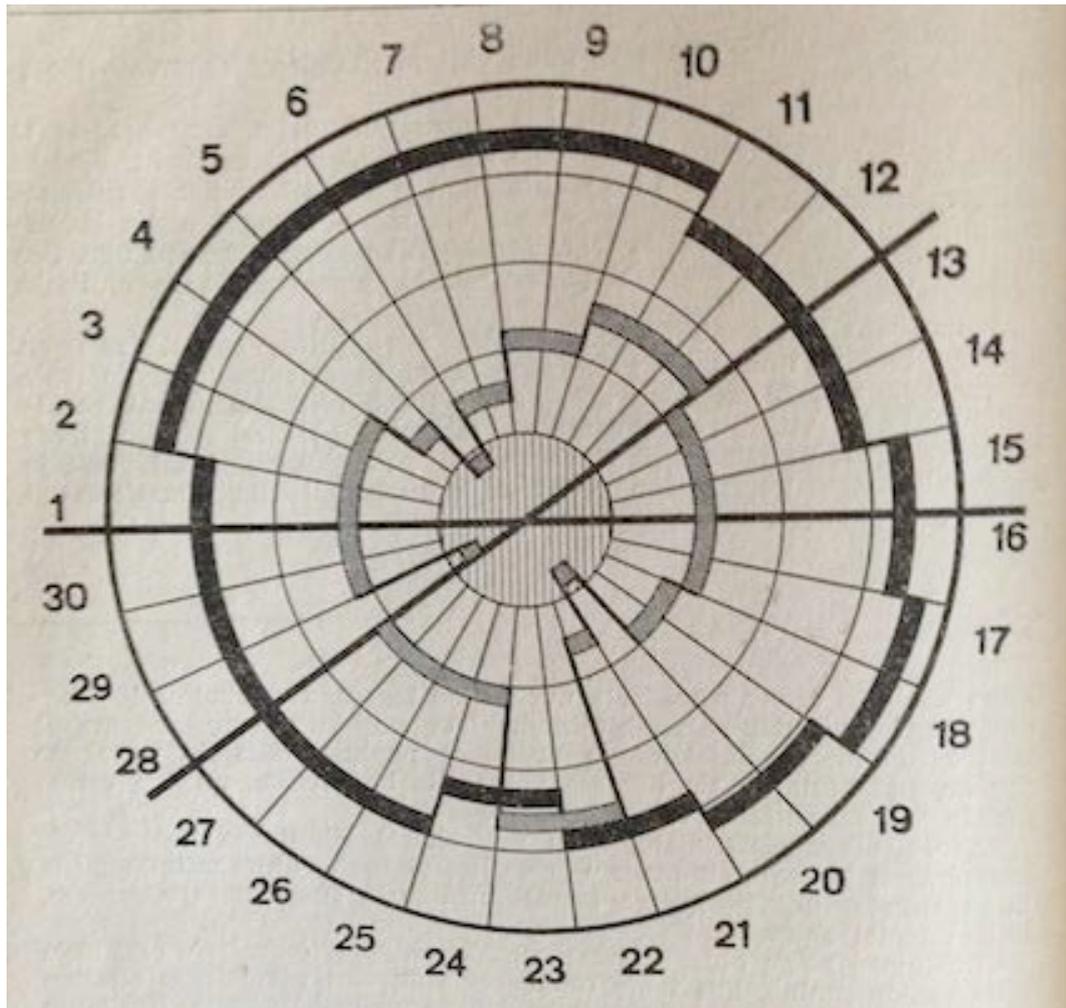
6.3.1 Diagram for evaluating new vacuum cleaners, proposed by Somov. Only three characteristics are related to aesthetic appearance: 28 is composition, 29 is form and 30 is colour solution. Credits: Yuri Somov, Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects

In an essay published in 1990, Lawrence and Vlatchoutsicos have phrased the criteria for evaluating Soviet design:

Simplicity in design, aimed at facilitating manufacturing operations and user performance;

Continuous design improvement, introducing small changes in product components;

Commonality of parts;

Prototype modelling;

Use of foreign standards as yardstick for new product design.[328]

Most of these criteria are not specific to the Soviet context. Simplicity in design and commonality of parts are valued in all factories, and prototypes are common in different production systems. Continuous design improvement, however, is somewhat arguable as a criterion in this list. While in certain production fields keeping up with the international trends might have been important, in everyday commodities it was definitely not essential. Certain products could be produced for years or even decades without any notable design improvement. However, Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos have been right not to point out the aesthetic quality of the design itself. Sadly, because of the shortage of commodities available, aesthetic quality was not primary.

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[328] Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos, Behind the Factory Walls : Decision Making in Soviet and Us Enterprises, 249.

6.3.2 Product information card in factory Tarbeklaas in 1966. It includes measurements, production details and assessment from the art council – "Very good". Credits: ETDM

Economic considerations were important in assessing new designs, especially in terms of technological possibilities. For example, the plastics factory Salvo was quite strict in verifying technical details.[329] Economic considerations mostly extended to factory process, not product development, as proved by Matti Õunapuu's case. Õunapuu, as the leader of the design group ARS, would discuss the possible wage with factory directors and often the quality of the design would be measured in money. According to Õunapuu:

> "Then if I told that something would cost for example ten thousand rubles the client would say that well I don't know, put another zero to the end. He was praised for using a hundred thousands on product development instead of ten thousands."[330]

Thus, while economic and technological possibilities of factories were not always sufficient for good quality product design, these shortcomings did not need to influence

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[329] Sau.

[330] Õunapuu.

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the income of designers. However, it should be stressed that this mentality was one of the perks of designers at ARS. Factory designers earned a monthly wage.[331]

After the design was deemed suitable for factory production, it went on to be assessed by the Art Council. The existence of Art Councils was a key element that shaped the Soviet design economy, comprising of specialists from the same field who assessed each design to see if it had sufficient aesthetic value to be mass-produced.[332] After they had deemed the design suitable, it could finally be introduced to production. The process of introducing a new object to production depended on the technology used at the factory and on the degree of mechanisation. The processes of introduction at two different factories are compared, the furniture factory Standard and the plastics factory Salvo. Both were large and highly mechanised. To facilitate the explanation, this thesis focuses solely on the steps directly connected to the production of the actual objects, not their distribution, pricing or other aspects.

At Standard, if the necessary blueprints and specifications already existed, the process began with the deputy director of production preparing an order for introducing a new product. Therefore, two possible scenarios existed: either there was first a need for a specific product, which needed to be designed, or there was already a design that was planned to be introduced to production. If the design existed first, it was either designed by one or several of the factory designers or it was based on products from other Soviet republics or Western countries. However, as Standard was an experimental factory with

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[331] Sau.

[332] Art Councils are further discussed in the section 7.5.

a large design department, copying designs was less common than in other factories.[333] As soon as the blueprints and specifications were made, by the chief engineer's order the Department of Technology compiled the project for organisational-technological means; the project was then discussed at a meeting involving all departments.

The Department of Technology was the main department active in the introduction of new products. They were responsible for calculating the amount of materials needed (based on which the Department of Production would order the materials from the Department of Supplies, who then provided them, and the Department of Planning and Economics would calculate the initial price for the future product), developing the technology for the product and determining the necessary equipment for production. If the necessary equipment existed, it was ordered to the factory through the Ministry; if it did not, it was constructed by the Department of Technics. When the materials had arrived and the equipment had been set up, the Department of Technology, the Head of Manufacturing and the Department of Production prepared the actual process of production.

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[333] Grünberg.
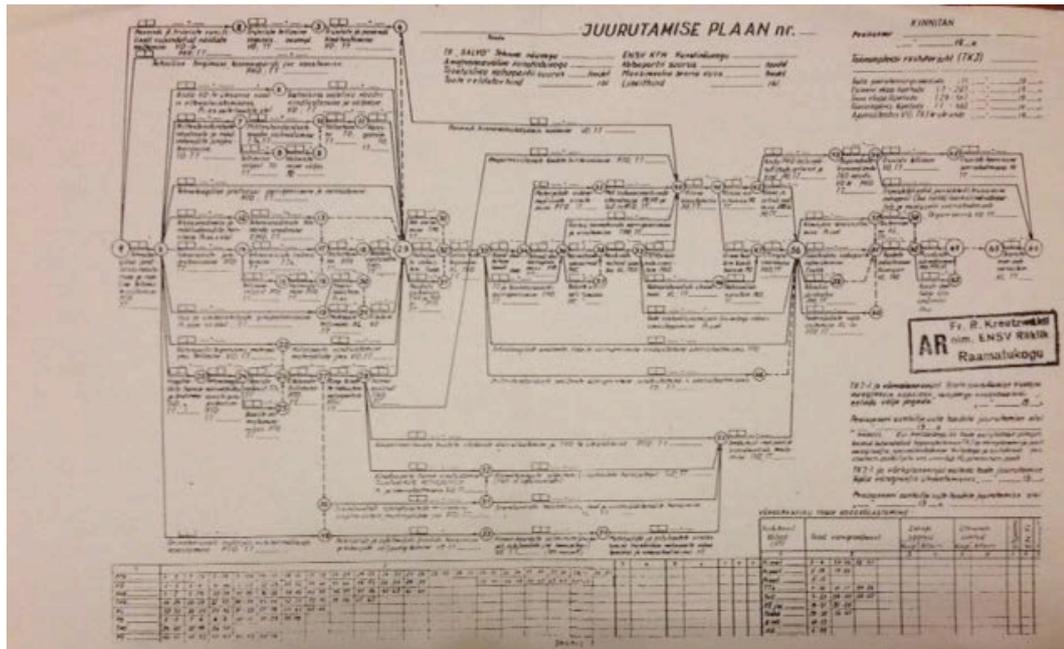
6.3.3 A scheme depicting the process of introducing new products in factory Salvo. Credits: Estonian National Library

At Salvo, the basic procedure was quite similar, though as producing plastic objects is more complex than plywood furniture, the technological side of the introduction of new products was more time-consuming and had more stages. First, equipment had to be secured and material ordered just for manufacturing a trial series. Samples from the trial series were sent to the Art Council to be evaluated. Based on the trial manufacturing, the Department of Projecting and Technology and the Department of Technics would secure the equipment necessary for mass production. Only after yet another trial run would the actual mass production begin. One of the designers working for Salvo, Raimo Sau, emphasised that as the examples sent to the Art Council were from a different series produced using different technology, the final mass-produced product on sale was often considerably different from that which the Art Council had initially approved.[334] Therefore, while the Art Councils did have a say in shaping the general Soviet Estonian

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[334] Sau.

design scene, often the actual quality of the products was not the same as that of the initial samples. The basic form and colour scheme was similar, but not identical.

In contrast, the glass factory Tarbeklaas had a relatively low percentage of mechanisation. In 1980, only 31% of workers in Tarbeklaas were involved in mechanised work; this percentage was the lowest in Soviet Estonia, whereas the average was 56.3%.[335] As the technological side of the introduction of new products was less complex, the introduction process had fewer stages. All designers working for Tarbeklaas had been trained as glass artists, which meant that they were also more familiar with the possibilities glass had to offer. The typical introduction process in Tarbeklaas was simply to produce a wooden mould for blowing the initial example, which was then sent for evaluation to the Art Council. Afterwards, metallic moulds were produced to facilitate mass production. Therefore, the introduction process naturally depended on the technology used at a specific factory. Often, the work of designers cannot be judged based on the end products.

Interestingly, while the process of introduction was described in such detail in official documents, involving even the details about which department was responsible for printing the plan, no documents even vaguely touch the subject of creating the design. Presumably, there are several reasons for this. Firstly, as already mentioned, ways of acquiring blueprints varied, and they were often copied. Direct copying was not considered shameful in the Soviet context, but rather as simply relying on the experiences of other countries and cultures, yet it was still not often discussed in

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[335] H. Männik, "Masina- Ja Käsitsitöö Vahekorrast Kohaliku Tööstuse Ettevõtetes [About the Relations between Handmade and Automatised Work in Local Industry]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1980-4 (1980): 2.

mainstream media.[336] Secondly, it is also a sign of the relative unimportance of designers in the factory setting. The status of industrial designers was ambiguous in Soviet production system and they had trouble fitting into the factory context. The Soviet mythology was built on workers, not thinkers or creators.

The planned economy dictated that every product had to be ordered by the relevant ministry; without an order, no object could get into production. The designs were mostly assessed through economic criteria, as facility and low cost of production were more important than aesthetic appearance. The aesthetic appearance itself was evaluated by a board of specialists, the Art Council. After passing evaluation, the design had to pass the process of being introduced to production, which was naturally dependant of the factory and the materials it was working with. The introduction process was mainly technological, although a large amount of bureaucracy was still involved. As a whole, the importance of designers in the process was relatively small; the main part was still played by the factory, as usual in most forms of mass production, or the Soviet state, as unique in a totalitarian society.

6.4 Everyday life in a factory

One of the key aspects of design ideology is the production of design, including the way it is produced by workers. Soviet factory life was highly regulated: as the Soviet system was built around Marx's theory with the premise that the proletariat would become the ruling class, it is natural that the factory was ideologically a very strong symbol. Instead

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[336] Even Lenin himself defended the exploitation of capitalist machinery and experiences, as discussed in 8.1.

of being just a workplace, it became a small model society where every detail was organised and politicised. Thus, it was important that members of these societies – the factory workers – acted according to a certain set of rules. Instead of the usual rules that conduct behaviour within the workplace, Soviet factories also dictated manners after working hours.

This section argues that the everyday rituals in a Soviet factory should be regarded as an attempt to mythologise everyday life and impose structural order onto human relations. As stated by Alexey Yurchak:

> "The acts of copying the precise forms of ideological representations became more meaningfully constitutive of everyday life than the adherence to the literal ('semantic') meanings inscribed in those representations."[337]

These acts of copying also constituted the daily life in a Soviet Estonian factory. Alan L. Nothnagle has suggested that these ideological representations could be seen as a kind of mythology:

> "Communist regimes need to remind their subjects that paradise will be postponed for a while. […] In the meantime, mythology was needed to fill in the gaps between the regime's claims and its usually limited achievements."[338]

Nothnagle also emphasises how these kinds of myths are generally created artificially through day-to-day practices:

> "To achieve the goal of universality, therefore, this kind of myth cannot just be made, it must also be built: one stone on top of the other, through monuments, mass events, festivals, holidays, film, the press, and a variety of other media."[339]

As the factory was one of the most important settings for Soviet ideology, everyday factory life involved many rituals, some almost as important as the actual process of

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[337] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More," 481.

[338] Alan L. Nothnagle, Building the East German Myth : Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 8.

[339] Ibid., 11.

production. The Soviet factory worker, immortalised by Vera Mukhina, was not simply one of the inhabitants of the Soviet Union, but rather a mythological archetype.

As an example, here are the rules set to Salvo workers in 1971 of what an exemplary worker must do:

1. Constantly improve their work productivity.

2. Take an active part in social life.

3. Value each minute of the working day.

4. Only make high-quality production.

5. Not waste materials.

6. Work honestly and conscientiously.

7. Share their work experiences with younger workers and teach them to respect the worker's honour.

8. Fight that no one in the brigade would stay behind, be late or absent without a reason.

9. Constantly improve their level of education in production and everyday life, thereby setting an example to everyone.[340]

These demands show that the perfect socialist worker had to excel at everything they did, while having a spotless personal life. The author of these rules, published in a factory information pamphlet, is unknown, but it can be assumed that the Communist Party had approved and possibly influenced this document. The emphasis on the importance of the collective is once again demonstrated by the fact that an individual is made responsible not only for their own actions, but also for the actions of their co-workers. At every step, it was to be realised that the factory was not simply a

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[340] "Salvo," ed. Salvo (Tallinn1971).

workplace, but the model of a socialist society where everyone had their own role to play. And, even more importantly, workers continued to belong to this society outside of working hours. The demand for an exemplary personal life was not just empty words. For example, if a minor committed any kind of a serious offence, such a stealing or vandalising, their names were published as short notices in the national newspaper together with their parents' names and workplaces. This guaranteed that workers were always aware and critical of their colleagues' personal as well as professional lives.

Every factory had its own small cell of the Communist Party. Formally, it was supposed to be founded in enterprises that employed at least three party members, but with the constant politicisation of everyday life it meant every existing factory. [341] The cell was referred to as the party base organisation and its function was to inspect the work of all public societies functioning within the factory, and since 1961, even to survey the work of factory administration.[342] Additionally, the acting director of the factory had to belong to the party and, therefore, to the party base organisation. In the same way, typical factories also had a Komsomol base organisation, an ideological party cell for younger employees.

In the mid-20th century, during the Soviet era, significant changes occurred in the treatment of workers. To be fair, it cannot be completely credited to the system, as similar labour laws were passed all over Europe and were mostly due to the general work climate rather than the specific political ideology. However, it did provide Soviet ideology with a powerful propaganda weapon, as it was an undeniable evidence of the

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[341] "Norma : Chronicle 1891-1975," 90.
[342] Ibid.

differences between pre-war capitalist Estonia and the Soviet system. It had only been in 1884 when it became illegal to employ children under 12, and the working hours for 12–15 year-olds were legally limited.[343] However, the average working day for adults remained long and difficult. At the metal factory Zvezda, for example, in 1901, the workday lasted for 12.5 hours. The factory had strict rules: workers who 'wasted time' by idly standing, messing around or smoking tobacco were fined. At the same time, the factory had no facilities for resting or even a canteen.[344] Early in the Soviet period, working days were shortened, and from 1960 most factories had 7 hour workdays.[345] In 1959, Estoplast became the first factory to have a 5 day working week, an example the others soon followed.[346] All this helped reinforce the official mythology that the Soviet power had helped to ease working class lives.

Despite the importance of technology and machine aesthetics, the actual technological quality in Soviet Estonian factories was poor. This was largely due to the destruction of the war, which left several factories damaged. For example, at the end of the 1940s, Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory had to use horses for transport within the factory, as there were not enough cars.[347] Due to the lack of specific equipment, machinery was often built inside the factory by the workers themselves. It is estimated

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[343] K. Kala, O. Karma, and T. Karjahärm, Tallinna Vineeri- Ja Mööblikombinaat [Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1977), 19.

[344] "Norma : Chronicle 1891-1975," 9.

[345] Kala, Karma, and Karjahärm, Tallinna Vineeri- Ja Mööblikombinaat [Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory], 169.

[346] Kajak, "Estoplast 1934-1989," 57.

[347] Kala, Karma, and Karjahärm, Tallinna Vineeri- Ja Mööblikombinaat [Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory], 119.

that in 1966, almost every factory had at least one self-built machine.[348] Factory workers and higher Soviet officials considered Western-built machines a sign of higher quality, compared to their Soviet counterparts – even in public media. In 1967, the Minister of Local Industry wrote about an excursion to a Czechoslovakian factory: "Visiting enterprises one could spot the use of imported raw material, materials and machines everywhere, which guarantees the high quality of products."[349] Although the situation in Estonian factories was a lot better than in many other parts of the Soviet Union, it was still far behind Czechoslovakia and Western Europe. Even as late as 1980, only 56.3% of workers in Estonian factories were involved in automatized production.[350] A lot of the work was still done manually and machinery was out-dated and in poor condition.

A Soviet factory complex did not simply consist of production space, but the larger ones resembled small villages. The Standard factory complex also had a canteen for 70 workers, a doctor, dentist, bar, sauna and an apartment building with 30 flats.[351] The factory intended to build a dormitory for 200 workers, but perestroika cancelled that plan. The sewing factory Marat even had a bookshop and a lawyer who gave free consultations to the factory workers.[352] Most factories had apartment buildings and dormitories designated to the workers. This practice was not brought in with the Soviet power, but had already existed at the beginning of the 20th century, especially at the

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[348] P. Lageda and L. Kanne, "Plastmasside Töötlemise Organisatsioonilisest Tasemest Eesti Nsv-S [About the Organisatory Quality of Processing Plastics in Essr]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1966-1 (1966): 4.

[349] V. Käo, "Tšehhi Sõprade Juures [Visiting Czech Friends]," Ibid.1967-2 (1967): 2

[350] H. Männik, "Masina- Ja Käsitsitöö Vahekorrast Kohaliku Tööstuse Ettevõtetes [About the Relations between Handmade and Automatised Work in Local Industry]," Ibid.1980-4 (1980).

[351] ."Tallinna Teaduslik Mööblitootmiskoondis Standard [Tallinn Scientific Furniture Factory Standard]."

[352] Bykova, "Marat."

shipyards. Besides working class dormitories, it was also a common practice to build special apartment buildings for engineers to attract more qualified staff.[353]

In the Soviet period, the need for working class housing became more desperate than ever. After the war, the population of Tallinn, where most factories were located, rose quickly: in 1934, it had been 137,800, but in 1959 it was 279,900, and in 1979 already 428,500. Thus, population more than tripled in just 45 years.[354] There were several reasons for this, mostly rapid urbanisation and the official strategy to import migrant workers from others parts of the Soviet Union. The rapid growth of factories brought about the need for a large number of new workers. The city itself had suffered greatly in the war and, due to economic reasons, rebuilding had not been fast enough during Stalin's era. Many people were living in communal apartments and did not have enough space. Besides that, a lot of the older houses had not been renovated and were barely habitable by contemporary standards, lacking running water and indoor toilets. This problem was still very much present in the late Soviet period. Although since the beginning of the 1960s several new modern districts were planned and built in Tallinn, the housing problem remained severe until the end of the Soviet period.

For those reasons, many people hoped to get an apartment through their workplace. Although technically everyone had the right to apply for an apartment, in reality the queues were long in both regular and factory houses. For example, at Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory in 1964 there were over 300 people queuing for an apartment, but

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[353] Kala, Karma, and Karjahärm, Tallinna Vineeri- Ja Mööblikombinaat [Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory], 41.

[354] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 601.

only four apartments were vacated that year.[355] There was no open rental market, thus finding a living space was especially difficult. In a chronicle written about life at Salvo, former employee Endel Liive tells the story about the factory accountant, 24 years old, who in 1960 lived in a communal apartment and did not have a separate room. The only way she could have rented one was via the black market, paying 20,000 rubles, but she did not have that much money. To put this sum into context: after redenomination in 1961, she would have had to pay 2,000 rubles, but even in 1966, the monthly wage for the head of the marketing department at Salvo was only 130 rubles.[356] Therefore, even for a higher-level employee, this sum would have been more than annual wage. Not many people in Soviet Estonia could afford to pay that much money, even as a onetime expense. Endel Liive further claims that the young accountant ended up deliberately becoming a single mother so that she would be preferred above others in the apartment queue.[357] It is difficult to determine if the story actually ended this way or if the constant scheming in the Soviet Union actually went this far, but this story illustrates Soviet Estonian housing problems well.

Another way of reinforcing the myth of the factory as the cornerstone of Soviet society was organising extracurricular activities among the factory staff. Especially important were sports activities, as Soviet ideology valued physical improvement as much as mental improvement. Here, one can draw parallels to Nazi ideology – an ideal citizen must not only be moral and obedient, but also in good physical shape. The proverb "Mens sana in corpore sano" was constantly repeated. On propaganda images, an

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[355] Kala, Karma, and Karjahärm, Tallinna Vineeri- Ja Mööblikombinaat [Tallinn's Plywood and Furniture Factory], 237.
[356] Liive, "Salvo in the 1960s," 165.
[357] Ibid., 60-61.

exemplary communist was always in excellent physical shape, whereas the class enemy was usually obese and unattractive. Sporting events for the masses also provided an excellent tool for creating and reinforcing this mythology. To encourage sports, factories usually had gymnasiums, pools or other sporting facilities, depending on the size of the factory, as well as sports teams that organised practices and took part in different competitions with other factories. Occasionally, the different possibilities were almost overwhelming. As written by V. Kajak in the chronicle of Estoplast, during the stagnation period, Estoplast offered a free formula car to any young man who would be interested in motor sports. There were no hidden clauses, just that the interested man would get free lessons and a chance to compete at different events. The offer was on the notice board for two months, but no one was interested.[358]

6.4.1 Sports club at the Standard factory. 1984. Promotional photograph for a pamphlet. Credits: Estonian National Library

Besides sports, many factories also had other organised activities, such as bands, choirs, dance lessons, debate clubs, bridge clubs or craft clubs. And, if any kind of interest was not yet presented in the form of a club, creating a new one was strongly encouraged as it was an example of "taking an active part in social life", which as previously mentioned,

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[358] Kajak, "Estoplast 1934-1989," 103.

was a characteristic of an exemplary worker. So why exactly was social extracurricular activity so encouraged in socialist factories? The first and most obvious reason was to improve the workers' motivation. The other reason is connected to the first: building community spirit. If workers spent more of their free time together, they would be better acquainted and probably function better in professional relationships. It must be stressed that clubs themselves did not have to represent Soviet ideology. Endel Liive in his "Salvo" chronicle remembers how in 1968 the factory started teaching English to everyone who was interested. The lessons ended up being hugely popular, as there were over fifty people attending. The mandatory reading material was a book by Oscar Wilde; when students asked if *The Daily Worker*, a famous American communist newspaper, was good for improving their reading skills, the teacher recommended *The Guardian* instead.[359] Therefore, despite the ideological charge of the Soviet factory setting in general, not all individual factories were completely controlled.

In addition to these two economical reasons, a third was purely ideological: socialising workers' free time. In communist ideology, 'individualism' has a strongly negative charge. Social activity per se was considered better than individual work. This preference was coded into the very essence of both socialist and communist ideologies, as they were understood in the Soviet Union. The less time a person spent alone, the better. Alone, people may develop dangerous thoughts that were impossible to control, whereas group mentality was much easier to steer and survey. In the factory setting people were easier to submit to control.

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[359] Liive, "Salvo in the 1960s," 205-206.

6.4.2 The Norma factory receiving three travelling Soviet flags at once for results in Socialist competitions. August 7, 1984. Credits: Tallinn City Museum

An important part of everyday factory work was the constant competition. Alan Nothnagle names the socialist competitions as one of the most common examples of communist mass events organised for reinforcing Soviet mythology.[360] Filling the Five-Year-Plan was a competition with oneself, as workers were expected to excel themselves and fulfil the plan as quickly as possible. The best workers of every factory were announced and awarded; however, this assessment was based purely on quantity instead of quality, a fact that further helped reduce the general standard of factory production. The idea behind them can be seen as Marxist in the Soviet way. As wages, a purely materialistic outcome of work, were considered an insufficient motivation for

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[360] Nothnagle, Building the East German Myth : Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989, 11.

workers, it was deemed necessary to also "stimulate them morally".[361] However, it is questionable how well this strategy worked on the general public.

There were also competitions between different factories in various fields, the prizes and their value varied according to the competition. Taking part in a socialist competition was considered an honour and privilege; for example, at Norma, if any worker broke the factory rules, the entire department was removed from the competition and therefore lost the chance to win.[362] At the same time, competitions were also an obligation, to an extent. Not all of them actually raised productivity. In 1972, the Ministry of Local Industry held a design competition to honour the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union, the task was to come up with ideas for new products. 14 prizes were supposed to be given out, but only 20 designs were submitted. The reason given by several factories that refused to take part was that the competition would have disturbed fulfilling the plan.[363] This actually shows a double disturbance to factory quality created by competitions. Firstly, participating would have inconvenienced meeting the plan. Secondly, the constant struggle to meet the unrealistic plans made it difficult for the factories to find resources for creating new products. This case study illustrates the importance of maintaining the Soviet mythology over factory productivity.

All in all, factories played an important part in Soviet society and ideology, both symbolically and economically. Most of the economy was built on industry and mass production played a key role in political discourse. Factory workers were often active

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[361] A. Köörna, "Kümnes Viisaastak Ja Toodangu Kvaliteet [the Tenth Five-Year Plan and the Quality of Production]," in Eesti Nsv Tööstus Üheksandal Viisaastakul [the Industry of Essr During the Ninth Five-Year Plan] (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1972), 143.

[362] Uno Kammal and Karl Tihase, "Disain [Design]," (Tallinn: Valgus, 1978), 55.

[363] Ibid., 32.

politicians, as it was ideologically suitable. The inner climate depended on the factory, but although there was constant political control and the work was often physically challenging, the wages were good and factories always needed new workers. Everyday life in a Soviet factory was quite different from that in a Western factory, involving rituals such as socialist competitions. As the factory setting was an important backdrop to Soviet ideology, the rituals in Soviet factories were crucial to maintaining the system.

Conclusions

Industrialisation and mass production were important tools for the Soviet system, thus it is natural that Estonia's industrialisation started already at the establishing of Soviet power in the 1940s. After the Thaw, numerous factories were functioning in Estonia. Soviet production was submitted to a centralised control from Moscow and, due to their small size, Estonian factories were often overlooked by the Soviet power. Often, local management posed problems for the workers as well, imposing rules that disrupted work progress. Combined with a general discontent towards the Soviet system, workers often felt alienated from production. All in all, the production landscape in Soviet Estonia was diverse. Almost everything needed in everyday life was produced locally. As Estonian products were popular throughout the Soviet Union, demand was always greater than the production. While Soviet politics favoured the production of plastics, more traditional materials remained popular in Estonia – for multiple reasons that are presented further in this thesis.

The creation of new products was a bureaucratically difficult process, as with most things in a planned economy such as that of the Soviet Union. Coordination with the Ministry was needed to introduce new designs into production, as well as approval from different authorities. Designs were mostly assessed on economic criteria, as facility and low production cost were more important than aesthetic appearance. As usual in mass production, the technology of the factory was decisive in the introduction of new products, and with the poor conditions of most Soviet Estonian factories, designers had even less freedom in creation. A board of specialists, the Art Council, evaluated the appearance of products. As the entire process, due to bureaucracy and poor conditions, was quite lengthy, Soviet Estonian design lagged behind international trends. The designers' importance in the process was relatively small; the main part was still played by the factory.

A Soviet factory was considerably different from a typical Western factory, resembling rather a small model of society with facilities for eating, resting, doing sports and often even sleeping in the shape of a dormitory or factory-owned apartment block. Most activities, both work- and leisure-related, were highly ritualised in order to intensify the Soviet mythology and thereby strengthen the Soviet power. However, as a factory was supposed to be a model of Communist society, it is no surprise that the same problems as in Soviet everyday life were also present in the factory, in the shape of disorganisation, theft, and general discontent.

7. Soviet Estonian industrial designers

The factory as the location of production played an important role in the evolution of Soviet Estonian industrial design. This chapter extends the analysis to research the profession of industrial designers as primary agents in order to determine the ideological charge of their material practices. The traditional production of industrial design objects takes place in locations that are public and therefore must conform to state power. As factories in the Communist context were owned by the state, they were by definition extensions of state power. While the politics and prevalent ideologies within factories were influenced not only by the state, but also by the people working there, open dissidence was still virtually impossible. Industrial designers had to compromise with state power in order to survive. However, politics dictating creative practices varied. In Soviet Estonia, exhibitions were fully financed by the state, as well as the execution of exhibits. As most well-executed objects were later bought, these provided designers with additional income.

This chapter begins studying the organisation of design education in Soviet Estonia by comparing relevant books to the structure of design teaching. The main focus is on the industrial art department of the Estonian State Art Institute as the training place of most Estonian factory designers. From the problems of education, the thesis goes on to research its implementation in reality by exploring the occupation of industrial design, especially in terms of positioning it within the Soviet system and ideology. The emphasis is on the gradual process of professionalization during the time period in question. The third section focuses on the issues of creativity among industrial

designers, concentrating on exhibitions as the main alternative of self-expression to factory work. The aim is to give an overview of self-determination, addressing the evolution of industrial design exhibitions as design unhindered by bureaucracy and poor technological possibilities. The fourth section researches the second economy of factory design, more precisely the part played by industrial designers. The treatment of various activities relating to second economy is dualistic, to discuss both the extracurricular activities in which designers might have participated in their daily work, and the ways by which they might have acquired additional information or objects relating to design originating from outside the Soviet Union. The final section positions industrial designers within the general Soviet Estonian design ideology, analysing both the role of industrial designers as agents with their coping mechanisms and the nature of control over industrial design.

7.1 Design education

Education is an important aspect of the profession of industrial designers, as it is the first point of contact with both peers and the different apparatuses active in the development of the discipline. As industrial design was only establishing itself as a discipline, education was another problem the profession had to face at the beginning of the period in question. While the local industrial art department was considered innovative in its own time, it was not until 1978 that the first guidebook in its contemporary sense was published for aspiring designers. Therefore, the gap between the different aspects of design education illustrates the deficiencies in the Soviet system as well as the efforts of Estonian industrial design in establishing its position.

While design theories in general offered very few guidelines about the ideal Soviet form or how exactly it was supposed to contribute to aesthetic education, for most of the period in question there was a shortage of educational materials intended for design students. *The Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects*, written by the Russian design philosopher Yuri Somov in 1967, was one of the first books on the problems of industrial design, and it was published in several languages within the Soviet Bloc. Somov mostly discusses the importance of economic considerations. He preaches rationalism, even claiming that throughout history, the objects of best artistic quality were created with the minimum use of decorative means.[364] According to Somov, the designer should not act as a stylist aiming to follow fashion, but rather as an inventor.[365] This idea mirrors the general ideal in Soviet design, a scientific approach that would be based on technical laws and scientific calculations used to improve the structure of products.[366]

Rather than seeing design as a creative process, Somov treats it as a mathematical assignment with right or wrong answers. He writes:

> "There is no doubt that if we could calculate the loss of energy caused by inexpedient and unprofessional design of electric lamps, we'd get astronomical figures. But what about the damage dysfunctional lamps cause to the human being (decline in work capability, rise in fatigue and nervousness!"[367]

Between the lines, there is hidden criticism towards the generally poor level of Soviet production. The late 1960s was also the period when the Soviet government started

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[364] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]."

[365] Ibid., 39.

[366] Karpova, "Accommodating 'Design': Introducing the Western Concept into Soviet Art Theory in the 1950s–60s," 637.

[367] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]," 43.

imposing standards or GOSTs to improve the general level of design. The idea behind GOSTs was that there is a best design solution for every product; the same idea is also visible in Somov's text. He calls it 'optimal form', a term that seems to embody both the efficiency of production and functionality. However, Somov also admits that optimal form depends on specific cases, and in certain cases there may be tens or even hundreds of options.[368] Also, he does not prohibit decoration completely; he admits that the different options for everyday commodities should vary according to form, decoration, price and other factors – although these different versions should still be based on the optimal form.[369] One must bear in mind that in 1967, international principles of industrial design were only beginning to enter the majority of the Soviet Union – VNIITE had only been founded in 1962.

Somov's sceptical approach towards decoration and stylistics was largely caused by the backwards state of Soviet economics and industrial possibilities at the time. In 1967, there was a shortage of all products, not just everyday commodities. The political choice was to prefer the production of different apparatuses to general household objects, therefore this is also the question Somov mostly deals with. While from a design historian's perspective it may seem like a cruel decision, the fact was that Soviet society needed a technological revolution, not a stylistic one. Other parts of the Soviet Union were in a much worse state than Estonia, especially those with less favourable economies. The conditions within factories were poor, thereby hindering all aspirations toward better-looking design. Somov writes: "In practice, there are several cases where the designer, wanting to amaze the consumer with the wit of design, artificially

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[368] Ibid., 56.
[369] Ibid., 57.

complicates his task in a manner which we must consider irrational."[370] Here, one must

remember that due to the poor technological level of Soviet factories, most decoration

tasks were executed manually. Hence, even the simplest ornament made the production

a lot more complicated and time-consuming, as well as increasing the risk of damage or

mistake. Despite the designers' aesthetic aspirations, it was easier to teach future

professionals to avoid ornament rather than deal with these problems. So, rather than

being seen as an ideologically driven wish to impede designers, Somov's book can be

seen as a painfully realist account of contemporaneous Soviet industry and the

insignificant part industrial designers played in it, as well as an honest prediction of the

lack of artistic freedom a young designer was going to have in their first job.

As industrial design gradually established itself as a discipline, two Estonian authors,

Kammal and Tihane, wrote the first guidebook on design education in 1978.[371] Its more

liberal treatment of Western influences was manifest already in its name, *Disain* – the

Western word 'design' written according to Estonian grammar rules. In comparison,

Somov's book, *Artistic construction of industrial objects*, had avoided that word, even

though it made the terminology a lot more complicated. The word 'designer' is used a

few times in Somov's text, but that could also have been the choice of the Estonian

translator Uno Kammal. One must not forget that ten years had passed since Somov's

book had been first published. By the late 1970s, the word 'design' was already

common. For example, the debate on the aims of contemporaneous design published in

a widely spread newspaper in 1976 was called "Design", not "Artistic engineering".[372]

Throughout the book, Tihase and Kammal use the phrase "creative solutions" when

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[370] Ibid., 78.

[371] Kammal and Tihase, "Disain [Design]."

[372] "Disain [Design]."

referring to design, thereby emphasising the role of designers as creators, who do not have to reproduce known forms, but rather have to solve problems.

Besides terminology, the general attitude towards design and the role of designers had changed as well. One of the authors, Uno Kammal, had also translated Somov's book to Estonian. Already in the foreword to that translation he had hinted at the shortcomings of Somov's cold rationalism:

> "Sadly, author has not reached deep enough into all the problems of artistic engineering, even overlooking one very important aspect of design – the aesthetic expressiveness of form, a problem that is considered only briefly."[373]

Kammal and Tihase define four main categories of demands on design: social, ergonomic, utilitarian and aesthetic.[374] Or, to use the authors' own words:

> "The aim of design is to create a product that functionally satisfies the needs of people and society of its time, is produced according to the possibilities of contemporaneous technology and designed in compliance with the logic of form and function and the society's understanding of beauty."[375]

Interestingly, the authors admit that different cultures have different understandings of beauty, thereby rendering universal design solutions useless.[376] Here, one can see an evolution from Somov's rationalism, one that might even be seen as a sign of rising postmodernism. Ideologically, this idea shows a weakening in control, as the idea of the dominance of historical culture or its superiority over state-controlled and state-approved design sounds blasphemous in the Socialist context. From admitting that different cultures may cause different aesthetic tastes, there is only a small step towards admitting that different cultures may also have different ideas about ideology and politics.

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[373] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]," 6.
[374] Kammal and Tihase, "Disain [Design]," 40-41.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.

As design became more established as a discipline, so did the contrast between Soviet and Western design become more apparent. Here, it should be stressed that in Soviet books, some references to communist ideology were an obligatory part of their content. Alexei Yurchak has separated two different parts of Soviet everyday practices: "ideological shell" and "work with meaning". The first was necessary in order to be allowed to do the second one.[377] The same principle applied to the written text as well: some ideological shell, whether a citation of Lenin or reference to a Communist Party Congress, was necessary. Therefore, references to Soviet ideology do not always represent the views of the authors, but rather the more accepted ideas around the time the book was written. When reading the books by Somov or Tihase and Kammal, it is very difficult to determine their own personal views towards socialism or communism (nor should anyone attempt to do so), but the books inform us about official doctrines. In Somov's book, reference to Western design is scarce. In the last pages, he made a claim that "functionalist products lack the human factor," without explaining the idea.[378] Kammal and Tihase discuss the matter further. In their book, socialist design is mostly defined by its purpose, to positively influence society.[379] Socialist design was supposed to be directed towards improving people in different ways,[380] not towards tempting consumers.[381] While drawing a line between capitalist and socialist design, neither of these books discourage young designers from using Western examples, but rather emphasise the role of design as the product of the society and the political model.

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[377] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More," 498.

[378] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]," 170.

[379] Kammal and Tihase, "Disain [Design]," 5.

[380] Ibid., 42.

[381] Ibid., 129.

While Somov's book served as design criticism mixed with design philosophy, pinpointing the possible flaws in products and discussing the aim of design, Kammal and Tihase provide more detailed and specific guidelines for future designers. Their book examines composition, tectonics, structure and colour theories, including the use of colours in work environments and their effects on humans. Instead of propagating the idea of 'optimal form', the book values creativity in design solutions. While there was no evidence that Somov's book would have been very commonly used in design education in Soviet Estonia, in spite of it being quite common in libraries, the book by Tihase and Kammal was actively used at the Estonian State Art Institute during the 1980s, as stated by both Raimo Sau[382] and Vello Lillemets.[383]

While these books represent the textual part of design education, the one that is written and therefore easier to research, the more important part of design education is still the actual teaching within higher education. Most Soviet Estonian designers trained in the Estonian State Art Institute, now known as Estonian Art Academy. Many professors teaching students had trained in the pre-Soviet era, which helped to establish a contingency between the designs of the two political orders. The department of industrial art, where most factory designers trained, opened in 1967, but some designers working in more material-oriented fields also trained as artists of their domain – most notably glass or textile designers or interior decorators.

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[382] Sau.
[383] Lillemets.

Comparing to the rational approach of the two design textbooks discussed, the education given at ERKI was more focused on the artistic side of design. Leonardo Meigas, an industrial designer for the artists' society ARS, graduated from the industrial art department in 1975 and therefore studied there roughly at the same time that Somov's rational book on industrial design was published. According to Meigas, the department of industrial art "had just opened and nobody knew what the hell it was exactly".[384] The birth of the department of industrial art was linked to the founding of VNIITE, the USSR Research Institute of Industrial Design, in 1962. The man behind the department was Bruno Tomberg, an acknowledged Estonian designer and interior architect. While he himself claims that the offer to add the department of industrial art to the State Art Institute came from the higher Party official, Matti Õunapuu, another former student of the industrial art department, argues that actually it had been mainly Tomberg's own initiative.[385] The study materials and examples were all acquired by Tomberg himself.[386] Bruno Tomberg also became the head of the newly founded department, a position that he held until the late 1980s.

In contrast to Somov's technological rationalism, design education at the State Art Institute was oriented towards the idea of the industrial designer as an artist. Drawing and painting had an important part in the curriculum.[387] In Tomberg's own words:

> "When a designer begins his studies, he has a whole bunch of aesthetic and design-related prejudices, mostly of poor quality or wrong. Primarily we must deal with getting rid of them. Until the third year our students treat form-related issues without a specific aim. They study the problems of creating form, the transitions of form et cetera. When solving projects, they follow the function of the object."[388]

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[384] Meigas.

[385] Õunapuu.

[386] Ibid.

[387] Meigas.

[388] Era.R-1.30.12, (1970), 7.

As visible from this description, Tomberg was highly influenced by the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus's impact on Tomberg and the department of industrial design was also emphasised by one of the graduates, Vello Lillemets.[389]

It is important to note that in the Soviet Union, the Bauhaus was generally seen in a positive light and at least some information concerning it was fairly easily available.[390] Although Somov does not mention the Bauhaus, Tihase and Kammal discuss the methods and ideals of the Bauhaus to great detail. They also mention the fact that Hannes Meyer was a communist and fled to the Soviet Union, although naturally keeping quiet about him returning to the West a while later.[391] The same trend can be seen in other Soviet design materials as well: none of them fail to mention Meyer's ideological beliefs. It can be assumed that it was largely because of these beliefs that the Bauhaus was more acceptable in Soviet Union than most other manifestations of Western modernism. Meyer's principles in teaching were compatible with socialist ideals, focusing on improving general life standards through industry.[392] Also, Hitler's position against the Bauhaus made the school more acceptable for communist ideology, even without Meyer's contribution. And, as the Bauhaus was ideologically acceptable, its principles in teaching were as well.

Contextual and theoretical studies also played an important part in education: since the foundation of the department, Bruno Tomberg involved, for example, sociologists in the

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[389] Lillemets

[390] As demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5.

[391] Kammal and Tihase, "Disain [Design]," 27-28.

[392] Éva Forgács, The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 1995), 161.

teaching process.[393] Leonardo Meigas remembers that during his university years, most exhibitions organised by the design students consisted mainly of paintings or at least examples of art-design.[394] During that time, there were no separate Baccalaureate or Master's degrees in the Soviet Union, just one 'higher education' degree on completion of five years of studies and the final project or thesis. Students who studied for at least three years but failed to submit their final assignment received an 'unfinished higher education' (which has now been declared equal to a Baccalaureate). The system was the same at the ERKI – full-time studies took five years, evening studies six. While evening studies were normally attended in addition to a full-time job, the classes took place every evening.[395]

7.1.1 Projects executed by Year 2 students of the industrial design department in 1970. Authors Marje Maidla, Elje Palkman, Kersti Püssim, Alfred Raadik. Credits: Kunst ja Kodu 1970-2

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[393] Õunapuu.
[394] Meigas.
[395] Sau.

According to the Union-wide standard, industrial art departments were generally intended to have three separate study programs: "cultural commodities", "instruments and transport" and "packaging and trade marks".[396] However, as explained by Tomberg: "In the conditions of our republic a more universal preparation is needed and the department has followed this idea when compiling the curriculum."[397] In a country as small as Estonia, separating three curriculums would have been inefficient. Therefore, although the course was called "industrial art", both product design and graphic design were taught.[398] Most of its graduates later became graphic designers, as demand was higher in that field. Raimo Sau estimates that approximately 80% of graduates who found professional work became graphic designers; in his class, he was the only one who became an industrial designer.[399]

Therefore, studies at the State Art Institute and work as an industrial designer were still two quite different things. As Raimo Sau recalls of the relations between education and factory work:

> "These two things were quite distant from each other. What was in a factory and what was at the university… At the university, there was the initial training, there was art and the ability to draw, the ability to plan, spatial perception… All that was separate studying and what we had at the factories, these two weren't really connected. They weren't really interested. And actually it was a very small part who worked as designers, there weren't that many factories making everyday commodities."[400]

There was some practical training organised in the factories, but it was generally quite superficial and failed to properly introduce the work of a factory designer. Leonardo Meigas recalls that practical training in his year took place in the Estoplast factory. In

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[396] Era.R-1.30.12, 7.

[397] Ibid.

[398] Sau.

[399] Sau.

[400] Ibid.

his words, the training was "pure formality": "Afterwards, we just went and got some kind of a signature that we've spent a month there […] The rule of the game was that we all made a serious face and we had no clue about that life."[401]

Therefore, the connection between factory work and education at the industrial art department was never very strong, as illustrated by different accounts about different time periods. However, most interviewees seemed to consider it a strength rather than a weakness. The aim of the industrial art department is perhaps the best summed up by Leonardo Meigas:

> "No, we were not prepared to be true product designers, however we were prepared for… readiness. Actually, I have needed this state of mind all my life, this ability to reorient. It is actually vital for a designer."[402]

The quality of education given at the industrial art department is well illustrated by the case of Arvo Kuningas, a former student of the department, who already during his studies worked for the plastics factory Salvo. Kuningas's graduation project in 1978 was a hockey helmet; not only was it taken into production at Salvo, but it was later used by the entire ice hockey league of the Soviet Union.[403] Therefore, at the time it was the best product of its category not only within Estonia, but also within the Soviet Union, beating even the products of Leningrad and Moscow. As commented by Kuningas's former co-worker and co-student Raimo Sau: "its appearance and quality were nothing to be ashamed of, very decently made."[404]

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[401] Meigas.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Sau.
[404] Ibid.

As industrial design was a new and developing concept in Soviet Estonia, the formation of industrial design education was problematic. Soviet design ideology was unclear and indecisive about the possible roles and tasks of an industrial designer. The evolution of concepts can be seen in the comparison of two different design textbooks: *Artistic construction of industrial objects*, written by Yuri Somov in 1967, and *Design*, written by Kammal and Tihase in 1977. While the first treats the designer as an engineer whose task is to find the most economic solution, the second already allows a bit more creativity. Still, both books preached rationalism. In contrast, the industrial art department, founded at the Estonian State Art Institute in 1967, taught a more artistic approach. The methods used were quite innovative in their time and place, following Western examples. However, although the graduates executed designs of a high level, they were poorly prepared for the reality of Soviet Estonian factory life.

7.2 The occupation of industrial designers

In 1976, Bruno Tomberg wrote:

> "This year, 10 designers will graduate from the department of industrial art, but still, 5 position offers will remain unfulfilled – although they are large enterprises with a lot of possibilities for designers. The increased demand for industrial designers during the last few years shows that already now, the amount of industrial designers studying at the Art Institute does not cover our actual needs. Due to some complications, the planning organs have not been informed of these needs. Thus, the plan for designer positions reserved for the industry does not correspond to the number of graduates or actual needs. Alas, it seems like there was no need for industrial designers. In this Five-Year-Plan, only two designers are supposed to be employed in Soviet Estonia, but life corrects plans with actual needs and the problem of fulfilling the need for qualified designers is quickly becoming an issue."[405]

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[405] "Disain [Design]," 8.

This paragraph, printed within a debate on the subject of design in the weekly cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*, illustrates the problems that Soviet Estonian industrial designers and design in general had to face. Design was seen as insignificant in the Five-Year-Plans that dictated Soviet life. It was not common to see someone, even a respected professor like Bruno Tomberg, point out the shortcomings of the Soviet system, even if he did not blame the planning organs directly, but rather abstract 'complications'. Tomberg was maybe overly optimistic when he assumed that the current situation would change soon and that Soviet Estonian industry was eagerly waiting for young industrial designers. While there was a large amount of factories in Soviet Estonia, the majority did not require a qualified creative industrial designer.[406] There were factories where production was almost at an equal level to some Western products and where designers had plenty of possibilities for creating high-quality design. However, even in the late 1970s some factories did not employ designers at all, or made them divide their time between designing and other less professional tasks.

Michel Foucault has said: "[…] Post-Stalinist Stalinism, by excluding from Marxist discourse everything that wasn't a frightened repetition of the already said, would not permit the broaching of uncharted domains."[407] Originally, Foucault's sentence described problems relating to madness, but it works equally well to describe other problems with the general rigidity of Soviet ideology. This theory explains the problems with industrial designers: as Marxist ideology did not chart industrial design, it remained 'an uncharted domain'. In the beginning of the era in question, the main employment possibility for industrial designers was to work for specific factories. The

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[406] Lillemets.

[407] Foucault and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 52.

status of designers varied greatly, depending on the factory. Industrial design might have been increasingly recognised as a discipline, but some factories were still reluctant to hire designers.

Considering the application of industrial design to mass production, there are variations throughout the Eastern Bloc. As this thesis demonstrates, the majority of Estonian factory designers often had to conform in their practices within the system of mass production and often, factories saw no need to hire designers. In Central Europe, where many countries had longer traditions of industrial design and economy was in a better state, designers were often in a better position. As written by Fedja Vukic:

> "In the local context of the socialist Yugoslavia, and especially in Slovenia, this idea was evaluated in the domain of culture. Art historians, architects, and artists were the leading promoters of the idea of high-quality design, arguing that the quality of the industrial product finally contributes to the quality implementation of ideological programs. In the other Yugoslav republic's party, leaders couldn't understand this idea, but in Slovenia, design as a strategy was easily implemented in production and also in society."[408]

Thus, the position of industrial designers was dependent on specific cultural and historical location. Although Estonian industry was arguably more accepting towards including designers, Central European socialist countries still had an advantage.

As mentioned previously, many new products in Estonia and the Soviet Union were simply copies of Western objects accommodated for production with the existing possibilities. This process of accommodation was carried out by constructors working in

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[408]Fedja Vukiç. "The Idea of Socialist Design: Iskra Show Review." Design Issues, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2010): 81

the factory. New products were created by engineers who were already familiar with the technology and its allowances and limitations.[409] As said by Matti Õunapuu:

> "And the factories did not really expect designers and actually had no need for them. Or if they accepted them, it was because an order came from somewhere in the Central Committee, a position was assigned and formed and maybe they got a corner at a desk somewhere, but actually the designers still performed other functions."[410]

The other functions of designers mostly included propagandistic graphic design: designing newsletters for factory walls and, before important Socialist holidays, creating banners. Initially, young designers who were employed by the factories were keen to create new designs and get them into production. However, for the factories it was often easier to maintain the existing status quo. As further stated by Õunapuu: "Of course, as designers always, they want the best and for things to be like everywhere else, so the products were too fantastical and insane."[411] Therefore, young designers were soon submitted to the status quo and given only secondary tasks. The general attitude was arguably rebellious against propagandistic graphic design, which was considered boring: Saima Priks recalls her former husband, who was working as a packaging designer for the chemistry factory Orto, deliberately executing propaganda materials in such bad quality that he was later removed from the propagandistic duties.[412] Both of these designers were talking about the late 1970s and early 1980s, when industrial design had already established itself as a discipline. However, not all factories agreed with the need for professional designers.

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[409] Õunapuu.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Priks.

Naturally, this description was just one of the more pessimistic scenarios. In other factories, where the limitations of the production technology were not as crucial, designers had more importance. As said by Maile Grünberg, a former designer at the furniture factory Standard: "That you cannot do anything in the industry – you can. You just have to be clever."[413] Mostly designers tried to familiarise themselves with the technological possibilities. The machinery of more successful factories might not have been the same quality as that of Western factories or even Polish or Czechoslovakian, but it was still enough to produce modern items. Therefore, in several of the larger factories, designers were relatively free, as long as they were familiar with the possibilities. Further quoting Grünberg:

> "You work for a factory and you do not think foggy. You think concretely and you know these possibilities and limitations, you are constantly figuring, how to make it aesthetically a bit more beautiful as well."[414]

The working environment for designers was different, as well as the organisation of work. As mentioned in section 6.4, factory workers in general were strongly regulated in terms of their working hours and methods. For designers, that level of control was not actually necessary. Therefore, many factories were more lenient about their working arrangements. For example, Maile Grünberg recalls that when her child was little, she was allowed to work from home, to make caring for her family easier.[415] Peeter Kuutma, who was employed by the factory Red Dawn, or *Punane Koit* in Estonian, was allowed to work only in the mornings.[416] Even the designers, who were not actually given that kind of liberty, usually enjoyed better working environment than ordinary factory workers. However, it was not always the case. Saima Priks, who worked for the

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[413] Maile Grünberg, 10/07/2012.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Kuutma.

textile factory Marat, remembers that her working hours were strictly regulated. Her times of arrival and leaving were marked daily and even being a few minutes late could result in punishment.[417]

Within the factory and the general system of production in Soviet Estonia, designers did not stand higher in the hierarchy than other workers. Their names were rarely mentioned in product information or anywhere else. Although designers worked in a different rhythm and setting than other factory workers, they were still simple parts of a mechanism. This attitude towards designers is in no way unique to the socialist setting, as the situation had been similar in the West a few decades earlier. In 1940, Harold Van Doren wrote a text where he emphasised the designer's role as one of the many, calling an industrial designer "only one of the gears in the train."[418] Therefore, while the anonymity of designers was compatible with the Socialist ideal of the factory as a living organism, it was in no way exclusive to the Socialist Bloc.

As the assertion of postmodernism took more time in the Soviet Union, so did the idea of the designer as an artist. Also, the anonymity of designers was always subjective and highly dependent on the discipline in question. For example, the glass factory Tarbeklaas included the names of the designers in their official marketing materials up to the year 1972. Here, one may speculate on the influences specific to the glass industry: one of the main role models for Estonian glass artists was the Finnish glass factory Iittala. Within modern Finnish traditions, designers were almost equal to artists, and many have become almost international 'superstars', such as Aalto, Sarpaneva,

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[417] Priks.

[418] Harold Van Doren, "The Designer's Place in Industry," in The Industrial Design Reader, ed. Carma Gorman (New York: Allworth, 2003), 143.

Wirkkala. As glass was a popular material in Finnish industry, the designs for mass-produced glass objects played an important role in their image. However, in factories and production fields that were more influenced by Western high modern traditions, the designer was not an artist, but an ordinary factory worker, just like the others.

As Adam B. Ulan claims: "Soviet theory assumes that people can be motivated to work for the collective good and that consequently both productivity and economic justice will best be served."[419] However, the collective good was a foggy area. Introducing new products took time and effort, which was not necessarily compliant with the need to produce as much as possible. Maintaining quantitative and basic qualitative expectations was difficult enough in typical Estonian factories, and the existence of industrial designers added a third factor to consider, aesthetic quality. Therefore, designers were somewhat mismatched in the general factory scene. As a creative process, designing was difficult to submit under the rigorous bureaucracy otherwise common in Soviet factories.

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[419] Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos, Behind the Factory Walls : Decision Making in Soviet and Us Enterprises, 11.

7.2.1 Interior for Tallinn Airport. Maile Grünberg, 1980. Commissioned through ARS. Credits: Maile Grünberg

In the late 1970s and 1980s, an alternative to factory design emerged when ARS, the Art Products Factory, started executing orders for design. ARS was a curious Soviet experiment of submitting art to the same rules as factory production. Production was organised into different workshops and consisted mostly of mass-produced handmade products such as jewellery or decorative objects. Therefore, although the workers were professional artists, their artistic freedom was quite limited. The Design Studio, created in 1968, was an exception within the Art Products Factory. Unlike the rest of ARS, it did not create mass-produced items, but made work to order, from exhibition designs to interior solutions.[420] Later, its production diversified: in 1972, an urban design group led by Matti Õunapuu was formed, mainly to redesign Tallinn for the coming Olympic Games, as that was where the sailing regatta was held in 1980.[421] In the 1980s, the design group started executing orders for serial production in different factories both in

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[420] Lobjakas, "Design Studio," 356.
[421] Ibid., 362

Estonia and in other Soviet republics.[422] The design group of ARS was the Soviet answer to freelance design bureaus, except that all designs still had to pass the Art Council. Therefore, all legal ways of creating a design involved a control system imposed by the state.

ARS was admired amongst both designers and clients. Peeter Kuutma says that his work for ARS was not easy, but interesting and profitable.[423] The same idea is also phrased by Leonardo Meigas, who says, "orders came from everywhere".[424] One of the secrets of the success of ARS was the ability to execute orders from Russia, as it was a far bigger market for design than Estonia. According to Peeter Kuutma:

> "ARS had always happily made for Russia, because it was part of the Art Fund, it was financed by the Art Fund. Two fifths of the production went to Russia and that was like into a mole hole. You could do anything – I wouldn't say anything was made poorly, but there were no problems with selling."[425]

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[422] Ibid., 363.

[423] Kuutma.

[424] Meigas.

[425] Kuutma.

7.2.2 Caravan 375 for the Tupolev Machinery Factory in Russia, 1982. Designer Matti Õunapuu. Credits: ETDM

Leonardo Meigas also admits that orders to Russia paid better.[426] However, good wages were not the only factor attracting designers to ARS. From these accounts it is clear that the designers at ARS enjoyed a higher status than factory designers. They were not subjected to a factory board, but were more independent. However, their designs were still influenced by the generally poor availability of commodities in the Soviet trading system. Peeter Kuutma talks about it further:

> "Behind us was the Soviet system where there was never enough of anything, there was rather too little of anything. And then the interior decorator knew they could be faced with a situation where the flooring material wasn't quite it, wall coverings weren't quite it, you can't get those tiles for the ceiling, but you had to substitute, substitute, substitute."[427]

Industrial designers working for the design group were faced with even graver problems. Matti Õunapuu recalls the process of designing a juicer for the Tupolev

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[426] Meigas.
[427] Kuutma.

factory in Russia in the late 1980s. In the entire Soviet Union, there was only one engine that could work in a juicer and even that was a bit too big. The others were designated for industrial purposes, but buying from the West was out of the question. After that problem, it turned out to be difficult to find a switch. When he could finally find a suitable one from Georgia, he still had to slightly redesign the body of the juicer.[428] Therefore, even if the designers of ARS were formally in a better position and had better working conditions than their colleagues in factories, they too were influenced by the general problems of design. The emergence of the ARS design group signifies a break in Soviet Estonian design practices. Although it was subjected to the same control as the designers working for factories, the existence of the ARS design group was still a small step closer to the diversification of the occupation of industrial designers.

Even though the State Art Institute's department of industrial design did not have many graduates, finding work was still problematic. In a society where there was constant deficit and everything was bought regardless of design, factory boards had little reason to start hiring designers. Even if a designer was assigned to work in a factory, they were often assigned to execute propagandistic tasks, for example painting banners for Socialist holidays. Meanwhile, engineers and constructors with no artistic training would 'design' new products according to the most economic solution. As the rigid Soviet ideology was indecisive about industrial design and its role in production, the status of designers varied greatly in different factories. In the 1980s, a new opportunity arose for industrial designers when the design group was formed within the Art Products Factory. Its designers executed orders to both Estonia and Russia, having better working conditions and more respect than ordinary factory designers. However,

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[428] Õunapuu.

they too had to face the economic and technological problems experienced by their colleagues who were employed in factories.

7.3 Creativity, regulations and adaptation

This section presents the evolution of the culture of industrial design exhibitions in Soviet Estonia. While poor technological possibilities and extensive bureaucracy hindered mass production in Soviet Estonia, the exhibition economy was different. Initiated and managed by different organisations for different reasons, all Soviet Estonian exhibitions, even the more avant-garde experiments, were financed by the state. Organisation of exhibitions was funded by the Ministry of Culture and at least in certain cases designers received financial support for making prototypes.[429] Many local design exhibitions were highly ambitious and innovative, seeking to modernise the local culture of design.

Besides being a welcome distraction to daily lives, exhibitions were also an important additional source of income for designers. Peeter Kuutma, a textile designer who was active in both exhibitions and Art Councils, estimates that almost all exhibited objects were later bought from the exhibition.[430] According to Kuutma, more successful designers and applied artists lived from one exhibition to the next, as this was their main source of income. Kuutma adds: "That they taught somewhere, worked in some other

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[429] Grünberg
[430] Kuutma

place – that was just extra."[431] The biggest and most remarkable objects were often bought by high political figures, for example a postmodern design for a mobile working unit, designed by Mait Summatavet and first exhibited at the exhibition *Space and Form III* in 1976, was later bought and used to furnish the office of the head of the Artists' Association of the ESSR.[432] This fact shows that avant-garde design experiments were tolerated and even admired. A remarkable fact is that none of those interviewees mentioned any cases of censoring taking place in an exhibition.

Alexey Yurchak has stated:

> "The relationship of the last Soviet generation with official ideology did not simply involve a resistance to ideology, or its opportunistic use for self-advancement, or a dissimulated repetition of official ideological statements, but also entailed interesting and creative acts of rendering communist ideology meaningful within the broader framework of human values." [433]

Exhibitions are a good example of this phenomenon. As the Socialist system of supporting culture was independent of private funding, it gave designers possibilities for experimentation. Of the more radical events, one series of exhibitions was especially widely visited. *Space and Form* was initiated by professor Bruno Tomberg, founder and head of the industrial art department, in 1969. In total, four exhibitions took place in that series during the Soviet period: in 1969, 1972, 1976–1977, and 1984. The initiation of this exhibition series coincided with the beginning of industrial design as a discipline in mid-1960s. The exhibition series was innovative in both its content and organisation: instead of employing the modernist white cube, interior designers were given more freedom to experiment with environment.

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[431] Ibid.

[432] Lobjakas, "Design Studio," 386.

[433] Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More," 499.

Already the first *Space and Form* was unprecedented in both Soviet Estonia and the whole Soviet Union. Contemporaneous reviews gave positive feedback:

"An exhibition in this form is unprecedented in our republic and in the Soviet Union. Interesting, educational, raising problems and hopefully discussions and therefore an extremely positive phenomenon. The result verifies that we have enough of potential resources for continuing these experiments. Probably on a smaller scope, but these kinds of exhibitions must be permanent, with a constantly changing display. This would be the only way for a directed developing of interior culture."[434]

7.3.1 Views of the exhibition "Space and Form" in 1969. Credits: Kunst ja kodu 1969-2

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[434] Vello Asi and Väino Tamm, "Näitus "Ruum Ja Vorm" [Exhibition "Space and Form"]," Sirp ja Vasar, 04/04/1969 1969, 1.

While the first exhibition was an innovation in Soviet design, the second *Space and Form* moved even further. The Estonian National Archives still holds a written record of an unpublished discussion between Estonian and Russian art and design critics during the exhibition. The entire discussion was supportive, with general admiration towards the exhibition and its aims. Estonian art critic Leo Gens phrased the aims of the exhibition as follows:

> "Exhibition 'Space and form II' is an experiment that aims to create a model of the developing new relations between space and form, even program these relations. This task cannot be interpreted lightly by seeing it as a demonstration of contemporary ideas of interior or exhibition design, but in a wider sense, as a dynamic model of the changing form and space systems of living environment, where the sum of static elements has been replaced by complex relations between nature and built environment, where the main accent of all designer thought is directed towards shaping new principles of integration. […] Exhibition 'Space and form' is an exhibition of designer ideas, it bravely denounces the simplified relations of function and form, tries to remove the spectator from the closed circle of pragmatism and utilitarianism where he is forcefully pulled by his daily routine."[435]

Considering that the industrial art department had only been founded at the Estonian State Art Institute in 1966 and that many factories still saw no need for employing industrial designers, *Space and Form II* was a courageous experiment. In the same speech, Leo Gens also addressed the contemporaneous critique against the exhibition; according to Gens, there had been discussions during the organisation process whether an experiment such as *Space and Form* was justified in a constant deficit of quality commodities.[436] Gens does not mention if those discussions took place amongst the organisers, art professionals or the general public, although the fact that this discussion was initiated and fully transcribed seems to suggest that the accusations might have had a political background, especially considering Gens's justification:

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[435] Era.R-1665.2.657, (1972), 6.
[436] Ibid., 7.

"The development of designer thought is hindered by narrow-minded pragmatism. As a result of a simplified interpretation of design, it is seen as a shaping of a specific material environment and a programming of consumption. The main function of design specific for capitalist countries, one that demands design to create consumption value and shape consumer expectations, cannot be the main objective of Soviet design. Its first and primary task is the integral shaping of living environment for the realisation of the most progressive social ideas."[437]

Gens goes on to claim that the very reason why Soviet design was falling behind its Western counterpart was that capitalist design principles were "adopted without critique".[438]

Left: 7.3.2 Helle Gans. Mirror. Exhibition "Space and Form II" in 1972. Credits: Kunst ja Kodu 1973-3

Right: 7.3.3 View of the exhibition "Space and Form I" in 1969. Photo: B. Mäemets. Credits: Estonian State Archive

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[437] Ibid., 7.
[438] Ibid., 8.
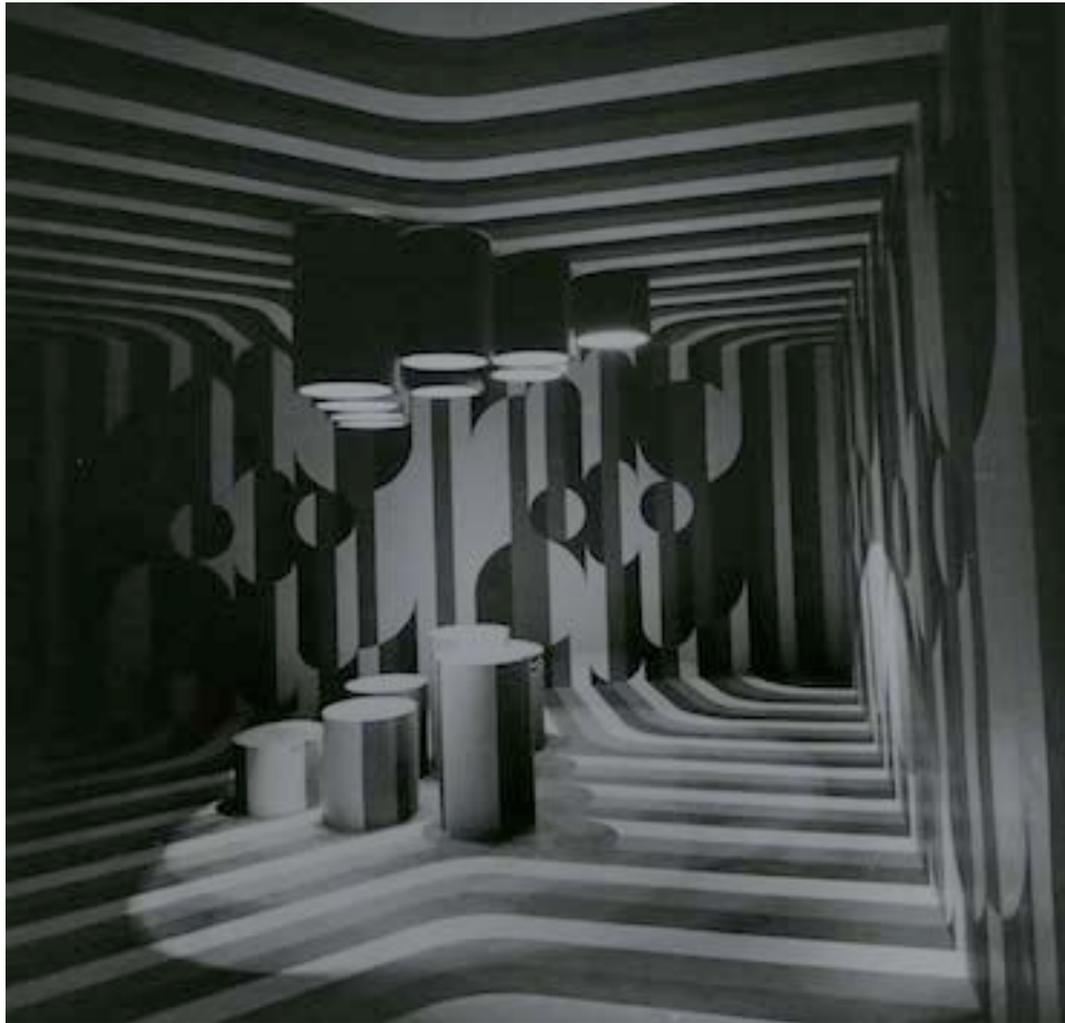
Fig 7.3.4 Taimi Soo. Experimental space. While this image is in black and white, the real colours of the space were yellow and black. Exhibition "Space and Form II" in 1972. Photo: B. Mäemets. Credits: Estonian State Archive

Finally, Gens makes an interesting comparison between *Space and Form I* and *Space and Form II*. According to another set of complaints Gens hints at, *Space and Form II* was less understandable by the general public, as proved by the larger number of visitors at *Space and Form I*. Here, Gens blames the audience and criticises the attempt to please visitors. He claims that the first exhibition had been "a lot more open for compromises" than the second, and that the first had been "slightly flirting with the audience, coaxing and enticing them."[439] Gens's radical views sum up the general

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[439] Ibid., 9

intentions of organisers to rapidly revolutionise and rejuvenate the genre of the design exhibition in Estonia. Until then, as already mentioned, one-off objects were shown at applied art exhibitions and ready-made industrial products at trade fairs, but most of these events failed to address the wider problems of industrial design.

In ideal cases the aim of exhibitions or any kind of cultural phenomenon is to broaden the horizons of the respective field. Theodor Adorno has written: "Culture – as that which goes beyond the system of self-preservation of the species – involves an irrevocably critical impulse towards the status quo and all institutions thereof."[440] In this case, the critical impulse is directed towards both the Soviet Estonian political institutions and against the general conceptions of both industrial design and exhibition culture. Interestingly, as the interviews conducted for this research suggest, Soviet Estonian design politics made rebellion through exhibitions quite easy. The available state funding seems to have been generous, as designers were able to execute quite ambitious projects without having to search for sponsorship elsewhere. As there was no clearly defined design ideology when form was concerned, it was quite difficult to go against it: as suggested in Gens's speech, it was easy to use Socialist dogmas to ideologically justify aesthetic experiments. And, finally, in the state of constant deficit, artefacts were bought more often, as one-off design had little competition from luxury brands which could only be acquired from trips to the West.

The will to position the Soviet Estonian exhibition landscape in relation to Western and international culture, rather than simply concentrating on local context, is well

[440] Theodor W. Adorno and J. M. Bernstein, The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture (London: Routledge, 1991), 100.

illustrated by a review for the exhibition *Form: Building art and applied art*, published in 1986, where the author quoted Estonian art critic Ants Juske: "What is this? In the international art experience, this is no longer avant-garde."[441] The author herself, Marika Valk, went on to ask why an exhibition whose content belonged to the decade before had not been organised at a museum level until then.[442] Although dating from a considerably later period than the first *Space and Form* exhibitions, these questions are mirrored candidly in Gens's speech, in the will to constantly look outside of the Soviet Union. Rather than falling behind the Western trends, Soviet Estonian exhibitions tried to keep up or even introduce their own ideas corresponding to the times – even if knowledge of those exhibitions rarely extended to the Western world.

Despite the artistic side that emerged in one-off designs for exhibition, design and applied arts remained separate. However, by the end of the 1970s, some critics were attempting to lose the boundaries between these disciplines. In a review for the annual applied arts exhibition of 1979 in Tartu, critic Maire Toom employed the term 'designerly thinking' for modernist look in applied arts, defining it as one of the two key tendencies in contemporary applied arts besides national heritage. Toom explained:

> "As we know, designerly expression in applied arts was instigated by industrial arts, which consider simple and rational form free of unnecessary details to be the ideal. As details are rarely used, searches in colour and texture are even more important."[443]

This new application of the word 'design' demonstrated a growing general awareness of design and the changing paradigms, tendencies that were largely caused by exhibitions such as *Space and Form* questioning and propagating design as a more general term for

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[441] Marika Valk, "Theoretical Day "Form. Building Art and Applied Art" and the Museum of Applied Arts," Sirp ja Vasar, 16/05/1986, 8.

[442] Ibid.

[443] Maire Toom, "Tartu Tarbekunst 1979 [Applied Arts in Tartu 1979]," Ibid., 18/01/1980, 9.

different cultural phenomena. The novel applications of the word 'design' and its variations in the applied arts were also mentioned during interviews. Matti Õunapuu recalled another student of industrial design who worked as a jewellery artist. The simple geometrical forms valued at ERKI started influencing his works, which became more laconic and modern than was usual among Estonian jewellers. Thus, according to Õunapuu, the jeweller's creations were often named 'design jewellery', although the objects were "made on the desk as always."[444] As Õunapuu explained, 'design' began to stand for a certain type of approach: novel, rational, unexpected and original.[445]

However, the majority of applied artists still considered design and the applied arts to be different notions. In 1983, when design critic Mirjam Peil called ceramic artist Leo Rohlin a representative of the "designerly attitude", the latter protested:

> "I consider the term 'designerly' a failure, it seems to rather describe external form – often, people categorise anything with laconic shape of stern line as 'designerly'. While my things may have a certain prerequisite to become a project for production, I would not dare to offer my dining sets to any enterprises, as they do not correspond to all demands of mass production, mainly because of the intricacy of technical realisation. […] I consider myself to be an applied artist, whose artefacts are all made with his own hands."[446]

Therefore, while exhibitions such as *Form and Space* pushed boundaries, there were also circles where design equated with mass production, while applied arts were the product of the artist's hands. Thus, design remained separate from applied arts, both in exhibitions and outside of them, allowing both to retain their independent characters.

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[444] Õunapuu.

[445] Ibid.

[446] Mirjam Peil, "Jutuajamine Leo Rohliniga [a Conversation with Leo Rohlin]," Sirp ja Vasar, 28/01/1983, 9.

Space and Form III, which took place from 1976 to 1977, was once again incredibly popular: 26,018 people visited it and 762 catalogues were sold.[447] However, professional reviews were quite critical, mainly as, unlike the first two exhibitions which had no specific theme, the third focused solely on furniture. Heikki Zoova, a young industrial designer, saw it as setting limitations to the exhibition, as furniture in itself has to conform to our daily demands.[448] Furthermore:

> "Arises a tendency quite familiar to our contemporary art, to play safe, in any case, being sure of the outcome in advance. This approach demands that only that which is already controlled is presented. […] The outcome is quite logical: an approved and renowned exhibition has at the same time lost its appeal of novelty…"[449]

7.3.5 Exhibition "Space and Form III" in 1976-1977. Credits: Kunst ja Kodu 1979-1

In other words: *Space and form* had managed to become institutionalised, to conform. Zoova claimed that it looked rather like a trade fair for experimental furniture and had

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[447] Era.R-1954.2.327, (1976-1977), 11.

[448] Heikki Zoova, "Ruum, Vorm Ja Sisu [Space, Form and Content]," Sirp ja Vasar, 07/01/1977, 13.

[449] Ibid.

lost its content.[450] The same reproach of lost novelty was mirrored in other reviews as well. Maria Liive wrote:

> "Most objects are utilitarian space-fillers to satisfy our daily needs. This too can be done well and badly. Here, I would like to say that neither Boulle nor Chippendale, both of whom were good cabinetmakers, considered themselves as space artists, but stuck to their own means. It is possible that the artists of this particular exhibition lack that ambition as well, but – why call an exhibition that mostly deals with furniture design 'Space and form'?"[451]

Therefore, despite the large amount of visitors, professional critics did not praise the exhibition as highly as its predecessors.

Space and Form IV did not cause as much debate as the previous exhibitions. Russian design historian Vladimir Aronov claimed that at this exhibition, it was not the novelty or innovation of ideas that counted, but rather the resourcefulness of uniting aesthetics and utility through contemporary materials.[452] After a brief period of experimentation, *Space and Form* had returned to its utilitarian roots. However, by the 1980s, exhibitions raising different questions about design had already become more common. One good example was *Acta'87*, which took place in 1987. It tried ambitiously to unite different art forms, broadly calling them 'design'. Despite some criticism of the exhibition's lack of novelty, and accusations of being too utilitarian,[453] this exhibition demonstrated how design exhibitions had become legitimised since the first *Space and Form*. Design exhibitions with a concept were no longer novel, but rather a part of daily life in Soviet Estonia. Still, it is important to stress that exhibitions remained separate from everyday

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[450] Ibid.

[451] Maria Liive, "Vastandlikud Muljed [Diverse Impressions]," Ibid.

[452] Vladimir Aronov, ""Ruum Ja Vorm" Uudsete Vormide Otsinguil ["Space and Form" On the Search of New Forms]," Ibid., 23/03/1984, 8.

[453] Krista Kodres, ""Acta'87" Probleemid [the Problems Of "Acta'87"]," Ibid., 25/12/1987, 6.

design. Factory design gained little, if anything, from design exhibitions. As Krista Kodres stated:

> "Product design thus became another art form, the aesthetic of which people could enjoy at exhibitions, but from where they returned to their unvaried houses furnished the same way as those of their neighbours."[454]

7.3.6 Views on the exhibition "Space and Form IV" in 1984. Credits: Kunst ja kodu 1985-1

Soviet Estonian exhibitions were fully financed by the state, as well as the execution of designer's product exhibits. Since most well-manufactured objects were later bought, exhibitions provided designers with additional income. Due to state funding, it was possible to organise a series of avant-garde design exhibitions called *Space and Form.* All exhibitions in this series were different in their aims and strategies, mirroring the era when they took place. Analysis of these exhibitions, as well as the reviews and general feedback that they received, serves as a study of institutionalisation of design exhibitions in Soviet Estonia, as well as of the debates regarding industrial design in

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[454] Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space], 295.

general. While one-off design for exhibition remained separate from the applied arts, it was still unable to significantly influence everyday factory design.

7.4 Second economy

This section focuses on the material practices of industrial designers that were either completely against Soviet law and/or morale, or were simply not looked upon favourably. Design practices relating to the second economy can be divided into two categories: those related to creating and those related to obtaining information, either objects, texts or visual materials. This subchapter does not attempt to cover all the material practices of Soviet Estonian industrial designers relating to the second economy, as the range varies too greatly to be fully describable. Rather, the aim is to position industrial designers within the second economy in Soviet Estonia and provide exemplary stories told by interviewees in order to indicate the scope of second economy as it related to industrial design.

To describe the material practices related to the Soviet Estonian second economy, this thesis employs Alena V. Ledeneva's use of the word *blat*. Instead of emphasising legal or moral aspects, she defines *blat* as "the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures."[455] Mostly, *blat* is not actively anti-Soviet in its nature, but rather an inevitable by-product of the Soviet system itself. Ledeneva explains this phenomenon by the specificity of Soviet morality:

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[455] Alena V. Ledeneva, Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

> "The Soviet system is often characterised as engendering a morality of its own, endowed with two ethical scales in everyday life: one of official ideology and one of human sets of values which governed relations between people."[456]

She stresses that it was not a question of compromising different moralities, but using different sets of values according to the specific situation.[457] In interview, Eduard Tinn, the former editor of *Sirp ja Vasar* summed up well the omnipotence of blat: "Every problem could be solved with a bottle of vodka."[458]

The foreign countries more commonly visited were other parts of the Eastern Bloc, such as East Germany, Poland or Czechoslovakia. Those countries were closer to Western Europe and had a better selection of written materials and products available. Therefore, designers who were able to travel tried to find ways through *blat* to acquire information. For example, Leonardo Meigas recalled his trip to East Germany in the mid-1980s. He was able to get only a small amount of German currency, and professional books were naturally expensive. Coffee beans, however, were universally known to be less expensive and more available in Soviet Estonia. Therefore, Meigas took two kilograms of coffee beans with him and found an interested buyer in a German tavern, who bought the coffee right there over the tavern table. With the German currency acquired, Meigas was able to buy several design books and new shoes for his fiancée.[459] Besides offering insight to how exactly *blat* was organised, this story illustrates just how common *blat* was in the Eastern Bloc. Meigas's business deal did not require arranging contact beforehand, finding an interested buyer was simply a question of walking into a tavern.

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[456] Ibid., 67.

[457] Ibid.

[458] Tinn.

[459] Meigas.

Instead of financial status, in Late Socialist Estonia the possibilities for consumption were determined by possibilities for *blat*. As Igor Kopytoff has written:

> "Given their endemic shortages and ubiquitous black markets, commoditisation in them [modern state-ordered economies] expands into novel areas, in which the consumer, in order to purchase goods and services, must first purchase access to the transaction."[460]

Social connections were usually acquired through a high position in the Communist Party, as bureaucrats often had more options for purchasing things from the black market. Acquaintances living in either further parts of Soviet Union or, even more preferably, outside the Soviet Union were another type of valued social connection. Through occupation, more valuable *blat* contacts were people whose work included either handling products, such as salespeople, or travelling, for example drivers. The first could easily put limited products aside for their acquaintances; the second could purchase slightly different products in other Soviet republics. Having a *blat* contact could elevate a person's social status, as, unlike actual financial capital, it was often shared with acquaintances. A saleswoman could in certain contexts be considered to rank higher in the social hierarchy than a surgeon, as the latter had less possibilities for consumption. Designers were able to offer services through *blat*, but within the factory system, workers were considered to be the most valuable contacts, as they had access to the material resources.[461] The 'usefulness' of designers as *blat* contacts depended on the material they worked with: while interior designers were able to employ their skills outside of a factory setting, for a product designer employed in a plastics factory it would have been significantly more difficult.

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[460] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 72.

[461] Ledeneva, Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange, 132.

Professionally, Soviet Estonian designers could be on either end of *blat*. Mainly, they were able to provide certain services, such as interior design for private homes, in exchange for money or other perks.[462] Obtaining objects or services through *blat* is relevant to the profession of Soviet Estonian industrial designers when discussing the obtaining of information, especially that concerning design outside of the Eastern Bloc. Information could either be in the form of written materials such as books, exhibition catalogues or journals, or in the form of foreign products. Acquisition was possible either through contacts in the Eastern Bloc, contacts outside of the Eastern Bloc, or, for the few who were allowed to travel, during their trips. As travelling became easier in the later periods of Soviet era, the possibilities for *blat* diversified.

Even life within the factory entailed certain elements of second economy. Not all of them were necessarily examples of *blat* through contacts, but practices outside of the normal factory work intended to either achieve personal gain or facilitate work, often at the cost of factory production. For example, Maie–Ann Raun, formerly connected to the glass factory Tarbeklaas, recalled how workers would occasionally obstruct the alteration of the product line. As their wages did not depend on the selection of objects in production, introducing new products presented a lot of extra work without any gain. Whenever a new product was being developed, the rationality of its production was assessed. Amongst other criteria, this assessment included the time it took the workers to make one object. Maie-Ann Raun remembered that in Tarbeklaas and several other factories, workers would deliberately stall the production to extend the time needed, so

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[462] Grünberg.

that the new product would be deemed unprofitable. While the glassblowers could not delay the process, other workers would polish the glass as slowly as possible.[463]

The most typical example of designers profiting through second economy was executing projects for personal customers with factory resources. For example, Peeter Kuutma, who was officially employed at the textile factory Punane Koit, was not obliged to spend whole days at the factory, but instead he was able to execute orders for ARS on the side. However, as the equipment in the factory was better than anywhere else, he would sometimes use it in secret. Later, he also had to use the equipment of the Marat factory. Kuutma remembers:

> "There, it was harder for me, as there were new people at the security, but everyone did their own part, who had better relations, that alright, we will do that kind of a job, and we will do it at night, we will come and do it – and well, they respected it and closed their eyes. It was quite nervous and risky, all that business with taxis at night. In the Soviet times, when you had 100 metres of fabric in three rolls, they would immediately think that you had been stealing. But well, it all ended well."[464]

He often had collaborators on larger projects, with whom he would divide the assignments. Half-jokingly, Kuutma refers to it as a "criminal operation".[465] However, through these illegal activities it was possible to avoid bureaucracy and to earn more money. Executing outside orders was not necessarily the designer's initiative, but may have come from above. For example, Saima Priks recalled that employees of higher ranks often asked designers to complete orders for their friends or higher Communist Party officials. In her words: "The ladies from the Ministry were catered to personally."[466] In this case, the designers were rather factory resources used for *blat* by

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[463] Raun.
[464] Kuutma.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Priks.

somebody else similarly to factory machinery. As designers often did not receive any personal gain, these kinds of tasks were a hidden part in the job description.

Another common example of profiting at the expense of the factory was stealing. It was so common that in many factories, workers were subjected to body searches before leaving factory after their shift. Maie-Ann Raun remembered that in Tarbeklaas, workers could not even take scraps or rejects from the factory. As many products were hard to find at the store, workers often tried to steal them. Here, women had an advantage over men. As body searches were performed by men who mostly tried to act as politely as possible towards their female colleagues, some women attached smaller products to their thighs under wide skirts, where they remained undiscovered.[467] Maie-Ann's recollections date from the mid-1960s, when the fashion made this practice easier; later, when tight jeans and miniskirts became the trend, women lost this advantage over men.

The anti-stealing regulations were the hardest on designers. While they often desired to acquire at least one example of their own creations, factory management prohibited both taking scraps and buying directly from the factory. Legally, the only way to acquire the products they themselves had created was purchasing from a store; however, many objects were only very rarely available. Therefore, the best way to get them was often to steal.[468] This rule was the most difficult on students. In certain courses of the Academy of Arts, students were expected to produce their assignments in factories in order to better prepare them for future work assignments. However, not all factories allowed

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[467] Raun.
[468] Ibid.

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students to keep their own creations, even if they needed to for evaluation. Maie-Ann Raun recalled that in Tarbeklaas, students could not take their school assignments with them. It was especially problematic as this factory was the only location in Tallinn with suitable conditions for making larger glass objects. Stealing school assignments was more difficult than taking scraps, as it was impossible to smuggle them out underneath clothing. Usually, it required the assistance of a few other trustworthy workers, who helped to get the object out behind a corner, over a fence, or in some other imaginative way. Whenever there was an evaluation at the university, it was common knowledge that most of the objects on display were actually stolen property. In this aspect not all factory managements were the same. While Tarbeklaas maintained this policy throughout the Soviet era, some other factories were more lenient. For example, the Leningrad Glass Factory, where Raun made a large part of her assignments, allowed students to keep their creations without question.[469]

According to Maie-Ann Raun, the problem of stealing was never raised at the Estonian State Art Institute, as students and university staff simply accepted it as one of the idiosyncrasies of the Soviet system.[470] These types of idiosyncrasies were fairly common. As written by Katherine Verdery: "The second economy, then, which provisioned a large part of consumer needs, was parasitic upon the state economy and inseparable from it…. On the contrary: parts of the second economy will wither and die if deprived of the support of the official, state economy."[471] Therefore, in the poorly planned system *blat* was necessary for survival and encouraged from above.

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[469] Ibid.

[470] Ibid.

[471] Katherine Verdery. What was Socialism, and what comes next? 27

These stories provide evidence for an alternative view behind the façade of Soviet Estonian factory life from the designer's point of view. In the Soviet system, including Soviet Estonia, second economy or *blat* was all-inclusive and much more ubiquitous than in the capitalist system. The main material practices through which designers were involved in second economy were either the acquisition of rare or foreign objects or resources of information, or provision of their professional knowledge and skills. The latter depended on the material with which designers were working, as not all designers were able to do work on the side. Often, involvement in *blat* was involuntary, for example due to a command from a higher official.[472] Because of the faults in the Soviet bureaucracy, *blat* was so omnipresent that in certain situations it was needed for surviving within the system.

7.5 Designers within design ideology

How were industrial designers positioned in Soviet Estonian design ideology? What kind of political control was their work subjected to and how much of a political charge did it carry? Although the style of industrial design depended less on Soviet ideology than, for example, film or painting, in its nature it was still an ideological practice due to its connection to factory production, as well as due to its subjection to control by ideological apparatuses. This section positions industrial designers within the general context of Soviet ideology and within the more specific setting of the Estonian design system.

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[472] Priks.

By the period in question, open dissidence against the Soviet power was seemingly

fading. Instead, people were finding balance between the Communist power and quiet

resistance. For example, one interviewee, Matti Õunapuu, the head artist of ARS,

phrased this practice in the following way:

> "There were all sorts of suck-ups too, that's for sure. But at the same time, there
> were a lot of those, who just… To be able to do something and for anything to
> come out of it, you couldn't be locked up. You had to submit to certain game
> rules. For that, a lot of people belonged to the Party, but it was completely
> formal."[473]

Therefore, the status quo had developed to the point where everybody was aware of the

'game rules', acceptable norms of behaviour. It is difficult to identify these rules as

'Soviet' or 'anti-Soviet', as survival and creative processes demanded a combination of

different practices. These practices were not easily distinguishable and they could be

interpreted differently, depending on the context and the interpreter. This thesis employs

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus:

> "The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices –
> more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the
> active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the
> form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the
> 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all
> formal rules and explicit norms."[474]

Bourdieu has stated:

> "At the same time, 'without violence, art or argument', it tends to exclude all
> 'extravagances' ('not for the likes of us'), that is, all the behaviours that would be
> negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective
> conditions."[475]

As Chapter Four argued, the Late Socialist period in Estonia was a complex

combination of both habitus and resistance. What was acceptable for one person or

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[473] Õunapuu.

[474] Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge : Polity, 1990), 54.

[475] Ibid., 56.

group of people was not acceptable for another. To survive and successfully cope in society, one had to find a balance between personal convictions, general convictions and the Soviet ideology. Concerning public dissidence, Matti Õunapuu stated: "If I wanted the thing to be done and the people to get their wages and the machines to work, I could not do that [Openly oppose the Soviet power – TJ]."[476]

As written by Poulantzas:

> "Ideological power is never exhausted by the State and its ideological apparatuses. For just as they do not create the dominant ideology, they are not the only, or even the primary, factors in the reproduction of the relations of ideological domination/subordination. […] In short, ideological relations always have roots which go beyond the state apparatuses and which always consist in relations of power"[477]

Therefore, in reality, as noted by Poulantzas, the ideological power does not equal the official ideology nor is it necessarily shaped by it. In Soviet Estonian context, this research suggests that the true ideological power, or in Bourdieu's terms habitus, was formed by the interrelations of Soviet ideology, Western influences, and the construct of national identity. Thus, designers should rather be seen as agents in this habitus, rather than in a strictly Soviet/anti-Soviet polarisation.

Designing in the Soviet system was in many ways similar to the general system of survival. In interview, Matti Õunapuu compared it to solving puzzles or crosswords. He specified: "You have limitations and you have to find a solution within those limitations."[478] The limitations within industrial design could mostly be divided into three categories: those caused by ideological rules, those caused by the backwardness of

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[476] Õunapuu.

[477] Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, 37.

[478] Õunapuu.

industry, and those caused by the inefficiency of bureaucracy. Surprisingly, most of the interviewees stated that out of those three, ideological rules were actually the least limiting. The main problem was still that Soviet industry, especially within the production of consumer goods, was in a poor state and the technological possibilities rarely amounted to those enjoyed by Western countries.

7.5.1 E. Holm. Furniture set "Sofi" for Standard. 1978-1979. Credits: ETDM

The ideological side of the limitations mentioned by Matti Õunapuu was mostly of a formal nature, often linked to graphic representation. There were certain symbols that were out of the question, as well as certain combinations of symbols. In interviews, most of the cases mentioned were linked to graphic design or interior design. For example, Leonardo Meigas, who at the end of the 1970s worked briefly for Estonian television, remembered a curious case where on the background of a folk dance performance the designer had drawn a wheatear with fourteen seeds in it. After the

video of the performance went to the central television for ideological control, it came back with a scandal – someone had counted all the seeds and, as the wheatear was often seen as a symbol of the Soviet Union consisting of fifteen republics, the design was seen as a separatist statement. In the end, the performance had to be restaged, with a wheatear consisting of fifteen seeds on the background.[479] Similar stories also came from other fields of graphic design, from all eras: Matti Õunapuu recalled how in the beginning of 1980s, the Soviet Estonian savings bank ordered an advertisement from ARS to make people more aware of the savings system. The task was given to a young graphic designer Jüri Kask, who made several posters. One of them featured one eye inside another, which was scolded for resembling female genitalia. The other poster showed a woman's open mouth with coins flying out, and was accused of ridiculing Soviet money. A scandal arose and in the end, the people involved were reprimanded.[480] However, these problems mostly applied to graphic designers.

The Art Councils as boards of specialists that met regularly and judged new designs were the main tool for controlling design in the Soviet Union. There were separate art councils for different organisations; for example, ARS had its own Art Council. Although one might assume that these had a strong Communist Party presence, this was rarely the case. Saima Priks who was at the Art Council for textiles remembers only one openly Communist representative of the ministry, a Russian lady who always wore a fox hat.[481] The general attitude towards such open Party presence was hostile, Priks recalled how other members secretly made fun of her and questioned her ability to judge

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[479] Meigas.
[480] Õunapuu.
[481] Priks.

textiles and fashion, given that fox hats were out of fashion back then.[482] Yet, the ridicule of that lady seems to have more to do with her lack of professional knowledge than with her affiliation to the Communist Party, as another representative of the Ministry, textile artist Peeter Kuutma, was rather praised for his professionalism.[483] The Art Councils rarely had to deal with ideological issues, rather, as Saima Priks recalls, designs were denied because of their poor aesthetic level or unfashionable appearance; in Priks's words, "poor perception of the era."[484]

After increased centralisation started after 1978, as explained in Chapter Four, the Soviet Council of Ministers aimed to strengthen the ideological control over industrial design. Throughout the Soviet Union, objects that passed a regional Art Council evaluation in their home republic were sent on to Moscow, for an additional evaluation. For printed textiles the relevant decree, number 219, was passed on 21 May 1984 by the Ministry of Light Industry of the Soviet Union.[485] Random checks had taken place before that as well. For example, on 5 September 1965 the director of the Soviet Estonian branch for the All-Soviet Permanent Pavilion for Samples of Products, H. Vask, asked the V. Klementi Sewing Factory to send three festive shirts for men, models 99, 132 and 135, to Moscow for a general evaluation of men's shirts. After the evaluation the shirts would be returned.[486] However, as these kinds of letters are not very common in the archives, these checks were arguably rare. Considering the size of the Soviet Union, the task of evaluating all designs in Moscow was virtually unmanageable. Vello Lillemets recalled going to a few of these evaluations, but said

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[482] Ibid.
[483] Ibid.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Era.R-1.17.2685, (1984), 47.
[486] Era.R-2083.1.210, 36.

that for the Estonian designers these evaluations were mostly a formality. The technological and aesthetic levels of objects produced within the entire Soviet Union varied greatly and Estonian products were on a higher level than Soviet products on average.[487] Therefore, those evaluations were a mixture of a tourist trip to Moscow and an annoying nuisance.

A key difference between art and design was the level of control. Design was more acceptable because of its abstract nature and, as already stressed, the lack of a defined Socialist design ideology. Here, many other art forms were in a worse situation, as their ideological control was much stricter. This fact is well illustrated by the records of Art Council meetings: films went through extensive debate about their correspondence to Socialist ideals and the whole debate was written down and permanently kept in the archive.[488] However, the records for meetings of design-related Art Councils were simply sheets of evaluation, with the occasional short comment as a suggestion of improvement or grounds for rejection. Despite looking through a great number of remaining records of several different Art Councils, this research failed to identify any comments of ideological nature, as all were linked to the aesthetic nature, quality or production process of the object. This fact proves the claim made by all interviewees, that design-related Art Councils mostly dealt with issues of aesthetics and production. The fact that there were no full records of discussions in design-related Art Councils is caused by several different factors: there was a very large number of products to look through, which would have resulted in immense amounts of records; a single product

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[487] Lillemets
[488] Era.R-1707.1.1425a.

was not considered to be as important in shaping public morale; and it was a sign of a more liberal working environment.

7.5.2. Skates for Salvo. Raimo Sau, Tõnu Kallas. Mid-1980s. Credits: ETDM

Here, it is important to stress the key differences between the ideological manifestations in art and in design. The categories for mapping ideological influences in art are not completely valid when it comes to design. An Estonian art historian, Jaak Kangilaski, has identified three main discourses in art: socialist realism, international avant-garde, and national conservatism.[489] Only one of those discourses, socialist realism, which corresponded to the ideals of the authorities, could manifest itself openly.[490] However, herein lies the key difference between art and design – design lacked a specific socialist

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[489] Jaak Kangilaski, "Three Paradigms of Estonian Art During the Soviet Occupation," in Different Modernisms, Different Avant-Gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art after World War Ii, ed. Sirje Helme (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2009), 119.
[490] Ibid.

canon approved by the Soviet authorities, which would have been preferred over other discourses. While there is a small number of design historians who apply the term socialist realism to design as well, such as Katharina Pfützner,[491] in that context socialist realism would only be characteristic of the general style of the era, not the essence of the ideology itself. The aim of socialist realism was to provide propagandistic images foretelling the appearance of the socialist future, but industrial design is non-figurative in nature. As it does not depict anything but itself, therefore it could not depict the socialist future either. This section and section 8.1 claim that it is indeed possible to define socialist qualities in design, but they are located in the production mode of industrial design, not in the visual stylistics. However, a more accurate identification of these characteristics would be socialist qualities instead of socialist realist qualities, as they are connected to socialist ideology in general, not to socialist realism as a style.

Out of these three discourses, national conservatism could be applied as a label to industrial design as well as to the visual arts.[492] Regarding Western influences, international avant-garde would not be a correct name either. Firstly, design does not always aspire towards the avant-garde. Mass-produced industrial design was and still is mostly directed towards appealing to general tastes and needs, as well as to being easy to produce in large quantities, both in the Soviet Union and in the Western world. Secondly, many manifestations of Western style were influenced by design classics. According to a former designer of the plastics factory Salvo, Vello Lillemets, Bauhaus was one of the key influences in Soviet Estonian industrial design: this style was easy to

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[491] Katharina Pfützner, "Atomic Dwelling : Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture," in Atomic dwelling : Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture, ed. Robin Schuldenfrei (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2012), 153.
[492] This idea is explained in 8.3

obtain information about and it was universally seen as good design.[493] Although Soviet Estonian designers were familiar with general trends outside of the Eastern Bloc, their sources were mostly limited to the more general mass-produced objects. This thesis identifies the manifestations of modernism and postmodernism 'Western influences', even if these influences were not limited to Western Europe. One of the main sources for design information in Soviet Estonia was Scandinavia, most notably Finland and Sweden. Both these countries are located in Northern, not Western Europe. A lot of information came through other parts of the Eastern Bloc, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, which also did not belong to the Western world.

By the era in question, ideological pressure was relieving, but the existence of Soviet Estonian ideological apparatuses created a status quo where people followed certain rules instinctively. The same principle applied to industrial designers: there were ideological taboos, but they were rare and according to Matti Õunapuu and several other interviewees, most of these taboos connected to graphic representations or symbols.[494] Nonetheless, all designs still had to pass Art Council approval, just like all other art forms. Most of the control was aesthetic to make sure designs were of generally decent quality. In the 1980s, for a brief period of time the Soviet power tried to impose an additional control where all designs that received approval by the local Art Council would have to acquire additional approval from a central institution in Moscow; however, this system was never actually sustainable. Due to its nature, the ideological aspect of industrial design always remained separate from other art forms and the role of designers as agents within Soviet ideology was different.

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[493] Lillemets.
[494] Õunapuu.

Conclusions

Industrial design had fully emerged in Soviet Estonia only in the 1960s, at the beginning of the era discussed in this thesis. Therefore, the profession had to start at the beginning to define all the material practices related to its work, including education and exhibitions. In spite of the bureaucratic difficulties and its uncertain role in society, by the end of the Soviet era the profession of industrial design had been established in the public eye. The main problem for professionalization was uncertainty about the Soviet ideology of industrial design, a problem that stemmed from uncertainty of the essence of Soviet design ideology. While design textbooks preached rationalism and emphasised the cost of production, the industrial design department used Bauhausian methods to teach idealism and artistic expression to young designers. Although university education was generally on a high level, it provided very little preparation for actual work in Soviet factories.[495]

Factories often lacked motivation to hire designers. As factory boards saw little need to improve the aesthetic appearance of their products, designs were often left to engineers and constructors, who were more familiar with the production process. When a designer was assigned to work in a factory, he or she often became the factory artist whose main task was propagandistic decoration. However, that was not always the case – some designers had quite good working conditions. By the 1980s, factory designer was no longer the only career option for industrial designers, as the design studio of Art Products Factory started executing designs for factories, essentially creating the Soviet counterpart for freelance design. The working conditions of designers at the design

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[495] Meigas.

studio were better than those of factory designers, as they earned more money and were not subjected to factory rules. However, they were still subjected to strict bureaucratic control. In addition to their daily work, the lives of Soviet Estonian industrial designers also entailed other material practices, some encouraged, some illegal.

Exhibitions played an important role both as a distraction from daily work and as an additional source of income. Funded by the state, exhibitions were often quite experimental. However, despite their popularity, their connection to factory design remained weak. Another additional source of either income or desired objects or information was involvement in practices of second economy. The acquisition of Western design objects or information often required some illegal activities. Participation in second economy was not always the designer's own initiative, but an order from above or necessity for survival within the system.

The position of industrial designers within the Soviet Estonian design ideology was complex, as they were both subjects of control and, through their creations, also propagators of ideology. However, the nature of this ideology was unclear. As by the Late Socialist Era Soviet ideology had been reduced to an instinctive following of unwritten rules, the ideological control had also abated. Due to the lack of an ideological canon in industrial design, Art Councils mostly evaluated the aesthetic standard of products instead of ideological content. Industrial design as a profession was a complex result of different intertwining ideologies, which this thesis separates as Soviet, Western and national. These ideas were located not only in the final products, but also within the material practices of designers, as shaped by the Soviet power, society and the designers themselves.

8. Manifesting ideologies in design

This thesis argues that while the design system itself was very much ideological and communist ideology was imposed from above, the reality of the functioning design system was a complex system of communist, nationalist, Western and counter-communist ideologies. All the main participants of the system, designers, factories and the Soviet power, were influenced by all these tendencies. While it is true that all of these participants are not uniform masses, but rather complex systems of individuals, this thesis has mapped out the prevalent tendencies and power structures. After studying and analysing the position of factory designers within Soviet Estonian mass production and economy, this eighth chapter identifies the aesthetic materialisations of ideology in Soviet Estonian design to introduce the outcomes of the industrial design system.

The different ideologies are divided into three. The first is defined in this thesis as Sovietism, as the visual manifestation of Soviet ideology influenced by Soviet symbols. The second is 'Western influences', which mostly involves modernism and postmodernism as dominant styles during the period discussed. 'Western influences' is a relatively wide descriptor involving different impacts from outside the Soviet Union, mostly Scandinavia, Western Europe and the United States. The third ideology is labelled 'nationalism', whereas it actually comprises both nationalism and the constructions of traditional Estonian cultures from all eras. The aim is not to make a sharp distinction between different ideologies, but rather introduce them through their acceptability in the Soviet system. Soviet Estonian design was a meeting point of

several different ideologies that occasionally overlap, occasionally complement each other, and occasionally seem to contradict each other.

8.1 Sovietism in design

By employing the term Sovietism, this thesis is referring to the general influence of the Soviet ideology and system. The aim is not to look at the Soviet Union or its style as culturally homogeneous; Soviet style signifies a cultural construction propagated by the Soviet system. This cultural construction is a mixture of the Soviet economic system, theories of internationalism, and of the Soviet Union as a multinational entity. In reality, the style in all the Soviet republics, including Russia, was shaped by many different factors besides Soviet influence, most notably their pre-Soviet heritage and their geographical location. However, as the administrative systems of Soviet ideology were propagated throughout the Union, the nature of Sovietism as one of the factors influencing local style can be researched on the basis of one state, in this case Estonia. Besides the stylistic elements influenced by Sovietism, this section also analyses the material practices of designers.

In the Estonian context, Soviet influences and Socialist tendencies manifested in the attitudes towards design and the general design economy rather than in any clearly defined style. As Poulantzas states:

> "The political field of the State (as well as the sphere of ideology) has always, in different forms, been present in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production."[496]

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[496] Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, 17.

The influences of Russian style in visual forms have been excluded, as they do not fall under the category of Sovietist influences caused by the Soviet system. Estonia has historically been more influenced by Western Europe and Scandinavia. The influences of traditional Russian style were more present directly after the Second World War, as Estonian factory production was damaged by the war and extensive reorganisations during nationalisation. For example, the glass factory Tarbeklaas used many old glass moulds imported from Leningrad (in addition to pre-war moulds), until the late 1950s when designers were employed to create moulds more suitable for local taste.[497] Hence, products dating from the 1950s were pompous and more decorative, often trying to emulate crystal – a tendency of mass-producing cheaper copies of luxury objects, which Jukka Gronow has identified as Soviet kitsch.[498] However, by Late Socialism the general appearance of objects was more Western.

8.1.1 Plate for Tarbeklaas, executed after an example from Moscow. Early 1950s. Author's photo, taken at ETDM.

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[497] Raun.

[498] Gronow, Caviar with Champagne : Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia.

While it may seem like simplification, the chief manifestation of Soviet ideology in industrial design was the place itself – the factory. Chapter Six already explained the role of the factory as a symbolic location for Socialism. Maxim Gorky called the factory an "organiser of the socialist consciousness."[499] The factory as an ideologically correct location, with the participation of a large number of people (especially as many of them were members of the Communist Party) validates the object itself. The fact that something has been produced in a factory demonstrates an accordance with the system. Inside the factory as an organiser, the role of designers was not simply limited to their own work. As one particular example of material practices involved in the Soviet Estonian design economy, designers were often forced to be active in the execution of visual propaganda, such as banners for Communist holidays like the 1st of May. Therefore, however superficial those decorative tasks were, designers were active in the factory ideology both as objects and subjects.

Throughout the whole Socialist period, design ideologies offered very few guidelines about the ideal Soviet form or how exactly it was supposed to contribute to aesthetic education.[500] The book *Artistic construction of industrial objects*, written by the Russian design philosopher Yuri Somov in 1967, was one of the first books written on the problems of industrial design and also one of the most widely published. Somov mostly discussed the importance of economic considerations, preaching rationalism.[501] Somov did not advocate Western design, but instead he accused functionalism of lacking a "human factor" without explaining its differences from the economic-rational approach

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[499] Serguei Alex Oushakine, "The Flexible and the Pliant: Disturbed Organisms of Soviet Modernity," Cultural Anthropology 19, no. 3 (2004): 405.

[500] Design ideologies were explained more thoroughly in chapter 5, especially section 5.1.

[501] Somov, "Tööstustoodete Kunstiline Konstrueerimine [Artistic Construction of Industrial Objects]."

he taught. Therefore, it is only logical that the "human factor" is added solely by the Socialist environment of production and it is the surrounding ideology that somehow validates the design ideology. Raymond Hutchings, one of the first Western authors to research Soviet design ideology, also admitted that design forms were just a minor part of design ideology as a whole:

> "Ideology is rarely exerted without admixture of other elements. More often it is exerted through particular sets of economic priorities or organisational structures which have, among other foundations, an ideological one."[502]

Raymond Hutchings had also tried to pinpoint the visual characteristics of Soviet industrial design as:

> "Secularism, Proletarian Triumph, Orthodoxy (alias Classicism and Conformism), Isolationism or Exclusiveness (alias Fashion-Antipathy also conjoined with Nationalism), Grandeur or Grandiosity, Optimism or Exuberance, Popular Accessibility, Strength and Solidity, Institutionalism or Non-Individualism (overlapping with Machinism), Doctrinal Propaganda."[503]

It should be stressed that while Hutchings discusses Soviet design as a whole, his research was mainly carried out in Russia and therefore certain ideas were directed towards Soviet Russian design. It is questionable to what extent these characteristics would have been visible in the form of Soviet Estonian industrial designs, especially during Late Socialism. Rather, some of these qualities were strongly contested. Orthodoxy should be immediately ruled out, as Estonia had always been a predominantly Lutheran country. Isolationism, Secularism, Doctrinal Propaganda and Proletarian Triumph were actively contested in most cases, as Estonian design had historically leaned towards modernism. Grandiosity, Strength and Institutionalism did not manifest themselves, as Estonian design was traditionally based on craft and more

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[502] Raymond Hutchings, "Soviet Design: The Neglected Partner of Soviet Science and Technology," Slavic Review 37, no. 4 (1978): 72.

[503] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design : Interaction and Convergence.

intimate in its nature. Finally, Optimism clashed with the general feelings of "deception", as phrased by Caroline Humphrey, during most of Late Socialism.[504] Therefore, Hutchings's list serves as a good example of the more obvious Soviet design strategies, which were often rejected.

In some cases, Sovietism could also be seen in the décor of objects, as using Soviet symbols on products was strongly encouraged before different landmark Soviet holidays. Competitions were organised to find quality products for commemoration. Often, designers settled for adding simple Soviet symbols such as flags, as a simple print on an easily reproducible product, thereby treating the memorabilia as a simple low-cost souvenir. However, there were also more complex instances of creating several layers of meaning. For example, Peeter Kuutma recalled a competition to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution. Taking part in a competition was beneficial for the designer and factory, as both were able to win prizes. Instead of using a simple reproduction of official Soviet symbols, Kuutma composed a pattern of stars and lines. In spite of using a star as a Soviet symbol, Kuutma himself identified the flag of the United States and its use in American pop art as his primary inspiration.[505] This case presents an interesting example of different possibilities for interpreting the same object. Depending on the context and the reader, the same pattern could acquire completely different meanings.

A defining moment for Soviet Estonian souvenir production was the Moscow Olympics in 1980. As the sailing regatta was set in Tallinn, the presentation of Estonian culture

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[504] Humphrey, "A Culture of Disillusionment."
[505] Kuutma.

was important in terms of Soviet propaganda directed to foreign tourists. Factories and industrial designers had to start preparing for the Olympic Games several years in advance. On 5 June 1975 with decree 345-k, the Council of Ministers of Estonia announced a nationwide competition for new Olympic souvenirs. The deadline was 1 November.[506] The results were not satisfactory, according to the Industrial Art Committee: "The professional level of works submitted to the competition was very uneven, there were only a few worthy examples next to dilettante designs."[507] Later, there were two more competitions that were judged as slightly more professional.[508] However, the Industrial Art Committee especially emphasised that "enterprises have to constantly monitor that there would be a sufficient number of designs approved by the organisational committee of the Olympic Games in production."[509] As the Industrial Art Committee had no official juridical power as an institution, this sentence could only be a strong suggestion, not an order. As the number of official competitions and the products manufactured suggests, souvenir production was an important issue before the Olympic Games. In 1979, factory Polümeer produced 200,000 dolls depicting the Olympic mascots, Mischa the bear, and the local Estonian mascot, Vigri the seal.[510] Many other factories manufactured Olympic memorabilia as well. Being ordered by the central power, the increased souvenir production can be seen as an example of Sovietism, the Soviet state trying to influence the general Western view through local peripheral production.

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[506] ERA.R-1906.1.746, 8.

[507] Ibid.

[508] Ibid., 9.

[509] Ibid.

[510] A. Laev, "Näitus "Tarbekaup 80" [Exhibition "Product 80"]," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1979-6 (1979): 20

8.1.2 Wooden dolls "Vigri". Factory Salvo. Late 1970s. Credits: ETDM

It is important to stress that in the Soviet context, design had a very different position. To quote Dmitry Azrikan:

> "Design, having an obvious Western face, nature, and genesis, could be accepted as only a tool and not as an autonomous phenomenon with its own place and role in Soviet culture."[511]

Therefore, according to Azrikan, design was just a tool used for creating products and the quality of design was not the objective itself. Azrikan's theory would help to explain why there was no clear Soviet style in design. The ideal Soviet design was supposed to be based on technical laws and rational calculations and had to improve the object in regards to its functionality, ergonomic parameters, exploitation, maintenance and repair. This attitude was supposed to avoid cultivating commodity fetishism.[512] The view of design as a tool, not an autonomous quality, explains the copying of Western design. The Soviet system had always seen Western technology in a positive light. Even Lenin

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[511] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 48.

[512] Karpova, "Accommodating 'Design': Introducing the Western Concept into Soviet Art Theory in the 1950s–60s," 637.

suggested that capitalist technology would provide the base for socialist production.[513]

After all, socialism could not start off from zero; therefore it was necessary to use the

pre-existing means. In Lenin's own words:

> "The Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organisation of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism."[514]

This quote explains the readiness to adopt Western design influences. Socialism was

never intended to negate its capitalist past, but rather to take everything valuable from

that experience and build a new system on that foundation. After all, the problem

socialism had with capitalism was not based on technological grounds, but social. As

design, especially in the 20th century, was largely connected to technological

achievements, it was the duty of socialism to successfully adopt new achievements in

design as well.

There were three design methods for emulating foreign objects: either blueprints were

based on the example, the object was taken straight to production without any

interference by the local designer, or minor changes were made to adapt the product to

the factory's possibilities.[515] However, in most of these cases objects were taken into

production without the designer's contribution.[516] The aim of that practice was partially

to reduce the role of designers. Hence, these Western designs were adapted for

production by constructors – a Soviet Estonian term for a specific type of engineer.[517] A

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[513] Burawoy, The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism, 51.

[514] Vladimir Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government,":, http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/mar/x03.htm.

[515] Vaher, "Kunstilise Konstrueerimise Probleemidest [About the Problems of Artistic Construction]," 6.

[516] Grünberg.

[517] Õunapuu.

good example of an Estonian factory infamous for copying Western objects was the furniture factory Kooperaator. Their product range included, for example, copies of Alvar Aalto's famous three-legged stool. These copies were of inferior quality, due to the limitations both in material and technology. Here lies one of the most important problems in copying: the copies never amounted to the originals and were often surpassed by local designs. This problem was widely acknowledged by art experts: for example, a Leningrad artist Leonid Karateev explained: "These 'minute changes' impair the objects to a great extent compared to their original quality."[518]

However, while the consequences of Sovietism were mostly limiting for design, they did often inspire designers' creativity. There is one particular trend: namely, design problems stemming from the poor quality of technology. As they are a direct result of the actions or inactions of the Soviet state, they should be characterised as Sovietism, or as direct reactions to Sovietism unclassifiable under other categories of ideologies. Due to technological disadvantages, Soviet Estonian designers were unable to follow all modern trends and had to find a compromise between international trends and the local production landscape. Mostly, this compromise was achieved by decoration, which helped mask outdated forms.[519] While the technological disadvantages kept Soviet Estonian design from catching up with high modernism, in some ways the need to overcome this issue contributed in making the local range of products more varied.

In addition to the Sovietist design paradigms that were commonly present in completed designs, especially from the late 1970s onwards, there were many idealistic concepts

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[518] Karpova, "Accommodating 'Design': Introducing the Western Concept into Soviet Art Theory in the 1950s–60s," 631.
[519] Ibid.

that were never actually implemented or were executed as a few solitary examples. One interesting idea was, as named by Eduard Tinn, 'total design',[520] referred to in other sources also as 'complex design'.[521] 'Total design' was intended to be the design of human environments, a discipline embodying various fields of design: architecture, experiential interior design, graphic design and product design. Thus, 'total design' was a Soviet answer to urban and corporate design embraced in the same word. The forerunner of experiments in complex design was the urban design group formed within the Art Products Factory in 1977 and led by Matti Õunapuu. As the sailing events of the Moscow Olympics of 1980 were set to take place in Tallinn, the aim of the urban design group was to modernise the image of Tallinn for foreign tourists.

As Eduard Tinn recalled, already in the 1970s certain forward-thinking members of the Communist Party were encouraging factories to include art in their interiors.[522] Complex design was a combination of the two; in both his current interview[523] and in debates published in the 1970s,[524] Tinn, as one of the leading design theoreticians within the Communist Party and in design debates, considered it to be the ultimate goal of Soviet Estonian design. Still, complex design was more discussed than implemented in reality: although a few factories tried to use complex design, it did not become common.

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[520] Tinn.

[521] Ike Volkov, "Kompleksdisaini Esimesi Lahendusi [First Solutions of Complex Design]," Sirp ja Vasar, 01/02/1980, 9.

[522] Tinn.

[523] Ibid.

[524] "Disain [Design]."

In 1980, architect Ike Volkov wrote about an example of complex design, a grain factory in Keila. According to the article, the new design was initiated by the director of the factory, Karl Arusoo, who hired designers from the Estonian State Art Institute in order to achieve "a visually enjoyable colouring with pleasant colour accents" instead of a previously "eclectic inexpressive complex."[525] The designers involved were fifth-year students Leili Zoova, Heikki Zoova and Epp Asper, under the supervision of professor Bruno Tomberg.[526] As described by Ike Volkov:

> "The authors started with a lengthy research, familiarised themselves with the problems and the essence, studied the technology and the interrelations of buildings and invented an integral system that involves colour solutions, supergraphics, monumental art, information systems – up to the design or work uniform, envelopes and badges."[527]

However, with the exception of the idea of 'total design', developed in the 1970s and 1980s, there was little evolution in Sovietism as a complex of design ideologies. As industrial design was gradually establishing itself as a discipline, the idea of socialist design remained ill-defined. Eduard Tinn's concept of socialist design as an agent for harmonious environments was well phrased, but did not alter industrial design or its perception significantly. The establishment of design as a discipline in late 1970s coincided with improved knowledge of Western design and thus the debates acquired a more and more global focus.[528] These events concurred with russification in Soviet Estonia, which arguably decelerated the evolution of mass-produced industrial design.[529] While the contemporaneous centralisation of Soviet Estonian culture under Moscow's rule added further layers of control, most notably the attempt to establish a

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[525] Ike Volkov, "Kompleksdisaini Esimesi Lahendusi [First Solutions of Complex Design]," Ibid., 01/02/1980, 9.

[526] Ibid.

[527] Ibid.

[528] Global styles in Soviet Estonian design are further discussed in 8.2.

[529] More on this notion in 4.3.

Union-wide Art Council, the general nature of Sovietism, as manifested in the Estonian design economy, remained consistent throughout the period in question.[530]

While Estonia was a part of the Soviet Union, the role of the Soviet state and the ideology stemming from Soviet bureaucracy was largely limited to the material practices of production, especially the location of production: the factory. Soviet design ideology focused mostly on the immaterial qualities of design, especially on the question of distinguishing Socialist design from the dreaded consumerist Western design. This problem was especially pertinent as Soviet factories occasionally copied Western objects. The communist world order was intended to be built upon capitalist technology and design forms were adopted like any of the West's other technological advantages. Design as such was considered to be more as a tool for achieving different goals, not as a quality as such.

8.2 Western styles in Soviet Estonian design

This section studies the ways in which Western styles manifested in Soviet Estonian design, as well as the aesthetic connections between Estonian and Western design. Mostly, these included Scandinavian, Western European and North American influences.[531] As the period from 1965–1988 saw the change from modern to

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[530] Further information on the added layers of control in 5.4.
[531] Further information on the changes brought by Western influences in 4.3.

postmodern paradigms, the expression and range of Western influences varied.[532] Although Scandinavia, Western Europe and North America all have their regional specificities, the general tendencies permit them to be treated as a homogeneous 'Western' style. This thesis does not draw a line between modernism and postmodernism, as the research did not identify a clearly datable shift in industrial design paradigms in Estonia.

Unlike Soviet influences, which were mostly imposed by official power, Western influences were caused by both general taste and official politics. Western objects had acquired a symbolic value in society.[533] The objects became representations of the Western world in whole, a quality that was transferred onto the Western style in general. By Late Socialism, most designers had already grown up in a Soviet society that often fetishized Western objects. As Piotr Piotrowski claims:

> "One could even say that one of the key elements defining an East European context and framing its artistic processes has been the effort to upgrade the value of our culture within the framework of universal categories, which in practice means within Western perception." [534]

Western influences, as explained, were not an act of copying the West, but rather a way of demonstrating knowledge of international design trends. It is true that there were instances of blatantly copying Western objects,[535] but these were mostly just objects taken straight to production and without a designer's contribution.[536] This thesis argues that as a practice, this act of copying was related to the official Soviet design ideology,

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[532] Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space].

[533] As already discussed in 4.2, 5.3 and 6.4

[534] Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989, 28.

[535] Vaher, "Kunstilise Konstrueerimise Probleemidest [About the Problems of Artistic Construction]."

[536] Õunapuu.

the lack of a defined socialist form in design and a general underestimation of the importance of style.

While the general design system was built and shaped by Soviet politics, in their stylistic preferences designers often tried to follow Western examples. Leonardo Meigas, a designer who worked for the artists' association ARS, described the differences between the designers' work standards in Soviet Russia and Soviet Estonia:

> "We understood that if I make some kind of a lamp somewhere, then I draw this lamp and then we talk about that lamp, right? But no, in Moscow, to get the big bucks, you needed to draw ten big boards and that was it... well, actually it was a part of this pokazuha[537] mentality."[538]

Drawing a board in the Soviet Russian context consisted of drawing perspectives of the entire surrounding room in gouache paint as opposed to the detailed design of the object itself. However, Soviet Estonian designers tried to consciously emulate the West, not just in design stylistics, but also in the presentation of their work. This fact is evident in the existing archives of the Art Products Factory. Not only Leonardo Meigas, but also the other designers followed the same guidelines for presenting their blueprints. This seemingly small detail indicated a preference towards Western traditions in design practices.

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[537] pokazuha – a Russian expression often used in Estonian to refer to disorder hidden behind a respectable facade.
[538] Meigas.

8.2.1 Interior design for an exhibition space in Moscow, designed by the ARS design studio in 1961. This is an example of old-fashioned design depiction, preferred in Russia later as well. Credits: magazine Dekorativnoe Isskusstvo, courtesy of ETDM

Already in the late 1960s, Western influences were widely spread in Soviet Estonian industrial design. When discussing modernism in the Baltic context, it must not be forgotten that Estonia was only occupied during the Second World War. At the beginning of modernism as a design movement, Estonia was an independent country with strong historical links to Germany. Therefore, in the interwar period and before the Soviet occupation, modernism was already the prevailing style. Many professors working at the Estonian State Art Institute had already been active in the pre-Soviet period and therefore taught their students in the spirit of modernism. For example, Maile Grünberg, a prominent furniture designer who studied interior design at the Estonian State Art Institute in the 1960s, remembered that almost all of her professors had trained and worked in the pre-Soviet era.[539] The head of the department of industrial art, Bruno Tomberg, had graduated in 1950, at the very beginning of Soviet rule in

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[539] Grünberg.

Estonia; while he himself had not been trained in the pre-Soviet period, virtually all of his professors had trained before the Second World War.

As such, modernism as a movement acquired a nostalgic quality in some circles, as it referred back to the brief period of independence. As written by Steven Mansbach:

> "Toward this end, architects, critics, patrons, and politicians turned to forms of functionalism, which by the late 1920s was increasingly identified with progress, democracy, and, significantly, national identity. Indeed, by the 1930s functionalism, as flexibly defined by Estonia's critics as it was widely embraced by its architects, would itself become a national symbol." [540]

Thus, modern traditions were not always a new language or necessarily connected to the Western world (other than seeing Estonia as having been a country with predominantly Western traditions), but rather a continuance of pre-Soviet heritage. This fact also explains why the adoption of Western influences was so common in Western areas of the former Socialist Bloc: there was already a tradition of modernism from pre-Socialist period. However, the preferences varied according to local traditions and cultural contacts. Eli Rubin has seen the East German design being mostly influenced by Bauhaus traditions.[541] Turning to other Baltic States, John V. Maciuika has proven the existence of a "Westward gaze" amongst Lithuanian architects already since 1945, finding Finland and France to be the main sources of inspiration.[542] While no authors have made specific references to Lithuanian industrial design, one can assume that the sets of references were more or less similar in both neighbouring disciplines.

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[540] S. A. Mansbach, "Modernist Architecture and Nationalist Aspiration in the Baltic: Two Case Studies," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 65, no. 1 (2006): 101.

[541] Eli Rubin. "The Form of Socialism without Ornament: Consumption, Ideology, and the Fall and Rise of Modernist Design in the German Democratic Republic." 165

[542] John V. Maciuika. "East Bloc, West View: Architecture and Lithuanian National Identity." Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1999). 23

8.2.2 Pilvi Ojamaa. Glass set for Tarbeklaas. Early 1970s. Credits: Maie-Ann Raun

The propagation of Western design was also related to the image of Estonia within the Soviet Union. In an interview, Estonian designer Andres Tolts told that Russian functionaries often ordered Scandinavian-style interiors from Estonian designers. He assumed that the reason for the popularity of Scandinavian style was its exoticism, as the Russian style was traditionally more influenced by Baroque aesthetics.[543] In interviews conducted for this research, many designers, especially those working for the

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[543] Eha Komissarov, "Interview with Andres Tolts," in Mood Ja Külm Sõda [Fashion and the Cold War], ed. Eha Komissarov (Tallinn: Kumu, 2012), 270.

Art Products Factory, confirmed that Estonian design was sought after in other parts of the Soviet Union, especially Russia. As Leonardo Meigas said about his clients: "As I was from the Baltic States, people gave me a different look and that look was respectful."[544] However, as Meigas emphasised, not all Russian clients liked what he referred to as 'the Finnish style', for some of them it was simply too unusual: for example, Meigas never executed any lamp designs for Russia, as the style was too different.[545] Maile Grünberg, a furniture designer for Standard, also verified the popularity of Estonian products in various furniture competitions: the first prizes went to Moscow, for ideological reasons, but Standard mostly received a second or third prize.[546] Therefore, while originally the similarities to the Scandinavian style were triggered by cultural and historical links and the continuation of pre-Soviet traditions, by the Late Socialist period they were encouraged by the Soviet power and admired elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The same idea has been phrased by Russian design historian Iurii Gerchuk, who claimed that the Baltic States "bore the unmistakable stamp of the European culture we so desired".[547]

When discussing design in the same context as other forms of culture, most notably the visual arts, the lack of an official Soviet style was a key difference. On the subject of modern traditions in Eastern European art, Piotrowski has said that the rejection of socialist realism as the state-sanctioned art was actually more important than the affiliation with modernism.[548] However, the appropriation of Western styles had a different meaning in industrial design. As design lacked a clearly defined state-

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[544] Meigas.

[545] Ibid.

[546] Grünberg.

[547] Gerchuk, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the Ussr (1954-64)," 82.

[548] Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989, 127.

sanctioned style, the acceptance of Western style did not mean a rejection of Soviet style and thereby taking a stand against the Soviet power, but simply filling a void in an otherwise style-less medium. Instead of inventing a new style that would have suited the Soviet context, Western style was simply taken over with very few modifications.

As contacts to the West became more and more frequent, local debates on the different functions of design diversified. Already at the *Space and Form II* exhibition in 1972, a more philosophical approach to industrial design was visible.[549] It is difficult to say to what extent this tendency was brought on by postmodern ideas emerging in the global context, or how much it was caused by the evolution of industrial design as a discipline in the Soviet and Estonian contexts. However, the manifestations of these tendencies often followed the same trends as global postmodernism and increasingly kept the same pace as Western design. As Krista Kodres has explained, the influence of Robert Venturi reached Estonia in the mid-1970s, whereas the late-1970s were already characterised by historicism fashioned after the ideas of Robert Stern.[550] Later, in the 1980s, in addition to the historicist movement, the Memphis style was influential in shaping the latest trends.[551] However, as Kodres stated, postmodern tendencies were present in architecture, interior decoration and exhibition objects. As she wrote in a comparison between Estonian postmodernism and Memphis: "Unlike Italy, the Estonian market did not react to the new ideas of expressive and associative space and form. Thus, even in the future they could only be executed for exhibitions."[552] In this statement, 'market' in the Soviet Estonian context does not stand for consumers, but for

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[549] Exhibitions were discussed in 7.3.
[550] Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space], 292.
[551] Ibid., 308.
[552] Ibid., 309.

industry. Due to poor financial and technological possibilities, design experiments were more common in fashion design or one-off objects.

A different manifestation of postmodernism in Soviet Estonia was the reference to local context, including even the history of Soviet Union. Of the latter, an interesting example is Saima Priks's fashion collection "Perestroika and glasnost". Designer used geometrical shapes and bold contrasts, referring simultaneously to Western postmodernism and early Russian constructivism. There were three colours present: black, white and red, a common combination in propaganda. The clothes featured large slogans such as "perestroika", "Pravda"[553] and "glasnost", thereby taking an ironic position towards the relationship between fashion and Soviet ideology. Priks's collection could be seen as the fashion equivalent of *sots-art*, an ironic mockery of the collapsing Soviet system. While a few years earlier this collection could never have been presented, the fact that Priks even won a prize at a state-wide fashion show illustrates well the cultural and political changes during *perestrika*.

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[553] Pravda – "truth" in Russian. The official newspaper of the Communist Party, circulated throughout the entire Soviet Union.

8.2.3 Saima Priks. Collection "Perestroika and Glasnost". 1987. Credits: Saima Priks

While the postmodern tendencies explained above were confined to exhibition objects, the evolution of mass-produced design had decelerated, due to various economic and political reasons.[554] The technological and financial possibilities of most factories did

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[554] These reasons were explained in 4.3.

not allow mass-production to use a similar lavish style to one-off designs illustrated here by Tallinn airport. Thus, industrial products could only employ certain postmodern details or references. One good example was the glass set *Disney*, designed in the early 1970s (the specific date is unknown) by Pilvi Ojamaa. The glass set was produced in large quantities and, curiously, its production continued throughout the period of russification, until the end of 1980s. One of the main reasons for its popularity was that it was cheap and easy to make: the glasses were produced on an automatic line and decorated with silkscreen images. The images were bought from the United Kingdom, from A. Johnson Matthey Company – further proof of globalisation in the local context.[555]

The set is a good example of how Soviet Estonia was, in spite of the russification prevalent in the late 1970s and 1980s, increasingly involved in the general processes of globalisation. The characters of Walt Disney were not often present in the official media of the Soviet Union. *Donald Duck, Mickey and others*, the first comic book in Soviet Estonia and possibly the whole Soviet Union, had been published only in 1973 and was not followed by any others.[556] However, as Western culture was circulated through unofficial channels, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck were quite well known amongst Soviet citizens. While in a contemporary context it may be tempting to see these Disney images (as well as other similar manifestations of Western culture) in an ironic way or as anti-Soviet activity, it would be an over-interpretation. To repeat Djurdja Bartlett's theory, appropriation was mostly not a conscious act of resistance, but rather a simple

[555] Laduseva, "Tehase 'Tarbeklaas' Uudistoodangust [About the Recent Production of the Factory 'Tarbeklaas']," Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria [Local Industry: information series] 1982-12 (1982): 16-17.
[556] Misiunas and Taagepera, The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990, 220.

act of communication with their fellow class members.[557] Thus, these designs were rather displays of the local knowledge of Western mass media.
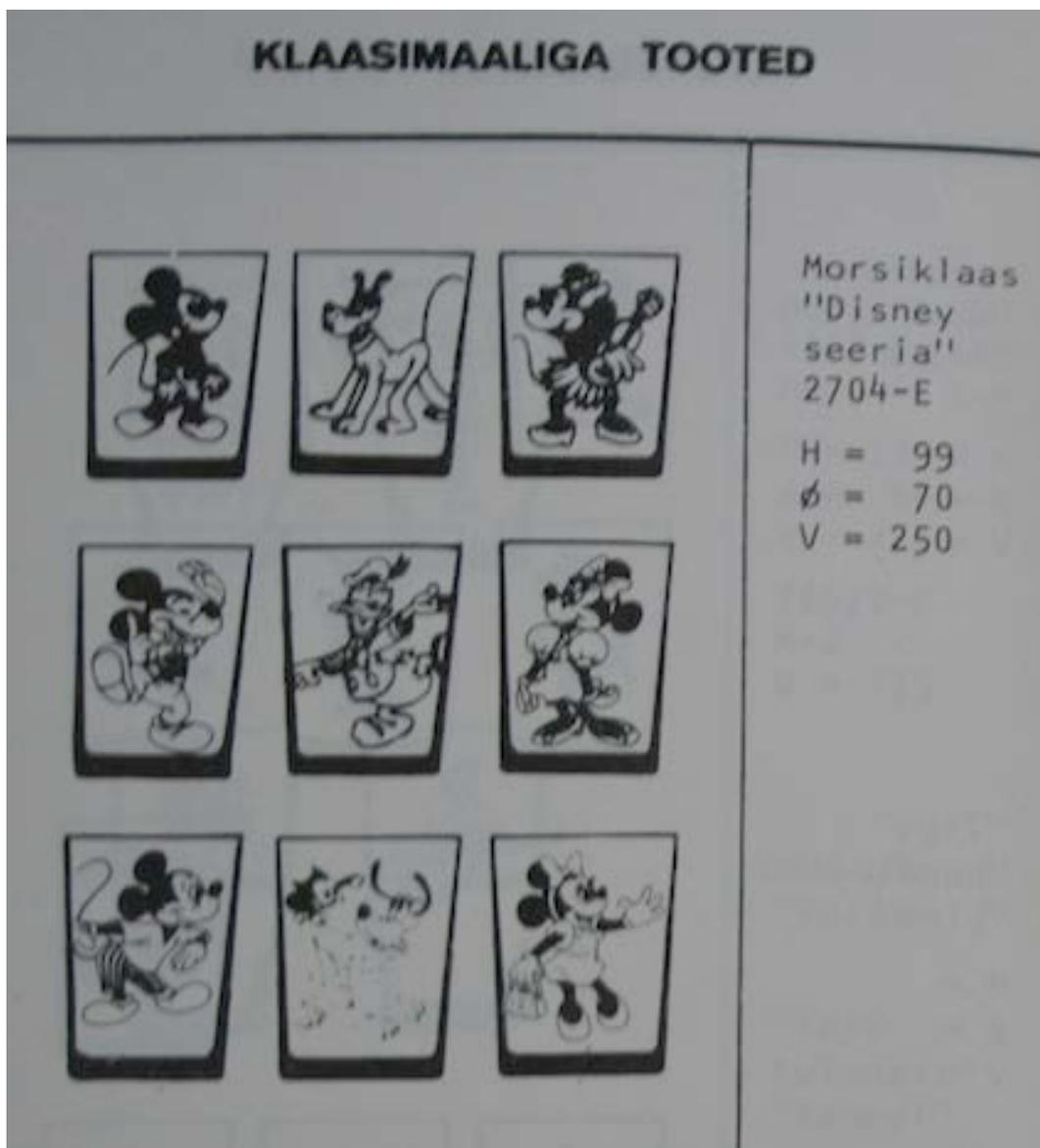
8.2.4 Pilvi Ojamaa. Glass set "Disney" for Tarbeklaas. Early 1970s. Illustration in a product catalogue.
Credits: ETDM

Among different ideologies, Western influences were most noticeable in the visual appearance of objects. As Western objects were highly desired, Western trends became

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[557] Bartlett, Fashioneast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism.

popular in local design as well. Instead of being an act of copying, for the local designers they were rather a way of demonstrating knowledge of international design trends. Despite belonging to the Soviet Union, the West was still seen as a cultural centre to aspire towards, not Moscow. This attitude could be seen as a self-colonisation, as people willingly adopted Western trends and ideas, making it almost equal to the Soviet colonisation, albeit in a different way. While initially this quality of Westernness had signified rebellion, by Late Socialism it was rather simply a consumerist tendency. Due to the absence of a clearly defined Socialist design style, adopting Western stylistics was mostly not an act of resistance, but rather filling the void in design.

8.3 National tendencies

National tendencies were frequent in Soviet Estonian design, as well as in other Soviet states. This thesis defines national tendencies as mostly visual references to pre-Soviet Estonian culture, either through use of form or ornament. Besides imagery, in some cases national references also included partially adopting certain material practices. Their use was an example of Soviet power, local power, designers and the public being interested in similar symbols, but for different reasons. From the communist perspective, using national references was a way of connecting with history, seemingly valuing local traditions and thus ensuring public approval. An opposing view could have seen national references as siding with the pre-communist bourgeois power. Thus, the two opposing world views worked with the same methods, not always acknowledging the adversary's reasoning.

The 1960s were particularly charged with national influences. In 1966, Uku, an association that employed non-professional craftspeople, was founded.[558] It was a peculiar example of using traditional material practices for official ideology. Employees were able to work from home and make national souvenirs based on designs by professional artists. However, Uku was an ideologically charged organisation, even if the idea of working from home referred back to the pre-Soviet traditional work arrangements. The products of Uku were, as stated by the Minister of Local Industry, intended to demonstrate the scope and perspectives of Estonian national culture to the entire world, disproving claims by some emigrant groups that everything national was doomed in Soviet Estonia.[559] Therefore, the raison d'etre of Uku and its counterparts in other Soviet countries was to validate Soviet power. Traditional national handicraft in Uku's example was used as an ideological symbol of national traditions in general. Uku employed different technologies, from metal- and woodwork to embroidery. However, while in traditional handicraft one person would make an entire object from scratch, in Uku the work was divided into stages, all of which were carried out by different people. While in promotional materials Uku was marketed as an organisation dedicated to "keeping the traditional handicrafts alive", it was still rather a step towards mass production, except that the factory system existed only as a work arrangement, not as an actual physical building. Therefore, while Uku used national connotations to create an illusion of maintaining traditional ways of life, it was a compromise between the factory setting and a traditional work environment.

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[558] More on Uku and its history in 6.2.

[559] Uuemõis, "Kodutööenduse Organiseerimisest Vabariigis [About Organising Home Industry in the Republic] ".

Accepting national tendencies as a method for advocating Socialism was not a novel concept during the Late Socialist period. As Lenin's regime had been largely built on peasant traditions, accepting and using folk imagery had been acceptable in Soviet politics from the beginning of the regime in 1922. Attitudes towards national culture were one of the key differences between Western European socialism and Soviet socialism. In 1914, Lenin had written:

> "Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeoisie nationalism, we stand against."[560]

Furthermore, he attacked the Marxist theorist Rosa Luxembourg:

> "In her quest for 'practicality' Rosa Luxemburg has lost sight of the principal practical task both of the Great-Russian proletariat and of the proletariat of other nationalities: that of day-by-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the right, the equal right of all nations, to their national state."[561]

In an advanced socialist state, the need for nationalist tendencies should have disappeared, leaving behind only every nation's right to self-determination – in Lenin's view, that kind of a compromise was possible, whereas Rosa Luxembourg did not believe that small nation-states would have a future in the contemporary world. However, nationalism never disappeared from the Soviet Union, including Estonia; if anything, it just grew stronger over the years. As stated by Djurdja Bartlett:

> "Once ethnic motifs had been introduced in order to counteract Western influences on socialist dress codes, they never disappeared from socialist fashion. While in the earlier period ethnic motifs had been an ideological barrier against Western trends, they acquired a new symbolic role in late socialism."[562]

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[560] V. I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in Nations and Identities, ed. Vincent P. Pecora (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 227.

[561] Ibid.

[562] Bartlett, Fashioneast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism, 230.

The attention on the exterior aspects of nationalism was a show not just for the home public, but also for the world outside. As explained earlier, in 1975 it was written that one of the main reasons behind reviving national culture was to demonstrate the scope and perspectives of Estonian national culture to the entire world in order to disprove the claims by some emigrant groups as if everything national was doomed in Soviet Estonia.[563] By showing that the Soviet Union was actively trying to nurture minority cultures, the regime was trying to establish its legitimacy and demonstrate democracy to outside viewers.

In the 1960s, even some highly respected designers employed references to traditional peasant culture in exhibition objects. Most notably, Bruno Tomberg designed furniture influenced by peasant culture. Soon, as national imagery was gaining popularity with the general public, many art and design critics stood against it as a sign of the decline in aesthetic taste. In an article published as early as 1969, renowned Estonian art historian Leo Gens wrote:

> "The dissociation in material environment has become a discerning feature of contemporary culture. Man really needs romance, needs a so-called carnival situation, it is not a coincidence that we have so many replica windmills, almost genuine country taverns with pseudo-national food and pseudo-national interiors. […] If the attic is empty, these needs are satisfied with wooden candlesticks by 'Uku', baskets, small tankards or national dolls by 'Salvo'".[564]

In Gens's view, mass-produced national objects were a poor substitute to genuine folk artefacts and used to escape from reality. As the contemporaneous Soviet interiors and objects were usually deliberately simple and lacked decoration, people tended towards the opposite. Folk objects or their contemporaneous mass-produced counterparts were

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[563] Uuemõis, "Kodutööenduse Organiseerimisest Vabariigis [About Organising Home Industry in the Republic] ".

[564] Leo Gens, "Inimene, Ese, Keskkond [Human, Artefact, Environment]," Rahva Hääl, 12/10/1969.

familiar, easily recognisable and sentimental. Gens's critique, combined with the evolution of contemporaneous design ideologies and an expanding knowledge of global design theories, was arguably an important factor for the decrease in interest towards national tendencies amongst more renowned industrial designers. Later, Western influences became more prevalent in the works of more informed designers.

While less popular amongst designers with higher ambitions, traditional influences remained visible in the products of certain factories, and the items made by the workers of *Uku* continued to be popular. In the same way, the attitudes of critics towards national tendencies remained critical. In 1982, Malle Antson and Tiina Toomet stated:

> "We want to emphasise that folk art actually hides many more possibilities for manufacturing products according to contemporary needs. We simply have to detach ourselves from the habitual attitude to folk art as something necessarily colourful, ornamented and… useless."[565]

While Gens strongly condemned pseudo-nationalism, Toomet and Antson did not label national souvenirs directly as kitsch, but the critical attitude is still present. However, they phrased their ideas differently and instead called for a modernisation of folk art. This difference in nuance may have been caused by the emergence of postmodernism: in the 1960s, the prevalent style was modern, whereas in the 1980s the local manifestation of postmodernism often entailed some stylised references to folk art.[566] The description of contemporary folk art as something "necessarily colourful, ornamented and… useless" still strongly insinuated the view of most manifestations of national tendencies as kitsch.

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[565] Tiina Toomet and Malle Antson, "Rahvakunst Toona Ja Täna [Folk Art Then and Now]," Sirp ja Vasar, 30/04/1982, 5.

[566] Kodres, Ilus Maja, Kaunis Ruum [Charming House, Beautiful Space], 308.

Contemporary art critics tend to disagree. Mai Levin claimed already in 1994 that national form was not just an 'emergency exit' for artists, but helped to generally maintain national identity.[567] Katrin Kivimaa agreed that this particular aspect of Socialist Realism helped uphold continuity in national culture.[568] Here, the analysis in terms of visual arts could be widened to comprise industrial design as well. As this thesis has already demonstrated, in Soviet Estonia consumers had little effect on the style of products. Thus, while in a capitalist society industrial design and visual arts would be differentiated by the factor of consumption, this was not the case in Estonia. Thus, Levin's and Kivimaa's theories in the context of industrial design would signify either a voluntary will or an unconscious act by industrial designers to maintain national identity amongst the general public, as opposed to Gens's view of national tendencies as nostalgic kitsch. These two theories may not be mutually exclusive, as general feelings towards national tendencies arguably varied, as well as the intentions of designers and factory boards.

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[567] Mai Levin, "Sotsialistliku Realismi Uurimisprobleeme [Research Problems of Socialist Realism]," Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi 7 (1994): 204.
[568] Katrin Kivimaa, Rahvuslik Ja Modernne Naiselikkus Eesti Kunstis 1850-2000 [National and Modern Femininity in Estonian Art 1850-2000] (Tallinn: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2009), 134.

8.3.1. Furniture set "Estonia", produced by Standard. The set was designed in the 1960s, but remained in production for a long period. Credits: ETDM

The national symbol most common for reference in industrial design was national dress. As painting was considered one of the most important art forms, national dress was popular as a symbol, as it was well suited for propagandistic scenes. After the Second World War when Soviet power was instated, it was necessary for art to glorify the new regime. To better justify the Soviet power visually, national dress was not only allowed, but even encouraged. It was a common tradition that on paintings depicting the arrival of Soviet soldiers, there were also young girls and women in national dress, handing the soldiers flowers. Even important ceremonies featured people wearing national costume

to suggest the historical continuity of national traditions and the legality of the Soviet regime.

One of the most popular uses of national costume was a small wooden doll in national costume, produced by Salvo.[569] The appearance of different dolls varied greatly, but they were always in production from the 1960s throughout the entire Soviet period. Use of national dress in Soviet propaganda was not specific to only Estonia, but rather a common method for referencing pre-Soviet traditions and culture. Evidence suggests that this type of doll in a national costume was fairly common throughout the Socialist Bloc as means for demonstrating an idea of a national identity: for example, Vladimir Kulić described the Yugoslavian pavilion of EXPO '58 as being filled with "forty-five dolls dressed in traditional folk attire from all parts of Yugoslavia, surrounded by the images of the country's most beautiful natural landscapes."[570]

Besides national dress, other peasant images were used as well, although to a lesser extent. One curious example is a souvenir spinning wheel produced by Salvo in 1965.[571] In itself, it was an interesting example of emphasising the image of traditional culture, while neglecting the actual content. Initially, a spinning wheel had been a tool, not a decorative object. In 1965, very few households would have used a spinning wheel for its original purpose, especially as the Soviet power insisted collectivisation.[572] As such, while this object was based on traditional ways of life, it was also an active attempt to reduce rural culture to decoration. While at first glance it could have been seen as an

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[569] See figure 6.2.1

[570] Vladimir Kulić. "An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO '58," Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2012). 161

[571] "Saagem Tuttavaks: Plastmasstoodete Vabrik "Salvo" [Let's Meet Plastics Factory Salvo].".

[572] Zetterberg, Eesti Ajalugu [History of Estonia], 541.

apologetic revival of the past, the souvenir spinning wheel was rather a final blow to peasant life, suggesting that its rightful state was a novelty item. This object only featured in one product catalogue in 1965, and was therefore probably produced only in small quantities. However, it was definitely not a sole example of revivalism of traditional ways of life. Even in the 1980s, Tartu Plastics Factory was producing a small weaving loom, usable for making doll carpets.
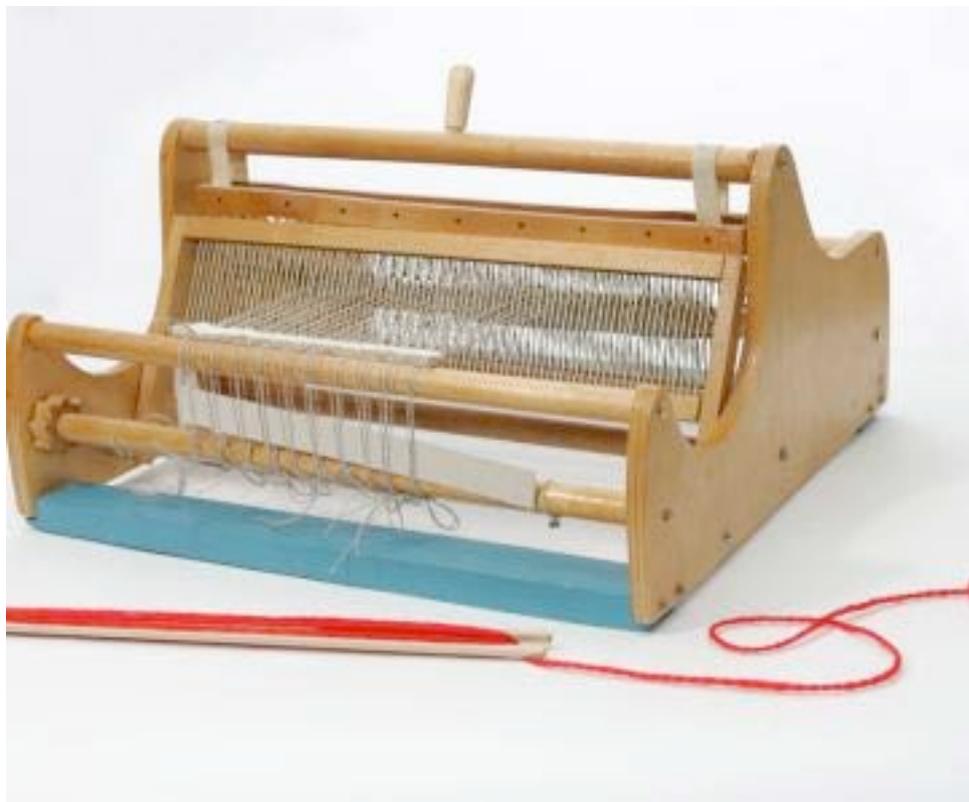
8.3.2 Weaving looms by Tartu Plastics Factory. 1980s. Credit: Tartu Toy Museum www.mm.ee

Besides rural culture, the other common national symbol, especially in souvenirs, was Tallinn's medieval architecture. While the German roots of Estonian culture were otherwise denied or devalued, using the Old Town as a symbol was a good example of how some aspects of it were appropriated. As Tallinn was one of the few cities with an old town built according to Western traditions, either the town silhouette or images of

single medieval buildings were used because of their distinguishability. While originally they had been part of an occupant culture, after centuries they had also been appropriated by Estonians themselves as a proof of Western legacy and belonging to the European culture. As discontent towards the current regime grew, so did the idolisation of past regimes. Under Soviet power, these reasons became increasingly important. One interesting example of using the Old Town as a source of inspiration for a product was the lamp "Old Thomas", designed by Bruno Vesterberg in late 1960s and produced until the early 1980s.[573] It was shaped like an old-fashioned lantern and decorated with a figure of Old Thomas, famous from the weathervane of the Tallinn Town Hall. The lamp was produced in large quantities and became popular both in Estonia and amongst tourists. Interestingly, it is even featured in the music video produced in 1986 for song "Don't Dream It's Over" by Australian pop band Crowded House.

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[573] Helen Arusoo, "Vana-Tooma Lambike - Eesti Rahva Lemmik [the Lamp Old Thomas - an Estonian Favourite]," Õhtuleht, 10/05/2001.

Left: 8.3.3 "Old Thomas". Designed by Bruno Vesterberg and produced by Estoplast. In production from late 1960s until early 1980s. Credits: ETDM

Right: 8.3.4 Chair produced in Uku. 1971. Credits: Kunst ja Kodu 1971-1

As Soviet industrial design has not been researched thoroughly in the Eastern areas of the former Soviet Union, this study relies on architecture history as a neighbouring discipline. Greg Castillo has studied Soviet Orientalism, comparing it to Western colonialist traditions and practices. In his words: "Under an imperative to remake "back-ward" societies in the image of socialism, cultural authorities monumentalized the forms of vernacular design to symbolize the regional identity of peoples, at the same time they were eliminating the social and political structures that underpinned vernacular traditions."[574] In societies that differed more from the ideal image of modern socialist society, references to national cultures served to "fill the gaps" between past and future.

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[574] Greg Castillo. "Soviet Orientalism: Socialist Realism and Built Tradition". Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997). 33

Therefore, use of national imagery is one aspect that has a large effect on the regional variations of style in Soviet design. As the examples quoted above demonstrate, 19th century peasant culture and medieval heritage were the most popular themes in Soviet Estonian national references. However, these preferences in style and time period varied throughout the Soviet Union, same as the stimuli for adopting or imposing these references.

While using national symbols in design was tolerated and occasionally propagated by the Soviet power, this practice was also popular amongst the consumers. The most popular symbol was national dress, or rather the version of it that originated in the 19th century German-influenced culture. However, other motifs from the pre-Soviet rural culture were also used. While some art critics disproved such pseudo-nationalism, dolls in national costumes were popular. Their popularity was a result of the new Soviet Estonian man trying to recreate history, which had stopped existing with the Soviet power. Therefore, national symbols in Soviet Estonian design are simultaneously an attempt to justify Soviet power, and, to reconnect with the pre-Soviet roots.

Conclusions

This thesis identifies three different factors shaping the practices and designs of Soviet Estonian industrial designers: Sovietism, Western styles, and national imagery. Although occasionally overlapping and occasionally identifiable mostly because of context, they are still different in their origins and reasoning. Throughout the Soviet period, their interrelations slightly changed. Sovietism as a rigid concept stemming

directly from Soviet bureaucracy and mostly affecting the material practices of industrial design remained similar, as the stagnant Soviet system was not substantially modified during Late Socialism. The other two factors, more apparent in the appearance of objects themselves, underwent changes. In the 1960s, national tendencies were popular in different fields of design. However, as designers became increasingly aware of the Western world, global trends progressively replaced traditional references.

Sovietism is a term for describing the ways that Soviet power was imposed onto industrial design. As there was no Soviet style in design, Sovietist influences manifested in material practices regarding design, as well as factory and Soviet Estonia itself as the ideologising context. This fact stems from the general attitude within Soviet design ideology: design was just a tool used for the ultimate goal, never the objective itself. Soviet design ideologies rarely discussed form and rather focused on the problems of the production of design. The ideal Soviet design was based on technical laws and rational calculations and intended to improve the object with regard to its functionality, ergonomic parameters, exploitation, maintenance and repair. There were certain curious Soviet design experiments that were idealistic in nature, but they remained rare.

Western influences were most apparent in the visual appearance of objects. As Western objects were glorified, international trends became popular in local design as well. However, following Western trends was not intended as copying or as active rebellion, but rather as keeping in touch with the international design scene. Despite belonging to the Soviet Union, the West was still seen as a cultural centre to aspire towards. This attitude can be seen as a self-colonisation, as people willingly adopted Western trends and ideas, making it almost equal to Soviet colonisation, albeit in a different way. Due

to the absence of a clearly defined Socialist design style, adopting Western stylistics was mostly not an act of resistance, but rather filling a void in design.

The use of national symbols was both tolerated by the Soviet power and popular among the Estonian people. The most popular symbols were either 19th century peasant motifs, like national dress or the silhouette of the Old Town, as pre-Soviet relics. Mostly, national tendencies were apparent in souvenirs, but there were also examples of usable products. Most art critics denounced the practice of using national symbols, labelling it as kitsch, but that did not change their popularity. For the Communist power, encouraging national tendencies was a way of justifying Soviet rule to Western eyes. Not only did different factories make national souvenirs, but traditional handicraft practices were even combined with Soviet factory culture, resulting in an interesting borderline experiment. The popularity of products influenced by the Estonian national heritage is a result of the Soviet Estonian people attempting to reconnect with national history, which had stopped existing under Soviet power. The use of national symbols in Soviet Estonian design had two aims: to justify Soviet power and reconnect with pre-Soviet roots.

9. Changing points of view

This last chapter studies the changing rhetoric of Soviet Estonian factory design and the emergence of post-socialist nostalgia, while questioning if some elements of the Soviet industrial system could be employed in the contemporary context. While the full analysis of the collapse of Soviet Union and the problems of the 1990s would require separate research, this chapter also acts as a connecting link between the Soviet Estonian design economy and the current state of Estonian design in order to better understand both the period in question and its implications for the present.

There is a joke common throughout the former Eastern Bloc, told in slightly different variations: *"Everything the Communists told us about communism was a complete and utter lie. Unfortunately, everything the Communists told us about capitalism turned out to be true."* It simultaneously conveys unhappiness with early capitalism and a re-evaluation of the Soviet system. In the 1990s, the sudden political changes and process of privatisation brought uncertainty both socially and economically. At the same time, changing attitudes towards the past led to a certain amount of post-socialist nostalgia both in Estonia and other former Soviet states. Some traces of this nostalgia were also apparent in the interviews conducted for this research.

The first section focuses on critique. Although the aim is to define production, not consumption, this research briefly explores the public responses to Soviet Estonian design. Methodologically the section compares the responses in the West, in other parts of the Soviet Union and within the Estonian public, to examine the effects of local

conditions ideas on the reception of design. The second part researches the effect of the Soviet Union's collapse on Estonian industrial design. Instead of a simple historical account, the section employs the opinions of industrial designers to examine the general point of view of the profession and, ultimately, seeks to analyse the emergence of post-socialist nostalgia. The third section analyses the post-Soviet context. For a better understanding of the mechanisms behind contemporary attitudes towards Soviet Estonian design, the section discusses contemporary Estonian production. Additionally, the aim of this last section is to consider whether some aspects of the Soviet Estonian design system, removed from their original narrative, could be relevant in the contemporary context.

9.1 The reception of Soviet Estonian design

While the thesis has generally focused on different aspects and nuances of the production of objects, reception and the rhetoric surrounding design also hold an equally important place in design history. This section compares the professional opinions of different critics on Soviet Estonian industrial design in order to identify the role of political background processes such as expectations and perception of the culture on the mediation of design. There are three points of view compared in this section: Estonian critics, Western critics, and those from other parts of the Soviet Union. As the local situation of industrial design differed in each of those contexts, their reviews of Soviet Estonian design varied as well.

An example of contemporaneous local criticism was offered by Maria Liive in an article written in 1977, on the subject of the poor quality of toys produced in Soviet Estonia:

> "In other parts of the world there are also toy companies that have not redesigned their usual toys every year, but produce good toys of their grandmothers' time. That signifies these toys have stood to the test of time, achieved a permanent popularity among consumers. Why couldn't we in Estonia have a toy that would live through the times and become common, would be made of quality materials and would not age in a year? Moral ageing is not an issue with artistic toys, which, being miniature works of art, developing the sense of beauty and morale of children, have become a natural ingredient of national culture in many countries. We could name artistic toys of England, Spain, both Germanys and Finland where, much like in the art of those nations, one can distinctly sense a national origin absent in standard factory production. […] We in Estonia currently have no professional toy designers; toy cars, dolls and building sets are designed in addition to other works and that is apparent in the construction and colours of our toys. It would be useless to even discuss a national appearance of Estonian toys. […] Let those handmade dolls and animals be a bit more expensive (tankards are!)."[575]

Within this type of criticism, Estonian products were often compared to their Western counterparts. The full article only briefly mentioned Russia and paid no attention to other Soviet states. At the same time, East Germany was mentioned alongside Western countries, in the same context. Interestingly, it is quite clear that the author had a wide knowledge of the toys available in other countries, but solely because she had seen pictures or the objects themselves. She made no reference to the price differences between 'artistic toys' and factory production. Naively, she added that handmade toys could be a bit more expensive, not understanding that in the West, these toys made by artists would probably have been inaccessible to most children due to their high price. This failure to grasp the capitalist price system and financial inequalities might have been an important reason for the idealisation of Western design. In the Soviet system, where prices were dictated by the state, the ability to buy something depended mainly on availability, having very little to do with price. Therefore, as it was common

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[575] Maria Liive, "Lapsed Ja Disain [Children and Design]," Sirp ja Vasar, 25/03/1977 1977, 9.

knowledge amongst Soviet Estonians that in the West the stores had a wider selection of products, the influence of cost on the ability to consume was often overlooked.

9.1.1 Wooden car for Norma. 1970. Credits: Tallinn City Museum

Quite often, criticism was directed at the poor selection of products on sale, rather than accusations of a generally poor quality. In a debate discussing an annual furniture exhibition in 1980, designer Vello Asi wrote:

> "All right, we agree that the selection of 'Standard' is already too large. The full selection of the furniture factories in our republic is two and a half hundred different products, this is a decent number. But the consumer cares about the selection in stores. If it is difficult or impossible to buy a simple shelf, wardrobe or a practical desk for a student, then these numbers offer no consolation. Sadly, the selection is not shaped by consumption, but by production. This tendency seems to deepen in furniture industry and fend off even essential furniture items."[576]

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[576] "Mööbel '80 [Furniture '80]," Sirp ja Vasar, 31/10/1980 1980, 9.

This criticism, directed towards certain aspects of the system itself, was phrased quite diplomatically. Asi described the situation, but did not place blame on anyone specifically. Any kind of political criticism was carefully avoided.

At least in professional criticism, negative feedback was usually given towards factories or industry, recognising the limitations of industrial designers. Partially, this tendency could have been caused by Estonia's small size: critics discussing industrial design were often either industrial designers themselves or had met many of the designers they were criticising personally. However, their close connections also increased their awareness of the bureaucratic and technological limitations and thus critics were well prepared to assess the bigger picture. In 1983, Aivo Nurkse, the head of the department of conjuncture, wrote:

> "Sadly one rarely sees novel and tasteful design in industrial products – that was the collective opinion of saleswomen. What are the artists working for industries doing? Neither they nor the consumers know why the industrial designer here is tied by hands and legs like Prometheus. We also have enterprises that value industrial art and have considered future. They have installed import equipment, developed new technology, are able to order quality raw materials – they should be able to achieve products comparable to foreign examples? At first they do, when the braking mechanisms have not activated yet. The artists are thrilled by the opportunity and create interesting designs, produce samples that are approved by the union-wide art council, even advertised. People would be glad to buy them… And yet the production stands still, because approving the samples by all bureaucratic structures takes more than a year. Once they get approved, the raw material used for samples is no longer available and the design is no longer novel. The reason?"[577]

Once again, one could notice a comparison to Western products. In this article, as well as elsewhere, 'import equipment' was used to signify quality. Nurkse wrote "the industrial designer here" to imply that in the West, the system was different. This

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[577] Ene Vool, "Konjunktuurist, Maitsest, Tööstuskunstist [About Conjuncture, Taste, Industrial Art]," Ibid., 09/09/1983 1983, 7.

particular piece of criticism was slightly different from usual, as it criticised the system itself, instead of placing blame on factories or industrial designers.

Opinions from critics outside of Estonia, however, were quite different. This thesis has already referred to Iurii Gerchuk and his theory of the Baltic States being perceived within the Soviet Union as the bearers of European cultural values.[578] Industrial designers, especially those working for ARS, were always able to find orders from Russia, and Russian factories were generally content with Estonian design.[579] Naturally, this fact cannot be attributed solely to the high reputation of Estonian design, as it also illustrated just how vast and chaotic the Russian design scene was, compared to that of Estonia. Nevertheless, it also showed respect towards the general Estonian industrial design system. Maile Grünberg, a furniture designer for Standard, verified the popularity of Estonian products at different Soviet furniture competitions: the first prizes went to Moscow for ideological reasons, but Standard mostly received a second or third prize.[580]

Therefore, although some designers such as Leonardo Meigas admitted that occasionally certain designs were perceived as too modern by Russian clients,[581] Estonian design was generally admired. Of Western authors, Raymond Hutchings also recognised the drive of the Baltic States, including Estonia, to follow European styles, as well as their generally positive reception:

> "That the Baltic nationalities are slightly more prominent in Soviet design than the relative sizes of their populations would suggest may be deduced from the

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[578] Gerchuk, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the Ussr (1954-64)," 82.
[579] Kuutma.
[580] Grünberg.
[581] Meigas.

prominence of articles produced in the Baltics republics and the quasi-Scandinavian qualities of some of these articles."[582]

As Soviet Estonian design never reached Western Europe in larger quantities, the opinion of Westerners could only be assumed, based on the reactions of the few foreign visitors. Peeter Kuutma recalled how in the early 1980s, a delegation of American artists arrived to Estonia. According to Kuutma: "It was as if they came to darkness, they knew nothing about us."[583] The Estonian Museum of Applied Arts was hosting an exhibition of Tallinn Fashion House showing local fashion illustrations. It should be stressed that as it was an exhibition of illustration, the exhibits were less influenced by the usual problems of scarce materials and the occasionally poor quality of production. Rather, the ideal of Soviet Estonian design was shown. American visitors, who had no previous knowledge of Estonian design, were surprised. Kuutma recalled their words:

> "These things are not possible, you are at the edge of Europe, at the back of everything. France has that style, United Kingdom has that style, you could not have that style. Where could it come from?"[584]

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[582] Hutchings, Soviet Science, Technology, Design : Interaction and Convergence, 156.

[583] Kuutma.

[584] Ibid.

9.1.2 Board game manufactured by Salvo in 1986, pictured with the original cardboard box. Credits: Tartu Toy Museum, digital archive www.mm.ee

Vello Lillemets, a former designer of Salvo, told a curious story which, although dating from a few years after the end of the main period in question in this thesis, illustrated well the subjectivity of different evaluations given to Soviet Estonian design. Around 1990, as Soviet rule was collapsing, representatives of Estonian factories started visiting trade fairs outside the Eastern Bloc in hope of finding new business contacts; Lillemets himself was in a delegation that visited a trade fair in Sweden. An important fact to stress once again is that under Soviet Estonian conditions packaging had had little importance. Due to deficit, products were bought without needing to be advertised or made appealing to customers. Therefore, a typical Soviet Estonian product package was a simple light cardboard box that might have had a logo of the factory and some simple graphic elements printed with a few basic colours, but often was without any decoration. As a small group of Swedish designers noticed that, they were, according to

Lillemets, completely enthralled by what they perceived to be a contemporary sustainable approach to packaging.[585] This story is a good example of how certain aspects of the Soviet design system could be seen in a different light in different systems. In the Soviet context, where Western consumerism was used as a point of reference, the cardboard packaging would have seemed like yet another example of the scarcity prevalent in every field. For a younger and more ecologically aware generation of designers in the West, however, cardboard boxes were a less wasteful way of life.

As demonstrated, the view of Estonians themselves towards local design was a lot more critical than that of foreigners, either from the Eastern Bloc or from the West. There can be several reasons for this attitude, depending on the particular case. Firstly, there was a difference in the point of reference chosen by different schools of thought. Regarding outside criticism, Estonian design was mostly compared to that of other Soviet states, most commonly Russia, as it was placed within the same discourse. However, Estonians themselves used Western design as the ideal. Once again, the question lay in the positioning of Estonia between the two polarised powers of the Cold War. While Estonia was politically and geographically placed within the Soviet system, Estonians themselves were more likely to position themselves in relation to the Western bloc.

At the same time, different criticisms were also a consequence of the censorship of information due to the Iron Curtain, or the 'regime of truth' as Foucault called it.[586] Neither side was able to achieve clear knowledge of the design of the opposite side. Paradoxically, the strict Soviet censorship made Estonians even more critical of the

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[585] Lillemets.
[586] Foucault and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 73.

Soviet system and more positive towards Western design. The information available to the Estonian people mostly concerned high design, and thus people were likely to believe that most Western design was on an equally high level. For example, Maria Liive in her criticism of toys seemed to believe that artistic toys were common in the Western world. The same effect also worked the other way: the information most Westerners received about the Soviet Union, including Soviet Estonia, was often negative. Thus, the actual state of Soviet Estonian industrial design was likely to offer them a positive surprise. The visits of Western tourists to Estonia were, in most cases, carefully orchestrated. They were more likely to encounter high design such as the drawing exhibitions of the Fashion House, rather than the more mediocre products sold in local stores.

In researching the perception of Soviet Estonian industrial design in contemporaneous context, different views emerge, depending on the viewpoint of the spectator. Local critics were usually quite sceptical, highlighting the relative backwardness of Soviet Estonian consumer goods in comparison to their Western counterparts. At the same time, Estonian products were highly valued and sought after elsewhere in the Soviet Union and Western visitors were usually impressed with the level of design they encountered on their visits. While there were several reasons for this variation in opinions, it was mostly caused by different viewpoints. Local critics preferred to compare industrial design to more advanced Western products, while visitors from other Soviet republics and the Western Bloc contrasted it to the Soviet design in general. Thus, Soviet Estonian design positioned itself in the middle, surpassing Soviet production in general, but remaining technologically inferior to Western goods.

9.2 Privatisation and nostalgia in industrial design

For a better assessment of the period in question, the following section analyses the effect that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence had on Estonian design economy, through contemporary perceptions. To fully explain the true dynamics of privatisation on Estonian industry, one would require a whole thesis on that subject. The intention of this section is to explain the situation from the point of view of industrial designers, as an epilogue to the era in question. Additionally, it also finishes the thesis by providing the contemporary attitudes of the interviewees for a better understanding of the views expressed throughout this research.

Piotrowski has written on the subject of post-communism:

> "[…] The fulfilment of an utopia is synonymous with the loss of an external reference point necessary for the description of reality. In order to actually define, describe and consider that reality, we must have such an external anchor; in order to be understood, a place must be rendered relative through a reference to a non-place, a utopia, or it risks becoming ungraspable."[587]

In this passage lies one of the reasons for post-socialist problems, and criticism towards politics. During the Soviet era, instead of the socialist utopia that had been prescribed by the state, people chose the West's 'existing utopia' as their goal. This theory is well illustrated by the previous section, where Estonian design was compared against Western design, mostly using the latter as an ideal. One could even claim that emulating Western styles was a method for reaching this utopia. In political terms, the existence of capitalism was certainly one of the most important preconditions for utopia. However, once the Soviet Union collapsed and the long-awaited capitalism finally arrived, it lost its idealised utopian status, materialising as just an existing reality. Therefore, as

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[587] Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989, 437.

Piotrowski wrote, utopia was fulfilled and thus the external reference point was lost. As the old utopia was not only lost, but also stripped of its previous importance, post-socialist reality became 'ungraspable' for many people. In the context of this thesis, Piotrowski's theory of lost utopia could be applied to industrial designers who were forced to reorient their ideas.

In connection to post-socialism, Piotrowski raised another interesting question: is post-socialist culture political or apolitical? In his words:

> "[…] If official art, or more precisely Socialist Realism, which endured in many countries of the region for a long time, was perceived as political propaganda, even when it did not carry explicit political messages, then the search for artistic autonomy and rejection of 'political engagement', or more precisely of political propaganda, could not be apolitical."[588]

As his field of interest was visual art, the problems seem to differ at first glance. However, comparing the stylistic limitations set to artists by Socialist Realism to the limitations set to designers by the Soviet design system, there were parallels. Firstly, the question of geographical and ideological context presented a more direct analogy between Estonian post-socialist industrial design and Piotrowski's theory on post-socialist art. If the context of socialist ideology and the presence of the Soviet system were enough to add a dimension of Socialist Realism even to works lacking a direct political message, the same applied to industrial design as well. The post-socialist attempt to reinvent virtually all domains was, in its seeming rejection of previous politics, also political in nature.

Secondly, just as artists had to search for artistic autonomy, or, in other words, reinvent the material practices connected to art, industrial designers also had to develop new

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[588] Piotr Piotrowski, Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe (London: Reaktion, 2012), 437.

material practices fitting to the new post-socialist context. In the history of the industrial design profession in Estonia, this disruption was unprecedented: half a century earlier, at the instigation of Soviet power, there were very few designers working for industry. During the gradual professionalization of industrial design since the late 1960s, their material practices had mostly been prescribed by the socialist design economy. The arrival of capitalism and the disappearance of industry forced most designers to radically alter their habits.

This reorientation should not always be seen as a violent process forced by the changing political climate. In many cases, especially concerning former designers of ARS, designers themselves instigated the change. As the designers of ARS were the equivalent of Western freelance designers with some added control mechanisms, reorientation did not pose any significant difficulties. As told by Leonardo Meigas:

> "The 'fun' ended as soon as those first rays of freedom started shining here, then it was possible to deal with the client directly. A private client comes, says that they want that kind of a thing, I do not have to show that thing to any kind of an art council, I can deal with them directly. Capitalism began."[589]

There were also long-term projects initiated by designers that succeeded quite well; one example was MaDis, a design bureau created within ARS by Matti Õunapuu at the end of the 1980s, as a joint project with the Finnish. As Õunapuu recalled:

> "Suddenly, everything was possible when making something. However, the problems that arose were the kinds that we were not aware of before. Such as consumer semantics or how the buyer sees that thing. We had no idea of that thing before. It was a big breaking point back then, precisely for product designers."[590]

Factory designers, however, were in a worse position. During the interviews conducted for this research, the time immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union came up

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[589] Meigas.
[590] Õunapuu.

over and over again as the sad epilogue to the period in question in this thesis. It was not a question of nostalgia on the interviewees' side, but rather a shock brought on by sudden change. As demonstrated in section 6.2, there were very few factories left in Estonia and even fewer of them needed the creative output of industrial designers. In some ways, the industry was in a better state during the Soviet period. For example, Peeter Kuutma mentioned that at the time of our interview, in 2013, there was no jacquard loom in Estonia, which had previously existed during the Soviet period in the textile department of the Art Products Factory.[591] Thus, the industrial designers interviewed often felt that the industry had been mismanaged in the early 1990s.

This conception was strengthened by the general process of privatisation, which had a strong effect on the profession of factory design. As put by Boris Groys in his book on post-socialist art economy, *Art Power*:

> "The process of de-Communisation of the formerly Communist Eastern European countries may thus be seen as a drama of privatization that naturally played out beyond the usual conventions of civilization. It is well known that this drama kindled many passions and produced many victims. Human nature, which had previously been suppressed, manifested itself as raw violence in the struggle over the private acquisition of collective assets."[592]

Thus, Groys's view on privatisation was rather pessimistic, as he perceived the process to be traumatic and violent. 'The private acquisition of collective assets' was rarely a long-term investment into making the industry viable in the future. Most designers interviewed in this research had a similar point of view and tended to blame local management for the inability to preserve industry. As Peeter Kuutma stated:

> "The entire system collapsed because there were no leaders. Skilled workers, specialists, there was everything, technology was there, but there were no leaders, no business managers, who would have been able to market it. [...] Revolution

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[591] Kuutma.

[592] Boris Groys, Art Power (London: MIT Press, 2008), 166.

can come overnight, but not business specialists. They have to be raised, generation-by-generation. Like the English lawn, if you cut it in a certain manner for two hundred years, you will achieve it."[593]

Saima Priks expressed the same views:

"Estonian business managers had no sense to preserve what was ours and valuable, everything was sold to the foreigners. […] Estonian industry was just left to decay, nobody was interested in preserving it."[594]

Based on the research conducted for this thesis, local management did not seem keen to reorient to new markets or products. Many factories were sold to foreign investors. For example, the glass factory Tarbeklaas was sold to Swedish investors.[595] Salvo was sold to the Italian company HTM Sport, which later moved production to the Czech Republic.[596] Other factories retained their local management, but took advantage of the low production costs in Estonia in the immediate post-Soviet era and started acting as subcontract factories for Western companies. For example, the Swedish low-cost fashion chain H&M used to briefly subcontract their production to the textile company Marat.[597] Acting purely as subcontract factories for low-cost companies was not a viable strategy in the long run, as it relied solely on Estonia maintaining a low living standard. Saima Priks, a former designer at Marat, blamed the greed and short-sightedness of the factory management: "They just wanted to quickly pocket the money, they did not want to work hard anymore."[598]

As the accounts of interviewees in this section and throughout the thesis demonstrate, their opinion on the Soviet industrial system in general was indifferent and, in some

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[593] Kuutma.

[594] Priks.

[595] Raun.

[596] Sau.

[597] Priks.

[598] Priks.

aspects, even leaned towards nostalgia. Significantly, most of the positive nostalgia was directed towards certain aspects of the system itself instead of the products. It would be too simplistic to explain this attitude just through the trauma of privatisation, although it occasionally played a minor role. The idea of post-Soviet nostalgia as a sign of disappointment in capitalism has been often expressed amongst scholars. For example, Petra Rethmann in her essay on post-Soviet nostalgia advocated a claim made by Debbora Battaglia in 1997:

> "Nostalgia as a historical practice, she says, on the one hand enables its users to appropriate and assert feelings toward their own history and, on the other hand, allows them to express their detachment from a disempowering, harsh present."[599]

However, this thesis suggests that theories of nostalgia as an escapist practice are often applied too hastily in the post-Soviet context. This claim is supported by Serguei Oushakine's aptly named article "We're nostalgic, but we're not crazy," which defined nostalgia as a less oppositional process:

> "Inspired by glasnost, the initial desire to draw a sharp line between the recent Soviet past and the non-Soviet present gradually exhausted itself by mid 1990s. Attempts to clearly differentiate 'victims' and 'villains' of the Soviet regime were increasingly replaced by conscious efforts to restore the lost feeling of collective belonging and to re-establish cultural connections with the past that would be neither horrifying nor humiliating."[600]

Most of the interviewees in this research also stated a clear refusal of this dualistic victim-villain view, therefore proving the validity of Oushakine's argument amongst Estonian industrial designers.[601] However, Oushakine's article focused primarily on visual artists and their use of socialist symbols in the 21st century. Thus, the findings of this research differed in some aspects, while agreeing on the subject of post-socialist

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[599] Petra Rethmann, "Chto Delat'? Ethnography in the Post-Soviet Cultural Context," American Anthropologist 99, no. 4 (1997): 772.

[600] Serguei Alex Oushakine, ""We're Nostalgic but We're Not Crazy": Retrofitting the Past in Russia," Russian Review 66, no. 3 (2007): 452.

[601] More on this subject in chapters 5 and 7.

nostalgia in general. As this thesis has proven, the key elements of socialist design as an ideological phenomenon were not located in the form of objects, but rather in the material practices and the system of production. Therefore, the slightly nostalgic attitude of interviewees towards certain aspects of the factory system was similar to the nostalgia felt by visual artists towards the Socialist Realist form as the key definer of Soviet art. Like in the case of the artists Oushakine referred to, this re-evaluation should not be mistaken for a desire to rekindle the Soviet past, but rather be seen as a mechanism of acceptance.

While the view of industrial designers should not be regarded as objectively accurate, its analysis provides an interesting aftermath to a specific period within the profession. The collapse of the Soviet Union completely transformed the Estonian economy, mass production and industrial design. Capitalism required a new set of skills, which most inhabitants of the former Soviet Bloc did not possess. An idolisation of Western culture combined with poor economic decisions led to the demise of many Estonian factories. For industrial designers, there was the additional shock of having to develop new material practices fitting to the new post-socialist context. Thus, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc proved a disruption for a large part of Soviet Estonian industrial design.

9.3 The current state of Estonian design

The previous section researched the emergence of post-socialist nostalgia amongst industrial designers during the process of privatisation. The last part of this thesis

focuses on the present Estonian design economy in order to understand this nostalgia in the current context. Additionally, this section introduces various strategies for the future development of Estonian design. Although over two decades have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it still has a significant effect on the current politics and culture of Eastern Europe, either as a stigma still associated with a large part of the region or as impact on the economy. Among the affected fields, the design economy is no exception. Even though Estonia is a member of the European Union and its economy has improved significantly, industrial design as a discipline is still in transition.

Guy Julier has written on the subject of transitional countries, most notably Poland and Hungary, that often "localised forms of design- entrepreneurialism have emerged from various forms of the 'second economy' in transitional countries."[602] In Estonia, these types of experiments did not manage to achieve wider success in the 1990s. In comparison to Hungary and Poland, there may have been several reasons for this failure. Firstly, the geographical position, as Estonia is located further from the West and thus was less likely to attract tourists. Secondly, Estonia was economically less advantaged during the collapse of the Soviet Union than Central European socialist states. Thirdly, because of Estonia's smaller size, the possible local market was smaller. Although, as proved in this thesis, the Estonian economy was in a better state during perestroika than that of many other Soviet states, it still was not as advanced as Central European economies. These differences also explain the current differences between the design economies in Estonia and Central Europe.

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[602] Julier, "Re-Drawing the Geography of European Design: The Case of Transitional Countries."

The last mass survey on the role of design within Estonian enterprises was conducted in 2006 by the Design Innovation Centre at the Estonian Academy of Arts. The results demonstrated the poor state of Estonian design in general, as well as the unwillingness of different enterprises to employ designers. Four different fields of production were included: medical technology, electronics, machine industry and household objects. None of the enterprises had a separate design department and only 7% employed designers. 5% of the companies had a consulting designer. 11% of the enterprises had a contract with a design or advertising agency and a further 31% used the services of various designers when they saw a specific need. 43% of the enterprises did not use any professional design services.[603] Enterprise Estonia conducted a survey amongst a hundred Estonian furniture manufacturers in 2009. According to the study, two thirds of the companies managed their own product development, half occasionally employed product designers in the process, but only 14% employed a professional industrial designer. In many cases, the professional designer still had additional tasks within the enterprise.[604]

We have a separate design department	0%
Our organisation employs professional designers	7%
Our organisation has an advising design consultant	5%
Design agency or advertising bureau is responsible for design	11%
We use different designers according to our needs	31%
We manage without designers	43%

9.3.1 The use of professional designers in Estonian companies and organisations, according to a study conducted by the Design Innovation Centre in Estonian Academy of Arts in 2006.

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[603] "Disainivaldkonna Riiklik Tegevusplaan [National Action Plan for Design]," https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MsPZ0KHWxExB2w-xc9PiPmdvYRu29QzMnxF0Vy8jQ90/edit?pli=1.
[604] Ibid.

While there are no more recent studies, it would be naïve to assume that the situation would have changed abruptly during the last few years. The same problems are still highlighted in recent texts on the Estonian design economy. On 30 January 2015, the newspaper *Sirp*, successor of the legendary *Sirp ja Vasar*, published an article by Ott Pärna, an entrepreneur and investor. In Pärna's description, the situation within the industry had not changed significantly in the last decade.[605] In his words:

> "Agencies are employed to design logos and brand identity, industrial enterprises often commission designs for packaging and brands, but not complete solutions. Involving designers in product development is an exception amongst Estonian companies. They are the most involved in textile industry, where Baltika is clearly a leader. 18 designers work in approximately 500 furniture companies, or in other words only five per cent have hired a designer. In furniture industry there are only a few examples of enterprises that have systematically involved designers: Kitman Thulema, Standard, Borg, Softrend and Suwem."[606]

Therefore, in recent years a few rare examples of successful design management have emerged, to which one might add Mang, a renowned furniture company owned by interior designer Tiina Mang. However, Pärna proved that on a wider scale, design still has relatively little influence on Estonian industry and economy.[607] Pärna recognised the improvement in the general awareness of design, as well as the increasing visibility of the subject in the wider community. During the last decade, several recent institutions have been founded to improve the debate surrounding the discipline. The Estonian Design Centre and Estonian Centre of Architecture host various local and international events for professional and wider audiences. Estonian Design House promotes local design in Estonia and abroad. Annually, the festival Design Night is organised in Tallinn and a selected product designer receives the *Bruno* award, named after the

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[605] Ott Pärna, "Disaini Ja Arhitektuuri Arenguvedur [Development of Design and Architecture]," Sirp, 30/01/2015.
[606] Ibid.
[607] Ibid.

founder of the industrial art department at the Estonian Art Academy. Nevertheless, the connection between those organisations and the industry remains weak.

Numerous design students are educated every year in higher education institutions. In 2007–2010, 1038 design students, including graphic, product and interior design, graduated from nine different institutions. Of them, the most prolific were Estonian Academy of Arts with 286 graduates and a private university called Euroacademy with 288 graduates. 184 students graduated from vocational higher education institutions.[608] Naturally, the focus of design education and the intended outcomes vary largely between institutions. However, as the surveys quoted above demonstrate, few of these students become involved with industrial design or industry in general.

Thus, almost half a century later, the Estonian design scene is comparable to the situation in the 1970s. There are a large number of design students being educated, but the amount of designers involved in mass production is small. Often, other employees execute designs as an additional task. However, during the Soviet period the Art Products Factory managed to achieve a high standard of design as well as success and a high reputation. Even in 2011, the design agencies working in Estonia were few and small. There were only six design offices with over four to six employees, of which three enterprises specialised on product design and the rest on brand design. The other agencies only employed one or two designers.[609] Thus, not only do companies themselves fail to employ industrial designers, there is also a lack of professional design agencies.

[608] "Disainivaldkonna Riiklik Tegevusplaan [National Action Plan for Design]."
[609] Ibid.

Nevertheless, while this thesis has concentrated on factory production within a rigid and predetermined Soviet design economy, current global trends are pushing designers towards more ambiguous material practices. Current Estonian design culture increasingly includes new interdisciplinary projects. Amongst these, new technological start-up companies are particularly interesting. These new practices, whether digital, small-scale or grass-root, represent a 'gradual fragmentation of design practices,' to borrow terminology from Guy Julier.[610] Interestingly, their relative importance has augmented, not during the fast economic growth, but during the 'credit crunch'. As demonstrated above, some new design institutions have also been founded during the crisis. However, this kind of trend is not unique in the global context.

To quote Julier:

> "Indeed, I would suggest that innovations in design processes and thinking more often take place in recessionary contexts than in economic booms. Design business expands in periods of economic growth, but doesn't necessarily change its core way of working. By contrast, in periods of economic stagnation or contraction, designers have to find new ways of carrying on in order to ensure their commercial and creative survival."[611]

Therefore, in the contemporary context as well as in the setting of privatisation described in the last section, one might be tempted to define the process of re-evaluation as post-socialist nostalgia. However, Late Socialist design exhibitions and the work of industrial designers demonstrate a generally high level of design as a creative process. Subsequently, the majority of designers interviewed within this research held a

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[610] Guy Julier, "Nothing Special? Design Skills for the 21st Century," in Festival de la Imagen (Manizalez, Colombia 2012).
[611] Ibid.

generally high opinion of Late Socialist design, both their own creations and those of their peers – even if the low production quality of many Estonian factories received criticism. Furthermore, while interviewees tended to criticise the extent of bureaucracy involved, several of them found aspects of the former system useful.[612] Similar praise has been offered elsewhere throughout the former soviet Bloc as well. Dmitry Azrikan wrote in 1999: "We really need to create something which will allow us to change the rules. We should learn from VNIITE."[613] He referred to the idealistic beginning of Soviet design, which was soon demolished by the over-complicated bureaucracy. However, not all aspects of the Soviet Estonian design economy should be dismissed.

As already mentioned, the post-soviet nostalgia concerning industrial design is mostly focused on the design system and its various practices. Amongst various positive criticisms of the Soviet design economy two aspects have been singled out most frequently. Firstly, some specialists have considered adopting certain details of the design system and its arrangement to the new capitalist framework. In 2008, Raimo Sau proposed that the Estonian government follow the Scandinavian example and develop a clearly defined design politics. Sau adopted a radical approach, advocating the idea of a state-funded design agency with a workshop and exhibition space.[614] His propositions were influenced by the practices of Art Products Factory, where he himself was briefly employed.

Others have focused their strategies of re-evaluating the importance of public debates and interests, as well as the generally high intellectual charge within the design

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[612] Grünberg.

[613] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 38.

[614] Raimo Sau, "Designed in Estonia," Eesti Päevaleht, 02/12/2008.

disciplines. Matti Õunapuu emphasised the importance of public debates on the subject of industrial design. He admitted that public debates and congresses on the subject of Soviet and Estonian industrial design encouraged critical thinking, even if the results did not trickle down to the economically retarded Soviet mass production.[615] Heie Treier, an Estonian art historian, has voiced a similar idea. In her words:

> "There is a question: how was it possible to create this progressive little island in the faculties of design and architecture at the Estonian Art Institute? The paradox is that it was in these departments that artists should have been working predominantly with form, but in reality they were busy reading, conceptualising and verbalising modern theory."[616]

Therefore, while there are different viewpoints on the importance of state control within the success of the design economy, the quality of Soviet Estonian design is often attributed to the theoretical framework surrounding it. One can hope that the emerging intellectual discourse would help to create and develop new globally viable design practices.

In 2012, a development plan for Estonian design, the first post-Soviet attempt of a defined state politics, was finally launched. It did not attempt to reassess or rethink the Soviet period, but instead avoided the subject. Therefore, although the process of re-evaluating Soviet Estonia has already begun in the public discourse, it still has not quite reached the wider political context. The plan itself lacked the radical approach favoured by Raimo Sau, instead regarding the role of a state in design politics as that of an educator of enterprises, one that should raise the general awareness of the benefits of

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[615] Õunapuu.

[616] Heie Treier, "Sublime and Kitsch," in Lost Eighties: Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art in 1980s, ed. Sirje Helme (Tallinn: Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2010), 47.

industrial design.[617] However, the outcomes of the newly established design politics remain to be seen.

While many former Socialist countries, mostly those located in Central Europe, managed to save and even improve their mass production after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonian industrial design is sadly still in a poor state. In spite of numerous design students being educated at several higher education institutions, the involvement of industrial designers in mass production remains weak. There are many interesting projects, but most of them are located outside mass production. The popular tendency of re-assessing the Soviet period has also caused certain specialists to consider the possibility of adopting certain aspects of the Socialist design system for contemporary politics. Two different strategies are favoured: increasing debate within society, and more radically, the direct economic involvement of the Estonian state. In 2012, a new design development plan stressing the importance of public debate was finally passed. In the next coming years, its success or failure should reveal itself.

Conclusions

The general opinions of Soviet Estonian industrial design, as viewed by consumers and specialists, were divergent. The possible audience of Soviet Estonian industrial design included foreigners, either from the Eastern Bloc or from the West, and Estonians themselves. As the context of these groups and their previous knowledge of the subject varied, Estonian industrial design received diverse feedback depending on the viewpoint

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[617] "Disainivaldkonna Riiklik Tegevusplaan [National Action Plan for Design]."

and preconceptions of the spectator. As most Estonians were fairly familiar with Western design, a common comparison in local Estonian media was made between Western and Estonian objects. Thus, as local production quality was usually surpassed by capitalist standards, critique was often negative. Foreign visitors were likely to expect a similarly low standard to the rest of the Soviet states and a stylistic backwardness. Thus, as Estonian industrial design was more similar to Western examples than the Soviet average, the reviews of foreign tourists were often favourable.

However, with the arrival of capitalism began a process of re-evaluating the Soviet system and the industrial design of the period, often labelled post-socialist nostalgia. Certain scholars have explained these tendencies with a longing towards the socialist past, caused by the harsh conditions of early capitalism. Both in Estonia and other parts of the former Soviet Bloc, designers and factories had to accustom to new markets and practices. Many factories did not survive the reorganisation and went bankrupt. Some were sold to foreign investors or started subcontracting to Western factories. Most of these practices did not prove to be sustainable and thus Estonia still lacks mass production on a larger scale. Instead, economic changes have demanded a reinvention of the profession of design. This research, however, proposes that the nostalgic tendencies in industrial design are a sign of a larger process of re-evaluation within the post-socialist context, an attempt to make peace with history.

10. Conclusions

In the initial objectives of this thesis, there were four research questions, of which three referred to a specific Soviet Estonian context. Firstly, this thesis aimed to position Soviet Estonian industrial designers within the Late Socialist design economy. Secondly, the research aimed to define the relationship between Soviet power and Estonian industrial design. The third objective was to identify the different ideologies influencing Soviet Estonian industrial design. The last research question, using Estonia as a case study, was directed towards the general Soviet context: aiming to identify the qualities of 'Socialist design' in the post-Thaw period. This final chapter summarises the conclusions of the research, dividing them into three categories of output: the findings that concerned Soviet Estonia in particular, the sources studied during the fieldwork, and the conceptual framework relevant to the wider discipline of design history.

10.1 Estonia

By concentrating on Estonia rather than the Soviet Union as a whole, this thesis leaves the traditional russocentric point of view, providing more focused analysis to a specific Soviet state. This shift in emphasis is necessary to better understand the power structures and, through them, culture in general – both in the historic and present tense. Regardless of the time that has passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the history of the region still has immense impact in contemporary politics. Study into the organisation of mass production as an important part of economics offers valuable

information into a specific field that involves both state apparatuses and the wider society. One of the important contributions to both Estonian design history, as well as the general history of Soviet design, is composing a visual map of Soviet Estonian factory design with an emphasis on bureaucratic institutions.[618] While the scheme does not cover all of the intricate details of Soviet design politics, it broadly sketches out the basics of the system, thus providing a foundation for the field in former Soviet republics.

This thesis also offers a case study of the formation of industrial design as a discipline in Soviet Estonia. Due to political and economical problems after the Second World War, it was not until in the 1960s that industrial design emerged in Estonia. Thus, during Late Socialism industrial designers were still in a process of defining the material practices of their work, including education and exhibitions. The main problem for professionalization was an uncertainty about the Soviet ideology of industrial design, a problem that stemmed from the absence of a clearly defined Soviet design ideology. As the research proves, a certain type of Soviet design ideology can be found. Due to the lack of visual characteristics, it is more difficult to define within design than in other forms of culture. Instead, it is rather linked to aspects of production than to products themselves. According to this thesis, Soviet design ideology is located within the general ideologically-charged context, dependency on the state, the integration of artists within the Socialist factory environment and the location within the system of control.

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[618] This scheme is located in chapter 4.3.

The role of industrial designers in Soviet Estonia was complex, as different contexts prescribed different practices. Factory designers were bound by economic and technical limitations. Although the industrial art department was founded in 1967 at the Estonian State Art Institute, its graduates often had problems finding professional work. Factories often lacked motivation to hire designers. As factory boards often saw no need to improve the aesthetic appearance of their products, designs were often made by engineers and constructors who were more familiar with production processes. Designers assigned to work in factories often ended up painting propagandistic banners. At the same time, other designers had quite good working conditions, but those factories were rare. By the 1980s, the design studio of Art Products Factory started executing designs for factories, essentially creating the Soviet counterpart for freelance design. The working conditions of designers at the design studios were better than those of factory designers, as they earned more money and were not subjected to factory rules. However, they were still subjected to strict bureaucratic control.

Meanwhile, the curriculum of the department of industrial art was stressing the role of the designer as creator. The teaching methods were influenced by the Bauhaus, as in many Western universities. In the 1980s, more attention was given to design strategies and the role of liberal arts was reduced, but connections to industry remained weak. Although all students were sent to a factory to gain work experience, they mostly saw it as a boring obligation. The idea of the industrial designer as an artist was also visible in the exhibition economy: there, designers had virtually limitless possibilities, both financially and technically. The state funded both the production of exhibits and the organisation. As exhibits had a higher quality than factory products, virtually all objects were sold, providing extra income for designers. Funding permitted the organisation of

several experimental design exhibitions, most notably the *Ruum ja Vorm [Space and Form]* series, consisting of four exhibitions in 1969, 1972, 1976 and 1984. These exhibitions were popular and widely visited by the general public, but their connection to mass production was weak.

During Late Socialism, the role of Soviet ideology had been reduced to mere ritual. Instead of being divided between ideological polarities, most people were just trying to survive the Soviet system any way they could. As Susan Gal and Gail Kligman have stated: "Rather than any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public', there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories."[619] In that sense, designers were similar to the rest of the general public. Ideologically, Soviet Estonian designers neither conformed to nor rebelled against Soviet power. As they were active in the ideologically charged process of creating industrial products, they could not rebel actively and openly. Many designers were working on higher positions, belonged to the Art Councils or were otherwise active in cultural life, and thus had to participate in politics. At the same time, industrial designers were also involved in various second economy practice, either voluntarily or not. The most common of those practices was fulfilling private commissions. Also, the acquisition of Western design objects or information often required illegal bartering.

Although Estonia belonged to the Soviet Union and was thus behind the iron curtain, information about Western life and industrial goods was gradually becoming more available during Late Socialism. Many people were able to watch Finnish television and the amount of tourists was increasing. Despite Moscow holding administrative power,

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[619] Gal and Kligman, The Politics of Gender after Socialism : A Comparative-Historical Essay, 51.

the West was still seen as a cultural centre to aspire towards. This attitude could be seen as a self-colonisation, as people willingly adopted Western trends and ideas, making it almost equal to the Soviet colonisation, albeit in a different way. Thus, while Soviet control was exercised through state apparatuses, the Western world held a certain virtual power in Estonia as well.

The appearance of Soviet industrial design was mostly determined by VNIITE, the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics, founded in 1962. There was no official cell of VNIITE in Estonia, although the Industrial Art Committee, founded in 1962, was subordinate to VNIITE. However, its role was mainly to distribute information and connect industrial designers. As Dmitry Azrikan claimed, the close connections that leading founding figures of VNIITE had to Western design were a determining factor in the visual similarities between Soviet and Western products.[620] The distribution of scientific-technological information in all parts of the Soviet Union, organised by the State Committee for Science and Technology of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, was also centralised under Moscow's orders. Factories had specific libraries intended for employees. Usually, they contained journals and books from the Soviet Union; however, there were often some publications from Poland, Hungary and East Germany, and some specialist materials from capitalist countries. Since 1974, the official library at the Institute of Engineering, Technology and Design included some Western magazines.

Each design that received approval from the factory board had to pass by the Art Council of the Ministry of Local Industry, which was comprised of specialists, artists,

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[620] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?."

and representatives of commercial organisations; the meetings were normally held every month.[621] While some representatives from the Communist Party were always involved, the Art Council's main function was not ideological control, but verification that designs were aesthetically on a good level.[622] As the Art Council did not control ideological characteristics, Soviet Estonian industrial designers were mainly bound by economic and technical limitations, not stylistic. Thus, they were free to follow Western trends, thereby acting as agents of the symbolic Western power.

In the Soviet design system, while the government imposed control over industrial design in different ways, different bureaucratic institutions often failed to cooperate properly. This allowed more independence for local designers, but also hindered the evolution of Soviet industrial design. The problem of the Soviet design system was actually not high centralisation, but inefficient structure. In this sense, the conclusions drawn from the case study of Estonia are applicable to the whole Soviet Union, as the characteristics and problems of design system were similar.

This thesis identifies three different factors shaping the practices and designs of Soviet Estonian industrial designers: Sovietism, Western styles and national imagery. Although occasionally overlapping and often identifiable mostly because of context, they are still different in their origins and reasoning. Sovietism as a term signifies the ways Soviet power exercised control over industrial design. As Soviet design ideology lacked a clearly definable visual style, Sovietist influences manifested the material practices of

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[621] Tartlan and Konts, "Ensv Kohaliku Tööstuse Ministeeriumi Kunstinõukogu Ja Ettevõtete Kunstnike Tööst [About the Work of the Art Council of the Ministry of Local Industry of Estonian Ssr and the Artists of Enterprises]," 23.
[622] Priks.

design. Generally, within the Soviet design ideology, design was just a tool used for the ultimate goal, never the objective itself. Soviet design ideologies were mostly concerned with problems of production, not stylistics. The ideal Soviet design relied on technical laws and rational calculations and was mostly concerned with functionality, ergonomic parameters, exploitation, maintenance and repair. However, although not always clearly definable in the appearance of products, Sovietism constituted an influence on the production and practices relating to industrial design.

Western influences manifested in the visual appearance of objects. The popularity of Western stylistics was partially caused by the general glorification of Western culture. However, following Western trends was not an act of rebellion, but rather an attempt to follow global design trends. According to Piotr Piotrowski, a key element in defining Eastern European artistic practices was following Western styles, seen as universal values.[623] That Western influences manifested in industrial design was not an act of copying the West, but rather a way of demonstrating knowledge of international design trends. Due to the absence of a clearly defined Socialist design style, adopting Western stylistics was filling a void in design.

Symbols corresponding to ideas of Estonian national identity were also popular, even if critics often labelled them kitsch. Their use was propagated by the Soviet power, as encouraging national tendencies was a way of justifying Soviet rule to the outside world. Different factories had national souvenirs and certain traditional handicraft practices were integrated with the Soviet factory culture, resulting in an interesting

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[623] Piotrowski. Art and democracy in post-Communist Europe. London: Reaktion Books 2012. 74

borderline experiment. The use of national symbols in Soviet Estonian design had two aims: to justify the Soviet power and to reconnect with pre-Soviet roots.

10.2 Sources

An important contribution this thesis made to local and global design history is the collection and systematisation of material concerning Soviet Estonian factory design. As relatively little time has passed since the period in question, the variety of both primary and secondary sources is rich, but hectic. Although several studies have been published in recent years, the amount of uncharted domains within Soviet Estonian design history is still large and thus a significant number of sources have not yet been studied. While previously the problems of consumption have been researched by authors such as David Crowley or Victor Buchli, this thesis maps the material concerning designers working in factory conditions, a previously largely unstudied subject. Primary sources include interviews, written archival materials and objects themselves, whereas secondary research ranges from newspaper articles and magazines to books and journals.

One of the strengths of the timing of this thesis was the possibility to locate people formerly connected to Soviet Estonian factory design and conduct interviews. Most were former factory designers as the largest interest group. Several interviewees were also connected to state apparatuses. The use of oral history for this research was invaluable for various reasons. Firstly, material practices of industrial designers are a subject best learned from first-hand sources in any context, not just the former Socialist

Bloc. Also, details regarding ideology and power within industrial design were to a large part omitted from the official materials due to censorship. Within the Soviet context, even the bureaucracy was not sufficiently mapped in written sources, and thus charting the system also required verification from oral sources.

While oral history provides material often not found in written sources, facts such as dates and names had to be verified. For this purpose, this thesis employed archival research. As the remaining files have been scattered around different places, most of the larger archives in Estonia were consulted: the Estonian State Archives, Tallinn City Archives, and archives of the Estonian Museum of Design and Applied Arts, National Library of Estonia and Tallinn City Museum. Most of the documents this research refers to are bureaucratic in nature and thus offer simple facts instead of more complex details into the functioning of the system; nevertheless, there are also some letters, chronicles and statutes that include detailed accounts of various aspects of the system. Graphic materials such as detailed schemes of work process helped in mapping the general design system. Importantly, as not all products are accessible as objects, photographs and promotional pamphlets were a substantial part of research. For that purpose, the archive of the Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design were especially beneficial.

As industrial design involves several different disciplines, from art to economy, this research uses various secondary sources. A strength of the Soviet Estonian cultural landscape was the existence of many interesting periodicals. The weekly newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* tackled the subjects of culture, politics and society and managed to win public recognition and popularity, while still following the rules of censorship. Especially in the late 1970s the newspaper published various interesting texts and

debates on the role of design, often even touching the subject of design ideology. Although art magazines such as *Kunst* and *Kunst ja Kodu* mostly treated applied arts and craft, since the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s they also included some materials on the latest developments in design paradigms. From a different field, the journals of the Ministry of Local Industry provide beneficial information from an economic point of view, concentrating on mass production. As they were intended to specialists rather than the wider public, the publications often covered topics omitted from more popular periodicals. The balance between secondary sources from the disciplines of culture and economy helps this thesis to sufficiently unite the different aspects and roles of design within Soviet Estonian society and to complement the findings gathered from primary research with context.

10.3 Conceptual framework

In terms of conceptual framework, the main contribution this thesis makes to global design history is the analysis of Soviet design ideology from a new angle. It situates industrial designers within the system, balancing their role between creator and agent of the system. This strategy helped to arrive at a more detailed and multifaceted view of design ideology in a totalitarian system. While this thesis focuses on the Estonian context, the categories and framework could be employed to research most of the Western areas within the former Socialist Bloc. The three ideological influences defined in this research are applicable to most of the former Soviet Union and other Socialist countries. In Eastern areas, religious influences coming from Islamic heritage and geographical proximity to China as another cultural centre must be considered as well. However, the other ideologies identified by this research are still valid.

By using Estonia as a case study, this thesis defines the characteristics of a specific Soviet industrial design ideology. Soviet factory design often followed the same trends as Western design, although it was a few years behind and tended to be technologically inferior. It is important to stress that in the Soviet context, Socialist ideas were hidden in the context and practices surrounding design, rather than in the actual style of design. Design was intended as a tool for conveying a message.[624] Socialism was never supposed to negate its capitalist past, but rather to take everything valuable from that experience and build a new system on that foundation. The conflicts between socialism and capitalism were not based on technological grounds, but social. Adopting Western design stylistics was merely an example of the same tendencies.

In spite of the various control mechanisms, the Soviet system lacked a specific centralised organ in charge of industrial design and products were judged mostly on economic or technological grounds. Therefore, designers had some artistic freedom and were able to follow modern traditions. There were two reasons for accepting modernism in Soviet ideology: firstly, because modern objects were easy to produce in factory conditions, and secondly, because there was never a clear definition of Soviet form. Design produced in the Soviet Union was compatible with the official power because of the surrounding ideology. Industrial design depended on the state and was located within the general system, being both the agent and the subject of control. Last but not least, the direct production environment of industrial design, the factory, was the most ideologically charged context in the socialist environment.

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[624] Azrikan, "Vniite, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?," 48.

This thesis argues that the defining socialist factors of Soviet design ideology are:

The general ideologically charged context

Dependency on the state

The integration of artists within the socialist factory environment and their participation in the factory as "an organiser of the socialist consciousness"

Location within the system of control

However, the nature of Soviet design ideology remained unclear, as these factors were not enough to form a clear doctrine. This problem was caused by several different factors: the complex status of design within the Soviet society, the lack of a consensus between different ideologies and, most importantly, the lack of a definite visually distinguishable aesthetic style. Designers benefitted from this problem, as it allowed less control and more artistic freedom. Most restrictions were technological and economical, leaving design aesthetics to evolve on their own. The context and environment ideologised the industrial design, regardless of its form.

10.4 Further research

This research analysed the ideological influences in Soviet Estonian industrial design, but the general subjects of Soviet design ideology and design economy during Late Socialism, especially from a peripheral point of view, are still relatively sparsely researched. Additionally, this thesis was limited to the production of everyday household objects, as they offer designers more freedom than, for example, heavy machinery, whereas the analysis of influences, control and economic possibilities would presumably be different in other fields of production. While the periods of the Thaw and perestroika have received more attention from design historians and scholars in general,

Late Socialism has remained a less popular subject and especially the design economy of the period in question has not been studied extensively. Thus, there are several possible ways to expand on this research either by adding new fields or new areas to the study.

While this thesis mapped the economy of industrial design within Soviet Estonia, the general Soviet design system in its details of control apparatuses was only studied briefly. Although some authors, including Raymond Hutchings, have provided an initial schematic description, the complexities of interrelations between Moscow as the administrative centre and peripheries have still remained unstudied. This project could be undertaken in two different ways with different emphases. Firstly, archives and data would be more easily manageable by choosing one exemplary peripheral state, either Estonia or a different one, and researching its relations to Moscow in depth. Secondly, if the research aimed to additionally identify the differences between states themselves, it would also be possible to either choose two or three geographically and culturally diverse states and analyse their relationship to Moscow or to perform a less extensive study of all Soviet states in their connections to general Soviet design apparatuses. While the second approach would risk being less detailed in nuances, it would have the additional benefit of mapping the whole Soviet system at least in one specific aspect.

Another possible direction a further study could take is researching the balance between Western and Soviet influences in either a different peripheral Soviet state or even Russia itself. Naturally, Russia, because of its vast size, could not be chosen as an entity, but the methods and outcomes would depend on whether the research would concentrate on Moscow, Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) or a less affluent and more

remote area. As Estonia was located on the Western border of the Soviet Union and had close cultural contacts with Finland, Western influences were especially noticeable in Estonian design. However, in other Soviet states the influences of global styles were less frequent and more mediated through different channels. Possibly one of the most interesting and contrasting comparisons might be one between Estonia and a Far-Eastern state with a traditionally Islamic culture, for example Azerbaijan. In that case, the research would not be solely limited to Western influences, but would incorporate all extra-Soviet impact, such as that of China, and could be used to illustrate the continuity of traditional cultural contacts and their compromises with the Soviet power.

To sum up, this research has several possibilities for a further development. While this study analysed the relationship between Soviet power and industrial design in Estonia, Soviet mass-produced design has not been analysed thoroughly, especially where ideological issues are concerned. Research is particularly limited where peripheral areas and their peculiarities are concerned. A more balanced examination of variations within the former Soviet Union would help to avoid reckless generalisations of the former Communist Bloc, in both past and present. Studying industrial design as a meeting point of culture, economy and power, especially because of its omnipresence in society, is useful in terms of analysing various processes and tendencies. Although the Soviet Union collapsed twenty years ago, its power relations and ideological paradigms still haunt the present, occasionally surfacing in political conflicts. Thus, analysing differences between former Soviet republics in various time periods is essential in order to understand more about the current geopolitics and cultures in Eastern Europe and Western Asia.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questionnaire

How and when did you make the decision of becoming an industrial designer?

Who were your role models/influences? How did that change over the course of time?

How were designers prepared for factory work at the university?

How exactly was the creation of a new design organized?

What were the starting points for a new product – aka did it rather start with form or function?

Was a new product initiated rather by designers or by the board?

How much was there collaboration with workers/board? Was a new product also consulted with engineers/workers? Or were designers that familiar with the factory's possibilities? How often was a design modified because of technological issues and if, then by whom?

To what extent were current design trends considered?

In what way were the opinions of consumers taken into consideration?

Were the needs of foreign market taken into consideration?

How did designers get information about design outside of Estonia? Was any information distributed by factory?

Did copying other designs ever occur? If so, whose initiative was it?

How often was legal protection searched for a design and for what reasons?

How were packaging and commercial materials solved?

What other tasks did designers have besides creating new designs?

How were the designers' wages compared to other factory workers? Did they search for alternative ways to make money? How important were exhibitions?

Did designers see themselves rather as artists or designers?

What were the most common reasons for refusal of a design?

Did you occasionally feel like your personal life or ideological beliefs had anything
    to do with how your designs were received?
How did you feel about the design system then? How do you feel about it now?

How has perception your own designs changed during time and why?

Appendix 2. Glossary of names

Gens, Leo (28.VI.1922 – 31.X.2001) – art historian, critic and pedagogue. Studied art history 1942-45 at the Tashkent University and 1946-1949 at the Ilya Repin Leningrad Institute for Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Worked 1949-1951 at the Tartu National University and 1951-1995 at ERKI, where he was named professor emeritus in 1995. Has researched visual and applied arts, architecture, interior design and photography and published several books and articles.

Grünberg, Maile (born 24.II.1942) – interior architect and designer. Studied interior and furniture design 1961-1966 at ERKI. Worked 1966-1975 at the furniture factory Standard, 1975-1977 at Estonian Project and EKE Project, 1977-1994 at ARS and later for Marlekor and Grünberg. She has created many modern and postmodern interiors and objects for both mass production and exhibitions.

Kuutma, Peeter (born 8.IV.1938) – textile artist and designer. Studied textile design 1961-1966 at ERKI. Worked 1967-1985 at the textile factory Punane Koit [Red Dawn], 1985-1987 as the secretary for the Union of Artists, 1987-1994 as the leading expert of visual arts for the Ministry of Culture, after that as a freelance artist. Since 1966 also executed designs for ARS. Has created print patterns for industrial production and textile art, including many carpets, for public interiors.

Lillemets, Vello (born 10.III.1962) – designer. Studied industrial art 1981-1987 at ERKI. Worked 1985-1994 for Salvo, later as a graphic designer for various newspapers

and a lecturer for TTK University of Applied Sciences. He has created many products for Salvo, mainly sports equipment and household objects.

Meigas, Leonardo (born 14.II.1952) – graphic and product designer. Studied industrial art 1970-1975 at ERKI. He worked 1973-1975 as a set designer for the Estonian Television, 1977-1988 as a designer for ARS, 1992-1994 at Overall and since 1995 at L-Disain. Created visual identities and products in Estonia and Russia.

Priks, Saima (born 14.II.1947) – textile and fashion designer. Studied fashion 1970-1975 at ERKI. Worked 1973-1989 as a set designer for the Estonian Television, 1978-1989 as a designer for textile factory Marat, 1989-1994 as a secretary for the Designers' Union and later for Design Studio Saima Priks. She has created fashion collections for both factories and fashion shows.

Raun, Maie-Ann (born 7.XII.1938) – glass artist and pedagogue. She studied glass design 1958-1964 at ERKI and 1966-1969 at a doctorate level at the Moscow Institute for the Decorative and Applied Arts. Worked 1965-1966 in Russia at the J. Sverdlov Glass Factory, 1969-1993 at ERKI and 2002-2004 at Skankristall. Was named professor emeritus at ERKI in 2003. Has created small glass art products and stained glass art for public locations, as well as researched the history of Estonian glass design and technology.

Sau, Raimo (born 28.IV.1955) – industrial designer and interior architect. Studied industrial art 1977-1983 at ERKI. He worked 1978-1985 for Salvo, 1985-1992 for

MaDis and 1992-1996 for furniture company ETK Mööbel, later as a freelance designer. Has created several products for mass production, mainly used plastic.

Tinn, Eduard (born 28.X.1943) – publicist, entrepreneur and Communist Party figure. Studied 1970-1972 at the Moscow Institute of History of Arts, 1978-1981 at the Academy of the Social Sciences of the Communist Party, where he also did his doctorate 1986-1988. He worked 1972-1974 as a lecturer for the Tallinn Institute of Pedagogy, 1974-1975 for the Tallinn Communist Party City Committee, 1975-1978 as the head editor of Sirp ja Vasar, 1982-1990 as a lecturer of aesthetics at the Tallinn State Conservatory and 1988-1990 as the head editor of magazine Estonian Communist. Included many texts and debates on design in Sirp ja Vasar.

Tomberg, Bruno (born 29.III.1925) – interior designer, applied artist, product designer and pedagogue. Studied interior design 1945-1950 at ERKI. Worked 1949-1994 at ERKI, was named professor emeritus in 1994. Has created interior designs and objects both for mass production and exhibitions. Founded the department of industrial art at ERKI in 1966 and initiated many other design initiatives, most notably the exhibition series Space and Form since 1969. His writings were influential in the development of Soviet Estonian industrial design.

Õunapuu, Matti (born 5.I.1945) – graphic and product designer. Studied 1968-1974 at ERKI. Worked 1975-1978 at Estonian Project, 1978-1988 at ARS (head artist after 1983) and after 1987 for MaDis. Created visual identities, especially in public spaces for the Olympic games, and industrial products in both Estonia and Russia.