Critical Soviet Design:

Senezh studio and the utopian

imagination in late socialism

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Abstract

This is the first academic study of the socialist critical design practice known as artistic projecteering [*khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie*], developed at the Central Experimental Studio of the Soviet Union Artists between 1964 and 1991 (commonly referred to as Senezh studio). While some Soviet designers saw their practice as 'applied science,' Senezh studio was established to develop practical and theoretical tools for overcoming technocratic tendencies in Soviet design. The aim of the studio's founders was to create a space for design that would not be subsumed by the constraints of technology or economics, or the bureaucracy of Soviet central planning. Senezh studio was tasked with creating new design methodologies that could be applied following the transition to communism to produce a material environment that would maximise the creative and collaborative potential of humankind. During the 1970s, however, the failures of the Soviet Thaw became apparent and designers at the studio worked on critical projects that highlighted how the government's treatment of citizens, urban heritage and the environment were materially manifest in daily life. The projects produced at Senezh came to reflect the aspirations, hopes and anxieties of the Soviet cultural intelligentsia during and after the 'Thaw' of the 1960s. Based on archival research, extensive interviews and analysis of images in private collections – this dissertation engages Mannheim and Ricoeur's theories of utopia to show how experimental design projects reflected changing relationships towards communism, ideology, history and the state.

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Glossary

DI SSSR	*Decorative Arts of the USSR (journal)*
KamAZ	*Kamsk Auto Plant*
KhKB	*Industrial Design Bureau*
Khudozhnik-konstruktor	*Artist-engineer (industrial designer)*
Khudozhestvennoe konstruitovanie	*Artistic engineering (industrial design)*
Khudozhnik-oformitel'	*Form-giver*
Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie	*Artistic projecteering*
KPSS	*Communist Party of the Soviet Union*
GANO	*State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region*
GKNT	*State Committee for Science and Technology*
GOST	*State Standard*
HfG Ulm	*Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm*
ICSID	*International Council of Societies of Industrial Design*
MMK	*Moscow Methodological Circle*
NER	*New Element of Settlement*

NO SKh SSSR	*Novosibirsk Section of USSR Union of Artists*
NOT	*Scientific Organization of Labour*
NTR	*Scientific Technological Revolution*
razveshchestvleniie	*Deartifactualization*
RGALI	*Russian State Archive of Literature and Art*
RGANTD	*Russian State Archive for Scientific-Technical Documentation*
RGKAFD	*Russian State Cinema and Television Archive*
SKhKB	*Special Industrial Design Bureau*
SKh SSSR	*USSR Union of Artists*
Sovnarkhoz	*Council of National Economy*
Tekhnicheskaia estetika	*Technical Aesthetics*
TsDKh	*Central House of the Artist*
TsUES SKh SSSR	*Central Educational and Experimental Studio of the Soviet Union of Artists (Senezh Studio)*
VkhUTEMAS-VKhUTEIN	*Higher Artistic Technical Studios/Institute*
VNIITE	*All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics*

Introduction

Until recently, many Russians and foreign observers have viewed the term 'Soviet design' as an oxymoron. In the West, design in the USSR has been traditionally associated with low product quality and a lack of attention paid to formal properties of objects. Before 1991, the Soviets gained a reputation for reverse-engineered military hardware, while anybody purchasing an exported Lada automobile would have to put up with a barrage of jokes about breakdowns, rust and poorly attached doors. The Kalashnikov rifle and Lomo camera are two rare examples of famous Soviet products that might meet the criteria of so-called 'good design'. Raymond Hutchings, one of the first writers to seriously investigate the mechanisms of Soviet industrial design wrote in 1976, 'one might say that Soviet-made products are finished roughly, even very roughly, except where precision is required for their functioning.'[1]

Furthermore, the inconsistent provision of Soviet household goods has led to assumptions that the Soviet Union lacked a sophisticated design culture. An American consumer paradise displayed at the 1959 American Exhibition provided the backdrop for Khrushchev and Nixon's famous kitchen debate that has been traditionally described as a triumph for the US in highlighting superior standards of living under capitalism.[2] Such views were reinforced in 1980, when Hungarian economist János Kornai coined the term 'shortage economy' to describe the

[1] Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.180.
[2] For a recent example, see Jack Masey, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008) pp.152-283.

systematic flaws in centrally planned systems of manufacture and distribution.[3] All of these associations have until recently created the impression that Soviet design is an unworthy subject of study.

However, since the late 1990s, historians of socialist material culture have highlighted the potential importance of design during the Khrushchev Thaw that followed Stalin's death.[4] This period of limited relaxation of censorship and liberalization of intellectual life saw new emphasis placed on light industry, consumer goods production and housing construction. The American National Exhibition of 1959 has been reinterpreted as a deliberate provocation on the part of Khrushchev to inspire Soviet industrial leaders to improve the quality of consumer goods. It was, writes Susan Reid, an 'instructive museum of the future'[5] that was supposed to play a role in spurring Soviet industry to lead the way in overtaking US living standards. Khrushchev's turn to light and consumer industry in the late 1950s[6] created an atmosphere that stimulated the expansion of Soviet design offices and organisations.

The largest and best-known Soviet design organisation is the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics [VNIITE], founded 1962. Technical aesthetics was conceived as 'a *science* of the *laws* of artistic creativity in the field of

[3] János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co, 1980).

[4] For example, eee Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), David Crowley and Susan Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

[5] Susan E. Reid, 'Who will beat whom?: Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9/4, pp.855-904. See also Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.167.

[6] For an account of the political announcements relating to Khrushchev's consumer turn, see George W. Breslauer *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp.65-69.

technology,' which is 'to a significant degree linked to technological progress, industrialization of industry and mass production' [my emphasis].[7] VNIITE played an important role introducing research in anthropometrics, ergonomics, colour theory, market research and many other areas in the 1960s.[8] This approach to design was strongly linked to the concept of scientific-technological revolution [*nauchno-tekhnicheskia revoliutsiia,* or NTR] that grew in ideological prominence from the mid 1950s onwards. NTR signified the idea that scientific and technological breakthroughs would be the primary force in the Soviet economy that would provide the basis of material wealth necessary to facilitate the emergence of communist social relations. For designers, this frequently meant justifying their practice as a means of introducing scientific and technological innovations in order to boost economic productivity.[9]

For some, however, VNIITE's 'scientific' approach illustrated some of the central paradoxes of socialist design. While mass production and manufacture would be necessary to improve the material circumstances of the Soviet population in the present, these brought dangers associated with commodity fetishism and division of social groups according to the objects they own. Furthermore, the extension of mass-manufacture that was needed to increase production might also increase the alienation of the worker in socialism. The modernization of Soviet light industry through scientific and technological advancement seemed to contradict key findings of Marxist philosophy that urged workers to overcome the alienating and dehumanizing effects of industrial production.

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[7] Iurii Solov'ev, 'O tekhnicheskoi estetike,' *Tekhnicheskaia estetika*, 1964/1, pp.1-2, p.1.

[8] For an overview of VNIITE's activities, see Dmitry Azrikan, 'VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?' *Design Issues,* 15/3 (1999), pp.45-77.

[9] See ibid. p.48. Also, Susan E. Reid, 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005) pp. 289-316.

The Central Educational and Experimental Studio of the USSR Union of Artists (Senezh studio), the subject of this dissertation, was established in 1964-5 in response to this paradox. How could designers participate in the modernization of Soviet industry without betraying the ideals of Marx and socialist humanism? In search of answers, the studio's founders Karl Kantor and Evgenii Rozenblium looked to Russia's Constructivist design heritage. In the 1920s, advocates of Russian Productivism had proposed that *artists* (rather than engineers) should take on the job of restructuring material forms and methods of production in order to stimulate the emergence of communist social relations.[10] The development of these ideas was abruptly halted following the 1930 closure of VKhUTEMAS-VKhUTEIN[11] (the major centre for the development of Russian Constructivism and Productivism). The subsequent hegemony of Stalinist socialist realism put a halt to the development of the modernist avant-garde practices until the Khrushchev Thaw.

In response to the ascendency of technical aesthetics during the 1960s, Senezh studio's founders revived the Productivists' desire to bring 'Art into life!' and set about creating the new discipline of artistic projecteering [*khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie*] as an artist led counterpoint to technical aesthetics. Following a series of pilot seminars, the studio gave artists from across the USSR the chance to attend biannual 90-day workshops over a period of four years to work on projects

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[10] See Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 2005), Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005).
[11] *Higher Artistic Technical Studios/Institute, Moscow* 1920-1930.

that included the design of factory interiors and industrial equipment, museums, propaganda displays, and urban design.

The projects discussed in this thesis span 1964 to 1983, a period that covers all of Brezhnev's leadership of the USSR, and one year after his death. This is frequently referred to as the period of 'late socialism' that followed the Khrushchev's ouster and preceded Gorbachev's perestroika. It is a period of current interest among historians who seek to understand a period that saw a gradual waning of the belief that socialism would one day be achieved.[12] As shall become clear, the studio's practice reflected broader discussions among intellectuals who have been mythologised as 'a socially engaged and morally potent intelligentsia [that] collapsed in August 1968, smashed by the brutal force of the authoritarian state.'[13] Even after 1968, attendees at the studio drew influence from major trends in Soviet academia that included aesthetic philosophy, semiotics, Western architectural theory, history, theatre and official and unofficial art. For this reason, Senezh studio and artistic projecteering can tell us not only about Soviet design culture, but also about the hopes, ideals and frustrations of broader sections of the late socialist intelligentsia.

As we shall see, Senezh studio's aims and ambitions changed over its lifetime in a way that both reflected and contributed to changes in the relationship between design and socialist society. By providing many new details of these changes – supported by interviews with former members of the studio and in-depth archival

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[12] For example, see the 2013 double special issue of *Cahiers du monde russe:* 'L'expérience soviétique et son apogeé – Culture et société des années Brežnev – vols. 1 & 2,' *Cahiers du monde Russe,* 54/1-2.

[13] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. ;London: Belknap, 2009).

Image 1| Constructing paper models at Senezh studio, still from documentary film, 1979.

A documentary film shot at the studio in 1979 gives a rare glimpse of projects under construction. Records indicate that these are most likely designs for a power station in Ekibastuz, (right) and a design for the centre of Dzhambul (above) both in Khazakhstan. The size and material of the models precluded the possibility of their long-term storage.

Source: Afanas'ev, N., *(dir.), Dizain,* [On colour film] Moscow (1979), RGAKFD d.27000.

research – the thesis constitutes the first scholarly study of Senezh studio and the development of artistic projecteering in relation to developments in design theory and issues of relevance to the culture of late socialism as a whole. My research in personal collections and film archives has revealed a wealth of visual resources that enable, for the first time, analysis of how studio projects were conceived and developed. Studio projects developed between 1964 and 1971 were focussed on creating a design theory and method that would enable the harmonious development of communist man.

As time went on, projects became increasingly conceptual and *critical*. Throughout the thesis, I interpret Senezh projects as examples of *critical design,* which is defined by a symbolic or discursive (as opposed to utilitarian) function.[14] From the early 1970s, artists at Senezh began producing giant paper and card models of cities, parks, museums and cultural centres (see image 1) that were never intended to be produced in real life, but highlighted deficiencies in the present and indicated directions for the future development of design. As I identify in the literature review below, knowledge of designers' critiques of Soviet modernist urban planning and engagements with semiotic theory can help us to understand how Soviet design culture was closely connected to international tendencies associated with the reform of modernism and postmodernism.

Although the studio ran its final seminar in 1992, I have chosen to focus this study on the period before *artistic projecteering* was subject to market forces introduced during and after perestroika. From 1964 to 1985, the studio operated in a design

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[14] Matt Malpass, 'Criticism and Function in Critical Design Practice,' *Design Issues,* 31/2 (Spring 2015), pp. 59-71 (p.59).

culture that was primarily determined by monolithic institutions such as VNIITE, The Union of Artists, the Union of Architects as well as various industrial and planning organs. During this period, the studio was structurally dependent on being able to navigate state-wide bureaucracies of art, design and propaganda in order to operate a critique of the system. After the advent of perestroika in 1985, this landscape changed significantly.[15] The subsequent flurry of new cooperatives in industrial design, fashion and architecture,[16] and the establishment of the Union of Designers in 1988 pushed designers into a world that was increasingly shaped by the forces of globalization, rather than the ethics of the intelligentsia or the bureaucracies of central planning.

While Senezh would be a fascinating lens through which to understand this period, it would require an alternative historiography and set of questions that is beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis. I have instead decided to focus on an earlier transition, from Thaw to stagnation in order to better understand the continuity of practice in periods that are often treated as historically distinct.

Aside from the contribution of this thesis to the history of Soviet design, I also argue that Senezh projects can help us to understand an underexplored aspect in cultural history of the period: the utopian, or social imagination in late socialism.[17] By taking Karl Mannheim's definition of utopia as a common human engine for

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[15] See Thomas C. Owen, *Russian Corporate Capitalism from Peter the Great to Perestroika* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.84.

[16] See Constantin Boym, *New Russian Design*, (Rizzoli: New York, 1992)

[17] The utopian, or social imagination is a concept relating to Paul Ricoer's theory of 'constitutive utopia,' discussed in chapter 1.

imagining life beyond our immediate social reality;[18] it is possible to judge not only the nature of artists' ideals, but how artists conceptualized their own agency in relationship to ideology, reality and changing perceptions of history and time that characterise the late socialist period. I make the case that an examination of artistic projecteering in the late socialist period can help us to question received wisdom about the divisions between official and unofficial culture and the relationship of so-called dissidence to broader intellectual life.

Structure and research questions

The following sections of this introductory chapter comprise an explanation of basic terminology in Soviet design, a description of my research methods, and a literature review where I indicate how this study of Senezh contributes to our understanding Soviet design culture and its relationship to postmodernism in design. This, I define in relation to conceptions of the manmade environment as an informational sphere that reflects politics, ideologies, culture and economics.

The literature review continues in chapter 1, where I explain why Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur's theories are of use in the study of late socialist culture. Drawing on Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (first published in 1936), I argue that assessing the incongruence between Senezh projects and prevailing norms in state ideology and design practice can unmask the utopian agency of artistic projecteering (and by extension other practices) in late socialism.

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[18] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).

Mannheim (1936) and Ricoeur's (1986)[19] theories not only provide a means for analysing how Senezh projects were critical of Soviet realities, but give us tools for understanding Senezh projects in relation to the broader 'social imagination,'[20] thus facilitating particular insight into the strategic use of time and historical consciousness in the production of both ideologies and utopias in late socialism.

The remainder of the thesis follows a broadly chronological path. Chapters two and three explore the reasons and contexts behind the generation of theory and method associated with artistic projecteering during the 1960s. Chapters four and five examine the afterlives of these concepts. In chapter two, I analyse the emergence of artistic projecteering in reference to design politics and policies of the Soviet sixties. I show how contacts with foreign designers and resistance to the domination of engineering in Soviet industrial design led a group of designers and writers to set up an experimental studio that became an important critical voice within the profession. In this chapter I pay close attention to the revival of theories of labour and art associated with Productivism in the 1920s by the studio's co-founder Karl Kantor in his 1967 book *Beauty and Utility*.[21] He outlined ways in which the artist could intervene to create a more harmonious material environment that would reflect the values of communist society in an era of advanced technology. Here, I trace how Kantor revived theories of Soviet Productivism developed by Boris Arvatov, Boris Kushner and Nikolai Tarabukin in the 1920s to propose a new theory of 'the production art of the future'[22] suitable

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[19] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986)

[20] Ibid., p.3

[21] Karl Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za: Sotsiologicheskie voprosy material'no–khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1967).

[22] See ibid., pp.184-200.

for an age of rapid technological progress. At this point, artistic projecteering was imagined as a design practice that would take the place of technical aesthetics following the transition to communism.

In chapter three I discuss how designers attending seminars at the studio set about creating the new practice of artistic projecteering. With a focus on projects developed from 1965-1971, I examine how the studio's pedagogical programme was oriented around the creation of new methodologies for applying artistic knowledge to design. I pay particular attention to the design of labour environments that contributed to contemporary discourses on the 'scientific management of labour' and the nature of delineated labour under communism. While the design of 'socialist objects' continued until 1972, artists became increasingly sceptical that artistic projecteering would one day take the place of mainstream industrial design. With reference to design theory, I show how artistic projecteering was reimagined as a critical practice that could influence mainstream design in the present.

As the leftist intelligentsia's vision of a reformed socialism waned in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so too did the belief that the planned economy could produce alternative types of material relations. I argue that the ideals of the 1960s did not disappear, but found new significances in the following decade. In chapter four, I explain how designers tasked with the production of propaganda environments produced model cityscapes that were critical of the Soviet state's relationship to historic buildings, and to history itself. Analysis of the semiotic qualities of the material environment and critiques of Soviet modernism were materialised in

practices that both paralleled and appropriated various aspects of architecture's postmodern turn in the West. This included explorations of the concept of collective memory in the city and an attempt to integrate the ideals of urban collective life that were perceived to have reached their apotheosis in the Italian Renaissance city. The approach developed by the studio's leader Evgenii Rozenblium became known as 'museification' of the urban environment. I argue that artistic projecteering switched from promoting a vision of socialist modernity to engaging an activist strategy that would protect against the insensitivities of modernist urban construction. In the conclusion of the chapter, I ask to what extent we can talk about a postmodern turn in Soviet design practice.

The final chapter explores the backlash against 'museification' and nostalgia among members of a rival faction at the studio. Despite the impossibility of having their projects realized, designers continued to produce environments that imagined alternative futures and ways of living to those currently possible in Brezhnev's USSR. Inspired by artists from Breughel to Tatlin, this group of designers produced visions of a future society that could only emerge under the conditions of humane socialism they had imagined during the 1960s. I show how artists at Senezh developed environments that were supposed to train a new type of democratic perception in the Soviet citizen. Throughout, I demonstrate that utopian thinking survived within the community of artists, designers and architects associated with Senezh.

Due to a lack of prior research on the history of the studio, one of the major tasks of the present thesis has been to produce an historical account of the formation and activities of the institution. I ask how and why did the founders of Senezh

studio develop the theoretical and practical basis of artistic projecteering? What were its historical and contemporary influences? What was the relationship between artistic projecteering and Productivism of the 1920s? Moving on from a theoretical discussion, I turn to the design projects themselves to answer how artistic projecteering differed from technical aesthetics in theory and practice. How did this constitute a critique of the scientific-technological revolution? What methods were developed at Senezh to bring art into the design process, and how did artistic projecteering relate to broader developments in Soviet art and culture? It is my intention to then track how and why the aims of the studio changed after the Thaw. What initiated the shift in focus from industrial design to urban design? Can we talk about a postmodern turn in Soviet design and if so, which postmodernism? Why and how did divergent design strategies appear after the Thaw?

Building on this knowledge, I have engaged theories of utopia to examine the changing agency of Senezh projects over time, and what they tell us about the nature of utopian thinking in late socialism: How did the ideals of the Thaw find new significance in subsequent decades? How did perception of the designer's agency in effecting social change develop over the period? What do Senezh projects tell us about the utopian imagination in late socialism?

These questions are answered over the course of the thesis, however in each chapter I return to the issue of utopia in an attempt to demonstrate the changing relationships between state ideology and the utopian practice of artistic projecteering.

Artistic projecteering and the language of socialist design

In order to explain the meaning of 'artistic projecteering' [*khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie*] and the reasoning behind my translation of this term, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of Soviet design terminology. This is because artistic projecteering was largely defined in contradistinction to other practices and disciplines that came into common usage as a result of the professionalization of design practice during the 1960s. Unfortunately, no comprehensive *Begriffsgeschichte* of Russian design exists, so we cannot be sure of the exact etymology and development of each of the terms discussed below. I will therefore focus my attention on terminology as used during the 1960s.

While questions surrounding the appropriate design of products arose following the increased emphasis on consumer goods production during the Thaw, the word 'design' [*dizain*] was barely used in Russia before the 1980s. *Dizain* briefly featured in discussions among professionals around 1960 when the journal *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* [Decorative arts of the USSR] started an exchange with the British journal *Design* and the American journal *Industrial Design*.[23] However, the word almost completely disappeared two years later when VNIITE began to promote a set of terms specific to the socialist context.

'Technical aesthetics' [*tekhnicheskaia estetika*] was used to refer to the *theory* of socialist design that combined a number of research disciplines including economics, sociology, ergonomics, anthropometrics, psychology and colour

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[23] Karl Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine: Dizain v kontekste kul'tury doperestroechnogo tridtsatiletiia 1955-1985*, (Moscow: ANIR, 1996), p.24.

theory. According to Raymond Hutchings, technical aesthetics 'was selected because it was at the junction of technique and aesthetics; this legitimised the term, as according to philosophers of science new branches of science arise at the confluence of existing branches.'[24] Whereas *dizain* referred to the Western practice of producing new product forms motivated primarily by profit (which as perceived as chaotic and irrational), technical aesthetics stood for the rational and scientific study of the relationship between man and technology. This would dictate the form and typology of goods produced under in a centrally planned economy.

Technical aesthetics was therefore designated a theoretical discipline that was supposed to regulate and guide the practice of industrial design, known as 'artistic engineering' [*khudozhestvennoe konstruirovanie*]. The industrial designer was known an artist-engineer [*khudozhnik-konstruktor*]; a term that implies the synthesis of artistic and the technical cultures. As shall become clear this represented an ideal rather than reality. Other terms such as 'form-giving' [*oformlenie*] could be used to refer to design practices associated with mass industrial production (such as styling), but also to a broader range of activities that might include the design of textiles, propaganda or festivals and parades. The term 'industrial art' [*promyshlennoe iskusstvo*] could be used to refer to all areas of artistic activity within industry and could include artistic engineering [*khudozhestvennoe konstruirovanie*], crafts [*remeslennoe iskusstvo*], folk art [*kustarnoe iskusstvo*] or decorative arts [*dekorativnoe iskusstvo*].

The term 'artistic projecteering' [*khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie*] was initially used at Senezh to describe the practice of 'production art of the future'[25] that would

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[24] Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design*, p.146.
[25] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, pp.184-200.

emerge following the transition to communism. It refers to design activities undertaken in the sphere of artistic culture with the aim of generating forms that support the humanistic development of society. Rozenblium explained in 1972 that artistic projecteering 'openly opposes the technocratic tendency of making man into an accessory of technology, emphasizing the importance and necessity of making technology into…an accessory of the societal aims of man, a possibility founded on creativity in all areas of activity.'[26]

While the word *proektirovanie* is frequently translated in Russian simply as 'design,' I believe it necessary to coin the new translation of 'artistic projecteering' to communicate the full meaning of the concept. Firstly, *khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie* should not be translated as 'artistic design,' as this phrase [*artisticheskii dizain*] was used to refer to artist-led design (such as high-quality Italian furniture) that was intended for elite consumption in capitalist societies.[27] Furthermore, the term *projecteering* emphasizes the idea of the artist's engagement in a project. While the word project [*proekt*] might refer to a short-term programme of work, e.g. a single design commission; projecteering is also associated with the word *proektnost'*. *Proektnost'* in Russian culture refers to humankind's grand task of the simultaneous spiritual and physical transformation of the cosmos.[28] At different times in history, this might be a religious, communist or nationalist project. The concept of *proektnost'* is therefore inherently utopian in its logic. At Senezh, artistic projecteering was initially about the practical use of art to support harmonious

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[26] Evegenii Rozenblium, 'Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v sisteme dizaina,' in *O nekotorykh voprosakh uchastiia khudozhnika v sozdanii predmetnoi sredy sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva,'* (Sovetskii Khudozhnik, Moscow, 1972), p.54.

[27] Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine: Opyt raboty Tsentral'noi uchebno-eksperimental'noi studii khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia na Senezhe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p.166.

[28] See Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine*, p.19. This idea is also discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the concept of the 'projective.'

relations among men according to a set of ideals derived primarily from Marx. Although the aims of artists engaged in projecteering changed over time, the idea that art could be practically engaged to support grander aims remained constant throughout the period.

The term *khudozhnik-proektirovshchik*, which translates roughly as 'artist-projecteer,' was used to designate a practitioner of artistic projecteering. However, I have chosen to use the terms 'artist' [*khudozhnik*], 'designer' [*khudozhnik-konstruktor*] and 'architect' [*arkhitektor*] to refer to practitioners at Senezh studio. This is because artistic projecteering remained a marginal practice that never replaced the professions of artist, designer and architect. The majority of people who attended the 90-day seminars at Senezh worked in regional studios and design offices. When they returned home, they went back to those jobs with new experiences and perspectives that informed their work. Yet, the failure to achieve communism meant that the artist-projecteer remained a fantasy: nobody could fully escape the limitations, restrictions and compromises imposed on designers. The practice of artistic projecteering, on the other hand, did exist – albeit only for brief moments as designers learned new ways of seeing, understanding and working together at the studio.

Research methodology

The task of researching this project has been closer to reconstructing theatrical events and happenings than locating objects in museum collections. The ephemerality of the projects - which often took the form of large paper models - means that the only remaining traces of the designers' work are in photographic

form. The mysterious loss of the studio's photographic archive during perestroika[29] has meant that my initial task has been to assemble visual materials from personal archives, documentary films and periodicals of the period and locate them within the chronological and intellectual development of artistic projecteering. Many of the visual documents in this thesis are taken from personal collections of former participants, while others have been published in Mark Konik's *Archive of a Studio* (2005)[30], Rozenblium's *The Artist in Design* (1974)[31], and various issues of the Union of Artists' journal *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* [Decorative Arts of the USSR – or DI SSSR].

In order to interpret photographic material and understand the motivations behind specific projects, I have been heavily reliant upon the studio's document archive, which is located at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art [RGALI] in Moscow. *DI SSSR* contains documentation of some Senezh projects and many articles that began life as lectures at the studio. The journal *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* [technical aesthetics] and documentation from the Russian State Archive of Scientific Technological Documentation [RGANTD] have served as a guide to the development of mainstream Soviet design and technical aesthetics. Kantor and Konik were also able to publish memoirs that have been incredibly useful for understanding not only facts, but also the atmosphere and spirit of Senezh.[32]

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[29] There are unsubstantiated rumours among former members of the studio that the archive was deliberately destroyed.

[30] Mark Konik (ed.) *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi* (Indeks Dizain: Moskva, 2003).

[31] Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine: Opyt raboty Tsentral'noi uchebno-eksperimental'noi studii khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia na Senezhe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974).

[32] See Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine* and Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi* .

In order to gain an understanding of what Senezh meant to different leaders and participants, I have travelled across Russia to Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Kazan' and Tol'iatti where I have interviewed designers whose experiences differ significantly from the Muscovite intellectuals who ran Senezh. I was also able to spend time in the State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region [GANO], an important centre for Siberian design.

The question of how to construct a narrative of the studio from an incomplete visual archive led to my engagement with theories of utopia, discussed in the following chapter. The projects selected for analysis have been chosen because they illustrate how the possibility of effecting social change through artistic projecteering was conceived at different points during the studio's history. For this reason I have chosen to omit many projects, including Evgenii Rozenblium's exhibition design (discussed elsewhere by M. Maistrovskaia),[33] and early work on public interiors. The limitations of this thesis also preclude analysis of the ecological utopias developed at the studio during the 1980s.[34] I have therefore endeavoured to select projects that represent the range forms of optimism and hope for a better future that initially drew my interest to this little known institution.

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[33] See M. T. Maistrovskaia, 'Evgenii Rozenblium i ekspozitsionnoe iskusstvo,' *Problemy Dizaina* vol. 6, (2011), pp.85-121

[34] The studio collaborated with the USSR Academy of Sciences on a several eco-city projects during the 1980s under the name *Ekopolis.* See, for example D. N. Kavtaradze and E. A. Rozenblium, *Khudozhestvennaia kontseptsiia Programmy "Ekopolis" v g. Khimki* (Pushchino: Nauch. tsentr biologicheskikh issledovaniii AN SSSR, 1989).

Literature review

The following literature review explores several bodies of work that are of relevance to the history of Senezh studio. The first relates to histories of the 'socialist object' and the question of the role objects should play in socialist society. Here, I position the study in relation to histories of 1920s Productivism, material culture studies of the Thaw and histories of post-War socialist design. The second body of literature relates to the question of postmodernism in Soviet design. In this section I discuss how recent accounts of the postmodern turn Western design and architecture can help position the studio in an international context, thus extending pre-existing definitions of Soviet postmodernism in art and visual culture. The third topic of utopianism and the historiography of late socialism needs to be discussed in relationship to theoretical concepts or utopia. This topic is therefore discussed in chapter 1, following the literature review.

My investigation of Karl Kantor's theoretical attempts to revive the ideas of Soviet Productivism and create a 'production art of the future', as well as my analysis of the studio's experimentation in producing objects and machines that support the development of socialist man makes a new contribution to the growing literature on the 'socialist object.' The 'socialist object' is an artefact that has agency in restructuring societal relations by altering the dynamics of labour and class, both through its production and consumption. This is an important topic in histories of Russian Constructivist art of the 1920s[35] which provide important historical context for the revival of these ideas in the 1960s.

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[35] See, for example, Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (1983) and Selim O. Khan-Magamedov, *Pionery sovetskogo dizaina* (Moscow: Galart, 1995).

The history of the socialist object in the 1920s is the subject of Christina Kiaer's *Imagine no Possessions* (2005).[36] Kiaer devotes significant attention to Productivist theorist Boris Arvatov. Arvatov, she explains, was a figure 'who developed a theory of the "socialist object" of modernity that specifically responded to the exigencies of NEP,[37] and so can clarify and amplify our understanding of objects produced by the Constructivists in the mid-1920s.'[38] Kiaer shows how Arvatov provided a new take on Marx's theory of the commodity whereby objects would not automatically be reduced to the structure of the fetish, but play a positive role in restructuring social relations. Arvatov endowed modernist principles of truth to materials and laid-bare function as means of unraveling the commodity form and developing new psychological relationships that privileged use-value over the desire to own objects.[39] Kiaer's focus is on Arvatov's theorizations of the formal properties of socialist objects and subsequent experiments in their production by Rodchenko, Tatlin and Popova and Stepanova. In Maria Gough's *The Artist as Producer* (also 2005),[40] attention is shifted from questions relating to the creation of the discreet objects to the role of the artist in restructuring the organization of production. Her analysis of Boris Iogansen's attempts to reorganize industrial processes and production at the Krasnyi prokatchik metalworking factory between 1923 and 1926 constitutes an alternative reading of Productivist theory that poses a series of questions relating to what actually happens when a Constructivist enters

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[36] Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 2005).

[37] The New Economic Policy 1921-1928 was a period when small privately owned businesses were able to trade in the Bolshevik Russia. It was introduced in order to revitalize the economy after its destruction during the civil war of the preceding years.

[38] Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions,* p.27

[39] Ibid., p.35

[40] Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005).

production. What distinguishes a *process* driven production art from an *object* driven art of production?[41]

These histories provide an important background for exploring the development of neo-Productivist theories during the 1960s. Scholars including Victor Buchli (1997) have situated the reappearance of Constructivist ideas in 1960s architecture and the 'return to Lenin' policies of the 1960s whereby absolution, 'could only be found in terms of the body of Bolshevik ideas which were in existence before the Stalinist ascendency.'[42] Others have traced the re-emergence of Constructivist themes within art of the 1960s to 1980s. The range of appropriations and subversions of these symbols are diverse: they range from sincere invocations of the revolutionary spirit of the 1920s in celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the October revolution in 1967,[43] the art of the *Dvizhenie* and *Mir* groups,[44] paper architects, and artists Komar and Melamid and Il'ia and Emilia Kabakov who ironically subverted the language of the early twentieth century avant-garde.[45] However, studies of the post-war era have placed little emphasis on the theoretical legacy of the Productivist artist as an organiser of industry. As John Roberts (2009) notes, this is partly due to the logistical limitations artists face if they wish to

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[41] Ibid., p.17.

[42] Buchli, Victor, 'Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against "Petit-bourgeois" Consciousness in the Soviet Home', *Journal of Design History*, 10/2 (1997), pp. 161-76 (p.162).

[43] David Crowley has identified the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union in 1967 as an important time for the resurrection of the avant-garde with 'festive rediscovery of the "spirit of October"…[being] stage managed across the bloc' but also identifies at this time the voices of reform pre-'68 in People's republics leading to a cautious non-inflammatory promotion of the avant-garde by the state. See David Crowley, 'Staging for the End of History: Avant-garde Architectural Visions at the Beginning and the End of Communism in Eastern Europe', *Illusions Killed by Life: Afterlives of (Soviet) Constructivism*, Princeton, May 10-12 2013.

[44] Margareta Tillberg, 'You are now leaving the American Sector: The Russian Group *Dvizhenie*, 1962 – 1978,' in *Place Studies in Art, Media, Science and Technology: Historical Investigations on the Sites and the Migration of* Knowledge ed. Andreas Broeckmann and Gunalan Nadarajan (Kromsdorf and Weimar: VDG Verlag Bettina Preiss 2008), pp.147-168.

[45] Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

engage in the reorganization of industrial labour.[46] The Russian revolution was unique in giving artists access to factories that were later more concerned with meeting production quotas than inviting artists to promote the spiritual emancipation of workers through new production methods. It therefore appears that development neo-Productivist theory and practice at Senezh was a similarly distinctive moment in the history of the socialist object. This was made possible due to the atmosphere of optimism, reform and intellectual excitement of the Thaw which was taken from the title of a 1954 short novel by Il'ia Ehrenburg.

Kozlov and Gilburd (2013) have strongly argued that the Thaw metaphor should not simply be considered reflective of what happened in the period. The metaphor in fact *produced* social change:

> It created an environment of anticipation. It was inclusive, accessible and broadly comprehensible. It reconstituted the relationship between social and natural orders. It admitted chance and alternative to a deterministic ideology. It highlighted the issue of language, with which Soviet writers, journalists, artists and ordinary citizens would grapple henceforth. It heralded lyricism and emotionality.[47]

In an attempt to locate the impetus the for the neo-Productivist revival of the 1960s, this thesis therefore builds upon research into the effects of the intellectual, political, social and economic changes on the material culture of the Thaw.

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[46] John Roberts, 'Productivism and Its Contradictions', *Third Text*, 23/5 (2009), pp. 527-36.
[47] Denis Kozlov and Eleonary Gilburd, 'The Thaw as an Event in Russian History' in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp.18-84 (p.23).

During the Thaw, the question of appropriate 'socialist consumption' became an important issue in the wake of policies that sought to extend the provision of consumer goods to the masses. Whereas consumer goods under Stalin had been distributed to 'model' consumers such as factory managers, engineers and shock-workers,[48] a new phenomenon emerged in the late 1950s that Susan Reid has called 'Khrushchev Modern' (2006).[49] This, she explains, manifested itself in, 'the shift towards mass consumption and the democratisation of provision, with its attendant shifts in the mode of production, implications for visual style, and for the semiotic uses of consumer goods.'[50] She observes how the expansion of consumer industries in the 1960s meant that designers and artists would need to play a dual role of educating consumer taste and promoting rational consumption while simultaneously studying and responding to consumer demand.[51] Her work, and that of other scholars including David Crowley (2010),[52] Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (2012),[53] and Kate Brown (2013)[54] has clearly disproven assumptions that consumer goods provision was based solely on a 'dictatorship of needs,' i.e. the idea that models of consumption were formed and imposed by state authorities. They have shown that consumers and so-called 'aesthetic specialists' played an important role in determining the nature of provision within the planned economy.

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[48] See Julie Hessler, 'Cultured Trade,' in *Stalinism: New Directions* ed. Sheila Fritzpatrick (Routledge: London and New York, 2000) pp.182-209. Also Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

[49] Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,' *Cahiers du monde Russe,* 47/1-2, (Jan-Jun, 2006), pp. 227-68.

[50] Ibid., p.232.

[51] Ibid.

[52] David Crowley and Susan Emily Reid (eds.), *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc,* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

[53] Paulina Bren, and Mary Neuburger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[54] Brown, Kate, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Whereas the aforementioned studies have considered the nature of socialist consumption, my aim is to assess how these debates influenced the designers of objects themselves. I am therefore interested in how debates related to the nature of appropriate socialist consumption contributed to the creation of new design methodologies, processes and concepts. The histories of Soviet design discussed below have gone some way to addressing this question, yet these studies have primarily drawn attention to the organisational aspects of major Soviet design institutes and rarely address the relationship between object form, design methodology, theory and broader historical and cultural contexts.

Economist Raymond Hutchings (1968, 1976 and 1978)[55] pioneered research into Soviet design, scientific and technological policies during the 1970s, and provides a useful starting point for understanding the development of design organisations and their relationships with government and producers. Hutchings was particularly astute in his analyses of the structural difficulties faced by designers: in particular the lack of civilian applications of military technologies, the ways in which statistics-driven central planning stressed engineering over aesthetic quality, and the difficulty of implementing design change within the quota system.[56] His main preoccupation as an economist was to explain how neglect of aesthetic and artistic qualities in design led certain areas of industry and technology to be underdeveloped in a society where scientific achievement and military capabilities

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[55] Raymond Hutchings, 'The Weakening of Ideological Influences upon Soviet Design', *Slavic Review*, 27/1 (1968), pp.71-84, Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Raymond Hutchings, 'Soviet Design: The Neglected Partner of Soviet Science and Technology', *Slavic Review*, 37/4 (1978), pp.567-583.
[56] Hutchings, 'Soviet Design: The Neglected Partner of Soviet Science and Technology,' pp.575-576.

were comparatively high. Based on his discussions with VNIITE's founder Iurii Solov'ev, Hutchings outlined how design was theoretically supposed to function within the planned economy. For example, he shows how VNIITE planned consumer choice in the Soviet economy by creating different types of objects according to defined consumer categories.[57] As Yulia Karpova has noted, Hutchings' scholarship was fairly criticised by reviewers due to his lack of knowledge of design practice and his rather cumbersome attempts to deal with issues relating to style and artistry. However, his book and articles remained the only significant piece of scholarship on post-war Soviet design until the 1990s.[58] Other studies, such as Kalincheva, Novikov and Zherdev's *VNIITE – Scientific School of Ergonomic Design* (2009)[59] have centred on bureaucratic and structural aspects of design organisation and the development of theory in VNIITE, but again shed little light on the processes and methods involved in design practice.

Dmitry Azrikan's article *VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism of Plato's Academy of Design* (1999)[60] provides an useful contextual summary of VNIITE's activities and changing organizational structure following its establishment in 1962. He explains that despite the Soviet leadership's political motivation to improve the quality of consumer goods, the lack of economic incentive to improve quality within the planned economy meant that 'the first design activists…tried to convince the

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[57] Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design*, p.175.

[58] 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 (2013), pp.627-647 (p.628).

[59] M.M Kalincheva, E. V. Zherdev, A. I. Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE: Predposylki, istoki, tendentsii stanovleniia* (Moscow: VNIITE, 2009).

[60] Dmitry Azrikan, 'VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?' *Design Issues,* 15/3 (1999), pp.45-77

authorities that design would help increase productivity, and they bought it.'[61] He explains how technical aesthetics, which presented itself as a *science* of design, was shaped by the rhetoric of the scientific-technological revolution.

More recent accounts of the Soviet design profession's development have placed emphasis on the relationship between design practice, form and broader social contexts. Ekaterina Lavrent'eva's article 'Design through text: VNIITE 1970s to 1980s' [*Dizain posredstvom teksta* VNIITE 1970s to 1980s] (2012),[62] neatly outlines ways in which designers at VNIITE began to consider objects as agents of discourse, expressing social and cultural values. She also points to other textual strategies, such as the use of theatrical metaphors at Senezh as a model of total environment, and to the influence of Italian design at VNIITE, in particular the Italian groups Memphis and Alchemia. Her article indicates how design historians might more effectively explore the relationship of design to the broader intellectual environment of late socialism.

Likewise, Karpova's article *Accommodating 'Design': Introducing the Western Concept into Soviet Art Theory in the 1950s–60s* (2013)[63] provides an authoritative and historically informed background to the emergence of the industrial design profession in the 1950s. She maps the emergence of theories of industrial design, and also highlights the importance of the 1956 publication of Marx's manuscripts in foregrounding design as force that may humanise technology in advanced industrial civilisation. Her article ends in 1965 with the creation of Senezh studio and the appearance of

[61] Ibid., (p.48).
[62] Ekaterina Lavrent'eva, 'Proektirovanie posredstvom teksta. VNIITE. 1970-1980-e', in *Rakursy*, ed. A. S. Varantov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia, 2012), pp.197-245.
[63] 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 (2013), pp.627-647.

artistic projecteering as an artist-led approach to designing and therefore provides an invaluable pre-history to the current study.

Senezh studio itself is so-far little more than a footnote in the history of Soviet design. Aside from brief mentions by Lavrent'eva and Karpova, Lavrentiev and Nazarov's richly illustrated *Russian Design: Traditions and Experiment 1920-1990* (1995)[64] is one of the few English language publications that acknowledges the fact that there were two main schools of design in the USSR: technical aesthetics and artistic projecteering. As this book is based primarily on personal experience and insight, it does not offer a scholarly assessment of Senezh during the brief discussion of the studio. The authors do not present an overall picture of the studio's philosophy and do not indicate when or how the studio was established, or that its fundamental aims changed over time. Likewise, in *Russian Design: Studies in the History of Russian Design* (2001)[65], N. Voronov dedicates twenty-one pages to an outline of Senezh studio, describing its broad aims and several projects. His summary provides some insight into perceived differences between VNIITE and Senezh studio, but he does not situate the studio within the broader context of late socialism and writes that the Senezh method led to a 'superficial conformity to "contemporary style,"'[66] an accusation that ignores the critical and utopian agency of the projects. As this thesis shows, it is not possible to understand the nature of the Senezh projects without reference to the broader culture of the artistic intelligentsia.

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[64] Alexander N. Lavrentiev and Yuri V. Nazarov, *Russian Design: Tradition and Experiment 1920-1990* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).

[65] N. Voronov, *Rossiiskii dizain*, tom. 2 (Moscow: Soiuz dizainerov Rossii, 2001).

[66] Ibid., p.349.

In summary, while studies of 1920s Soviet Productivism have explored how artists, theorists and designers experimented with material form and the organization of labour as a way of supporting the development of communist man, little is known about how design was conceived as a means of supporting communist social relations during later periods of Soviet history. Studies of material culture have drawn attention to many of the fundamental issues surrounding appropriate socialist consumption during the Thaw, however historians have yet to examine how these issues were explored by designers themselves. Design historians' focus on VNIITE has highlighted questions of product quality within the planned economy. While limited attention has been paid to more marginal and critical design practices,[67] I do not know of case studies on smaller design organisations such as Senezh studio and regional industrial design bureaux. This study of Senezh therefore links our knowledge of socialist consumption during the Khrushchev era to histories of the 'socialist object' through examination of development of theory and design practice before 1971.

Chapter 4, entitled, *Postmodern Propaganda? Semiotics, environment and the historical turn 1972-1983* asks whether we can identify a 'postmodern turn' in practice at Senezh. This chapter describes projects that critically reflected upon the demolition of city centres and subsequent replacement of historic buildings with ubiquitous grey concrete blocks. Studies of socialist modernist architecture and urban planning now constitute a small industry dedicated to exploring the social implications that followed Khrushchev's 1957 denunciation of "excess" in socialist

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[67] For example, see David Crowley, 'The Art of Cybernetic Communism,' available online at http://faktografia.com/2011/09/13/the-art-of-cybernetic-communism/#_ftn26 [accessed 21/10/15]. Also Andres Kurg, 'Feedback Environment: Rethinking Art and Design Practices in Tallinn During the Early 1970s.' *Studies on Art and Architecture* 1-2/20 (2011), pp. 26-58.

realist architecture and subsequent construction of mass housing across Eastern Europe.[68] Lately, historians have turned their attention to architects' attempts to reform modernist urban development in Eastern Europe. Studies of Oskar Hansen (2014),[69] 'Team Ten East' (2014),[70] and 'Tallinn School' architects (2009)[71] have revealed extensive critiques of modernist urbanity across socialist Eastern Europe. The interconnections of such groups was also the subject of an exhibition at the 2014 Venice Biennale entitled *Lifting the Curtain: Central European Architectural Networks*.[72] My study of Senezh provides additional knowledge of the links between reformers of modernism in the USSR, Poland and the USA, and therefore contributes to our understanding of the development of Eastern bloc architecture after modernism.

While the Senezh projects were certainly 'postmodern' in a chronological sense (in that they called for the reform of modernist Soviet planning dogma) − they also engaged with and localized intellectual developments relating to semiotics and

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[68] The selection of studies below shows the geographical breadth of scholarship which links mass housing to the phenomenon of socialist modernity. See collected articles in Crowley and Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces,* Mart Kalm and Ingrid Ruudi (eds.), *Constructed Happiness – Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2005), On Soviet Russia, see William Craft Brumfield, and Blair A. Ruble, *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Susan E. Reid, 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005) pp. 289-316, Lynne Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private life in a Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), On Czechoslovakia, see Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), On Hungary, see Virag Molnar, 'In Search of the Ideal Socialist Home in Post-Stalinist Hungary: Prefabricated Mass Housing or Do-It-Yourself Family Home?', *Journal of Design History,* 23/1 (2010) pp. 61-81, On the GDR, see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[69] Aleksandra Kędziorek and Łukasz Ronduda (eds.), *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism: On Open Form, Art and Didactics* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014).

[70] Łukasz Stanek (ed.), *Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014).

[71] Andres Kurg, 'Architects of the Tallinn School and the Critique of Soviet Modernism in Estonia,' *The Journal of Architecture,* 14/1 (2009), pp.85-108.

[72] The exhibition was curated by Sarmen Beglarian, Piotr Bujas, Igor Kovačević, Iris Meder, Maroje Mrdujaš and Samu Szemerej.

reconceptualization of the man-made milieu that were formative in the history of postmodernism. My discussion of postmodernism in relation to artistic projecteering is not intended to impose arbitrary labels. After all, as Louis Menand asserts, 'postmodernism is the Swiss Army Knife of critical concepts. It's definitely overloaded, and it can do almost any job you need done.'[73] Instead, my intention is to situate urban design projects undertaken at Senezh in relation to recent scholarship on the intellectual foundations of Western postmodern design and architecture. In *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics After Modernism* (2007),[74] Felicity Scott outlines an alternative genealogy for the development of postmodern architecture that contrasts familiar narratives such as Charles Jencks' 1977 *The Language of Postmodern Architecture.*[75] In that work, Jencks detailed the failure of modernist architecture to meet its social aims, its submission to commercial interests and a subsequent emergence of 'a multiplicity of meanings and ...certain manifestations that had been repressed by Modernism.'[76]

Instead of analysing formal architectural language, Scott draws attention to what she calls the 'passage of postmodernization'[77] as a route to understanding how design and architecture was shaped by changes in the 'socioeconomic, cultural and political realms.'[78] She highlights 'architecture's engagement with the aesthetic, social, and political ramifications of technological change' from

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[73] Louis Menand, 'Saved From Drowning: Barthelme Reconsidered, ' *The New Yorker* (23 February 2009), p.68 cit. Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, 'Curators' Foreword,' in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970 – 1990,* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp.9-10 (p.10).
[74] Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics After Modernism*, (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 2007)
[75] Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977). This went into eight revised editions.
[76] Elie Haddad, 'Charles Jencks and the historiography of Post-Modernism', *The Journal of Architecture,* 14/4 (2009), pp.493-510 (p.494).
[77] Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia,* p.7.
[78] Ibid., p.7.

approximately 1968-75 by drawing attention to marginal practices including megastructures, geodesic domes, student insurrections and 'environmental design.'[79] In Scott's view, architectural postmodernism was in ascendance before it 'turned away from technoscientific investigation toward semantic legibility and formal rhetoric.'[80] By reading Scott, it becomes clear that designers at Senezh explored similar themes to their Western counterparts relating to the ethical implications of technological change. In both instances, this precipitated new understandings of how the man-made environment is formed by political and social forces. As I demonstrate in chapter 4, Senezh projects reflected intellectual developments that were crucial in the 'passage of postmodernization.'

The first of these was a new conception of 'environment' that referred to the 'man-made milieu' as 'a constructed realm characterised by both physical artefacts and expanding information networks.'[81] The second related development was designers' engagements with semiotics. K. Michael Hays (1998) writes that 'semiology…links architecture and the social city…setting off a fission that leads to the subsequent theorization of postmodernism itself.'[82] Such histories of the intellectual preconditions of postmodern consciousness (i.e. new ways of considering the socio-political construction of one's surroundings) allow us to consider the possibilities of a postmodern turn beyond the capitalist world. My study of urban design at Senezh potentially expands our understanding of the postmodern turn in design and architecture, and highlights themes that connect

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[79] Ibid., pp.3-4
[80] Ibid., p.252.
[81] Ibid., p.89.
[82] K. Michael Hays, *Architecture theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 1998), p.xi.

Soviet artistic projecteering to internationally significant developments in design an architecture from the 1960s to the 1970s.

So how does this relate to existing literature on 'Soviet postmodernism'? While I use the term postmodernism to link artistic projecteering to specific discourses about the environment as man-made milieu, the concept of 'Soviet post-modernism' in visual culture has been attached to Stalinist socialist realism, and the 'unnofficial' art movements of 'Sots Art' and Moscow Conceptualism. As I demonstrate, taking a similar approach to Scott may broaden our understandings of what Soviet postmodernism means.

Both Vladimir Papernyi (1985)[83] and Boris Groys (1988)[84] have proposed that the defeat of the Soviet avant-garde and ascendency of Stalinist socialist realist aesthetic allowed the exploration of certain 'postmodern' traits that were not explored in the West until the late 1960s and early 1970s. In *The Total Art of Stalinism,* Groys positions Stalinist socialist realism as a continuation of, rather than a rupture in the avant-garde project of the 1920s. He argues that under Stalin, the compulsory use of codes and symbols in place of individual artistic expression meant that art became 'eclectic,' 'citational' and therefore "postmodern."[85] Groys' argument has been criticised by scholars including Mikhail Epstein (1995),[86] who agrees that while socialist realism shares affinities with both avant-gardism and postmodernism, it should be seen as 'the intermediate link between modernism

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[83] Vladimir Papernyi, *Kul'tura "Dva",* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985).

[84] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Deyond* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992) originally published in German as *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (München: C. Hanser, 1988).

[85] Ibid., p.180.

[86] Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachussetts Press, 1995).

and postmodernism, attempting to embrace the diversity of styles and forms and subject them to one unifying and compulsory design. Serious purity, serious eclecticism, playful eclecticism: these three stages may be identified as avant-gardism, socialist realism, and post-modernism, respectively.'[87]

The 'playful eclecticism' to which Epstein refers signifies two major strands of 'unofficial' Soviet art that emerged during the 1970s: 'Sots Art' and Moscow Conceptualism.[88] Moscow Conceptualism's main figures include Dmitry Prigov, Il'ia Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Victor Pivovarov and Andrei Monastyrskii. These artists played with meaning and language in a playful subversion of official ideology. Similarly, 'Sots Art', sought to engage the language of Western pop art to deconstruct the visual language of socialist realism (or *sotsrealizm*).[89] This was premised on the idea that consumer imagery and language in the West found its near equivalent in the ideological imagery of the Eastern Bloc.[90] As artist Erik Bulatov put it:

> The most banal language in the Soviet Union is the ideological one. In the West there are the commercials, television, the giant flood of images. There, too, it is a question of a language of banalities. This language of

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[87] Ibid., p.359.

[88] In contra-distinction to Stalin-era postmodernism, Groys refers to these movements as 'post-utopian art.' See Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, pp.75-111.

[89] The term 'sots art' is a rough amalgam of the terms sotsrealizm and pop art.

[90] Aleš Erjavec (ed.), Introduction to *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp.1-54 (p.38)

Western truisms can describe the social space equally well as the language of ideology in the Soviet Union.[91]

This conception of Soviet postmodernism is premised on the manipulation of the hegemonic forms of socialist realism and official ideology and therefore has little to do with a reaction against or evolution of modernism. Mark Lipovetsky explains that, 'all-generalizations come from the works of Prigov, Rubenshtein, Sorokin, Kabakov, Bulatov, and…no one else…Why? Because all these models are attempts to translate the logic of Western (European and American) postmodernism into Russian culture.' This tendency to translate the logic of Western postmodernism has brought unofficial artists into the theoretical framework of Western contemporary art. The dominance of 'unofficial' art in the historiography of post-war Soviet art, and in Western museum collections and exhibitions[92] has had the effect of positioning Soviet official art as a normative hegemonic form, thus deflecting attention from the innovations that took place within official organisations such as the USSR Union of Artists.

The same can be said of architecture. The 'paper architects' of the 1980s, including Iosif Brodskii, Ilia Utkin and Iurii Avvakumov are commonly referred to

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[91] Erik Bulatov, 'Ich bin überzeugt daß des Raum der Kunst und der Raum unseres lebens zwei verschieden Räume sind: Ein Gespräch mit Heinz Schütz,' *Kunstforum*, 106 (March-April 1990) p.258 cit. Ibid., p.38.

[92] Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, *'Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience, 1956-1986 : the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection,'* (New York: Thames and Hudson in association with the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1995), Andrei Erofeev, *Breaking the Ice: Moscow Art 1960-80s*, (Moscow: Maier, 2012), John E. Bowlt and Donald E. Kuspit (eds.), *Forbidden Art: The Postwar Russian Avant-Garde* (Los Angeles: Curatorial Assistance, 1998).

as representatives of Soviet postmodernism [93] – a badge of honour that demonstrates individuals' intolerance for imposed aesthetic codes. In a 1989 book on the subject, critic Alexander G. Rappaport wrote, 'Paper architecture can safely be regarded as an *import* of postmodernism [my emphasis]… the specifics of the Soviet conceptual architecture of the eighties lie simultaneously in a postmodern rejection of the principles of modernity and, to an even greater degree, in the effort to withdraw from the protective cover of official architecture.'[94] But were these postmodern tendencies really imported, or did they have their roots in native discourses?

By introducing Scott's understanding of the conditions of 'postmodernization' to the Soviet context, the approach taken in this thesis expands our potential understanding of Soviet postmodernism by shifting focus back onto design practice in official institutions. This adds to art-historical research by Beliaeva (2006)[95] and Reid (1993)[96] that has acknowledged the importance of new ways of comprehending environment and semiotics in 'official' Soviet art of the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Andres Kurg's 2012 article on Andres Tolts' editorship of the Estonian Home decoration magazine *Kunst ja Kodu* has shown how the home was presented as a 'ground for critical dialogue with the outside,'[97] and was permeated

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[93] For example, the paper architects 'represented' Russia in the V&A exhibition *Postmodernism: Style and Subeversion*. See Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt (eds.) *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970 – 1990,* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).

[94] Alexander G. Rappaport, 'Language and Architecture of Post-Totalitarianism,' in *Paper Architecture* ed. by Heinrich Klotz (pp.11-16), p.12.

[95] Maria Baliaeva, 'K novomu iazyku stankovogo iskusstva 1970-1980-e gody,' in *Ot avangarda do postmodernizma: Mastera iskusstva XX veka* ed. Lidiia Iovleva (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia tret'iakovskaia galereia, 2006), pp.151-2

[96] Susan E. Reid, 'The 'Art of Memory': Retrospectivism in Soviet Painting of the Brezhnev Era,' in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992* ed. M, Cullerne-Bown and B. Taylor (Machester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.161-188.

[97] Andres Kurg, 'Fractured Boundaries: The Representation of Homes in the Critical and Artistic Practices of the 1970s,' *Home Cultures,* 9/3 (2012), pp.257-283.

by consumer items, popular culture, and information networks' that were partly inspired by the dissolution of boundaries between genres of Western art and design in the 1960s.[98] Kurg is successful in describing how such interpretations of the manmade environment were localised in the socialist context, which I also aim to achieve with regards Senezh studio.

In order to understand how new perceptions of the man-made milieu influenced artistic projecteering, it is necessary to explore Senezh studio's relationship not only to histories of architecture and design practices on both sides of the Iron Curtain, but also to histories of the intelligentsia in late socialism. Aside from Vladislav Zubok's *Zhivago's Children* (2009) that provides and overview of the 'late socialist intelligentsia,'[99] Maxim Waldstein (2008)[100] and Anesa-Miller Pogacar's (1983)[101] studies of the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics have proven invaluable sources for understanding the development of Soviet cultural studies. Likewise, Anatolii Piskoppel's 2004 essay on the cultural legacy of methodological philosophy[102] – an important school of thought in Soviet design theory - helps to position a complex intellectual phenomenon within its historical context. James P. Scanlan's *Marxism in the USSR: A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (1985)[103] provides insights into the development of aesthetic philosophy after Stalin that have been crucial to understanding Kantor's theories of artistic projecteering.

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[98] Ibid., p.262.

[99] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. ;London: Belknap, 2009).

[100] Maxim Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics*, (Saarbrücken: VCM Verlag, 2008).

[101] Anesa Miller-Pogacar, 'Transculture and Culturology: Post-Structuralist Theory in Late and Post-Soviet Russia,' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Kansas, 1993).

[102] Anatolii Al'redovich Piskoppel', 'G. P. Shchedrovitsky – podvizhnik i myslitel', in *Poznaiushchee myshlenie i sotsial'noe deistvie: Nasledie G.P Shchedrovitskogo v kontekste otechestvennoi i mirovoi filosofskoi mysli* ed. N.I. Kuznetsova (Moscow: F.A.S.-media, 2004), pp.11-58.

[103] James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR : A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

While exploration of the question of Soviet postmodernism helps to situate the practice of artistic projecteering within global discourses and native discussions surrounding the conception of the man-made environment, it tells us little about the agency of such projects: Why were they made and what was their intended effect? By way of explanation, I propose that the projects produced at Senezh should be read as utopias: material representations of alternative social realities. This, in turn, can produce new readings of the motivations behind creative production in the late socialist period. My review of histories of the Thaw and late socialist culture follows in the next chapter, where historiography is placed in dialogue with theories of utopia.

Chapter 1 | Utopias and late socialism

Over the past decade, historians have dismantled the idea that the period of 1964-1985 should be interpreted as an 'era of stagnation' - a term coined in retrospect by Mikhail Gorbachev to refer to the creeping disillusionment in all areas of Soviet society. Studies spanning themes including theatre, [1] academia, [2] architecture, [3] philosophy, [4] and the Westernisation of youth culture [5] have all sought to highlight the diversity of Soviet culture and everyday life during late socialism. Elie and Ohayon (2013) note that period is usually split into two distinct phases. The first consists of 'positive developments while Brezhnev still enjoyed good health and could envisage positive reform.'[6] In many accounts, this was followed by a long decline in the economic performance, human rights and the government's ability to tolerate criticism of its policies. In the arts, this began following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia and the stifling of dissent among the liberal intelligentsia, whereas economic historians position the abandonment

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[1] Susan Costanzo, 'Friends in Low Places: Russian amateur theaters and their sponsors, 1970-1983,' *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 54/3-4 (2013), pp.565-588.

[2] Maxim Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics* (Saarbrücken: VCM Verlag, 2008).

[3] Katharina Ritter, Ekaterina Shapiro-Obermair, Dietmar Steiner and Alexandra Wachter (eds.), *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012).

[4] James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR : A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[5] Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[6] Marc Elie and Isabelle Ohayon, 'Foreward' to special issue 'L'expérience soviétique et son apogeé – Culture et société des années Brežnev – vol. 1,' *Cahiers du monde Russe,* 54/1-2 (2013), pp.29-46 (p.30).

of constructive reform around 1973.[7] Other studies suggest that the sustained diversity of cultural life under Brezhnev occurred in spite of the state or its ideology. For example, studies of 'parallel academia'[8] and 'non-conformist art'[9] have pointed to the diversity of cultural production that existed outside of so-called 'official culture.'

Cultural histories of the Khrushchev Thaw, on the other hand, have emphasised the symbiotic relationship between cultural production and the state. The publication and discussion of previously repressed literature in literary journals like *Novyi mir,*[10] the rehabilitation of Constructivism in architecture[11] and the abandonment of Stalin-era dogma in science in favour of more 'objective' methods of research[12] indicate that during the Thaw, culture was placed in the service of the state and its citizens who were engaged in the construction of communist society.

Cultural histories of the transition from Khrushchev to Brezhnev therefore indicate to a gradual decline in utopian thinking of the period following the 1968

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs.*

[9] Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, *'Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience, 1956-1986 : the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection,'* (New York: Thames and Hudson in association with the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1995), Andrei Erofeev, *Breaking the Ice: Moscow Art 1960-80s,* (Moscow: Maier, 2012), John E. Bowlt and Donald E. Kuspit (eds.), *Forbidden Art: The Postwar Russian Avant-Garde* (Los Angeles: Curatorial Assistance, 1998).

[10] Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[11] Stephen V. Bittner, 'Remembering the Avant-Garde: Moscow Architects and the "rehabilitation" of Constructivism, 1961–64,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2/3 (2001), pp. 553-576.

[12] Konstantin Ivanov, 'Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science,' *Science in Context,* 15/2 (2002) pp.317-338, Also, Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT press, 2002).

crushing of liberal reform in Czechoslovakia. So was utopianism a 'spent force'[13] by the mid-1970s, or did it find new relevance? Zubok notes how 'it became fashionable among the intellectuals of the seventies to treat the sixties leftist intelligentsia and dissidents as naïve and irrelevant Don Quixotes.'[14] If this is the case, what happened to utopian thinking at a time when sincere appeals to social action were démodé? What were the afterlives of the utopian ideas of the Thaw?[15]

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider how utopias functioned in the context of the Thaw and late socialism. Below, I consider the relationship between utopianism and Marxism, before I discuss the limitations of current discussions on utopia in Soviet history. Following this, I explain why the theories of Mannheim and Ricoeur are particularly useful in helping to uncover the relationship between utopias and ideologies. I then turn to a discussion of the utopian features of Soviet ideology during the period, and identify the uses of Mannheim and Ricoeur's theoretical models in explaining the mechanisms through which utopias can critique the present through presentation of alternative futures. In particular, I show that Mannheim and Ricoeur help us to understand strategic uses of incongruence, time, and historical narrative in the production of both utopias and ideologies. Finally, I argue that such a model is of use in tracing

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[13] David Crowley, 'The Art of Cybernetic Communism,' available on line at http://faktografia.com/2011/09/13/the-art-of-cybernetic-communism/#_ftn26 [accessed 21st October 2015].

[14] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap, 2009), p320.

[15] These continuities are explored in the work of Denis Kozlov. In his study on the development of unofficial historical narrtives among Soviet intellectuals, Kozlov has shown how the liberal discourses of the thaw grew into flourishing underground movements of the following decades. See Denis Kozlov, 'The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography and Doubt 1953-91,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2/3, (2001), pp.577-500.

the movement of utopian ideas through history and producing what Svetlana Boym has called an 'Off-modern' history of socialist modernity.[16]

Marxism and utopia

> Marxists have a defensive attitude towards utopias. It was so laborious to escape them in the past. But today utopian thought has a new necessity. For that historical spontaneity that Marx conceived as a process of natural history and which our Marxist-Leninists celebrate in the name of objective economic laws, *must* today be overcome…. *Today it is general emancipation that is the absolute necessity*.[17]

In *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, East German dissident Rudolf Bahro set out a passionate defence of utopian thinking. 'Scientific socialism,' the 'scientific-technological revolution' and 'objective laws' of societal progress were all terms used by socialist governments that by the 1970s had come to characterise the blindness, inflexibility and inhumanity of state socialism.

During the Thaw, ideals of objectivity had been closely linked to a desire to overcome the ideological dogmatism that had plagued Stalinist science. [18] Cybernetics was popularized due to its supposed objectivity and potential for enabling rational management of the planned economy and workspaces.[19] By the 1970s, writes Gerovitch (2002) the language of scientific even-handedness had

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[16] Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).
[17] Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* trans. by David Fernbach (London: NLB, 1978), p.253.
[18] See Konstantin Ivanov, 'Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science,' *Science in Context,* 15/2 (2002) pp.317-338.
[19] See Chapter Six in Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak,* pp.253-291.

become re-absorbed into an authoritarian power structure that used 'scientific' and 'objective' language to lend it credibility.[20] It is in this context that Bahro urged the creation of a new tradition of utopian socialism descended from thinkers of the nineteenth century: from writers like Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and Morris. He saw utopian thought as a necessary engine for the renewal and redirection of socialist society because it is in utopian thought, and not scientific 'laws,' that the core beliefs of a society might come to the surface. Utopian thought might enable a reflection and reconsideration of society's ideals and resurrect the possibility that communism might one day be achieved.

Bahro understood that the Marxist denial of utopianism was paradoxical. Marx and Engels had thought images of alternative society detrimental to the historical project of scientific socialism as they stand 'in opposition to the progressive historical development of the proletariat.' [21] Lenin, in turn, declared that 'Marxists…are hostile to all and every utopia' because a utopia is 'a wish that can never come true.'[22] Yet, as Vincent Geoghean notes, the denial of utopian thought within Marxism-Leninism was often accompanied by a tacit acknowledgement of the need to create an image of the future in order that the masses knew what they were working, fighting and suffering for.[23] This paradox comes to the fore in areas such as design, which by its nature anticipates future needs and desires.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975) vol. 6, p.515 cit. Vincent Geoghean, *Utopianism and Marxism* (Methuen: London and New York, 1987), pp.28-29.

[22] Lenin, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1963) vol. 18 p355, 359 cit. Geoghean, *Utopianism and Marxism,* p.54.

[23] Geoghean, *Utopianism and Marxism,* p.35.

Utopias and Soviet history

Utopias are of use to the historian as they bring the hopes, ideals and anxieties of different social groups to the fore. Instead of dismissing utopias as naïve daydreams, as Soviet ideologues were apt to do,[24] scholars of utopia have argued the point of view that 'utopia is not escapist nonsense but a fundamental part of human culture.'[25]

Yet, for some historians of the Soviet Union, utopia is understood as a form of wishful thinking on the part of the state that had to be abandoned due to poor management or lack of will. This is the view taken by Maria Balina and Evgenii Dobrenko (2011) who have stated that, 'a Utopia has no place in real life, and never can – and this is the key difference between a utopian dream and wishes rooted in reality. The paradox of the Soviet Utopia is that the authorities, in striving to define and build a specific space for this Utopia, constantly defer the attainment of utopian happiness in time.'[26] This view positions utopia as a kind of promise by the state that can never be fulfilled. But the state did not hold a monopoly on utopias: a closer study of the nature of utopia indicates its central role in daily life that is diverse and understudied.

Fredric Jameson (2005) has commented on how the conflation of utopia with promises made by the state can be seen as a legacy of Stalinism. 'During the Cold War,' writes Jameson, 'Utopia had become a synonym for Stalinism and had

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[24] See Jerome M. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p.73.

[25] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (London: Philip Allan, 1990), pp.1-2.

[26] Maria Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.) 'Introduction' to *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2011) pp.xv-xxiv (p.xxi).

come to designate a program which neglected human frailty and original sin, and betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and reluctant subjects.'[27] For thinkers including Karl Popper (author of *The Open Society and Its Enemies,* 1945),[28] the idea of gradual change through the democratic process was the only alternative to a utopian society that 'seeks to impose in toto a rational, unchanging, aprioristic blueprint.'[29]

Ernst Bloch, on the other hand, refuted the view of utopia as an inflexible and monolithic vision of the future. His intellectual life was dedicated to identifying the utopian impulse in all aspects of life that lean towards the future. From day-dreams, myths and fairy-tales, to architecture, music, medicine, tourism and religion – Bloch saw utopian actions in day-to-day activities which extend from minor 'little daydreams' and 'anticipatory consciousness' to full-blown 'outlines of a better world.'[30] Bloch's concepts of 'abstract' and 'concrete' utopia enable us to distinguish between utopianism in everyday life and those around which ideologies are formed, known as abstract utopias. Abstract utopias can be described as ideological in the sense that they 'exist as representations that deflect attention away from the realities of lived and embodied social experience towards a realm of spectral abstractions and idealizations.'[31] With important exceptions (discussed below), historians such as Balina and Dobrenko have tended to stress forms of

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[27] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p.xi.

[28] Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies,* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1945).

[29] Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p.93.

[30] For summaries of Bloch's extensive writings, see Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia,* pp.97-122 and Geoghean, *Utopianism and Marxism,* pp.87-97.

[31] Michael E. Gardiner, *Weak Messianism: Essays in Everyday Utopianism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), p.4.

abstract utopia, thereby placing a major emphasis on the state's role as a producer of utopias. Citizens have so far been granted little agency in their production.

Concrete utopias, on the other hand, are part of a process of the continual production the future in everyday life whereby 'the unfinished nature of reality locates the possible within the real.' [32] For Bloch, the process of actively transforming reality is utopian. Some scholars (particularly those studying late socialism) have sought to locate utopia in culture, science and everyday life. Writing in 1975, sovietologist Jerome Gilison looked beyond the embargo that Marxists had placed on utopia to 'piece together an (albeit inconsistent) image of how writers imagine future society.'[33] In his pioneering study, Gilison pulled together writings that included descriptions of future social relations, economic and political organization, the economics of superabundance, the nature of work and the future communist man. Since then, many of the issues highlighted by Gilison have received greater attention, particularly in the field of material culture studies discussed in the literature review. In particular, Kate Brown (2012) has explored the topic of utopia in a comparative study of two closed 'atomic' cities in Soviet Russia and the USA. She writes, 'what is often overlooked in the critique of communism as a failed utopia is that utopias are all about desire, about creating a surfeit of it so that people no longer need to worry about fulfilling their wishes and can move on to other aspirations.'[34] Elsewhere, Katherine Lebow (2013) has explained how the incomplete construction of the colossal Nowa Huta suburb of Kraków in Stalinist Poland guarantees its utopian status. As utopian thinking

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[32] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p.104.

[33] Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia*, p.101.

[34] Kate Brown, 'Utopia Gone Terribly Right: Plutonium's "Gated Communities" in the Soviet Union and the United States' in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* ed. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.49-57 (p.50).

'hinges on a feeling of incompleteness,' this means that, 'early visions of the town's planners and builders, only partially realized by an ambivalent sponsoring regime, are felt by many of Nowa Huta's partisans as an on-going challenge, and ones that will never be fulfilled "unless fostered by a deliberate collective action."'[35] Both scholars have used the prism of utopia to understand desire as a feature of everyday life under socialism that motivated groups and individuals to social action.

Constitutive utopias

In order to understand the agency of design projects at Senezh, it is necessary to engage a theory of utopia that can help us to understand their relationships to the changing socio-cultural and political environment. Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (first published 1936)[36] and Paul Ricoeur's later elaborations on Mannheim in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986)[37] provide a useful set of tools for understanding the production of design projects during and after the Thaw. Ricoeur's notion of the 'constitutive utopia' is a concept that bears some similarity to Bloch's 'concrete utopia.' The constitutive utopia places an emphasis on culture that directly or indirectly imagines forms of social existence and presents alternatives to the status quo. A constitutive utopia is in important part of the cultural or social imagination. Ricoeur explains:

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[35] Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p.182.

[36] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).

[37] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986).

The social imagination is *constitutive* of social reality. So the presumption here is precisely that of a social imagination, of a cultural imagination, operating in both constructive and destructive ways, as both confirmation and contestation of the present situation.[38]

This aspect of Mannheim and Ricoeur's sociological theories of utopia is of renewed interest among historians. Gordin, Tilley and Prakash (2010) have emphasised the value in examining 'utopia as a *practice*, as a technique used by historical actors for understanding their particular contemporary circumstances.'[39] In architectural theory, Nathaniel Coleman (2005) has concluded, 'exemplary architecture is *always* part of some potential whole imagined by its architect, a whole that serves as an organizing model…conceived of as a partial utopia.[40] He is interested in how the stories that shape buildings influence the ways they are later used and inhabited in both modernism and post-modernism.

The experience of failed grand schemes of utopian architecture has caused architects to shy away from associations with the word utopia in late socialism. For example, Soviet 'paper architects'[41] rejected the term that had become associated with the naïveté of the generation of the 1960s.[42] To accompany the exhibition of

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[38] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p.3.

[39] Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash, 'Introduction: Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time,' in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* ed. Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp.1-21 (p.4).

[40] Nathaniel Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005) p.2.

[41] The 'paper architects' are a loosely defined group of architects who produced a range of unrealizable projects on paper and in the form. The phenomenon started in 1981 when architects Mikhail Belov, Aleksandr Brodsky, Il'ia Utkin, Mikhail Filippov and Nad'ia Bronzova won top prizes in an international competition organized by the magazine *Japan Architect.*

[42] Vladislav Zubok writes of the 'scathing criticism' towards the generation of the 1960s that came from those who came of age in the subsequent two decades. He explains how 'most of them lashed out at the *shestidesiatniki* [generation of the sixties] from a postmodernist perspective and

Soviet 'paper architecture' at the 1988 Milan Triennale, architecture critic Aleksandr Rappaport penned an article in the critical spirit of glasnost entitled *Utopia versus Phantasy*. 'Phantasy,' he explained, is 'free from any dogmatic theoretical doctrine,' or the 'severe logical conclusion of utopia' meaning that 'these proposals are free and subjectively motivated, sometimes obviously in an openly unrealistic and fabulous manner.'[43] Rappaport's definition of utopia is coloured by the experience of the architectural profession's subservience to an ideological technocracy and pretensions to objectivity. Rappaport's usage of the term is close to Ricoeur's notion of a *pathological utopia* (the counterpart to a constitutive utopia), which is preoccupied by 'time as now' and the 'immediate fulfilment of an idea' that can be characterised by 'neglect of the actual effort, physical as well as mental, required to get things right.'[44] Phantasy, for Rappaport, makes open reference to the limitations of utopian thought.

When conceived as a *practice*, however, it is possible to identify how utopias are devised in order to influence social action. Mannheim's innovation was to define utopia as a something that 'acts directly upon reality by initiating transformation of present social conditions.'[45] Utopias seek out what is deficient in the present day and produce alternatives. For Coleman, utopian thinking in architecture has not been exhausted by modernist grand plans. Any exemplary building should be thought of as *constituting* the means for a 'continuing renewal of architecture.'[46]

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blamed them for their participation in the Soviet project.' See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. ;London: Belknap, 2009), pp.359-360.

[43] Alexandre Rappaport, 'Phantasy versus Utopia,' in *World Cities and the Future of the Metropoles: International Participations* ed. Luigi Mazza. (Milan: Electa, XVII Triennale di Milano, 1988) p.229.

[44] Coleman, *Utopias and Architecture,* p.58.

[45] Ibid., p.34.

[46] Ibid., p.5.

This could apply as much to an idea as to a building. In an environment such as Senezh studio, theory and aesthetic practice were coproduced. This meant that theory and practice influenced one another rather than slipping into roles of extreme dominance and subservience.[47] While paper architects claimed that the inability to realize interesting work led them away from utopia, Karl Kantor argued that the utopian element of design becomes even more pronounced when politics stands in the way of the fulfilment of a project. He explained in his 1996 memoir:

> If the failure to realize a project is not due to the weakness of industry, but because of the government's indifference to domestic and world culture in the way it constructs its cities; the designer gains the desire to design urban environments that entail an even deeper examination of socio-cultural and historical principles and aims. [48]

One of the initial considerations that must be made when analysing projects produced at Senezh is the extent to which they conformed to the present social consensus as to the future direction for society at different times. To what extent were they *critical* of the present? What would need to change for the prescribed alternative future to become a reality?

Mannheim's approach is particularly useful in the Soviet context because of the way he factors in the likelihood that perceptions of present reality are themselves

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[47] Natalia Titova speaks about how a great number of articles written for the Union of Artists' Journal *Dekortivnoe iskusstvo SSSR* were inspired by issues raised by practice. Interview with Natalia Titova, Pushchino, October 2013.

[48] Karl Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine: Dizain v kontekste kul'tury doperestroechnogo tridtsatiletiia 1955-1985* (Moscow: Anir, 1996), p.174.

influenced by ideology. A utopia is defined in terms of its relationship to reality as perceived through the lens of ideology, rather than to reality in an objective sense.[49] A utopia may therefore question ideology without entirely escaping its influence. Utopian strategy is a process of interpretation and positioning of the social dimension of existence within specific political contexts in a way that is integral to social existence.

Mannheim referred to the gap between reality (as perceived through ideology), and its utopian alternative as *incongruence.* He wrote, 'a state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality in which it occurs.…Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.'[50] The perception of reality from which a utopian alternative emerges is simultaneously aware of, and influenced by ideology.

This aspect of Mannheim's theory is of particular use in assessing how values functioned in late socialism and explaining the view that despite a general absence of belief that the USSR was on the path to communism, this 'did not put an end to the Socialist ideals of equality, personal development, collectivism, and technical and social progress.'[51] How were those critical of the regime simultaneously influenced by the ideology of their surrounding environment?

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[49] This is because we cannot know what reality is. Everything we see is coloured by ideology. See Lyman Tower Sargent 'Ideology and utopia: Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13/3 (2008), pp. 263-273 (p.269).

[50] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) p.173.

[51] Marc Elie and Isabelle Ohayon, 'Foreward' to special issue 'L'expérience soviétique et son apogeé – Culture et société des années Brežnev – vol. 1,' *Cahiers du monde Russe,* 54/1-2, pp.29-46 (p.35).

Scholars have recently engaged theories of discourse and language to propose a variety of ways in which the intelligentsia creatively incorporated and subverted ideological texts and images into their work during the 1970s and early 1980s. Serguei Oushakine (2001) has applied a Foucauldian interpretation of 'mimetic resistance' to Samizdat literature, asserting that, 'the oppositional discourse in a sense shared the symbolic field with the dominant discourse: it echoed and amplified the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioning itself outside of or underneath it.'[52] In other words, when used in non-official contexts, ideological and revolutionary language could take on a wide range of new meanings.

Alexei Yurchak (2005) has shown that citizens developed complex relationships with ideological language during late socialism. Even those citizens who positioned themselves 'outside of' [*vnye*] official ideological discourse remained within the system, despite a deliberate lack of engagement with semantic fields of meaning commonly expressed in official language.[53] Yurchak emphasizes how 'for many, "socialism" as a system of human values…was not necessarily equivalent to "the state" or "ideology"; indeed, living socialism to them often meant something quite different from the official interpretations provided by state rhetoric.'[54] The values according to which one lived were likely to only partially coincide with the ideology of the state. Zubok writes that during the Thaw, members of the reform-minded intelligentsia sought to promote values of 'social and moral responsibility, truth and sincerity' that would lead to the 'humanization of Soviet society' that

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[52] Serguei Alex Oushakine, 'The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat.' *Public Culture*, 13/2 (2001), pp.191-214 (p.192).

[53] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.132.

[54] Ibid., p.8.

were drawn from the pre-Stalinist ethos of the intelligentsia.[55]

By focusing on incongruity with, rather than critique of ideology, it is possible to perceive a wide range of relationships to ideology expressed through design projects that extend beyond binary relationships of conformity and dissent. For example, something that is outside of [*vnye*] ideological discourse can possess a degree of incongruity without being directly critical. An incongruous utopia can be simultaneously informed by official culture *and* its critics. This challenges scholarship that places emphasis on binary categories of dissidence/conformity and official/unofficial culture.

Ines Weizman (2012) has recently produced a definition of 'dissidence' that includes Soviet 'paper architecture' of the 1980s. According to Weizman, the production of paper architecture can be seen as a dissident activity due to its production in the 'private domain' that was 'articulated by subversion' and characterized 'by a retreat into the imaginary, ironic, dreamlike and the impossible.'[56] Her definition erects boundaries between public and private discourse and practice within and outside of official institutions that I challenge in this study. In Aleksandr Daniel's article on the relationship between the 'culture of dissidence' (as opposed to dissident culture) and the broader culture of the intelligentsia, he argues that dissident activity was far from underground or hidden away:

Dissidents did not usually sever links with the outside world and enter a

[55] Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, pp.359-360.
[56] Ines Weizman, 'Dissidence Through Architecture,' *Perspecta* 45 (2012), pp.27-38 (p.29, p.38).

dissident monastery or commune. They did not need to hide their dissidence because it is an endeavour oriented around transparency rather than being underground. Furthermore, most of their friends belonged to the same freethinking intelligentsia and generally distinguished between the dissidents' ideological, cultural and political leanings.[57]

At Senezh studio, individuals to had links with both official and non-official areas of art, science and academia. Evgenii Asse, an architect who worked as a consultant at Senezh has referred to their activities as 'semi-dissidence' [*poludissidentstvo*].[58] The studio's leadership were certainly members of the 'free-thinking intelligentsia,' but nevertheless hoped to maintain careers within the USSR Union of Artists. A focus on dissidence is essentially a study of a certain type of *behaviour*, whereas an emphasis on utopian aspects of design and architecture can shed light on a broader range of relationships with and incongruence to 'official' and 'unofficial' Soviet culture. Analysis of utopia is about the *content* of practitioners' thinking and tells us about the agency of their projects.

Utopia, time and historical consciousness

The centrality of historical narrative and social development in Marxism-Leninism means that both ideology and utopias produced in the Soviet Union are hypersensitive to concepts associated with time, social progress and the future. The strategic use of time is therefore an important feature of the incongruities we will perceive in projects developed at Senezh. What can these theories tell us

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[57] Aleksandr Daniel', 'Dissidentstvo: kul'tura uskol'zaiushchaia ot opredelenii,' *ROSSIIA/RUSSIA vyp1 (9): Semidesiatie kak predmet istorii russkoi kul'tury* (Moscow: O.G.I., 1998), pp.111-124 (p.119).
[58] Interview with Evgenii Asse, Moscow, December 2013.

about the strategic uses of time in the utopias and ideologies of late socialism?

Mannheim thought socialist-communist utopias to possess unique temporal structures that were neither fully rooted in the desire to maintain the status quo, or to abandon history. This is due to the way they contrast the chiliastic or remote elements (i.e. those elements to which a path from the present is not immediately apparent) and the near future (i.e. the immediate steps that should be taken to progress towards a long-term goal). This process takes place with constant reference to the past (e.g. the glorification of the struggle of the proletariat). Commenting on this multi-dimensional aspect of time, Mannheim wrote:

> It is not alone through the virtual presentness of every past event that every present experience embodies a third dimension which points back to the past, but also because the future is being prepared in it. It is not only the past but the future as well which has virtual existence in the present. A weighing of each of the factors existing in the present, and an insight into the tendencies latent in these forces, can only be obtained only if the present is understood in the light of its concrete fulfilment in the future.[59]

The need to define the present in relation to a narrative of historical progress is what distinguishes socialist utopian thinking from other critical representations of society such as allegory. For a utopia to have meaning as an engine of social change, it must bear some conception that the changes it prescribes are possible – and a hypothetical idea of when it may take effect. A *constitutive* utopia must retain

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[59] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.221.

a possibility, however small, that the social conditions it presents may be possible.[60] At Senezh, this difference can be observed in changing conceptions of artistic projecteering: industrial design projects of the 1960s (see chapter 3) were part of a project to develop a new industrial design discipline for the future, whereas later urban design projects (see chapter 4) were intended to encourage social action in the present by preventing the demolition of historic city centre buildings. These strategies cannot be deduced in isolation however; in order to fully grasp the utopian agency of Senezh projects in relationship to time, it is important to understand their congruence or incongruence to expressions of time in official ideology.

Descriptions of socialist realist utopianism closely resemble Bloch's 'abstract utopia', i.e. – a utopia that is used to deflect attention from the inadequacies of the present through simultaneous reference to idealised pasts and future.[61] Papernyi (1985) has drawn attention to the temporality of socialist realist monumentalism in architecture, whereby the past could reflect changes in the present:

> The crystallization of current events into historical monuments is not irreversible in Culture Two [the culture of Stalinist socialist realism]. The monuments kept evolving and reflecting changes in the present, as if in time Culture Two flowed backward. Some events in the present caused

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[60] This is in contrast to the critical utopia that acknowledges the impossibility of its own realisation.

[61] Michael E. Gardiner, *Weak Messianism: Essays in Everyday Utopianism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), p.4.

changes in the past. For example, the…architects expelled from the Soviet Union of Architects (SSA) later were erased form archival stenograms.[62]

Changing the past would allow the conditions of the present to appear in continuity with those of the future. Similarly, an image of the future could act as a justification for inadequacies in the present. For example, Sheila Fitzpatrick (1992) has described the obsession with 'life as is becoming,' during the Stalin era that represented a constant placing of oneself within a narrative of revolutionary change:

> In the socialist-realist view of the world, a dry, half-dug ditch signified a future canal full of loaded barges, a ruined church was a potential kolkhoz clubhouse, and the inscription of a project in the Five-Year plan was a magical act of creation that might obviate the need for more concrete exertions.[63]

One of the noticeable features of post-Stalin ideology is the reconceptualization of time. Khrushchev's promise that communism could be achieved within the lifetime of his contemporaries was significant because it radically altered the temporal structure of the socialist utopia as expressed in official ideology by pulling a once distant future into the present. The oft-cited 1961 Third Party Programme of the Communist Party carried the declaration that 'the economic task of the party and the Soviet people is to create *the material and technical basis of*

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[62] Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* trans. By John Hill and Roann Barris (Cambridge University Press: Cabridge, 2002), p.18. First published in Russian in 1985.
[63] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.217.

communism within two decades.'[64] The programme contrasted the present stage of the 'full construction of communism' *(razvernutoe stroitel'stvo kommunizma)* to the previous era of 'gradual transition to communism' *(postepennyi perekhod kommunizmu).*[65] The document proclaimed the 'material and technical base of communism' would '*ensure*…an abundance of material and cultural benefits for the whole population'[66] [original emphasis]. By stating that communism would arise by the mid-1980s, formerly chiliastic elements of the socialist-communist utopia had been moved into the near future as the timetable was premised on 'the immediate emergence of certain elements of the future society within the framework of the old.'[67]

The Thaw is frequently characterized as a simultaneous re-evaluation of the present society's relationship to the past and to the future.[68] Although coming to terms with the Stalinist terror was a traumatic, incomplete and sometimes unpredictable process, the mid-1960s saw the waning of the terror's grip on national consciousness.[69] Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in his 1956 secret speech and the eventual decision to allow publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962 signalled a degree of legitimization for the discussion of personal memories that diverged from the shape-shifting accounts in official

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[64] KPSS, *Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961).
[65] Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia,* p.61.
[66] KPSS, 'The Documentary Record of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', in *Current Soviet Policies IV* ed. Leo Griulow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p.15.
[67] Donald R. Kelley, *The Politics of Developed Socialism: The Soviet-Union as a Post Industrial State* (New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.3.
[68] See Katerina Clark, 'Introduction' to special issue 'Rethinking the Past and Current Thaw,' *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 3/4 (1988), pp.241-254.
[69] Miriam Dobson, 'The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 12/4 (2011), pp.905-924 (pp.911-912).

textbooks during the Stalin era.[70] Descriptions of alternative futures, on the other hand, offered an escape route from deep-rooted fears, suspicions and material and intellectual poverty. As Katerina Clark (1988) notes, a Thaw constitutes an intensification of what might be considered normal cultural practice at other times:

> There is a continuous, if not always perceptible, process whereby the master narrative which informs our very perception of reality is recorded or transvalued. In the Soviet Union where the hegemonic forces characteristically attempt to freeze history, to countervail against such flux, these fits of memory are necessary components in the struggle to master history as change. During a Thaw, many of the mythemes, images, values and much of the vocabulary which are constituent parts of Soviet cultural myths are reaccented and transvalued, recombined and thus changed.[71]

The potential for a set of utopian images to have a constitutive effect on reality and to act as a sourcebook for the redirection of ideas is therefore accentuated during a Thaw. Despite the inherent anti-utopianism in scientific socialism, the 1961 Third Party Programme of the communist party was brimming with images of how the future communist society might appear. While the document represents just one moment in an approximately fifteen-year period, it acts as a metonym for the broader Thaw. The programme's focus on the immanent transition to communism and the agency it placed on citizens to define how communism might appear in the future summarizes the anticipation of reform in

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[70] On the search for new historical continuities during the Thaw, see Kozlov, Denis, 'The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography and Doubt 1953-91,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2/3, (2001), pp.577-500, and James V. Wertsch, Voices of Collective Remembering, (Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press: 2002).
[71] Clark, 'Introduction,' pp.246-247.

all areas of life as well as the possibility of constructing of less deterministic ideology. Kozlov and Gilburd (2013) see the Thaw as an animating metaphor that does not merely signify a period of transformation, but helped shape 'social, political and cultural realities.'[72]

Rather than providing technocratic projections of grain output or currency reserve levels, the Third Party Programme is full of references to material and social changes that paint a series of *images* to which citizens might relate. Motor cars, housing for all, free canteens for workers, consumer goods produced 'in accordance with the varied demands of the public,'[73] raised incomes and a shortening of the working day were among the various concrete promises of the programme.[74] It was these images that helped to make the programme broadly comprehensible to a mass audience and linked state ideology to the visions of the future frequently encountered in mass culture. In their well-known book *The World of the 60s* (1988), Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis explain how the programme took off in the social imagination:

> In the most direct, concrete sense, nobody believed in the concrete numbers in the Programme. This was not the point [because it] functioned along the lines of an artistic text. Because of this, however, everybody saw in it what they wanted to see…Its aim was to proclaim the construction of

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[72] Denis Kozlov and Eleonary Gilburd, 'The Thaw as an Event in Russian History' in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp.18-84 (p.23).

[73] KPSS, 'The Documentary Record of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', in *Current Soviet Policies IV* ed. Leo Griulow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p.21.

[74] Ibid., p.15.

communism, that is a society whose aim is the creative transformation of the world.[75]

Despite the official embargo on utopias in Marxism-Leninism, the programme was littered with legitimations for reimagining the future. It promised 'material and moral encouragement to mass invention' and 'free comradely discussions promoting the creative solution of timely problems.'[76] However, its focus on technology and technique also suggested limitations for social dreaming. A key emphasis of the programme is the increased specialization and education of Soviet citizens in order to 'develop in every way the initiative of economic councils, enterprises, public organizations, scientists, engineers, designers, workers and collective farmers in creating and applying new technical improvements.'[77] While the party retained control of the meta-narrative of historical development, the programme legitimized visions of the future (i.e. utopian thinking) in areas of specialist concern.

Mannheim writes that when advocates of certain utopia take power, the agency of that utopia becomes transformed. It no longer indicates an alternative to the status quo, but serves to obscure the conditions of reality. Mannheim asserted that this is no longer a utopia, but an ideology: 'There is implicit in the word "ideology" the insight that in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it.'[78] It is in moments of revolution and reform that utopia and ideology

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[75] Petr Vail, and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka,* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), p.5.
[76] KPSS, '22nd Congress,' p.17.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Mannheim, *Ideolgy and Utopia*, p.36.

are least separable. Richard Stites (1989) explains that in times of revolution, utopia can act as a 'script for the coming of life and drama, a scenario of novel human relations, and a guide to the use of space, time, and technologies.'[79] Yet, as the perceived need for new ideas diminishes, an increased emphasis is placed on stability. Therefore, when a utopia is transformed into a rigid set of rules concerned with safeguarding stability and legitimacy; it should be considered an ideology.

The abandonment of Khrushchev's timetable during the Brezhnev years is a familiar historical contour of the period that represents the dissolution of utopia by ideology. Following the failure to attain the goal of 'overtaking and surpassing' US per capita production, the doctrine of developed socialism emerged in its place. Donald R. Kelley (1986) explains how in place of the 'incautious commitments to firm timetables for the transition to communism…emerged a sense of political and intellectual caution that dictated current stability and gradual transition…[that] signalled a considerable scaling down of expectations for transformations in the near future.'[80] At the same time, the Brezhnev regime sought legitimacy in the past, for example in the cult of the Great Patriotic War (World War Two). Nina Tumarkin (2002) explains how 'the idealized war experience was a reservoir of national suffering to be tapped and tapped again to mobilize loyalty, maintain order and achieve a semblance of energy to counter the growing nationwide apathy and loss of popular resilience of spirit.'[81] The scaling back of support for academics interested in sociological prognosis is another example of the temporal

[79] Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.7.
[80] Kelley, *The Politics of Developed Socialism*, p.4.
[81] Nina Tumarkin, 'The Great Patriotic War as myth and memory', *European Review*, 11/4 (2003), pp.595-611 (p.601).

readjustment of the Brezhnev years.[82] At the same time, the amplification of rhetoric surrounding the 'scientific-technological revolution' maintained the doctrinal orthodoxy on the instrumentality of scientific progress in enabling the transition to communism.

This brief sketch is intended to show that both ideologies and utopias use time strategically. Therefore, when we consider in what sense a utopia is congruous or incongruous to ideology we must pay particular attention to its temporal structure: how are the past and future strategically engaged to give meaning to a utopia in the present?

Finally, a focus on utopia that is composed of various temporal elements can help us track the evolution of ideas over time. Just as the utopianism of the Soviet 1920s was rooted in intellectual traditions of the nineteenth century that extended far beyond Marxism,[83] the utopias of the 1960s and 1970s drew inspiration from a range of historical sources from the Renaissance to the European avant-garde art of the 1920s.

Off-modern

The projects under discussion in the following chapters can be characterised by a simultaneous aesthetic diversity and stylistic continuity: artistic projecteering was founded upon the ideals of socialist humanism and the conviction that an improved material environment could support the developments of a harmonious society. As a critical discipline, however, it needed to adapt to new ideological conditions in order to retain semantic and discursive relevance. I therefore do not

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[82] Gordon L. Rocca, '"A Second Party in Our Midst": the History of the Soviet Scientific Forecasting Association,' *Social Studies of Science,* 11/2 (1981), pp.199-247.
[83] This is explored in Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams.*

propose a rupture in the tactics engaged at Senezh following the transition from the Thaw to late socialism, but rather a strategic adaption of processes and methods to make the ideals of artistic projecteering relevant in new circumstances. The thesis has therefore been conceived as an 'Off-Modern' history that Svetlana Boym (2008) describes as 'a form of passionate thinking engaged in a double movement between theory and practice, between imaginary architecture and material experience.' [84]

In *Architecture of the Off-Modern*, Boym identifies the need to produce a 'third way' intellectual history of modernity in which ideas move through history in a way that 'doesn't follow the logic of crisis and progress.'[85] Her book highlights the potential for 'an alternative genealogy of avant-garde experimentation, one that neither "ends" in the 1930s or the 1970s nor simply develops into Socialist Realism or modernist functionalism, but rather opens toward an off-centred horizon of experimentation that remains largely unexplored.'[86] The strategic usage of utopias to critique of the present, idealise the past or incite social action relies upon the continuous re-examination of the intellectual foundations of what constitutes an ideal society. It is in this sense that the remainder of the thesis comprises 'Off-Modern' history of Senezh studio that looks at experimental practice to understand the evolution of concepts, methods and strategies of the late socialist utopian imagination.

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[84] Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern*, p.37.

[85] Ibid., p.4.

[86] Ibid., p.7.

Image 2 | Artists, designers and consultants at Senezh studio, 1965

This is the earliest known example of a long tradition of group photographs taken to accompany each seminar. Present in the photograph are Viacheslav Glazychev (above), Evgenii Rozenblium (fourth from left at the front). Moving to the right of Rozenblium we see Karl Rozhdestvenskii, Natalia Titova, Mark Konik and then Liudmilla Konik. Historian Larissa Zhadova is on the far right of the front row.

Source: Natalia Titova Personal Archive

Chapter 2 | Senezh Studio and the politics of design during the Soviet Thaw

It was a time of great dreams, unexpected initiatives and brave beginnings. The general ideological premise of our work was thus: to engage artistic projecteering to restructure the material environment of our society in order to promote the emergence of communist relations among people.[1]

Karl Kantor, 1996

At the first design seminar held on the shores of Senezh lake in 1964, a graphic artist designed a device for electrostatic painting (image 3), monumental sculptors made a work-station for assembling radio components (image 4), and painters worked on the interiors of a bread factory and a club lounge interior.[2] Members of the USSR Union of Artists had been invited from across the Soviet Union to undertake a two-month programme of training and project work. Artists were selected by regional and national branches of the Union of Artists and were asked to bring projects commissioned by local industries.[3] The projects undertaken at this idyllic lakeside retreat were unlike the landscape paintings and applied art objects usually created at such locations. Instead of fine-tuning the external

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[1] Karl Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine: Dizain v kontekste kul'tury doperestroechnogo tridtsatiletiia 1955-1985* (Moscow: Anir, 1996), p.174.
[2] See E. Shaposhnikova, 'Senezhskii Seminar', *DI SSSR,* 1966/3, pp.17-21.
[3] Ibid., p.17.

Image 3 | Electrostatic painting device, I. Nemogai (Minsk), Senezh studio, 1964

Of the studio's early work, this project is perhaps most symbolic of the artist's move into design. Nemogai, a graphic artist familiar with paint-brushes and pens, designed a device for electrostatic spray-painting, a process then commonly used for painting cars and other large industrial objects.

Source: E. Shaposhnikova, 'Senezhskii Seminar', *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* (1966), pp.17-22 (p.18)

Image 4 | Work-station for assembling radio-components, G. Troshkin and A. Golubev, project drawing, Senezh Studio, 1964.

This project responded strongly to compositional exercises and bears some resemblance to objects produced at the wood and metalwork faculty at VKhUTEMAS.

Source: E. Shaposhnikova, 'Senezhskii Seminar', *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* 1966/3, pp.17-22 (p.18).

appearance of objects and environments, the seminar indicated a new direction for Soviet artists not seen since the dissolution of VKhUTEMAS-VKhUTEIN in 1932:[4] the artist would not merely depict or reflect society in the work of art, but actively structure the activities of daily life.

So how did it come to be that *artists*, still officially subject to the conventions of socialist realism, were using their skills to reorganise labour processes? The artist's involvement in industrial design during the Stalin years was primarily as form-giver [*khudozhnik-oformitel'*]: i.e. an individual who may decorate or adjust the external form of an object. What political and philosophical innovations, personal actions, coincidences and meetings were required to revive Productivist experimentation within official Soviet institutions?

In this chapter I explore the emergence of artistic projecteering as an outcome of the politics of design in the 1960s USSR and developments in aesthetic philosophy during the Thaw. Conceived as a new type of design practice that could only exist following the transition to full communism, artistic projecteering bore the hallmarks of two major trends of the 1960s intelligentsia: the sincere belief that the transition to communism was to be achieved within the lifetime of the young generation, and the resurrection of ideals from the 1920s before the communist project had been led astray under Stalin. Artistic projecteering was also developed in the search for an alternative to technical aesthetics, which was inscribed in the ideological rhetoric of the Soviet Scientific-Technological Revolution.

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[4] VKhUTEMAS stands for Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops, founded 1920. It changed its name to VKhUTEIN (Higher State Artistic and Technical Institute) in 1926. It was in important site of experimentation for Constructivist artists.

In the second part of the chapter, I pay particular attention to the development of a neo-Productivist theory of design developed by the studio's co-founder Karl Kantor. Kantor's critiques highlight a key tension for theorists of socialist design. If the construction of the material basis of communism was predicated on overtaking US productivity and living standards, the necessary rationalisation of industry and provision of consumer goods might in fact strengthen both the division of labour, and division among different groups of workers. Workers would be subject to increased alienation in mass manufacture, while a creeping mass consumer culture might stimulate the expression of social status through the ownership of *things*. Kantor's vision of artist projecteering was the presentation of an alternative set of relationships between consumers, creators and producers following the transition to communism and the dissolution of the capitalist division of labour.

Technical aesthetics as a 'science of design'

In order to understand why an artistic design discipline was deemed necessary, it is vital to consider how the role of science in the construction of communism was reassessed during the Thaw. As an organizational science of design, technical aesthetics represented the predominant theoretical approach to design during the first half of the 1960s. Below I outline how the foundation of VNIITE in 1962 was part of broader attempts to engage specialist and scientific knowledge in improving the living conditions of Soviet citizens.

One reason commonly cited for the loosening of ideological controls during the Thaw was to allow specialists greater opportunities to take part in producing the

knowledge base necessary for overtaking the US in production. For example, H. Gordon Skilling has noted how during the Thaw 'a greatly expanded participation in decision–making by experts and specialists in their respective fields, made itself evident….The various sectors of the intelligentsia exerted their influence through their institutes and associations, and through newspapers, scholarly journals, and special conferences, and in varying ways expressed the needs and interests of broader segments of the population.'[5]

The Soviet government's new found reliance on experts is linked to a consensus on the significance of science and technology that emerged after the 1956 party congress. At the congress, intense debates emerged over how best to apply scientific and technological achievement to Soviet industry.[6] This was a pivotal moment in the re-conceptualization of science and technology as a "direct productive force" that would act as the main driver of social change.[7] The 'scientific-technological revolution' [*NTR, or nauchno-tekhnicheskaia revoliutsiia*] was the catch-all term linking technological development to societal progress. Science was moved from superstructure to base, meaning it would not simply influence the conditions of production, but exist within the apparatus of production. The NTR thus gave science a central role in Marxist-Leninist theories of social progress. As a "direct productive force," the technological application of scientific knowledge

[5] H. Gordon Skilling, 'Interest Groups and Communist Politics,' in *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics*, ed. H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp.3-45 (pp.10-11).

[6] Natalia Nikiforova, 'The Concept of Technology and the Russian Cultural Research Tradition,' *Technology and Culture*, 56/1 (2015), pp. 184-203 (p.195).

[7] Donald R. Kelley, *The Politics of Developed Socialism: The Soviet Union as a Post-Industrial State* (New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1986) pp.18-19.

would 'penetrate all components of production and [remould] the physical conditions of human life.'[8]

Susan Reid has researched how the domestic environment became subject to narratives of the transformational potential of technology in society. She has shown how the kitchen – the traditionally female and amateur domain at the heart of family life – was inscribed in discourses of 'scientific management and rational spatial planning' that would introduce 'socialist industrial organization and standardization, labour discipline, a modern work tempo and a communist consciousness into the home.'[9] As technology entered the domestic sphere, a range of specialists expressed views on how to furnish the modern Soviet home. Among these were the 'aesthetic specialists' [*iskusstvovedy*] who sought to ensure the artistic quality of new goods under production.[10]

VNIITE's foundation in 1962 occurred in the context of a public discourse on the appropriate uses of consumer goods. Technical aesthetics [*tekhnicheskaia estetika*] was conceived as the 'science' behind the everyday activity of industrial design, known in the USSR as 'artistic engineering' [*khudozhestvennoe konstruirovanie*]. The institute took on the role of simultaneously researching expedient forms of goods through research into ergonomics, anthropometrics and colour etc., and propagandizing them to the consumer (through exhibitions, displays and

[8] Unknown author, *Man, Science, Technology: A Marxist Analysis of the Scientific and Technological Revolution.* (Moscow and Prague: Academia, 1973), p.352 cit. Erik P. Hoffmann, 'Soviet Views of "The Scientific-Technological Revolution",' *World Politics*, 30/4 (1978), pp.615–644 (p.618).

[9] Susan E. Reid, 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific Technological Revolution,' Journal of Contemporary History, 40/2 (2005), pp.289-316 (p.310). See also, Susan E. Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev', *Slavic Review*, 61 (2002), pp. 211-52.

[10] Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen,' pp.242-243.

advertising) and to the producer (through contracts and the monthly trade journal *Tekhnicheskaia estetika*, published from January 1964).[11]

While there had been no coordinated industrial design profession to speak of before 1962, the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics [VNIITE] quickly colonised the design profession after its establishment that year. Answerable to the State Committee for Science and Technology [GKNT], VNIITE's Moscow office became the headquarters of a highly centralized 'state system of design' and assumed the role of a research organization that also carried out bureaucratic functions in overseeing the work of design offices across the USSR (see image 5). The concept of an integrated system was seen as an important way to ensure the integration of design with material production within the planned economy, which had only occurred haphazardly until this point.[12] In 1968, the link between VNIITE and central government was cemented as it took on responsibility for administering state standards [*GOSTy*] in industry and also set the criteria for the state quality mark [*znak kachestvo*].[13] Within six years, VNIITE had the authority to define what good design would be in the USSR.[14]

According to Senezh theorist Viacheslav Glazychev, VNIITE's founder and director Iurii Solov'ev 'by no means hid his intention to unify the entire profession

[11] Dmitry Azrikan, 'VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?' *Design Issues*, 15/3 (1999), pp.45-77.

[12] For a full description of VNIITE's organisation, see M. M. Kalincheva, E. V. Zherdev, A. I. Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE: Predposylki, istoki, tendentsii stanovleniia* (Moscow: VNIITE, 2009) pp.190-192.

[13] D. Mel'nikova, 'Nazad v budushchee,' *Blank*, 4 (2011).

[14] The 'scientific-methodological basis for assessment of industrial goods' was developed at VNIITE from 1963-1968. See Kalincheva, Zherdev, and Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE*, p.227.

Image 5 | A map of design offices in the USSR.

The map is taken from a 1977 film entitled *Design in the USSR* [Dizain v SSSR]. The film was made by *Vneshtorgreklama*; the organization responsible for marketing goods intended for export abroad. The narrator states there are more than one thousand design teams working in the USSR.

Source: *Dizain v SSSR,* dir. L. Boldyreva, 1977, [On colour film]. RGAKFD d.25635.

under the aegis of VNIITE and the system of *SKhKB'*[15] - Special Industrial Design Bureaux.[16] By 1970, VNIITE oversaw more than 1500 design organizations and groups (see image 5).[17] This rapid growth was achieved partly by retraining (or sometimes simply re-categorizing) engineers. Since 1962, courses had been developed at higher education institutions for 'people with technical education and artistic abilities' so that the 'engineer [*konstruktor*] has the possibility of becoming a designer [*dizainer*].'[18] As attempts were made to rapidly compensate for a shortfall of qualified professionals, the Senezh seminar was devised to give the artist the possibility of working in industrial design and overcome the dominance of engineers in the field of artistic engineering.

Although the 'state system of design' did not set down roots until 1962, it would be misleading to assert that industrial design simply did not exist before then. Goods were conceived and manufactured, and it is possible to trace some stylistic development in the production of industrial products under Stalin. This can be seen, for example, in the development of streamlined in aircraft and passenger vehicles.[19] Yulia Karpova views the unregulated appearance of these forms as the consequence of 'a regimented system, where functional environment is separate

[15] Viacheslav Glazychev, 'Opyt Senezhskoi studii,' (2004), Available online at http://www.glazychev.ru/publications/articles/2004-03-11_opyt_senezh_studii.htm [accessed 22nd April 2015].

[16] The SKhKB (special industrial design bureaux) were set up from 1962 to 1965 in order to formalize the relationships between Regional Economic Soviets (or Sovnarkhozy) and the KhKG (industrial designers' groups) that existed in large enterprises. When VNIITE was reorganised in 1966-197, some SKhKB became incorporated as regional branches of VNIITE. Various various ministries and industries set up their own SKhKB at this point too. See Kalincheva, Zherdev, and Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE*, pp.190-192.

[17] V. N. Kniaginin, *Promyshlennyi dizain rossiiskoi federatsii* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo politekhnicheskogo universiteta, 2012) p.62.

[18] Shaposhnikova, 'Senezhskii Seminar,' p.17.

[19] 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 (2013), pp.627-647 (p.629).

from the sphere of aesthetics. The contact between the two did occur in reality but was not officially conceptualized, remaining beyond the grid of the official worldview.'[20]

The development of official institutions, spaces and publications for combining the aesthetic and utilitarian aspects of design during the Thaw was dependent on both the democratization of provision and the development of humanities and social sciences that were concerned with generating images of the future communist society. The establishment of VNIITE and the introduction of technical aesthetics was an important attempt to unite engineering with other disciplines. As historian of science and technology Langdon Winner explains, the efforts of engineering 'lie at the opposite end of the spectrum of thinking from that occupied by philosophers and political theorists, focusing upon immediate practical tasks rather than abstract speculation. Indeed, one can say engineering is strongest where philosophy is notoriously weak: finding solutions robust enough to withstand a great many political contingencies.'[21] 'Khrushchev modern' brought with it a new attitude about the appearance of things that allowed design to exist because society was aware of the need for objects that reflect social values. 'As a liberal art of technological culture,' explains Richard Buchannan, 'design points toward a new attitude about the appearance of products. Appearance must carry a deeper, integrative argument about the nature of the artificial in the human experience.[22] For VNIITE, this meant promoting useful, rational, convenient to

[20] Karpova, 'Accommodating Design,' p.629.
[21] Langdon Winner, 'Political Ergonomics,' in *Discovering Design: Explorations in Design Studies* ed. Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1005), pp.146-170.
[22] Richard Buchanan, 'Wicked Problems in Design Thinking,' in *The Idea of Design: A Design Issues Reader* ed. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.3-20 (p.19).

use objects that would be accessible to the mass population.

In 1964, VNIITE published the first issue of its journal *Technical Aesthetics*. On the inside cover of the fledgling periodical was a reproduction the 1920 resolution, signed by Lenin that had formally brought VKhUTEMAS into being. 'With the publication of an extract from this remarkable document, this bulletin is starting a new page in the history of industrial design in the USSR,'[23] wrote the art historian Abramova.[24] By citing this document, the new institute was associating itself with the pre-Stalinist spirit of the revolution and the 'return to Lenin' policies of the Thaw. However, there was no mention of the artistic avant-garde contingent of VKhUTEMAS in Abramova's text. For some architects responding to Khrushchev's denunciation of excess in socialist realist architecture in 1957, the Russian avant-garde symbolized the vibrancy and pluralism that was the inverse of the 'petit-bourgeois' values that characterized socialist realist architecture and interiors.[25] In the *Technical Aesthetics* periodical, however, VKhUTEMAS was described simply as an institution for the 'preparation of highly qualified masters in the design of the objects of daily life which correspond to the demands of expediency, simplicity and beauty.'[26] Emphasis was instead placed on practical aspects of design and the text contained little more ideological content than Lenin's signature. This reflected the low status of art in production during the NTR. There was also nothing in this text to suggest that VNIITE would follow

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[23] A. Abramova, *Tekhnicheskaia Estetika*, 1964/1. Inside Cover.

[24] Abramova published some of the earliest articles reviving the legacy of Soviet Constructivism in the Journals *DI SSSR* and *Tekhnicheskaia Estetika.*

[25] An excellent discussion of the politics of the rehabilitation of constructivism during the Thaw can be found in Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008) See Chapter 5, 'Remembering the Avant-Garde pp.105-140.

[26] Abramova, inside cover.

the Russian Constructivists and 'tackle the task of creating completely new objects to serve the needs of the new society.'[27] Instead, technical aesthetics was supposed to reflect the spirit of rationality and objectivity.

A key principle of the organisation of technical aesthetics was its status as an 'organizational science.' Petr Tučny, the Czech theoretician and designer who coined the term 'Technical Aesthetics' stressed that the aim of the discipline was not to externally beautify technology, but to create new objects 'tectonically.'[28] In the 1920s, Tectonics [*tektonika*] was described as one of the three formal disciplines that comprise Constructivism (alongside construction and faktura).[29] It is derived from the term 'tectology' [*tektologiia*], a precursor to cybernetics, and was conceived by Alexander Bogdanov in 1913 as an 'overall organizational science' aimed at the 'systematization of all possible human experience and the unification of all social, biological, and physical sciences.'[30] Natalia Nikiforova explains that tectology was a discipline that could define technology's role in relation to other social aims: 'operating at a high level of abstraction, capable of encompassing the organization of things (technique), methods of organization of people (economics), and the organization of experience (universe of ideas).'[31]

At VNIITE, the notion of tectology was closely related to a cybernetic view of socio-technical organization. The institute was planned as a kind of hub where inputs of scientific, social and economic data could result in the generation of

[27] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p.134.

[28] Petr Tučny, 'O formakh sochetaniia tekhniki i estetiki', *DI SSSR*, 1960/9, pp.20-21 (p.20).

[29] Kristin Romberg, 'Aleksei Gan's Constructivism, 1918-1928' (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2010), pp.134-135.

[30] Nikiforova, 'The Concept of Technology,' p.191.

[31] Ibid.

design objects suitable for the economic and social context. Many of the individual disciplines introduced at VNIITE expressed the supposed neutrality and objectivity of the discipline. Ergonomics, anthropometrics, the study of consumer demand,[32] colour and materials and social prognosis were all activities introduced at VNIITE that could be 'objectively' integrated with the planned economy. Systematic research would allow technical aesthetics to become a structured discipline with mechanisms for integration with scientific technical, socio-economic and political administrative change. In 1960 Tučny declared:

> Scientific technical aesthetics, created on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist science of societal development and on the basis of natural sciences will become the theoretical basis and guiding principle for the use of visual means in technology.[33]

For VNIITE's founder Iurii Solov'ev, design was an important engine both for improving people's immediate standard of living, and quickly surpassing the USA in per capita production as promised in the Third Party Programme. Technical aesthetics could be a source of pride, and an important propaganda tool. In 1964 he explained how objects should not only be 'comfortable, economical, beautiful and reliable,' but should also 'contribute to awakening a feeling of pride for the industry, science, culture and people of a socialist country that has created first

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[32] Solov'ev claimed that only in the Soviet Union, with the absence of advertising, could market research be an objective science. It is for these reasons that market research was not undertaken at Ulm. See Tom Cubbin, 'From Technocracy to Techno-Utopia: Futurology and the Soviet Home at VNIITE 1968-1974,' (Masters dissertation, Royal College of Art, 2012), pp.30-66.

[33] Tučny, 'O formakh sochetaniia tekhniki i estetiki,' pp.20-21.

class products with high technical and aesthetic qualities.'[34] It could stand as a symbol of the superior organisational capabilities of the communist system.

Meanwhile, 'scientific' designers were commonly attacked in the West for their inability to integrate social values into their work. In his introduction to MOMA's 1972 Universitas Project, designer and architect Emilio Ambasz explained, 'If design is understood…as the endeavour by which man…creates structures that give meaning and order to his surroundings, it cannot leave aside matters of purpose and aspiration, and it must be concerned not only with facts but also with values and purport.'[35] Solov'ev believed that design could not exist solely as a science in market economies because those societies lack a scientific guiding principle for the organisation of society, meaning that technological and economic development would be without social or political purpose. Only a rationally planned economy could regulate aesthetic aspects of objects that would otherwise appear spontaneously and without coordination.

However, proponents of technical aesthetics believed that social values would automatically be inscribed in design through the mechanisms of the planned economy. Technical aesthetics was about squaring *technique* with *technology* i.e. reconciling the practical materialisation of designed objects with its overall social-political and economic organization. As shall become clear, VNIITE's role as

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[34] Iurii Solov'ev, 'Itogi raboti v oblasti khudozhestvennogo konstruirovaniia i puti sovershenstvovaniia etoi raboty,' Speech given at All-Union Conference for Industrial Design, Moscow, (9-11 June 1965), RGALI. f.20182. op. 2 d.2164 l.5-14 (l.6).
[35] Emilio Ambasz, 'Project Working Paper', in *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society* ed. E. Ambasz, Harriet Schoenholz Bee, and Gina Rossi (New York: MOMA, 2006), pp.17-48 (p.22, 31).

governing body at the head of a state system of design meant that it shared the limitations of the planned economy alongside the potential offered by its scale.

Theories of design in art and aesthetics

The emerging cult of science and technology led to widespread discussion of relative merits of artistic and scientific knowledge in the dawning era of socialist modernity. From 1959 to early 1960, the editors of the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda* published a series of letters written by the public that became known as the 'fiziki-liriki' (physicists-lyricists) polemic. The debate began with a letter sent to the newspaper by the student Nina, whose scientist boyfriend Iurii was resistant to visiting the Hermitage (he had already been there once) and reacted negatively to attempts to engage him in ancient Russian history or Silver Age poetry. Iurii believed that high culture was irrelevant when the future was being produced by scientists such as himself. Subsequent letters published in the newspaper represented both sides of the debate: the conviction that socialist scientific progress should not be held back by the cultural values of the past, and the belief that the harmonious development of socialist man would rely on the development of 'humanism that grows from the masterpieces of culture, not formulas and diagrams.'[36] The debate concluded with an appeal by the editors for the "reconciliation" of art, which would entail finding a common language between the sciences and humanities. C.P. Snow simultaneously explored the absence of a common language in the West in his famous 1959 lecture and book *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (parts of which were translated into Russian the

[36] Konstantin A. Bogdanov, 'Fiziki vs. liriki: k istorii odnoi "pridurkovatoi" diskussii,' *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 111 (2011). Text available online at http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2011/111/ko7.html [accessed 3rd July 2015].
[37] Ibid.

same year). Author Il'ia Erenburg, who selected the letters for publication, warned of the importance of retaining social ideals in order to appropriately guide scientific progress. [37] This reflected a broad concern among the artistic intelligentsia of the possible side effects of unchecked scientific and technological development.

Whereas the establishment of VNIITE in 1962 arose partially from a conviction of the centrality of science as a productive force in the path to socialism, artistic projecteering was preceded by debates among philosophers and art historians that took place following the 1956 congress and the state's reorientation towards light industry and manufacturing. Many of those writing about 'everyday aesthetics' were concerned that engineers would be unable to solve ideological issues relating to the appearance of objects brought about by socialist modernization. New directions in the study of aesthetic philosophy described below informed discourses on the nature of design that were printed in the journal *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* [Decorative arts of the USSR].

In particular, debates arose related to the question of how to interpret socialist realism in relation to everyday aesthetics. James Scanlan explains that 'a lathe, it seemed, could not be "socialist," any more than a building could be "realist." The conceptual apparatus of reflection, partisanship, and ideology was out of place in reference to these nonrepresentational arts…'[38] These debates were often played out through the discussion of a the concept of beauty, a topic that had been repressed in Stalin era aesthetic philosophy. The conservative (and dominant)

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[37] Ibid.

[38] James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR : A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.310.

position in the debate was held by materialists who believed that beauty is an objective characteristic found in nature and reflected in the human mind.[39] The second group (known as 'societalists') followed a historical materialist path that elaborated on brief aesthetic discussions in Marx's early works. They believed that man's perception of beauty is determined by the 'social structures and relations within which consciousness arises.'[40]

Karl Kantor was a member of a group of philosophers who sought answers to issues of everyday aesthetics by developing a 'practical-productive conception of art.'[41] In the pages of *Questions of Aesthetics* [Voprosy estetiki],[42] these scholars placed emphasis on Marx's conception of creative human labour.[43] The 1956 publication of Marx's complete *Economic and Political Manuscripts* (1844) was an important moment in overcoming the 'primitive Stalinist-Zhdanovian version of Marxism'.[44] The availability of Marx's early writings endangered Stalinist interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, and encouraged by rehabilitated philosophers of the pre-Stalin era (such as aesthetic philosopher Aleksandr Losev),[45] young scholars began to probe some of the previous orthodoxies of Soviet philosophy. In his manuscripts, Marx stressed the '"productive" character of art…[and] its similarity to other forms of production.'[46] Writing in the first

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[39] This was a position derived from the writings of Engels and Lenin.

[40] Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR*, p.301.

[41] The other members of this group include Boris Iosifovich Shragin, Iurii Dabydov, L. Pazhnitov. See Ibid.

[42] Nine volumes were published 1958-1971.

[43] James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR*, p.310.

[44] Ervart van der Zweerde, *Soviet Philosophy – the Ideology and the Handmaid* (Nijmegen: 1994), p.129.

[45] Ibid. Also, see James P. Scanlan, 'A. F. Losev and the Rebirth of Soviet Aesthetics after Stalin', in *Contemporary Marxism*, ed. James O'Rourke, Thomas J. Blakeley and Friedrich J. Rapp (Springer Netherlands, 1984), pp. 221-35.

[46] Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.77.

volume of *Questions of Aesthetics* in 1958, L. Pazhitnov (who later gave lectures at Senezh) explained the humanistic essence of Marx's manuscripts for those interested in the aesthetics of artistic production:

> In the process of transforming nature, man actively deploys the full richness of his 'essential powers', i.e. his abilities, talents, skills and feelings: the sum total of his relationship to the world that surrounds him. The object emerges as a new realization of man's way of life: a sensory and material expression of the social content of his labour.[47]

The belief that man could use art to change reality chimed with the belief of the Thaw intelligentsia that that construction of communism entailed 'the creative transformation of the world.'[48] Marx stressed that these artistic human sensibilities should be cultivated in order that they flourish. It is the environment in which man lives and works that would enable man to seize his creative potential and use his practical and mental *senses* to full effect. 'The human nature of the senses,' wrote Marx, 'comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanised* nature.'[49] In the eyes of young aesthetic philosophers, the purpose of art was to create, in life, the new conditions that enable man's creative potential. According to Pazhitnov, 'Life itself gives birth to the new man, the human creator who is the master of his

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[47] L. Pazhitnov, 'Problemy estetiki v "Ekonomichesko–filosofskikh rukopisiakh" K. Marksa,' in *Voprosy estetiki,* vyp. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1958), pp.120-168 (p.125).
[48] Vail and Genis, *Mir 60-e,* p.5.
[49] Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959). Text available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm [accessed 30th April 2015].

own fate. There is no greater honour for an artist than to serve this great pursuit with his craft.'[50]

A key figure in the pre-history of artistic projecteering was the decorative arts historian Aleksandr Saltykov.[51] A member of the Soviet Union of Artists, Saltykov led discussion of taste and artistic quality during the 1950s and promoted this agenda within the organization. Since 1954, Saltykov had advocated the role of aesthetic specialists in industry and pushed for the modernization of production techniques in decorative and applied arts to meet the needs of the new Soviet consumer. His speech at the 1957 Union of Artists' congress promoted decorative and folk-arts as a means of humanizing the material environment, as well as promoting the value of art in industry.[52]

In the same year, Saltykov initiated the publication of a new journal, *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* [Decorative Art of the USSR], or *DI SSSR.* Published by the Union of Artists from 1959, *DI SSSR* 'became the mouthpiece of the propagators of mass-production aesthetics.'[53] The journal played a dual role. The first was to showcase interesting and innovative work in the decorative arts, and campaign for better quality. The second was to develop aesthetic theory in order to better understand the Soviet artist's role in industry. As technical aesthetics emerged as the dominant force in industrial design, authors including Kantor used the journal to advocate for the artist's role in industry.

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[50] Pazhitnov, 'Problemy estetiki,' p.145.

[51] For an account of Saltykov in the context of the fight against small-minded bureaucrats in arts production, see Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,' *Cahiers du monde Russe,* 47/1-2, (Jan-Jun, 2006), pp. 227-68 (p.239).

[52] Karl Kantor, 'Nachalo i tvorcheskii put' TsES SKh SSSR,' in *Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: k 20–letiiu TsES SKh SSSR* (Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1987), pp.35-45 (p.36).

[53] Karpova, 'Accommodating Design,' p.632.

The journal's advocacy of the role of art in mass-manufacture was important because during the early Thaw, the bureaucracy surrounding the production of new furniture and consumer goods was a major issue of concern. Reid explains:

> Art specialists had established the "aesthetics of everyday life" as an essential area for reform, integral to destalinization, as early as autumn 1954, even before Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalinist "excess" in architecture. This campaign extended a traditional role of the intelligentsia that had continued during the Stalin period in the guise of the promotion of kul'turnost' [culturedness], but linked it directly to the critique of the recent, Stalinist past: its material practices and the entrenched power of poorly educated, "uncultured" bureaucrats.[54]

Decisions relating to the appearance of mass produced items often lay with individuals who had not received specific artistic training. At a 1964 seminar hosted by VNIITE, the head of the Riga *SKhKB* [Special Industrial Design Bureau] gave examples of how factory managers showed little interest in designers' solutions. Ease of manufacture was often seen as more important than ease of use:

> I would like to give an example relating to refrigerators…The enterprise insisted that the refrigerator would …[have] a 400 litre capacity. We were against this, they disagreed and the work didn't go ahead. Another

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[54] Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern,' p.239.

example: eight fluorescent lights. We had the aim of using fluorescent light in the domestic interior, but the enterprise was not interested in such work. Who will buy an enormous expensive table lamp? It's 120 centimetres tall. Who needs it? These are two typical examples.[55]

Evgenii Rozenblium (who later became the co-founder and artistic director of Senezh), had similar experiences as Chief Engineer and Artistic Chief of the Moscow SKhKB. One article referred to a table lamp that had been 'approved by our bureau's artistic-methodical committee and the central artistic-technical committee of the Soviet Lighting Research, Design and Engineering Technological Institute [VNISI], but was rejected for "not meeting the artistic tastes of the consumer."'[56] Having been accused of 'trying to impose their own taste on the consumer and reducing choice,' Rozenblium asked 'how should the artistic engineer approach the taste of the client, the taste of the consumer, and moreover, his own?'[57]

Despite some success in organizing exhibitions such as *Iskusstvo v byt* [Art Into Life] in June 1961, where prototype furniture for new homes was displayed,[58] the Union of Artists showed little interest in industrial design. Since 1954, aesthetic specialists and everyday life reformers had blamed the Union of Artists for the lack

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[55] V. N. Alasova in 'Otchet o provedenii seminara po teme "Bytovoe oborudovanie sovremennogo zhilishche",' 15th – 17th June 1964, VNIITE Moscow. Russian State Archive of Scientific Technical Documentation [RGANTD] f.281/r-688, op.3-6, d.19, l.37-38.

[56] Evgenii Rozenblium in 'Spetsial'noe khudozhestvenno-konstruktorskoe biuro: Reportazh,' *DI SSSR*, 1963/11, pp.6-17 (p.10).

[57] Ibid.

[58] On the exhibition *Iskusstvo v byt*, see Reid, *Khrushchev Modern*, p.234. On the production of furniture for new homes, see ch. 6 in Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp.228-266.

of attention it had paid to utilitarian objects.[59] When VNIITE was established in 1962, many of its employees' outlooks had been formed by the 'school of *DI*'[60] as it was a rare source of information on design. Yet, it is only after the founding of VNIITE that the Union of Artists' Secretariat appears to have shown concern that a rival organization might dominate discussions on the aesthetic nature of industrially produced artefacts. Karl Rozhdestvenskii, head of the commission of Decorative Arts of the USSR Union of Artists, was alarmed that the dominance of engineers in industry would push the artist into a role subordinate to the engineer. Reacting against the creation of VNIITE and the SKhKB, the Union of Artists attempted to create a 'system of artistic information' for artists working in industry. Calling for collective collaborative production, they complained how:

> These institutions [VNIITE and the KhKB] have not paid necessary attention to the other partner of collaborative creativity between the artist and engineer… The artist is becoming a stylist, rather than a creator of products. The result of such a one sided approach to the artist's work in industry is an error in the organization of artistic labour.[61]

The official title given to designers was artist-engineer [*khudozhnik-konstruktor*], which indicated the ideal synthesis of the two areas of knowledge required to undertake design in industry. In a 1964 speech about disunity in design terminology, Larissa Zhadova defined artistic engineering [*khudozhestvennoe*

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[59] Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern,' p.240.

[60] Karl Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine,* p.18.

[61] It is not clear who wrote this document, but it is likely to be Kantor writing for a more senior member of the Union of Artists, possibly Karl Rozhdestvenskii who was head of the Commission for Decorative and Applied Arts. 'Dokumenty o sozdanii sistemy khudozhestvennogo informatsiia,' Moscow, 1962. RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2135 l.9-10.

konstruirovanie] as the 'method for the practical realization of the aims of industrial art [*promyshlennoe iskusstvo*].' [62] However, members of the Union of Artists commonly complained that these technical specialists failed to take their artistic briefs seriously. One artist grumbled that simply naming the designer an artist-engineer did not substitute for deeper knowledge: 'Engineers, working in enterprises and in the first phase of activity in the SKhKB have interpreted artists' requests as caprice, rather than real needs.'[63] The term artist-engineer indicates a superficial reconciliation of science and art. Different emphasis on the relevance of these two halves of the profession – art and engineering – became the most important distinguishing factor of activities undertaken at Senezh and at VNIITE.

Foreign influences

Despite growing concerns that the artist was being side-lined in questions of industrial aesthetics, the bureaucracies of regional and central planning offered few opportunities for the artist to engage in activities that went beyond styling [*oformlenie*]. Archival documents reveal the importance of contacts in the more liberal environments of Poland and West Germany for providing the inspiration to create a new type of design practice in the USSR. These meetings encouraged Karl Kantor and Evgenii Rozenblium that the Soviet centrally planned economy would offer the possibility to undertake forms of design practice that Western designers could only dream of.

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[62] Larissa Zhadova, 'O terminologii i poniatiiakh v sfere promyshlennogo iskusstva,' Paper given at the All-Union Conference on Industrial Design, Tbilisi, 25th-29th May 1964. RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2142 l.73.
[63] Shaposhnikova, 'Senezhskii seminar,' p.20.

From 5th-27th November 1963, Kantor and Rozenblium travelled to Poland with a Union of Artists delegation of 'specialists in the field of industrial creativity,' in order to observe design education institutes, the Polish Council for Design and Aesthetics of Industrial Production[64] and to visit the *Exhibition of Industrial Design from Great Britain* that was being held in Warsaw at the time.[65] For the Soviet intelligentsia of the Thaw, Poland played a particularly important role as a conduit of ideas in literature art and philosophy from the other side of the iron curtain.[66]

The delegation visited a number of Polish art schools, but it was the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts that impressed them most. Here they met some of the most interesting and creative designers working in the Eastern Bloc: graphic designers Józef Mrozek and Bogdan Urbanowicz, architect Oskar Hansen and industrial designer Jerzy Sołtan. The delegation was particularly impressed by Sołtan, who divided his time between Warsaw and Harvard, meaning he had first hand knowledge not only of Western designers, but of the capitalist way of life. 'Without any illusions as to the difficulties facing industrial art in Poland,' wrote Kantor, 'he is nevertheless convinced that the real blossoming of design is linked to the socialist and communist transformation of society.'[67] In Poland they saw that it was possible to provide advanced education for designers even if industry had yet

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[64] This was established in 1959 and modelled on the British Council of Industrial Design. See Józef A. Mrozek, 'Behind the Iron Curtain: Design and Design Research in Poland Under Socialism,' in *No Guru, No Method? Discussion on Art and Design Research* ed. Pia Strandman, (Helsinki: University of Art and Design, 1998), pp.53-61 (p.57).

[65] K. L. Iogansen's report in SKh SSSR 'Otcheti khudozhnikov–spetsialistov v oblasti promyshlennogo tvorcheskoi kommandirovki v PNR,' 1964. RGALI f.2082 op. 2 d.2152.

[66] On the significance of Poland for the Thaw intelligentsia, see Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap, 2009), p.90.

[67] Karl Kantor in SKh SSSR 'Otcheti khudozhnikov–spetsialistov v oblasti promyshlennogo tvorcheskoi kommandirovki v PNR,' 1964. RGALI f.2082 op. 2 d.2152 l.32.

to realize the value and purpose of design. Sołtan explained 'we can already work as designers, even if industry is unable to work with us.'[68]

Students at the Academy were encouraged to conceive of projects in alternative socio-technical contexts and unrestricted by present-day technological capabilities. The department's principle was that designers could lead innovation, rather than be at the mercy of industrial managers who had little incentive to change production processes. Most impressive for Kantor was the way sociology was integrated with design projects in order that the 'material environment helps to promote the development and consolidation of the onset of socialist relations in labour and daily life.'[69]

The key encounter was Kantor and Rozenblium's meeting with Tomás Maldonado (see image 6), who had been invited to give a series of lectures on design methodology and was an advocate of socially programmed design.[70] Maldonado was then a leading designer at the Ulm Hochschule für Gestaltung in Germany. HfG Ulm was established in 1953 by Max Bill, who placed an emphasis on design as an artistic practice and established a foundation course based on Walter Gropius' Bauhaus pedagogy. After Bill's departure from Ulm, the school's pedagogy entered into a scientific phase with an emphasis on cybernetics, information theory, systems theory, semiotics, ergonomics, philosophy of science and mathematical logic.[71] From 1962, Maldonado became critical of so-called

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] This was an important moment for the Poles too, who after this moment adopted 'Scientific operationalism' as their basic model for design research. Mrozek, 'Behind the Iron Curtain,' p.58.

[71] On science and design at HfG Ulm, See Martin Krampen and Günther Hörmann, *The Ulm School of Design – Beginnings of a Project of Unyielding Modernity* (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 2003), pp.85–89.

Image 6 | Meeting at Senezh studio's Moscow headquarters during ICSID, Moscow 1975

Maldonado (on the right) and Kantor, who is sitting next to him, had the opportunity to meet again when VNIITE hosted the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design Congress in 1975. As they were both of Argentinian descent, they could communicate in Spanish. Rozenblium is standing by the projector with French urbanist François Barré.

Source: Natalia Titova personal archive.

'methodidolatory,'[72] and over-reliance on scientific analysis. From this point, increased emphasis was placed on engaging the social sciences as a means of guiding the activities of designers. Ulm was also a hotbed of socialism, with many students carrying membership cards of the Swiss communist party (the communist party of Germany was banned in 1956).

Kantor was impressed how Ulm students attempted to design functional objects that did not yield to short-term demands such as styling and planned obsolescence. Instead, emphasis was placed on the social value of objects. He praised HfG Ulm for its work on the 'creation of genuinely new objects that make people's lives easier, improving the conditions of labour and daily life.'[73] Maldonado believed that planned economies provided opportunities unavailable to designers in the capitalist West, which included reassessing the fundamental properties of some objects. He explained the potential benefits of scale and long-termism of planned economies in 1961:

> One does not expect from the Soviet designers the imitation of our weaknesses, but rather the full exploitation of their own, specific possibilities…For instance, technical products themselves require an urgent revision as far as their structural and functional properties are concerned, but in the framework of our competitive society, initiative in this direction cannot be imagined, because the main activity of our society is to merchandise these products...the designers of a non-competitive

[72] Ibid., p.89.
[73] Karl Kantor, 'Vozrozhdennyi Baukhaus' *DI SSSR*, 1964/7, pp.21-23 (p.21).

society are in a favourable position for attacking this new kind of task, but until now not very much has happened.[74]

When Kantor and Maldonado met in Warsaw, they discussed the potential development of an educational design institution that could push the boundaries of design practice. In order to do this, Soviet designers would need to be able to work without being subject to the demands of bureaucrats in charge of Soviet light industries. The delegation 'came to the conclusion that something like Ulm (in the sense of an independent design school), but differently oriented, should be created in our country.'[75] Upon their return from Warsaw, Kantor and Rozenblium made their case for the establishment of a new educational programme to Karl Rozhdestvenskii (head of the commission for decorative and applied art)[76] and to the sculptor Ekaterina Belashova (then a secretary on the Union of Artists' executive who had studied at VKhUTEIN during the late 1920s). With their support and some bureaucratic manoeuvring by Natalia Titova, the first pilot seminar was held at the artists' retreat by Senezh lake in 1964.

Glazychev has noted with certain irony that *competition* between VNIITE and the Union of Artists during the 1960s proved very productive.[77] Encouraged by Belashova, Rozhdestvenskii began to fight the corner for artists in industry, stating at a 1964 conference that, 'The development of Soviet industrial art [*promyshlennoe*

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[74] Tomas Maldonado, 1961 cit. Kenneth Frampton, 'The Development of a Critical Theory,' in *Ulm Design: The Morality of Objects*, ed. Herbert Lindinger (Cambridge, Massachussetts: MIT press, 1991) pp.148-163 (p.152).

[75] Natalia Titova, 'Dvadstat' let Senezhskoi studii,' in *Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: K 20-letiiu TsUES SKh SSSR 1985* ed. V. R. Aronov (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1987), p.39.

[76] This was the section that organised exhibitions, competitions, retreats and other events for decorative, applied and monumental artists. From 1964, this also included artists working in industry.

[77] Glazychev, 'Opyt Senezhskoi studii.'

iskusstvo] is the concern of the entire creative collective of the Union of Artists, and not just a group of enthusiasts.'[78] As VNIITE's influence grew throughout the decade, more political projects were introduced that were intended to protect the artist's role in industry and grant the Union of Artists more powers. For example, in 1967, a proposal was made for the introduction of a 'unified state system for overseeing the development of technical aesthetics.'[79] In the absence of an official Union of Designers before 1987, this was a potential way for the Union of Artists to gain more control over design in industry. The document explained that this system would necessarily be overseen by members of the Union of Artists and Union of Architects 'in order to create the necessary conditions for the development of domestic industrial design in unison with the development of the country's common artistic culture.'[80] Accompanying this rhetoric was the notion that the artist could achieve something the engineer could not: *unity* and *harmony*.

From chaos to harmony

The question of how to overcome 'chaos' and promote 'harmony' in the material environment was a concern for designers across the globe that was absorbed into the nascent design discourse. This became one of the key areas of disagreement between proponents of artistic projecteering and technical aesthetics. Below, I outline how the debate was framed and introduce examples of how designers at VNIITE and Senezh approached the issue differently.

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[78] K. I. Rozhdestvenskii, 'Vystuplenie na vsesiuznom soveshanii po khudozhestvennomu konstruirovaniiu v g. Tbilisi, 27.5.1964,' RGALI f.2082 op. 2 d.2156 l.1-12 (l.7).
[79] TsUES SKh SSSR,'Dokumenty o provedenii Vsesoiuznogo seminara khudozhnikov promyshlennogo i oformitel'skogo iskusstva,' (5th February – 10th April 1967), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2194 l.55.
[80] Ibid.

While 'harmony' in society was supposed to be a specific feature of communist society (see below), it was an especially important topic in design on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the early 1960s. The second ICSID congress,[81] hosted in Paris in 1963, was themed 'unifying factors.' This title was derived from concerns that mass-consumer society could not solely be left to its own devices to provide a unified or harmonious material environment. Many Western designers looked to state institutions such as the British Council of Industrial Design (later the Design Council) or the French Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle to play a role in coordinating taste and encouraging standardization of certain types of goods (e.g. refrigerators and washing machines that could fit under a universally agreed work surface). Some western product designers were acutely aware that they were implicated in a capitalist system that used design as a means of selling objects, rather than the creation of expedient ones. Arthur Drexler (design curator at MOMA) complained that 'the economic complex in which things are made is also at fault. Most of the things which are sold to consumers are superfluous. And the best designer can't produce a rationally designed telephone if the manufacturer wants something called "The Princess."'[82] Popular books such as Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers* (1960)[83] exposed corporate America's use of styling and fads in order to stimulate over-consumption and prompted ethical debates on the responsibility of industrial designers.

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[81] International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) was founded 1957 and played an important role in structuring international debates on the nature of industrial design. Solov'ev played an active role in the organisation and acted as its vice president from 1975-1977, and then as its president until 1980. The ICSID biennial congress was hosted by VNIITE in Moscow in 1975.
[82] Arthur Drexler cit. Ann Ferebee, 'Technology, Yes. Industrial Design, Maybe,' *Industrial Design*, 1963/6, pp.72-74.
[83] Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960).

At the 1963 congress, the French Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle advocated the view that '"chaos of form" is a "curse on the modern world" and that all earlier civilizations were characterized by a harmony of form.'[84] Chaos of form was perceived as a negative outcome of designer's role in stimulating over-consumption. If tastes and fashions change quickly, there would emerge a range of objects that were stylistically so diverse as to have a negative psychological effect on the consumer. A survey of international members of ICSID found the majority to agree that "chaos" resulted 'from the fact that we are in an intermediate state between yesterday and tomorrow where today has not yet achieved maturity, unity and harmony.'[85] Furthermore, most members agreed that 'it is up to the spirit of Industrial Design…to combat that chaos.'[86] In short, the global design community would need to find a means for ensuring the continued visual unity of design that would resist constant stylistic development. Writing for the British journal *Design*, John Blake commented that for proponents of 'total design,' the notion of unity and harmony 'brought out a latent desire among certain designers to elevate industrial design to a plateau of social significance it certainly has not achieved so far.'[87] Others became exasperated by the vagaries of such concepts and 'could go back to chaos with relief and an easy conscience.'[88]

For designers working in socialist countries, the planned economy offered huge potential for the development of 'total design' as a means of combating chaos and producing 'harmony' and 'unity'. However, the question of what harmony

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[84] S. Boiko, 'Na tret'em kongresse ICSID,' *DI SSSR*, 1963/11, pp.23-25.

[85] ICSID, 'International Council of Societies of Industrial Design: 3rd Congress, June 1963.' University of Brighton Design Archives 02-1-3.

[86] Ibid.

[87] John E. Blake, 'Talk about design…at Paris…on chaos plagiarism and education,' *Design*, 1963/9 (no. 177), pp.61-62 (p.61).

[88] Ibid.

[*garmoniia*] and unity [*edinstvo* or *tselostnost'*] might mean in a socialist society was not clear.[89] Would the aim of design be to create a stylistically unified and rational environment, or is the aim, as one lecturer at Senezh put it, 'the humanization of the material conditions of human existence and the creation of a world of things that optimally correspond to the universal and *harmonious development of the personality* [my emphasis]'?[90]

At VNIITE, the promotion of harmony through the planned economy found its fullest expression in the institute's attempts to create standard typologies for domestic goods.[91] One way to combat chaos of material form is to reduce the number of models of certain types of goods put into production. Solov'ev was fond of referring to the folly of excessive consumer choice in the West, referring to the 377 models of refrigerator available to the French consumer in the mid-1960s.[92]

During the 1960s and 1970s, VNIITE's department for 'cultural and household goods,' attempted to develop a programme that would correspond efficiently with the needs of the population. By collecting demographic, economic and market research[93] data, and by studying the 'functional processes' that occur within the home; VNIITE produced hundreds of sets of documents that defined the basic

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[89] Scanlan writes that there was relatively little agreement as to the definition of harmony with in Soviet aesthetic philosophy: "Many believe that the harmony of nature in one or more of its manifestations – symmetry, rhythm, unity in diversity, the agreement of form and content – is fundamental to the perception of things as beautiful, but there is no agreement on a formula that would capture these characteristics in a systematic and discriminating manner…" Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR*, p.301.

[90] L. Bezmozdin, 'Veshch' v sisteme kul'tury i ee promyshlennoe proektirovanie,' (1967–1972) RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.935 l.127-163 (l.148).

[91] For a full account of the development of this programme, see 'Chapter 1: Redesigning Design,' in Cubbin, 'From Technocracy to Techno-Utopia,' pp.30-66.

[92] Iurii Solov'ev, 'Ob assortimente bytovykh izdelii,' *Tekhnicheskaia estetika*, 1966/6, pp.1-2 (p.2).

[93] Consumer surveys were undertaken briefly at VNIITE in conjunction with the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* institute of public opinion. See Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern,' p.253.

Image 7 | Nomenklatura of on a
range of family incomes, VNIITE 1972

This diagram suggests an
appropriate range of household
objects dependent on monthly
income and size of apartment.
Kantor was critical of projects where
consumption of certain types of
objects would reinforce social
stratification. While wage
differentials were an officially
recognised necessity, there was little
discussion at VNIITE about whether
design should be used to overcome
this problem.

Source: *Tekhnicheskaia estetika,*
August 1972.

functions that domestic goods should fulfil. Theoretically, these domestic items could then be produced in quantities appropriate to the various sections of the population. Everything from the number of burners on a cooker, to the size of writing tables and the acoustic range of radio sets was considered. After the basic typology of objects had been determined, individual designers could then create a range of objects to meet individual tastes. These normative documents were intended to be applicable for periods of approximately five years before the needs of the population would be reassessed and changes made accordingly. For example, detailed charts showed what types of objects should be manufactured for a two-room apartment for a family of four with a monthly income of 120 rubles (see image 7). Appropriate quantities of these objects could then be manufactured and sold at suitable prices. If implemented, this programme would have created strict standards for the dimensions and functional processes fulfilled by objects before the design phase had begun.

Critics of this approach were concerned about the lack of attention reserved for the aesthetic properties of objects, which were only later taken into consideration. Rozenblium was worried that by defining dimensions the designer-technocrat only created more complicated, *isolated* artefacts. Their dimensions alone could not create a 'unified environment' [*edinoe prostranstvo*] as their complex system of rules could only produce individual artefacts.[94] Efforts to introduce greater levels of standardization were criticised for not corresponding to the reality of life where objects appear and are disposed of at different times. This problem was exemplified by the rapid development of product styling in America from the

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[94] Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine: Opyt raboty Tsentral'noi uchebno-eksperimental'noi studii khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia na Senezhe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p.14.

1920s to 1960s that had shown a lack of stylistic unity even within so-called 'modern' design.[95] The coexistence, for example, of Stepform, Streamform, Taperform and Sheerform in one space would surely lead to visual chaos.[96] Instead, thought Rozenblium, the aim of design should instead be to facilitate the 'combination of individual elements in an expedient unity [*tselostnost*].'[97]

The question of how to produce objects that do not contribute to visual disharmony was addressed by Senezh participants V. Pletnev and F. Gorpostaev when tasked with designing new modular kitchen mixer (image 8). One of the duo's aims was to create a food mixer that would be a stylistic 'non-aggressor.' Rozenblium commented that new objects usually 'do not arrive as part of a pre-existing unity, [they] are demanding and obtrusive guests who do not wish to tolerate anything except for their stylistically close cousins.' The equipment was photographed with a range of other objects to investigate how smoothly it could fit alongside objects from the past as it was designed to 'coexist with a porcelain cup, a cuckoo-clock, a wooden loving cup or a housewife's hand'[98] and could result in 'stylistic similarity or sharp dissonance.'[99] Here, analysis of composition and construction were supposed to guide the artist in how to produce objects that sit alongside objects of the past.

Rozenblium and Kantor's continued insistence on the importance of the *artist* in producing a harmonious environment is perhaps surprising given an emerging global consensus that industrial design was a new type of activity that could

[95] See Gifford Jackson, 'Design Styles and Clichés,' *Industrial Design,* 1962/9, pp.59-67.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine,* p.14.
[98] Ibid., p.77.
[99] Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Otkrytaia forma,' *DI SSSR*, 1969/8, pp.49-53 (p.51).

Image 8 | A machine for various domestic tasks, V. Pletnev and F. Gorpostaev, Senezh studio, late 1960s.

This food mixer was intended to be a "stylistic non-aggressor," meaning it could co-exist with a variety of objects from part and future epochs.

Source: E. Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine,* 1974 [plate].

neither be considered an art nor a science. One of the early aims of ICSID was to decide upon a definition of industrial design in advanced technological society. For Misha Black (ICSID president 1959-1961), the positive potential of industrial design was in its potential to overcome the 'two cultures' binary:

> Industrial design is not art, but nor is it only science and technology. It is a creative process in which engineering necessity is equated with human needs.[100]

Maldonado was particularly dismissive of those who defined design in relation to art and science. He attempted to persuade audiences that the art/science debate was reductive and ignored the many possible applications of industrial design for modern society.[101] This topic was hotly debated when a delegation from HfG Ulm travelled to the USSR in 1964,[102] where they met with the editorial board of *DI SSSR*. The Russians, who were still in the process of uncovering their Constructivist heritage, were interested in how Gropius' thinking had been revived at Ulm under the recently ousted rector Max Bill.

Core to Kantor's ambition was the idea that the *artistic* avant-garde principles of the 1920s could be revived and then developed to meet the needs of modern day society. Ulm was an important model, he explained to the delegation, not only because the school designed objects in a way that was critical of the capitalist

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[100] Misha Black, 'Industrial Design: Art or Science (1965)' in *The Black Papers on Design* ed. Avril Black (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983), pp.28-34 (p.34).

[101] Tomás Maldonado, 'Aktualnye problemy dizaina,' Speech given in Warsaw, (1963), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2152 l.56-69 (l.68).

[102] Maldonado was not present at this meeting.

system, but because, 'you have not only revived these [Bauhaus] traditions, but have striven to push them forwards.'[103]

Maldonado was invited to publish an article in *DI SSSR* later that year, where he specifically addressed the issue of art and the avant-garde legacy in design,[104] stating, 'I do not believe that the fate of art is beginning to coincide with the fate of industrial products and that the evolution of the artistic work will coincide with the evolution of objects of consumption.'[105] The experience of Bauhaus revivalism and its failure to meet the complexities of the modern age led Maldonado to warn that 'such a hypothesis is reliant upon the broadly propagated conviction of the 1920s that all cultural activity of man will lead to the absolute unification of its means and that societal harmony may only be attained through a protracted limitation and simplification of the means and aims of culture.'[106]

In his response, published in the same issue, Kantor acknowledged that the Ulm model under Maldonado was idealistic in bourgeois society, where 'it is difficult to bring harmony to a society that is not interested in it.'[107] The union of art and technology would be impossible under capitalism because the goal of design in bourgeois economies is to merchandise products. Under socialism, the contradiction of artistic ideals vs. technological efficacy disappears, because the goal of all human activity (including design) is the promotion of *harmonious* social relations. Kantor made it clear that the artist's role in producing the material

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[103] Karl Kantor in SKh SSSR 'Stenogramma besedy s prepodovateliami shkoly v Ul'me,' (10th July 1964), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2144 l.3-4.

[104] For Maldonado's views, see Tomás Maldonado, 'Is the Bauhaus Relevant Today,' *Ulm* no. 8/9, 1963, pp.5-13.

[105] Tomás Maldonado, 'Aktual'nye problemy dizaina,' *DI SSSR* 1964/7, pp.18-20 (p.18).

[106] Ibid.

[107] Tomás Maldonado, cit. Karl Kantor, 'Vozrozhdennyi Baukhaus,' p.21.

surroundings of socialist existence must not be broken when he enters industrial production:

> The fact that the design and consumption of industrial products under capitalism emerges as a purely utilitarian activity demonstrates exactly why art, and only art fulfils an aesthetic function and how it satisfies the "higher" needs of human consciousness. The main flaw is not that the design of useful products…is considered to be the sole activity of humanity…but in that it [design] is not considered in relation to the higher needs of consciousness, the higher aims of humanity – the social reorganization of society.[108]

In other words, art could be an engine for introducing ideals into material reality and thus support the spiritual development of the communist collective.

The production art of the future

Having established the necessity of artists' involvement in industrial production under communism, Kantor set about generating a new theory of design he called the 'production (industrial) art of the future' [*proizvodstvennoe (promyshlennoe) iskusstvo budushchego*]. In the analysis that follows my aim is to explore two elements of his theorization. First of all, I will answer how a 'sociological theory of design' defined alternative roles for the object under capitalist and communist systems of production. Then, I will explain how collective creative labour was thought to be the key to the production of harmony in the material environment of communism.

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[108] Karl Kantor, 'Vozrozhdennyi Baukhaus,' p.23.

Finally, I will discuss how Kantor looked both to the Constructivist past and emerging technologies to develop a theory of the 'production art of the future.'

In 1966, Kantor warned that 'the malady of "scientificness" and "table-mania" which infected the Ulm school has also been caught by our young design profession and is threatening to mutate into an entirely original new phase called "plan-chartomania"'. This was the opening to a 1966 essay entitled 'The Social Nature of Design (Toward the Formulation of the Question of the Sociology of Design).'[109] It echoed the title of Boris Arvatov's 1925 work 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the formulation of the question).'[110] In this important text of 1920s Productivist theory, Arvatov sought to reconfigure Marx's theory of the commodity whereby the labour that produces an object is suppressed by the commodity form, i.e. the value projected onto it. For Arvatov, Marx's theory of the commodity rendered objects passive and failed to recognise the possibility that objects could play a positive role in structuring social relations for the benefit of the proletariat.[111]

In Kantor's 1966 treatise, he attempted to formalize what Arvatov had outlined forty years previously as a field of sociological enquiry that would 'examine relationships from the point of view of their manifestation in objects.[112]' Kantor was interested in how the emerging middle class in America articulated themselves

[109] Karl Kantor, 'Obshchestvennaia priroda dizaina (K postanovke voprosa o sotsiologii dizaina)', *DI SSSR*, 1966/10, pp. 2-4.
[110] Boris Arvatov trans. by Christina Kiaer, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (toward the Formulation of the Question)', *October*, 81 (1997), pp.119-28.
[111] See Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, pp.31-32.
[112] Kantor, 'Obshchestvennaia priroda dizaina,' p.2.

through patterns of consumption that played an active part in defining the 'role structure' of capitalist society.[113]

According to Kantor, within the past thirty years, design in the USA had emerged as a way for individuals to define their status within society. It had begun to act as a 'social regulatory mechanism' that 'facilitates unanimity corresponding to the material conditions of the existence of varying social groups and the multi-layered society of "consumers"' and therefore 'supports the material *unity* [*teslostnost'*] of the contemporary capitalist system.'[114] That is to say that design and consumption played a key role in structuring capitalist society and enacting its ideologies.

By Kantor's logic, VNIITE had proposed a system that would explicitly replicate the role of design in capitalist countries in structuring social relations as, under VNIITE's model for the design of consumer goods, the material needs of social groups would be defined and enforced centrally, with typological objects produced to suit their needs. VNIITE's creation of a system linking design to production and the needs of consumers would mean that individual objects were passively determined by external factors instead of being designed to actively structure social relations.

Kantor developed his thesis over the next three years during his brief employment at VNIITE's theory lab. In 1967 he published a major contribution to Soviet aesthetic philosophy entitled *Beauty and Utility: Sociological Issues in Material-Artistic Culture.* In this work, he explored the potential for a 'production art of the future'

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., p.4.

founded on ideals of collective creativity that would emerge at some point during the transition from socialism to communism. Unlike technical aesthetics, the production art of the future would not merely reproduce the objects and labour conditions of Western design, but materially reflect the organization of communist society and the needs of communist man.

Throughout *Beauty and Utility*, Kantor follows the historical narrative set out by Arvatov in his 1923 book *Art and Production* [Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo].[115] Arvatov's thesis expresses the notion that at some point during the Renaissance, the artist ceased to participate in the technical division of labour, resulting in the 'end of creativity in the sphere of social *byt* [daily life],' and 'art leaving life.'[116] One of the consequences of this was 'disharmony' and 'lack of organisation' in reality.[117] The separation of beauty and utility in labour (as demonstrated by the separation of artists into a special class of labourers apart from those involved in regular production) was considered by Kantor to be symptomatic of a divided class society.

The role of art as a representative and individualistic medium was seen to create the *illusion* of harmony in societal relations where harmony did not exist. For Arvatov, the 'commodity form of representational art,' exists as a medium that compensates for the 'discord of reality.'[118] Kantor agreed, stating 'the very fact of the existence of art indicates the absence of harmony in personal and societal

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[115] Boris Arvatov, *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* (Moscow and Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1926)
[116] Ibid., p.55.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.105.

interests…in other words, the lack of beauty in reality itself.'[119] He added: 'Beauty in art arises from the tragedy of reality.'[120]

In Kantor's theorization of design,[121] the deceptive nature of the work of art is replicated in industry by the artist whose designs are reproduced in the industrial object. Hence, the industrial object retains the individualistic character of a work of art.[122] However, under communism, the conditions of creative collective labour (following the liquidation of the barrier between physical and mental labour), give beauty the potential to re-enter reality.

Kantor's notion of collective creativity (as a precondition of beauty) is one where all members of society influence the outcome of creative work. This is due to the emergence of a new communist division of labour that does not bear the ill effects of capitalist organization of labour.[123] Such a system, M. P. Sakov declared, would be 'represented by the harmonious organisation of people, distributed according to various spheres of productive, and other social activities in conformity with the needs of society and abilities and interests of each man.'[124]

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[119] Karl Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za: Sotsiologicheskie voprosy material'no–khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1967), p.78.

[120] Ibid. p.80.

[121] Design [dizain] here is used to refer to both the USSR and America as design and manufacture in both countries was still predicated on a capitalist system of division of labour.

[122] Kantor was sceptical that any contemporary models of production would facilitate collective creative production. In design departments and consultancies, the division of labour meant that industrial products expressed the 'relationship to reality' and the 'creative fantasy' of the chief designer. While some believed that workshops producing folk arts and crafts provided an example of collective creative production, Kantor disagreed. In *Beauty and Utility*, he drew attention to the role of folk artists in reproducing form and ornament conceived by artists at the Institute for Arts and Industry in Moscow meaning that Soviet folk art had preserved only 'superficial embodiments of collective artistic practice. See Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, pp.194-195.

[123] See Ibid., pp.196-200.

[124] M. P. Sakov, *Osnovnoi printsip kommunizma* (Moscow, Gospolitizdat, 1961) p.20, cit. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia*, p.137.

For Kantor, beauty in its true form would be the product of collective creativity within the communist division of labour. This is because an expedient form of beauty is one that supports harmonious societal relations. Collective co-production would set the 'production art of the future' apart from contemporary decorative art and design, which merely reproduces the creativity of the individual:

> In the conditions of communal ownership….the necessity and even possibility of expressing the general properties of human activity, and integrity and unity of the human collective in the external forms of products will disappear. The integrity and unity of the human collective will stop being an illusion and become reality.[125]

Kantor therefore did not intend the object to unite beauty and utility in its external form, because the form of an object can be deceptive.[126] An object's form is the source of the fetish character of the commodity. Instead, the dialectic must be resolved through *labour*, as it is labour that produces both beauty and utility.

This is an important point, because here emerges the *temporal* division between artistic projecteering and the contemporaneous design activity of artistic engineering [*khudozhestvennoe konstruirovanie*]. Artistic engineering was seen to be reliant upon a division of labour inherited from capitalism. Artistic projecteering, on the other hand, could only exist as a mainstream practice following the emergence of communist relations.

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[125] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, p.55.
[126] Ibid., p.53.

Furthermore, if the study of beauty and its production is the central question of aesthetics, technical aesthetics could not be considered a branch of aesthetics due to its failure to study the role of beauty in technology.[127] Technical aesthetics treated social development, technological development and aesthetics as objectively defined 'laws' that amount to a science of design. The artist would remain an important figure in the production art of the future, because art is concerned with the study of beauty and is therefore concerned the production of beauty as a consequence of harmonic societal relations. 'The designer approaches the design of industrial products from the position of aesthetic culture, of which he is a vessel,' wrote Kantor.[128]

Rather than abandon the role of the artist in design to their fate as a replicator of external forms, Kantor followed the Constructivist call of 'art into life,' by envisaging a future when 'reality will become a work of art…[whereby] art is not a reflection, portrayal or illusion of life, but the material element of life itself.'[129] In Kantor's philosophy, 'production art of the future' is privileged as the activity 'called upon to create a material environment which will stimulate in man a partisan, active, and creative, rather than consumerist relationship to life.'[130]

Kantor's application of Productivist logic to the dialectic of beauty and utility led to the assertion that the aim of socialist design should not be to combine beauty

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[127] Ibid. pp.15-17 Kantor's dismissal of Technical aesthetics as a branch of aesthetics became the subject of a polemic within VNIITE. See Kalincheva, Zherdev and Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE*, pp.201-203.

[128] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, p.151.

[129] Ibid., p.185.

[130] Ibid., pp.193-4.

and utility in the form of objects: this dialectic would disappear in the communist future when beauty and utility become synonymous. The aim of artistic projecteering was to explore the means of achieving the useful effects of objects without the illusion and deception created by external forms because, 'the fetishism of an object appears as the fetishism of its form.'[131]

Objects of the future

So what would be the key characteristics of the future communist materiality? Kantor proposed a new set of material relations derived from his readings of Productivist theory and knowledge of contemporary American design culture. Building upon theories of Hannes Meyer and Productivists Boris Kushner and Nikolai Tarabukin; Kantor envisaged a new type of material relations in communist society based on collective creative labour. He believed Soviet Productivism, which emerged in the years immediately following the October revolution, had failed partly due to a lack of technological sophistication in the industrial apparatus inherited from Tsarist times. 'Only today,' wrote Kantor, 'is the technical basis of industry being created that corresponds to socialist relations of production.' [132] In the final section of *Beauty and Utility,* Kantor updated Productivist theories of the 1920s for the age of the scientific-technological revolution. He looked to contemporary American design culture for an indication of what was yet to come.

Kantor describes one of the major features of future materiality as '*razveshchestvlenie*' . The term *razveshchestvlenie* refers to the process of dissolution or

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[131] Ibid., p.223-224.
[132] Ibid., p.99.

gradual disappearance of the commodity object in the communist future. The unusual construction of the word distinguishes it from commonly used terms such as 'dissolution' [*raspad/razlozhenie*] or 'dematerialization' [*dematerializatsiia*]. The term acts as a counter to *'oveshchestvlenie,'* which signifies reification (in the sense of the process whereby commodities attain a fetish character). I have chosen to use Buchli's translation of the term, 'deartifactualization,'[133] because the Russian word is deliberately constructed to indicate the un-ravelling of the object's fetish form.

In his search for material forms of the communist future, Kantor drew inspiration from two figures of the 1920s: Hannes Meyer[134] and Boris Kushner. Meyer (whose legacy had recently undergone a revival at Ulm) was one of the first of the Bauhaus masters to resist the school's stylistic formalism in 1926, placing emphasis instead on the social function of architecture.[135] After Meyer moved to the Soviet Union following his dismissal as director of the Bauhaus in 1930,[136] he promoted architecture as 'objective' organizational practice concerned with social functionality. Like Kantor, he was dismissive of the notion that beauty should be expressed as an external formal feature, stating that 'the result of a process of organization does not stand or fall by any aesthetic assessment.'[137] Artistic knowledge would still play an important role in determining the psychological

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[133] See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp.149-142. Buchli's understanding of the term is derived from slightly later sources in the 1970s. For an in-depth discussion of its interpretation by architect Aleksanr Riabushin, see Tom Cubbin, 'The Domestic Information Machine: Futurological Experiments in the Soviet Domestic interior 1968-76,' *Home Cultures*, 11/1 (2014), pp.5-32.

[134] I was made aware of this link in Glazychev, 'Opyt Senezhstkoi Studii.'

[135] Meyer had been the first master at the Bauhaus to set himself vigorously against the formalism prevailing there. He had grasped that the problem of quality in the objects forming the background of our everyday life was not merely a formal one, and that if the creative artist wanted to play an effective social role he had to step in at the level of popular needs. See Claude Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer: Buildings, Writings and Projects* (Teufen: Niggli, 1965).

[136] Meyer had been appointed director of the Bauhaus in 1928.

[137] Meyer, Hannes: "On Marxist architecture." 1931. (Manuscript in German). cit. Claude Schnaidt, *Hanned Meyer: Buildings, Writings and Projects* (Teufen: Niggli, 1965) p.31.

effect of a building, but this would be 'objectively' determined. Meyer's initiation of a kind of social (as opposed to aesthetic) functionalism in his practice was an attempt to achieve the dissolution of the architectural object expressed as form. Furthermore, Maldonado and HfG Ulm had shown Kantor possible ways to recommence the experiments started by Meyer in the 1920s and 1930s.

Kantor's second inspiration came from Boris Kushner, a Productivist theorist who, gave a series of papers at INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture, 1920-1924) in 1922 where he predicted the 'death of objects' as the result of technologically advanced production. Kushner's concept of 'material installation' [*material'naia ustanovka*] consisted of a unified system of equipment that would be able to fulfil human need by changing form in time and space.[138] While a 'culture of the thing' [*veshchevaia kul'tura*] demanded that human needs be fulfilled by individual objects – a bed for sleeping, a chair sitting etc., a material instillation would enable human needs to be met in other ways. If a system could transform in order to meet those needs, which would change over time, the stabilised meanings of objects that perform a single function would disappear. 'The form of the object gives way to construction,' wrote Kushner.[139]

Following limited experimentation relating to transformable objects at the Dermetfak, the wood and metalwork faculty at VKhUTEMAS,[140] Kantor saw the emergence of multi-functional objects in the reformist interior of the 1960s as an indication that Soviet industry now had the potential to implement such strategies. This was a reference to the production of transformable furniture such as

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[138] Selim O. Khan-Magamedov, *Pionery sovetskogo dizaina* (Moscow: Galart, 1995), pp.251-252.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p.134, pp.137-9.

collapsible tables and foldable beds that had been designed to meet the spatial requirements of newly constructed small family apartments. 'The multi-functional artefact ceases to be an artefact,' Kantor explained, because it 'loses the continuity of its static composition.'[141]

The processes of deartifactualization were envisaged as continuing in the future when objects might disappear altogether. Kantor and his colleagues caught a glimpse of such a future in 1967 when an exhibition entitled 'Industrial Design USA,' toured Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. Designed by George Nelson and Company, the US state department exhibition featured the work of leading industrial designers including Henry Dreyfus and Raymond Lowey and attracted over 83,000 visitors. [142] The exhibition was designed to demonstrate how technological advancements were integrated into American daily life. It included a section on 'disappearing objects,' where function no longer required a supporting form (see image 9). The accompanying booklet explained how modern heating systems no longer require visible functional elements (radiators and fireplaces), but instead are an integral part of the building or environment.[143] American designers were beginning to develop ways of hiding kitchen appliances in order to ensure their easy integration into the environment of the kitchen without interrupting the intended psychological climate of the space.[144]

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[141] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, p.255.
[142] See Arthur J. Pulos, *The American Design Adventure* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp.262-265.
[143] George Nelson and Company and United States Information Agency, *Promyshlennaia estetika SSha* (1967), p.56.
[144] Ibid.

Image 9 | Advertisements for 'disappearing objects' featured in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition 'Industrial Design USA,' 1967.

The catalogue for the 1967 exhibition 'Industrial Design USA' contained many collages of adverts in order to stress the role of the market and competition in encouraging companies to innovate new products.

Source: George Nelson and Company and United States Information Agency, *Promyshlennaia estetika SSha*, 1967, p.57

Kantor analysed the objects on show in the spirit of Arvatov and Kushner, who had also based their predictions of the future material culture of socialism on the latest technological advances to emerge from the USA during the 1920s. Inspired by what he had seen at the exhibition, Kantor re-imagined Kushner's 'material installation' based on an extrapolation of contemporary technologies where the home lacked any permanent fixtures or fittings:

> In the house of the future...it will not be necessary to place specific objects in the space of the home. Some kind of centralised system will guarantee everybody the possibility to create a certain spatial environment in a room at the press of a button (just as we turn on a light switch)...[145]

Kantor was also intrigued by disposable objects that were on display at the exhibition (see image 10 for examples). In an age before environmental preservation was a major concern of industrial designers, disposable objects were presented as an outcome of automated manufacture that could overcome high costs of repair and maintenance. The enthusiasm for such objects is surprising, as both Solov'ev and Kantor were opposed to unnecessary obsolescence and aging of objects that enforce the consumer's passivity. Yet Kantor argued that disposable objects 'reveal their true essence as the *means* and only the *means* of fulfilling need…dying in the act of consumption, creating the real preconditions for emancipation from the bondage of things.'[146] Viewed through a neo-Productivist lens, the disposable objects on show at the exhibition appeared to fit the description of the ephemeral objects of the future described by Nikolai Tarabukin

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[145] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, pp.261-262.
[146] Ibid.

Image 10 | Aluminium foil, disposable cutlery, disposable furniture and a disposable dress featured in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition 'Industrial Design USA,' 1967.

Kantor believed a new type of productivist object was emerging in the disposable objects on show at the Industrial Design USA, despite possible counter-arguments that disposable objects stimulate over-consumption.

Source: George Nelson and Company and United States Information Agency, *Promyshlennaia estetika SSha*, 1967, pp. 59-61.

in his 1922 book *From Easel to Machine*. Tarabukin called for Productivist artists to abandon discreet objects and take full advantage of modern manufacture's ability to produce ever-increasing numbers of standardized objects according to a principle of rapid obsolescence.[147] Tarabukin wrote:

> Mass production cancels out the [hitherto established] conception of the object; it brings about an extreme reduction of the period of its utilization to a single act of consumption. Transformed from an object intended for a significant period of usage into an object…produced for single use only, transformed from a solid "elephant" into an "ephemera," the object loses its fundamental character.[148]

While disposable objects could help to overcome commodity fetishism in the physical world, cybernetics and computing constituted the dawning of a new phase in the dissolution of the object. Kantor proposed this was because the movement of electrons carrying information, as opposed to mechanical parts transferring physical force, would fundamentally restructure the machine's role as an agent of 'sensory-material relations'.[149] Transfer of energy in labour would be increasingly informational, rather than physical. This recalls Arvatov's assessment of radio as a system leading to the liquidation of the 'rupture between the material energies of society and nature…[by means of] technical systems in which the productive process is realized in the work of directly connected, spontaneous

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[147] Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2005), pp.146-147.

[148] Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1923), p.30 cit. Ibid., p.147.

[149] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, pp.210-11.

activities organized by human labour.'[150] The advent of cybernetics in the Soviet Union some thirty years later was viewed by Kantor as an indicator of the emerging intellectualization of labour and consequent reorganization of socio-economic relations, as well as a key force for the transformation of work into a satisfying, creative activity.

Computer technologies could also cause us to reassess how we perceive form. Kantor noted the arbitrariness of the forms of storage, encryption and transmission of information in these machines, which means that their external forms are not lent a 'material-sensory' nature. Their forms take on a 'uniform and harmonically undivided,' yet 'inexpedient' and 'abstract' character.[151] He took the computer punch card as an example of a physical element of the machine whose material and form is of little significance in comparison to the information it carries. [152] Cybernetic technology was an important indicator of the future disappearance of form, because, wrote Kantor 'automated technology of the future will lose the objective character of the commodity object which is intrinsic today. It will not be able to reflect forms of technology in its external aesthetics.'[153]

The above summary has introduced *Beauty and Utility* as a political and ideological framework that strongly influenced the structure and pedagogical programme of Senezh studio in its early years. Kantor indicated that only under socialism would it be possible to reconcile the dialectic of art with technology, of ideals with praxis. In describing the 'production art of the future,' Kantor created a vision of the

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[150] Arvatov, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing,' p.28.

[151] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, p.212.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid., p.212, pp.223-4.

'artistic projecteer' [*khudozhnik-proektirovshchik*]. The projecteer materializes the will of the communist collective in objects whose forms change in space and time to meet the changing needs of that collective – thus overcoming the material consequences of the capitalist division of labour. Kantor labelled his idea 'total projecteering' [*total'noe proektirovanie*] as an attempt to bridge the gap between theories of social change and socialist design practice. 'Total projecteering,' Kantor later recalled, was to be an unequivocally utopian activity that 'might stimulate a change in material relations in order to transform them and bring them closer to the ideals that were the subject of our research.'[154]

Conclusion – two utopias

Theorists of technical aesthetics and artistic projecteering presented visions of a material environment that was radically different to the experience of the Soviet citizen in the 1960s. They are both examples of utopian practice in the sense that there is a gap between reality they inhabit and the vision they present. Both disciplines attempted, in the words of Mannheim, to 'shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.'[155]

Technical aesthetics was a partial shattering – it worked on the logic of restructuring and organizing existing industries, factories and projects. The 'state system of design' was supposed to literally deliver the goods promised in the third party programme by systematically applying advances in social management,[156]

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[154] Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine*, pp.5-6.
[155] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.173.
[156] Referred to in official theory as the 'scientific management of society' [*nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom*].

management of labour, [157] science and technology. Like the Third Party programme, Solov'ev's vision for design was predicated on the idea of rapidly boosting per-capita production through rational organization. In Ricoeur's theory of utopias, the technical aesthetics' conception of a design system could be seen as pathological utopia: it is obsessed with the immediate fulfilment of an idea. The majority of its projects were intended to be realized within three to four years.[158] Long-term communist ideals, such as the elimination of wage differences, could not be considered in VNIITE's immediate strategy because it was bounded by the socio-economic realities of planned economy that were dictated by the communist party. While VNIITE employed a number of artists and designers engaged in futurological design,[159] the organization's main concern during the 1960s was to integrate design practice within the planned economy as it existed at the time. VNIITE's attempt to assert itself as an actor within the economic system should not be underestimated, however. The organization's leaders attempted to transform an aspect of that system by making better, more efficient machines and objects for sale to the Soviet public and to foreign markets. Working within the realms of the possible, they brought design issues to the attention of a broad audience and were successful in enacting legislation to ensure minimum levels of quality and standardization in Soviet goods.

On the other hand, Kantor's 'production art of the future' imagined a new collective material practice that could only exist after the full transition to communism had been achieved. It makes no concession to contemporaneous

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[157] Officially known as 'Scientific organization of labour' [*nauchnaia organizatsiia truda*].

[158] Solov'ev, 'Ob assortimente bytovykh izdelii,' p.2.

[159] The small group of designers who undertook prognostic work at VNIITE were much more closely aligned to artistic projecteering and were strongly influenced by Western critical design projects. See Cubbin, 'The Domestic Information Machine.'

production or consumption as these were seen as hangovers of the capitalist system. In this sense, it is a constitutive utopia because it acts as a contestation of the present situation – the organization of the division of labour, economic management and the structure of society in general.

This chapter has shown how both technical aesthetics and artistic projecteering were rooted in the intellectual discourses of the 1950s, with reference to discussions about the agency of art and science in the construction of communist society. Through analysis of how proponents of both disciplines proposed the production of a harmony in the material environment, it has been possible to demonstrate the fundamental differences in approach to time and the fulfilment of an ideal. For Kantor and Rozenblium, a harmonious material environment should reflect harmonious social relations, as opposed to generating stylistic conformity that could only be temporary due to changing tastes and fashions. Finally, analysis of Kantor's *Beauty and Utility* sheds light on the genealogy of the studio's philosophy that borrowed heavily from avant-garde theories of the 1920s to produce a contemporary theory of communist production art. This, the studio's founders believed, would one day replace contemporary artistic engineering and technical aesthetics.

Chapter 3 | Artistic projecteering and the formation of a critical practice 1965 – 1971

In this chapter I examine how the pedagogical methods and projects developed during the late 1960s balanced Kantor's lofty aims with the need to develop a set of practical tools to integrate artistic projecteering in Soviet industry. While Kantor worked on his theories of the production art of the future, the studio was a site of intense experimentation, development, and reassessment of artistic projecteering and its objectives. The first section of this chapter is devoted to discussion of the methods and processes developed at the studio for integrating artistic knowledge with technical form. The experimentation in this period constituted an attempt to overcome the 'chaos' of material through the full integration of artistic methods into the design process. With reference to a number of projects, I explain why participants undertook compositional exercises with the intention that the compositional 'unity' of a work of art could be transposed to material reality.

I then turn my attention to the design of machines and implements for factories and scientific laboratories. Paying particular attention to projects developed in

Novosibirsk, I show how machines and technical systems were restructured with the aim of overcoming alienation in labour and stimulating creativity among workers. The final section of the chapter is a discussion of how artistic projecteering was reconceptualised as a critical practice. With reference to methodological philosophy – a Soviet discipline that was intended to structure relationships of knowledge and praxis – I show how faith in the possibility of a 'production art of the future' was abandoned by theorists and practitioners. Instead, the projects discussed below were praised for their critical and discursive functionality.

From composition to unity

The idea that *aesthetic* knowledge should govern technical form recalls Walter Gropius' famous slogan, 'Art and Technology – a New Unity.' This was the title given to a 1923 exhibition that saw the Bauhaus move from crafts to industry: a development the founders of Senezh were attempting to initiate in the USSR some forty years later. Éva Forgács has argued that Gropius' attempt to resolve this philosophical dilemma was primarily political, leading Georg Muche to retort at the time: 'The limits of technology are set by reality, while art can only reach the level of true aims if it aims at an ideal goal.'[1] Likewise, the question of how to integrate an artistic ideal into an imperfect reality was a major issue for thinkers associated with Senezh who attempted to revive this aspect of early twentieth century avant-gardism.

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[1] Georg Muche, 'Kunst und Technik,' Bauhaus Zeitschrift für Gestaltung, no.1, 1926 cit. Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Budapest, London and New York: Central European University Press, 1995), p.115.

Following the pilot seminar in 1964, Rozenblium and his colleagues set about creating a pedagogical programme that would facilitate the transfer of ideas, knowledge and practices from the theoretical world of the educational and research institute to the factory and exhibition hall. Rozenblium was particularly inspired by successful collaborations with industry at HfG Ulm, where partnerships with companies like Braun were instrumental in the perception of the school's success.[2] The pedagogical programme at Senezh was structured with the intention of facilitating organic transfer of ideas from the studio to industry.

Instead of training students from scratch, the studio targeted artists who already held positions of responsibility in factories, as well as those who worked in local studios fulfilling commissions in the fields of monumental art and exhibition design. In order to recruit these individuals, regional and republic level headquarters of the Soviet Union of Artists were requested to nominate suitable individuals. The requests stipulated that 'the artists must bring concrete industrial assignments to be completed under the supervision of qualified consultants.'[3] Upon return from the seminars, it was hoped that some artists might be able to promote artistic projecteering in their home organisations and realize projects in diverse locations and environments. At each seminar, the most interesting projects were selected and the artists worked on these in groups of two to five.

[2] When a delegation from HfG Ulm visited the Soviet Union in 1964, Rozenblium asked several questions on this topic. See SKh SSSR 'Stenogramma besedy s prepodovateliami shkoly v Ul'me (zapadnaia germaniia) v redaktsii zhurnala "Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR.," 10th July 1964. RGALI f. 2082 op.2 d.2144 l.35-37.

[3] Letter from Karl Rozhdestvenskii to various local Union of Artists administrations, 11th December 1964. RGALI f.2082, op.2, d.2168, l.1.

A decree signed on 26th August 1966 'On the creation of the Central Educational and Experimental Studio of the Soviet Union of Artists'[4] made the Senezh seminars into a biannual event. By the time of the fourth seminar, held 5th February to 10th April 1967, Rozenblium and his colleagues developed a general educational programme that was broadly followed until the studio's closure in 1991. Artists could participate in the seminar up to four times before receiving a diploma. Thirteen Russians, four Ukrainians and two Kazakhs attended this particular seminar, all for the second time. Over the two months, attendees spent an additional seventy hours undertaking compositional exercises, and forty hours undertaking colour exercises. Attendees also heard fifty hours of lectures (see fig. 1) that covered both standard Soviet themes (such as *Mass Art in the Twentieth Century* and *The Role of Socialist Realist Art in the Fight for Communism*) and the cutting edge of thinking in the Soviet humanities, including lectures on methodological philosophy (see below), the history of Russian Constructivism, contemporary foreign design and many other topics.

The courses in colour and composition formed the central component of the pedagogical programme. The major innovation of Senezh was the close integration of these courses with the design process. From 1967, colour and composition were taught by Mark Konik, who had attended the pilot seminars since 1964.[5] The courses drew heavily on Johannes Itten's Vorkurs at the Bauhaus, Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, courses on composition at the Warsaw

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[4] From 1966 the studio was known as the Tsentral'naia uchebno–eksperimental'naia studiia soiuza khudozhnikov SSSR. It dropped the 'uchbeno ' [educational] from its name in 1979.

[5] Konik attended the early seminars as a participant before he moved to Moscow following the 1966 Tashkent earthquake. See Mark Konik, 'O sebe i svoiem dele' (1994) in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi* Indeks Dizain: Moskva, 2003) pp.13-25 (p.15).

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       Seminar for design and industrial art – Programme of work
…
Project work – 400 hours
Compositional exercises – 70 hours
Colour exercises – 40 hours
…

A: Lectures on artistic projecteering:

1. Aspects and principles of design – K. Kantor (4 hours)
2. Contemporary theories of design – K. Kantor (4 hours)
3. The methodology of artistic projecteering – E. Rozenblium (2
hours)
4. Artistic projecteering of the industrial interior – E.
Rozenblium (4 hours)
5. Artistic projecteering of industrial goods - E. Rozenblium (2
hours)
6. Artistic projecteering of museum exhibitions - E. Rozenblium (2
hours)
7. Artistic projecteering in the modern city - E. Rozenblium (2
hours)
8. 'Styles' in foreign design – V. Glazychev (6 hours)
9. Artistic projecteering of window displays – V. Glazychev (2
hours)
10. Industrial graphics – V. Lydin (2 hours)
11. Print media in artistic projecteering - V. Lydin (2 hours)


B: Art, Aesthetics, Contemporary Science and Technology:

1. The relationship between beauty and utility – K. Kantor (4
hours)
2. Soviet aesthetics – K. Kantor (4 hours)
3. Mass art in the twentieth century – B. Shagrin (2 hours)
4. Art and the development of harmonious man – L. V. Pazhitov (2
hours)
5. Art and technology – V. Talasov (2 hours)
6. Art movements of the twentieth century –  I. Golomshtok (2
hours)
7. Design and art: Congresses and exhibitions – L. Zhadova (2
hours)
8. New scientific disciplines – G. P. Shchedrovitskii (4 hours)
9. Humanism and technicism – I. S. Novik (4 hours)
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Figure 1 | Sample lecture programme, February – April 1967.

This programme gives an indication of the breadth of subjects covered by Senezh tutors and guest lecturers. The programme was designed to familiarize attendees with the latest developments in Soviet and foreign design, as well as philosophy. The presence of high profile speakers including Georgii Shchedrovitskii suggests that the students became familiar with cutting edge research in the Soviet humanities.

Source: TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Dokumenty o provodenii vsesiuznogo someinara khudozhnikov promyshlennogo i oformitel'skogo iskusstva,' RGALI f.2082, op.2, d.2194, l.5.

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  Summary of Courses in Colour and Composition, 1969


Composition:
Theme I – Basic graphic elements.
Theme II – Negative and positive space, or silhouette
and background.
Theme III – Relationship of two elements.
Theme IV – Organizing similar elements. Finding
patterns.
Theme V – Accentuating series of similar elements.
Theme VI – Contrasts.
Theme VII – Leitmotif.
Theme VIII – Centre.
Theme IV – Symmetry – Asymmetry.
Theme X – Rhythm – movement – direction.
Theme XI – Types of composition.
Theme XII – Articulating plane or space.


Colour:
Theme I – The physics of colour
Theme II – The effect of colour and reality
Theme III – The basis of colour harmony
Theme IV – Building a framework of studying colour
Theme V – Contrasts
     1 – The pure colour (hue) contrast
     2 – The light-dark contrast
     3 – The cold-warm contrast
     4 – The complimentary contrast
     5 – The simultaneous contrast
     6 – The contrast of quality (colour saturation)
     7 – The contrast of quantity
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Figure 2 | Main themes of colour and composition courses at Senezh studio, Mark Konik, 1969.

This is a summary of the main themes of the courses in colour and composition devised by Mark Konik. The composition exercises were designed to build gradually from an investigation of line and point to more complex compositional arrangements. Both courses were heavily derived from teaching at the Bauhaus. The exercises on colour contrasts are identical to those developed by Johannes Itten and presented in *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later.*

Source: Mark Konik, 'O kompozitsii,' (1969) and 'O koloristike,' (1969) in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, 2003 pp.39-77

See also: Johannes Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later,* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975) p.32.

Image 11 | Composition and colour exercises on display at Senezh studio, year unknown.

Completed exercises were displayed on the studio's walls throughout the seminar as a reflection of the 'artistic climate' of the two-month long meeting.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive.

Image 12 | Exercises exploring light and shadow in three dimensions on display at Senezh studio, year unknown.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive.

Academy of Art, and books on Japanese artistic education (see fig. 2).[6] Itten's book, *The Art of Colour* formed the basis of teaching on colour.[7] Analysis of artwork and the completion of two- and three- dimensional exercises in colour and composition were devised in order to provide participants with the building blocks of a 'grammar of design'[8] that would enable fluency in spatial expression.

The completed exercises (see images 11 and 12) frequently resembled abstract compositions, a controversial topic at the time. From 1956 to 1962, experimental young artists including Iurii Zlotnikov, Vladimir Weisberg, and Lidiia Masterkova revived modernist painting in Russia, including various styles of abstract art. This brief period of modernist experimentation was short-lived as Khrushchev's famous tirade against 'formalism' at the young artists' section of the 1962 MOSKh (Moscow Section of the Soviet Union of Artists) exhibition at the Moscow Manège encouraged further attacks on 'formalism' in art through the rest of the decade.[9] By 1965, abstraction had become the subject of fierce attacks by art critics eager to suppress the re-emergence of abstract painting during the Thaw.

While many fine artists working outside of socialist realism were not able to exhibit abstract work at official exhibitions, designers were protected from accusations of formalism due to the utilitarian value of their work. Igor Golomshtok, an art historian who lectured at the studio, has argued that the legitimization of interest in the Soviet avant-garde associated with design acted as

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[6] Mark Konik, 'O kompozitsii' (1969), in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi,* pp.39-54 (p.39).

[7] Mark Konik 'O koloristike' (1969), in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, pp.55-77 (p.55).

[8] Mark Konik, 'Kurs kompozitsii na Senezhe,' *DI SSSR,* 1973/11, pp.36-40 (p.36).

[9] For a brief account of the Manège affair, see Alexander Glezer, 'The struggle to exhibit,' in *Unnoficial Art from the Soviet Union* ed. Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer (London: Secker and Walburg, 1977), pp.107-120 (pp.107-108).

a shield for artists interested in experimenting with form, colour and light.[10] Abstraction could be the means for finding a new language of form in non-representational arts. For example, the artistic group *Dvizhenie* (1963-1967)[11] practised kinetic art in the Soviet Union but often presented their installations in a quasi-design context. For *Dvizhenie* and the associated group *Mir*, abstraction provided a possibility for non-verbal communication with specialist audiences, such as the physicists at the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy for whom the artists created an installation (see image 13). Margareta Tillberg has shown that *Dvizhenie* and *Mir's* self-labelled 'synthetic art' was designed to evoke 'alternative perceptual positions of sense impressions in the minds of those present.'[12] Cybernetics-inspired performances at the Institute of Atomic Energy were undertaken in the spirit of communicating through art to create 'inventive, non-standard ways of thinking'[13] that could apply to all areas of human knowledge.

At Senezh too, abstraction was conceived as a means of enabling non-standard ways of thinking that would generate new visual languages and forms of expression. The exercises were conceived as the starting point for the creation of a new language: the language of the project [*iazyk proekta*]. If projecteering was to emerge as a new type of activity free from the hierarchies of knowledge existent in the division of intellectual labour, artists would need to find a means of expressing

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[10] Igor Golomshtok, 'Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union' in *Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union* by Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer (London: Secker and Walburg, 1977) pp.81-106 (pp.100-101).

[11] Dvizhenie was made up of more than ten artists including Lev Nussberg, Francisco Infante and Viacheslav Koleichuk.

[12] Margareta Tillberg, 'You are now leaving the American Sector: The Russian Group *Dvizhenie*, 1962 – 1978,' in *Place Studies in Art, Media, Science and Technology: Historical Investigations on the Sites and the Migration of* Knowledge ed. Andreas Broeckmann and Gunalan Nadarajan (Kromsdorf and Weimar: VDG Verlag Bettina Preiss 2008), pp.147-168 (p.162).

[13] Viacheslav Koleichuk, 2007 cit. ibid., p.152.

Image 13 | Atom, *Mir* group, Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, Moscow, 1967.

This 12 metre high kinetic sculpture was placed in the square outside Moscow's Kurchatov institute for atomic energy. The rods rotated and reflected light produced by a colour music device (designed by Léon Theramin) in order to create a new aesthetic experience for the advanced scientific age. *Mir* member Viacheslav Koleichuk occasionally worked as a consultant at Senezh during this late 1960s/early 1970s.

Source: David Crowley and Daniel Muzychuk, *Sounding the Body Electric*, 2012, p.26

the core elements of a project that were not limited by the constraints of verbal language, or the limitations of contemporary technology.

According to Konik, the exercises were instrumental in setting the 'artistic climate' of each seminar.[14] Instead of being conceived of as an introduction to colour and form, the compositional and colour exercises were completed in allotted periods alongside the main design task in order that the designer would work in continuous reference to artistic culture.[15] In theory, constantly entering into experimentation with form was supposed to ensure that the project would remain within the realms of artistic rather than technical culture. Konik believed the courses to be unique because of the way they were designed to facilitate the organic transmission of knowledge of composition and colour to the project. The mechanism of this transmission was broken into several phases.

The first stage of any project was taken up by experimenting with two- and three-dimensional form on compositional themes related to the project. Image 14 shows the gradual development of the compositional ideas for Tupelev-144 supersonic jet interior. This moment was devised to free the artist from the verbal language of the brief and overcome the designer's tendency to compromise form based on the capabilities of manufacture. This was the key to enabling the generation of new forms. Konik explained:

> This is what we call the "translation of knowledge from a foreign to a native language," to the language of your own culture…We undertake the

[14] Mark Konik, 'Kompozitsiia (po povodu kursa),' (1967-1972), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.939 l.1-7 (l.7).
[15] Ibid.

translation of a technical aesthetics issue to a compositional, sculptural, colouristic and…cultural task that is solved using our artistic capabilities…This is one of the fundamental aspects in the theory and practice of artistic projecteering.[16]

The process suggests that an abstract expression can express a deeper understanding of a project than is possible either through a verbalisation with language or a figurative visual representation. After some experimentation in form, artists were supposed to arrive at a 'compositional ideal,' defined as the point at which an overall concept materialized in the form of a composition.[17] 'The activity of creating a general solution,' explained Glazychev, 'can be executed in any form of art or creative endeavour, forming a new unified [*tselostnyi*] product that exists in a particular form structure and a particular language that transcends matter in abstract space-time.'[18] The exploration of a theme in abstract form was therefore supposed to enable the artist to fluently explore formal concepts behind each project.

Several participants of the early seminars commented on their newfound ability to 'think more spatially,'[19] than before. Fluent three-dimensional thinking was seen as the starting point in overcoming chaos in the material environment. In his

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[16] Mark Konik, 'Kompozitsiia – Iazyk – Metod khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia,' (1967-1972) RGALI f.2082, op.2, d.2195, l.8-25 (l.16).

[17] Viacheslav Glazychev, 'Proektnaia kartina dizaina,' (1967) in *Teoriia dizaina: Teoreticheskie I metodologicheskie issledovaniia v dizaine: Izobrannye materialy* ed. O. I. Genisaretskii and E. M. Bizunova (Moscow: Shkola kul'turnoi politiki, 2004), pp.195-221(p.202). This was part of the unpublished 1967 book *Dizain v sfere proektirovaniia. Metodologicheskoe issledovanie* edited by Georgii Shchedrovitskii.

[18] Ibid., p.199

[19] See, Guretskii's comments, TsUES SKh SSSR 'Stenogramma zasedannia khudozhestvennogo soveta,' (16th April 1966), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2178 l.27.

book, *The Artist in Design*, Rozenblium explained that even a self-contained compositional exercise may be considered to express unity 'because it reflects a system of action, inherent to time and culture. Unity is already inherent the smallest element, e.g., in a line. The universe, as it exists for the author, is inherent in the structure of form.'[20]

This formal experimentation was directly compared to the spatial compositions produced at VKhUTEMAS during the 1920s. The development of spatial thinking had been a key aspect of Rodchenko's classes on construction that had formed part of the basic course at VKhUTEMAS. A 1967 catalogue text for a Senezh exhibition underscored this shared aim by dating the emergence of 'artistic projecteering' to VKhUTEMAS in the 1920s, which existed 'above all as a laboratory for new forms.'[21]

However, the absence of the word 'construction' in materials relating to the Senezh is noteworthy, and helps to illustrate how the Konik and Rozenblium's conceptions of composition differed from those of the Constructivists. Firstly, Constructivism had not been fully rehabilitated at this time and retained negative formalist connotations. Secondly, the Russian word for construction [*konstruktsiia*], following its brief association with the artistic avant-garde, was understood primarily as an activity related to engineering. However, the principal difference lay in the conceptualization of composition as a means for overcoming chaos in

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[20] Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine: Opyt raboty Tsentral'noi uchebno-eksperimental'noi studii khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia na Senezhe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p.16.
[21] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: vystavka proektnykh rabot seminara promyshlennogo i oformitel'skogo iskusstva Soiuza khudozhnikov SSSR,' (1967), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2197 l.48-54.

the material environment. This drew on classical definitions of 'organic unity' in the work of art.

Some Constructivists, including Rodchenko, had believed composition to express precisely a *lack* of purposeful organisation, which could only be presented as a 'laid-bare construction.'[22] Maria Gough has detailed how INKhUK [*The Institute of Artistic Culture*, Moscow 1920-1924] attempted to move art beyond theories of organic unity, ultimately derived from Aristotle, which state that a composition cannot be taken apart without the overall meaning, and thus unity of a work of art, being fundamentally changed. According to Aristotle, any part of a composition that can be removed is superfluous and therefore not integral to the organic unity of a work of art.[23]

The compositional exercises developed at Senezh conform to the classical, rather Constructivist understanding of unity in art. When seen through the lens of Productivism, the Senezh process implies that the artist who is able to achieve unity on a small scale might be able to transmit an expression of unity from a fine art context to the real world. The point at which the project is expressed as a compositional ideal is the stage when the artist engages what he has learned from undertaking formal experiments in order to overcome 'chaos of form' in the material environment.[24]

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[22] Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, California and London: University of California Press, 2005), p.39.

[23] Ibid., pp.45-46.

[24] The artist's first compositional task at the studio was to produce 'chaos' in the form of 'active a-compositional themes.' This was designed to help the artist sense the journey from 'chaos' to 'system.' See Konik, 'Kurs kompozitsii na Senezhe, p.37.

Image 16 | Development of a project for a machine used in the production of curds. E. Maziuk, N. Zhukov and V. Metelev. Senezh studio, 1968.

The block of images on the right comprise a series of compositional exercises undertaken in order to explore formal aspects of the machine. The various circular motifs correspond to the churning motions of the machine. The block of images on the left show the machine's 'compositional ideal,' beside the final project concept that was constructed as a model.

Source: Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, 1974 [plate]

The 'compositional ideal' of a machine was often generated in reference to the movement undertaken by the machine. For instance, image 16 shows experiments leading to the generation of 'compositional ideal' for machine used in the production of curds.[25] Here, the necessary churning motions of the machine were extrapolated to explore its compositional potential. In these images, it is clear that the compositional structure of the machine was developed by exploring the relationship between movement and form. After several representations of the 'formal structure' of the project had been produced, these were collectively analysed. The 'compositional ideal' was produced following the analysis of compositional experiments.

The 'compositional ideal' produced for the Tupolev-144 supersonic jet (image 15), takes into account the form of the fuselage and wings as fixed elements. Here, the 'compositional ideal' constitutes an attempt to unify two factors: the aerodynamic shape of the aircraft, and the compositional potential of the human body (weight, the most important factor in designing aircraft fittings, seems to have not played a major role at this stage). Instead of applying anthropometrics and ergonomics, the human body was viewed as a compositional entity, capable of taking on many forms that would need to be accommodated within the environment of an aeroplane cabin. The compositional experiments relate to a search for a unity (rather than compromise) of form and structure that incorporates both technical and human requirements, in this case resulting in uniting of the interior and exterior.

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[25] Curds, or *tvorog* is a popular snack in Russia.

Image 14 | Exercises exploring the compositional properties of an interior for a Tupolev-144 supersonic jet. M. Konik, E. Rozenblium, S. Bulatov and V. Kataev. Senezh studio, 1968.

Source: Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, 1974 [plate]

Image 15 | Designs for a Tupolev-144 supersonic jet. M. Konik, E. Rozenblium, S. Bulatov and V. Kataev. Senezh studio, 1968.

The images on the right show the design for seating in the jet interior. The design drew on organic forms of the human body and was intended to allow a range of seating positions that would stimulate interaction among passengers. This is seen in the layout of the seating (top left). The use of the human body as the starting point for compositional arrangements is a common feature of design at Senezh during this period.

Source: Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, 1974 [plate]

Artists were then asked to judge the possibility of adapting their compositional structure to the real world. Where it was unsuitable, they were encouraged to return to the drawing board and continue with processes of experiment and analysis. Where an expedient compositional structure upon which to base the project had been achieved, this would be developed and refined to produce a so-called 'ideal project.'[26]

Following the production of the 'ideal project' in the form a compositional structure, the artist's task was to accommodate the project to real world considerations including size, material, engineering and social factors. In theory, all of these elements would meet during the final phase of the project. The interior of the Tupolev project engaged organic forms to promote social interaction within the cabin (see image 15). Konik later summarized this processes the transference of knowledge from the 'illusory' world of painting to the 'semi-real space of the project.' [27] For Konik, this method of undertaking compositional exercises alongside design work had an important effect of empowering artists to undertake design projects:

> The corresponding links between the exercises within a theme helps the student to deepen their knowledge of the linguistic reality of a chosen theme, concentrate their attention on its specifics and potential possibilities, *and realize the simple fact, that he may transform any visual reality.*[28]

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[26] Konik, 'Kurs kompozitsii na Senezhe,' p.36.
[27] Konik, 'O sebe i svoiem dele,' p.16.
[28] Konik, 'Kurs kompozitsii na Senezhe,' p.37.

Nevertheless, compositional knowledge could not guide this transformation alone: knowledge of the political, social and ideological field of action would be vital for artistic projecteering to be effective as a practice of visual and material transformation. In order to fulfil the aim of collective creative labour, artists would need to turn to the labour environment and become organisers of production for the first time since the 1920s.

Industrial policy and labour

The machines designed at Senezh during the 1960s were produced in the context of deep industrial reform and attempts to boost production in industry. On the one hand, industrial expansion could provide many new opportunities for designers, but it also brought dangers of increased alienation in the modern workplace. So how did designers at Senezh contribute to debates on the nature of socialist labour? Below, I detail how this moment of reform and the relative receptiveness to new ideas following Brezhnev's ascendency to the Soviet leadership presented a number of opportunities for designers whose aim was not merely to improve the appearance, quality and quantity of individual goods, but to restructure how they were manufactured and consumed.

The design of machines at Senezh took was partly a reaction to the rebirth of NOT – the scientific organisation of labour - which historian Mark R. Beissinger dates to 1962.[29] In the context of the Thaw, NOT was generally viewed by intellectuals as a progressive discipline, as one of a number of 'return to Lenin' policies that were applied in the search for ideas following the Stalin years. Lenin

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[29] Mark. R. Beissinger, *Soviet Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power,* (Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.162.

had been an enthusiastic about the potential applications of Taylorism since 1914[30] and with his support, the movement was able to develop a bureaucratic, educational and scholarly basis. NOT was a term agreed in 1921 at the first conference on the application of Taylorism in revolutionary Russia, and was devised to distinguish the Soviet regulation of worker and machine from connotations of capitalist exploitation and increased division of labour.[31] The best-known aspect of the movement was Gastev's Central Institute of Labour, where workers were taught to think and act as 'human machines,' repeating various motions (such as hammering) until the body became capable of machine like efficiency.[32]

By 1924, there were approximately 108 organizations researching NOT and over 2400 titles had been published on that theme in Russian.[33] Under Stalin however, work-place rationalisers (whose chronometric standards for workers were deeply unpopular) became targets for denunciation, while the primary motivator for improved work-place efficiency became coercion. Many rationalizers were seen as wreckers, and 'nearly every industrial official who had been involved with the NOT movement in the 1920s and 1930s was systematically eliminated by Stalin between 1935 and 1938.'[34] NOT was largely replaced by the heroic image of the Stakhanovite shock-worker, which followed the logic of working to the limits of the human body, as opposed to rationalising the uses of energy and resources. The movement of the 1960s was viewed as progressive due its attempts to eliminate the

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[30] Ibid., p.23

[31] Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.147.

[32] Ibid., p.154.

[33] Ibid., p.59

[34] Ibid., p.131

'subjective factor' in management that could lead to resource misallocation and the wearing down of the human body.[35] During the Thaw NOT was seen as the key to boosting production, and therefore the living standards of the Soviet citizen.

It is no coincidence that the 1962 re-emergence of NOT coincided with the founding of VNIITE, where anthropometrics and ergonomics were promoted as a means of improving the efficiency of labour at work and in the home.[36] The ergonomics laboratory was a key pillar of the institution, as it constituted a site for the objective study of how to link the body with the machine during a period of industrial expansion and rescaling. VNIITE's most enthusiastic supporter in government was Dzherman Mikhailovich Gvishiani, author of a book entitled *The Sociology of Business* (1962), which urged the application of the lessons of American managerial strategies in the USSR. After he was appointed head of the State Committee for Science and Technology in 1965, he wanted to develop a multi-disciplinary, or 'complex' approach to management science.[37] His support of VNIITE in government suggests that he was a key promoter of design as an area that might unify various aspects of NOT that were competing for prominence. For example, design could enable the unification of a administrative view of workplace management with the results of time and motion studies and the conclusions colour psychologists. This could result in new standards for the appearance of factories, machines, or products.

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[35] Ibid., p.247
[36] See Susan E. Reid, 'The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific Technological Revolution,' Journal of Contemporary History, 40/2 (2005), pp.289-316 (p.310).
[37] Mark. R. Beissinger, *Soviet Management*, p.179.

Image 17 | Ergonomics laboratory at VNIITE, still from documentary film, 1977.

Source: *Dizain v SSSR,* dir. L. Boldyreva, 1977, [On colour film], RGAKFD, Krasnogorsk. d.25635.

The support for NOT grew even stronger in the mid-1960s. Following Khrushchev's 1964 ouster, Soviet premier Aleksei Kosygin announced economic reforms in September 1965 that were aimed at increasing consumer satisfaction among Soviet citizens through the introduction of profitability measures in Soviet industry.[38] The Kosygin reforms placed particular emphasis on rational economic management, with the new Soviet leader Brezhnev stating in 1965 that 'workers in the planning agencies must be guided in their work exclusively by objective economic calculations.'[39] One of the major measures to increase consumer output was a requirement for some heavy industrial plants to start manufacturing consumer goods – a policy shift that promised major new possibilities for designers. The decrees also promised a widespread restructuring of the relationships between economic planning, research and production and placed renewed emphasis on the role of science and technology as a direct productive force in the development of Soviet socialism.[40]

The new opportunities offered by the Kosygin reforms were not only of interest to scientific and technical professionals. In the years before Khrushchev's exit from power, all major policy fronts seemed dominated by confusion: there were foreign policy embarrassments in Berlin and Cuba, and the failure to meet economic growth targets while the government continued to predict the immanent transition to communism.[41] Many leftist intellectuals were encouraged by the Kosygin

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[38] See George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp.137-152. Also, William Tompson, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev,* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003) pp.64-69.
[39] Brezhnev speaking in September 1965 cit. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, p.138.
[40] Ibid., pp.138-139.
[41] Tompson, *The Soviet Union Under Brezhnev,* p.4.

reforms and 'still hoped, in a Marxist way, for the development of a material base and the scientific-technological revolution.'[42]

While the focus of Kosygin's economic reforms was on efficiency, his policies highlighted the need to re-examine the concept of the socialist organization of production: the decrees stated that enterprises were required to 'introduce scientific and technical achievements quickly, and to find better ways of solving economic tasks in the concrete conditions of the enterprise.'[43]

The changing nature of labour during the transition to communist society was one of the liveliest topics of debate among Soviet theoreticians of the 1960s.[44] The debate emerged as philosophers and sociologists attempted to accommodate Marx and Engels' vision of the future labour environment with contemporaneous trends in labour management and knowledge production. All theorists inherited from Engels the notion that labour will be the 'primary necessity of life,'[45] and that communism would lead to the elimination of the distinction between mental and physical labour.[46] There was also a near consensus among philosophers and ideologues that this would lead to de-specialization of the workforce, who would master of a wide range of mental and physical tasks. As Gilison notes, this created a doctrinal dilemma for Soviet theorists in an era of advanced industrial production:

[42] Orlova and Kopolev, *My zhili v moskve* p.112 cit. Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap, 2009) p.273.

[43] KPSS at Plenum of the Central Committee, 17th - 29th October 1965 in *Resolutions and Decisions of the Comunist Part of the Soviet Union: Volume 5, The Brezhnev Years, 1964-1981* ed. Donald V. Schwartz (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp.49-56 (p.53)

[44] Jerome M. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia,* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p.132.

[45] Ibid., p.131

[46] Ibid., p.132

Marx's mistake lay in identifying the division of labour, and consequent alienation, with the capitalist system rather than with the demands of modern technology for efficiency-maximising production. The very facts that knowledge increases, that production processes become increasingly complex, that the variety and complexity of material goods constantly expands makes it less and less likely that the relatively fixed capacities of the human brain will be able to expand more than a tiny proportion of the totality of human knowledge and experience.[47]

In order to understand how designers positioned themselves in relation to the need to simultaneously create more specialised industrial activities while reducing the alienation of the individual worker; it is useful to recall how they were rehearsed four decades previously.

In the 1920s, the question of NOT divided Constructivists. Arvatov was an enthusiastic supporter, citing the American technical intelligentsia as a class who were responsible for creating new collectivized forms of labour.[48] Despite their celebrated engagements with industrial production, Constructivists often paid little attention to labour conditions in the factories with which they collaborated: Stepanova and Popova's collaborations with the textile printing works in Moscow, for example, were undertaken with the intention of creating mass-produced goods rather than reorganising production itself.

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[47] Ibid., pp.132-133.
[48] Julia Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p.160.

Within INKhUK, there was disagreement as to whether artists, with limited knowledge in engineering, were qualified to enter into production and restructure working processes. In *The Artist as Producer*, Maria Gough explores the theoretical and practical obstacles involved in implementing Productivist theories in production during NEP.[49] For Nikolai Tarabukin, this type of intervention was essential because 'for the worker in production, the process of production itself – which is but the means of the object's manufacture – becomes the goal of his activity.'[50] Boris Iogansen's collaborations with the Krasnyi prokratchik factory are a rare example of the Constructivist artist entering industry as 'an inventor, and then organizer, of the very systems and processes of production.'[51] Iogansen's experiment in using art to transform the consciousness of production is an example of a Productivist trying to implement the ideals of artistic, collective labour throughout the factory. In the context of NEP, however, the Productivists' imperative to reform the division of labour came up against the authorities' practical concerns of increasing labour productivity.[52]

Industrial design projects undertaken at Senezh four decades later constituted a unique attempt to revive this aspect of Productivism that resisted the authorities' desire for immediate and rapid increases in production output. As John Roberts notes, the subjugation of the free labour of art to value form, 'is perhaps the reason why emancipatory Productivism, after the demise of historic avant-garde and the rise of the neo-avant-garde in the West, has tended to avoid work on and with the labour process: first it is too difficult (limited access; factory hierarchy;

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49 Gough, *The Artist As Producer*, pp.151-194.

50 Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1923), p.33 cit. Ibid., p.153.

51 Gough, *The Artist As Producer*, p.187.

52 Ibid., p.155.

market constraints) and second the rewards are minimal, particularly in non-revolutionary situations.'[53] The scientific-technological revolution of the 1960s offered potential for change to make the artistic reorganisation of labour a worthwhile project. This is because many new production facilities would need to be designed and constructed in the latter half of the 1960s following the government's pursuit of economic reforms that were intended to specifically increase production output.

Rozenblium saw the moment of rapid rescaling of industrial capabilities as an important moment for the artist to become an organizer of production in the factory.[54] Such an intervention would be necessary to demonstrate the possibility of a social alternative to increased division of labour whereby managers oversee production and workers on the factory floor are responsible for maintaining only a tiny part of a large apparatus. While nearly all Soviet theorists agreed on the temporary economic necessity of increased division of labour in production, their justifications seemingly failed to convince those who closely followed Marx's writing on the dissolution of the boundaries of creative and non-creative work in *The German Ideology*.[55] Some believed there would be a 'law of job changes,' where individuals would slip between creative and non-creative work, while others believed there would emerge a 'new division of labour' that could exist without the negative effects of rationalized production under capitalism.[56]

[53] John Roberts, 'Productivism and Its Contradictions', *Third Text,* 23/5 (2009), pp. 527-36.

[54] See Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Rol' iazyka proektirovaniia v formirovanii khudozhestvenno–proektnoi deiatel'nosti,' Speech given in Halle, GDR (March 1969), RGALI f.2082, op.3, d.906 l.36-40 (l.36).

[55] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p.95.

[56] Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia,* p.140.

Few challenged the reascendant NOT movement of the 1960s, partly because it was enshrined in the Third Party Programme and subsequent official doctrinal publications.[57] Kantor, however, was critical of contemporaneous tendencies to overcome such issues through rhetoric and doctrinal wrangling, as opposed to creative generation of new formal and organizational solutions. He complained, for example, how Productivist theorist A. Toporkov's 1927 book *Technical Life and Contemporary Art* (which was the subject of renewed popularity in design circles) 'arbitrarily interprets Marx's thoughts on the collective character of the fruits of industry as a conception of their collective creative creation.'[58] The notion that work on a production line could be creative was seen by Kantor as a self-deception. Forty years of experience had shown that 'the technical structure of modern industry eliminated the possibility of any direct producer engaging in authentically creative labour, in whatever social forms the labour is undertaken.'[59] The artist in design, explained a studio report, 'does not originate his conception of the worker from ergonomic data, but from the life of the educated worker.'[60] Through experiments at the studio, Rozenblium developed a new approach to the machine that borrowed from contemporary architecture. Putting the mind and body of the worker at the *compositional* heart of the machine, the methodology of 'open form' was developed as a means of allowing simultaneous development of the technical and creative aspects of work.

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[57] 'Technical progress and better organization must be fully utilised to increase labour productivity and reduce production costs at every enterprise.' See KPSS, 'Programme of the CPSU', 1961 in *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Volume 4: The Khrushchev Years* ed. Grey Hodnett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp.167-263 (p.217).

[58] Karl Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za: Sotsiologicheskie voprosy material'no–khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1967), p.197.

[59] Ibid.

[60] TsUES SKh SSSR, '"Khudozhnik i obshchestvo," o deiatel'nosti TsUES SKh SSSR,' 1971, RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.926 l.21-25 (l.24).

Open form

Open form in artistic projecteering was partly conceived as a means of overcoming alienation experienced by machine operators. In 1968, artist V. Stepanov from Sverdlovsk arrived at the studio with a commission to redesign an oxygen purification system. The factory had previously been kitted out with identical closed-cases that hid the system from workers responsible for its operation. In this instance, an application of open form principles was straightforward: the compositional arrangement of the gas containing cylinders was rearranged so that the worker could oversee the entire system (see image 18). Rather than acting as an 'accessory' to the system, the worker would be at its heart. Rozenblium wrote of the importance of this in an article published the same year, where he declared that 'fool-proof' machines designed by American engineers and designers amounted to the worker 'passively pushing buttons,' precluding an active relationship with a technical system.'[61] This project was described as an attempt to transform this technical system into 'man's inorganic body,'[62] - in reference to Marx's theorization of estranged labour in his first manuscript:

> Nature is man's inorganic body -- that is to say, nature insofar as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature -- *i.e.*, nature is his body -- and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it is he is not to die. To say that

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[61] Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Otkrytaia Forma', *DI SSSR*, 1968/3, pp.49-53. (p.51)

[62] Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, p.59.

Image 18 | Design for an open form system for the purification of oxygen. V. Stepanov, Senezh studio, 1968.

In this painting, which expresses the 'compositional ideal' of a system for purifying oxygen, the worker is able to oversee the entire system from a central point. The intention was to create the impression of a machine serving the operator as opposed to a machine that is serviced by the factory worker.

Source: 'Tsentral'naia uchebno-eksperimental'naia studiia soiuza khudozhnikov SSSR,' *DI SSSR* 1968/1, p.35.

man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.[63]

The industrial designer is frequently confronted with questions of how to integrate the machine with patterns of human movement and thought: it is the one of the major themes of ergonomics. In the case of the oxygen purification system, the operator retains a visual and intellectual link to the processes undertaken by the machine.

The need to develop machines specifically designed to overcome the alienation problem was identified by the Productivists. Writing in 1925, Arvatov had proposed that in socialist society the machine would become man's 'co-worker,'[64] thereby overcoming the estrangement experienced in labour. This, he linked to the 'laying bare of their constructive essence' as well new properties of movement observed in 'collapsible furniture, moving sidewalks, revolving doors, escalators,' etc.'.[65] For Arvatov, the combined 'mechanization and dynamization' of objects was beginning to blur the boundary of forms experiences in daily life and labour. This idea that flexibility of material form would help to overcome estrangement from the object was revived at Senezh with added theoretical insight derived from the practice of Polish architect Oskar Hansen.

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[63] Karl Marx trans. Gregor Benton, 'Estranged Labour,' in *Economic and Political Manuscripts* (1844) Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm [accessed 19th September 2015].

[64] Boris Arvatov trans. Christina Kiaer, 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (toward the Formulation of the Question)', October, 81 (1997), pp.119-28 (pp.126-127).

[65] Ibid.,

Like Rozenblium, Hansen was a trained architect whose convictions regarding the power of form structures to unite the totality of space in the material world were derived from fine art practice.[66] Hansen's 1959 manifesto, *The Open Form in Architecture – The Art of the Great Number,* was read to an audience at the final conference of CIAM[67] in Otterlo that same year. In this text, Hansen articulated the social failings of modern architecture in relation to form. 'Closed forms' in architecture, best illustrated by the minimal dwelling concept, had been devised to in order to solve to problem of constructing large quantities of housing and were not engineered to accommodate the socio-cultural needs of the individual. Hansen, who opposed monumentality in architectural form, proposed an architecture that would reflect and produce a society whose aim is to develop the individual and promote 'a synthesis between the objective social elements and the subjective individual elements.'[68] This would be made possible by engineering flexibility and adaptability into regional and city planning schemes, as well as in the construction of the dwellings themselves. For a Soviet reader, Hansen's manifesto on open form could be deployed to resist the suppression of the individual associated with the avant-garde living experiments of the *Dom Kommuna* that were briefly revived during the mid 1960s.[69] It could also show an alternative to the logic behind standard sized family apartments that were designed according

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[66] Hansen studied in Paris under sculptor Ferdnand Léger and architect Pierre Jeanneret. See Joan Ockman, 'Oskar Hansen's Radical Humanism: Open Form Against a Cold War Background,' in *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism: On Open Form, Art and Didactics* ed. Aleksandra Kędziorek and Łukasz Ronduda (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014), pp.29-60, (pp.42-48).

[67] Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne.

[68] Oskar Hansen and Zofia Hansen, 'The Open Form in Architecture – The Art of the Great Number,' Otterlo, 1959. Reprinted in *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism On Open Form, Art and Didactics* ed. Aleksandra Kędziorek and Łukasz Ronduda (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014), pp.7-9 (p.8).

[69] This refers to N. Osterman's *Dom Novogo Byta*, or house of the new lifestyle movement of the mid 1960s. See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp.148-149.

to regulations of the minimum space required for single-family occupancy in a dwelling. Hansen wrote:

> The Open Form differs from the Closed Form by recognizing concrete people – not the abstract so-called "average" – by leaving a margin for evoking one's own latent essence. It is an individual-collective phenomenon and, because of that, multi-stratified and alive.[70]

Open form architecture resisted the notion that the state had to define and cater to all needs. Instead, open form was supposed to generate a new aesthetics of collectivism because 'the sum of individualities of a given group – should in consequence lead us to the expression of a group form.'[71] In essence, this is a democratic expression where the material environment reflects a sum-total of individual wills, instead of being imposed from above. The idea of empowering collectives at the grassroots level to shape their own environment was appealing to those seeking to utilise the emergence of design to support egalitarian forms of socialist participation.

Archival sources show plans (eventually abandoned) were made to translate a book from Polish into Russian and English on Hansen's experiences at the Warsaw Academy of Art.[72] A close relationship between the Warsaw academy of

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[70] Hansen and Hansen, 'The Open Form in Architecture,' p.8.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The Soviet Union of Artists made plans to publish 5000 to 8000 copies of a book about Hansen's experiences at the Warsaw Academy of Art. The volume was to be entitled either *The Impact of Form* [Vozdesitvie formy] or *A Guide to Plasticity* [Spravochnik po voprosam plastiki]. The project was first suggested in a meeting between members of the Artists Union and the Polish Industrial Design and Aesthetic Council in Tbilisi 1965, and still planned in 1969, however the book never materialised. See TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Dokumenty o sotrudnichestve sovetskogo khudozhestvennogo

Arts and Senezh studio developed during the late 1960s: an exhibition of the studio's work was hosted in Poland in 1968[73] and the studio was visited by members of the Warsaw Academy including Józef Mrozek and Hansen in the same year.[74]

Rozenblium was inspired to adapt open form to industrial design as a means of creating an alternative to ergonomics – a discipline still dominated by closed-form principles designed to suit the average, rather than individual users. While some projects at Senezh engaged open form in architecture and interiors, the principal application of open form was in the design industrial objects.

The Senezh experiments differed somewhat in intent from those of Clauss Dietel and Lutz Rudolph: East German product designers who almost simultaneously developed the 'open principle' [*offenes Prinzip*] in GDR product design.[75] For Dietel and Rudolph, the open principal was primarily a means of creating structures that would prolong the life of objects by allowing components to be added and removed over time. This would ensure objects a would have a longer lifespan, while engineering a degree of modularity that would enable systems to incorporate new elements related to scientific and technological advances.[76] Dietel saw the open principle as a means of avoiding overconsumption and slavery to

konstruirovaniia i promyshlennoi estetiki (otchet, informatsiia, perepiska) t.2, (27th May – 3rd February 1965), RGALI f.2082, op.2 d. 2156, l.13 and TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Dokumenty o rabote sektsii' (7th March – 25th December 1969), RGALI f.2082, op.3, d.905, l.29-31.

[73] Viacheslav Glazychev, 'Opyt Senezhskoi studii,' (2004), http://www.glazychev.ru/publications/articles/2004-03-11_opyt_senezh_studii.htm [accessed 22nd April 2015].

[74] L. N. 'Senezhskaia studiia, ' *DI SSSR*, 1968/4, pp.36-37.

[75] I have found no reference in German scholarship of any links between Dietel and Hansen, however Hansen's broad influence in design across the Eastern Bloc and Architecture Across the Eastern Bloc (explored in *Team 10 East* ed. Łuaszk Stanek) means it is likely that Dietel was inspired by Hansen.

[76] Bernhard E. Bürdek, *Design: History and Theory of Product Design*, (Basel and Boston: Birkhäser, 2005), pp.53-54.

fashion, as well as allowing the development of components from new materials when original parts were in short supply.[77] The open principle was a philosophy that determined internal structure to a greater extent than external form. Whereas Dietel essentially viewed his creations as products with long life spans whose external forms were not radically different from other consumer goods (see image 19), an interest in restructuring the labour environment according to Marxist principles caused Senezh designers to focus on the means by which objects engage or alienate the user.

At Senezh, the purpose of open form was to overcome passivity and inertia: to find ways of allowing man to control the objects in his immediate surroundings and make them into an active participant in the construction of daily life at home and at work.[78] Kantor believed that the 'closed form' should be abandoned by designers who wished to create objects that would not be susceptible to the dangers of the fetish: 'The fetishism of an object appears as the fetishism of its form,'[79] he wrote. Closed form was closely connected to the role played by capitalist design in supporting Western role-structures. In the context of design politics of the late 1960s and VNIITE's creeping domination of the profession, it was the factory and the laboratory that presented the studio with the greatest number of opportunities for the development of open form.

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v sisteme dizaina (opyt raboty v oblasti khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia Senezhskoi studii SKh SSSR) ', in *O nekotorykh voprosakh uchastiia khudozhnika v sozdanii predmetnoi sredy sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo 1972). pp. 52-82 (p.55).

[79] Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za*, pp.223-224.

Image 19 | Mokick S50 basic model, Fahrzeugwerke Simson Suhl, GDR, Karl Clauss Dietel and Lutz Rudolph, 1967.

This example of open form in the GDR was designed with the intention of creating an easy to maintain bike whose components could be easily replaced by the user over time. Dietel and Rudolph's strategy reflected the need to allow consumers to repair goods and replace components using available parts, as a means of overcoming shortages of materials in the GDR.

Source: *Design in der DDR: Ein Projekt der Stiftung Industrie- und Alltagskultur in der DDR.* http://www.stiftung-industrie-alltagskultur.de/index.php?id=223 [accessed 5th October 2011

Sites of experimentation

Many of the commissions brought to Senezh stemmed from new centres of production far from the urban intelligentsia of Moscow and Leningrad. The Siberian city of Novosibirsk one such location and was strategically important for several reasons. Firstly, Novosibirsk was not chosen as the location for one of VNIITE's ten regional branch offices. This left the Union of Artists more opportunities influence to design practice in the region with the help of their long established regional administration. Secondly, the nearby scientific city of Akademgorodok had recently been founded in 1958 and was home to a generation of young scientists who desired to escape the dogmatic and hierarchical nature of science in Moscow.[80] Thirdly, industrial expansion in Siberia presented great opportunities: the Novosibirsk SKhKB worked on projects for large enterprises in an area that spanned the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.[81] The critical combination of a comparatively young population and the new opportunities presented by scientific and industrial enterprises (the city was home to 500 large industrial enterprises and 120,000 scientific workers)[82] meant that the potential to run collaborative projects was greater than in other locations.

Enterprises including *Tiazhstankogidropress,* who manufactured hydraulic presses, took the development of design seriously but needed outside knowledge[83] - leading them to cooperate with both VNIITE and the Union of Artists on a range of

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[80] See Paul Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited: Akademgorodok, the Siberian City of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[81] Interview with Vladimir Smirnov and Sergei Kashirov, Novosibirsk, April 2014.

[82] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Prilozheniie k press-spravke o rabote seminara khudozhnikov Zony Sibiri po khudozhestvennuiu proektirovaniiu', (1971), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.928 l.6-12 (l.6).

[83] Speech by K. Smirnov, head of the Technical Aesthetics Bureau at Tiazhstankogidropress in VNIITE, 'Stenogrammy 1ogo vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po khudozhestvennomu konstruirovaniiu,' Moscow, (9th-11th June 1965), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2164 l.96.

Image 20 | Development of betatron project (right) with final model (left), S.Bulatov and Iu. Volkov, Senezh Studio, 1968-1972.

Source: Left: 'SSSR-Pol'shcha. Problemy khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia,' *DI SSSR* 1972/8, p.24.
Right: Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, 1974 [plate]

projects. One artist from Novosibirsk highlighted the importance of the seminar for Siberian industry, stating: 'For the periphery, this seminar is a hotbed of fresh, new ideas. When we return to Novosibirsk, Frunze etc. we will bring with us the creative atmosphere of the seminar.'[84] The early seminars included a core group of designers from Novosibirsk including: A. Iuzinas, N. Kataev, Semion Bulatov, Boris Ugrimov, Iurii Volkov and Iurii Mikhailov[85] who planned to set up a regional branch of Senezh studio in the city during the early 1970s.[86]

While many regional organisations of the Union of Artists showed little interest in design and did not nominate designers to join their organization,[87] the spirit of idealism and socialist humanism associated with design is strongly felt in the resolutions and letters in the Novosibirsk branch. One resolution sincerely stated that 'This isn't about the enormous economic savings that can be produced by an artist working together with an engineer, but about the creation of a material environment that will be comfortable and attainable for the people.'[88]

The ideal of harmonious collaboration between artists and scientists is clearly articulated in the design of an open form betatron (instrument for creating electromagnetic fields), by a duo of artists from Novosibirsk: Semion Bulatov, and Iurii Volkov. The betatron (image 20) project was undertaken in 1968 at the first

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[84] Kolesnikov, artist from Novosibirsk in TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma zasedeniia khudozhestvennogo soveta,' (16th April 1966), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2178 l.28.

[85] Vladimir Smirnov and Sergei Kashirov, interview.

[86] Regional branches of TsUES were also proposed in L'vov, Ukraine and Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. See TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Khudozhnik i obshchestvo,' l.23.

[87] Evgenii Rozenblium in TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Dokumenty o rabote TsUES,' 1970, RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.914 l.74.

[88] NO SKh SSSR, 'Rezoliutsiia sobraniia sektsii dekorativno–prikladnogo i monumental'nogo iskusstva,' (3rd June 1965), Novosibirsk State Archive of Novosibirsk Oblast' [GANO] f.742 op. 1 d.94 l.2-3.

'travelling seminar' held in Novosibirsk. It was conceived as an apparatus that would bring together a range of functions that requite the creation of electromagnetic fields – in this case to determine the molecular structure of metals. It is likely that that project was initiated following a letter sent by the chair of the regional artists union and director of the artists' foundation [*khudozhestvennyi fond*], who were responsible for providing artists with workshops and materials. They saw potential for the artist to act as a mediator in the transfer of scientific knowledge to industry:

> In connection with the recent statements about the Siberian Branch of the Soviet Academy of Science creating models for industry (improving ties between science and production)…[we] propose collaborating on individual commissions and comprehensive solutions.[89]

The apparatus brought together a range of functions that had previously been fulfilled by individual devices,[90] and allowed for the discovery and addition of new components and elements. As the device was intended for use in an industrial setting, it is clear that the open form approach was not applied to overcome the commodity fetish or fashion cycles in consumer goods. Instead, the object's formlessness was engineered to encourage the user to manipulate and recombine aspects of the machine to discover new applications, and potential uses. The betatron, which may be disassembled and recombined around a detachable modular unit on wheels, highlights similarities between scientific modes of discovery and artistic processes of creating new forms. The machine is conceived

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[89] Letter from I. V. Titkov and N.A. Angelov to Siberian Branch of Soviet Academy of Sciences, (1967). GANO f.742, op.1, d.113, l.13.

[90] Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine*, p.58.

as a way of transforming the machine into man's 'inorganic body' that will allow him the fullest possible flexibility in applying the power of electromagnetic field generation. 'In order to "see" the form of the betatron,' commented Rozenblium, 'you need to see its "subject" [i.e. the operator]. The subject is not revealed in form, but in space: dynamically changing over time.'[91] It was in this way that the artist's knowledge of form could stimulate and support scientific and technical progress.

The movement of the human body as a compositional rather than anthropometric basis for designing a machine is even more clearly expressed in a design for a video telephone that was part of a project to enable doctors to communicate with infectious patients who had been placed in isolation (image 21). As before, artists came up with abstract forms representing a project's compositional 'ideal'. Here, the artists developed a multifunctional device that could fulfil many functions related to improving the patient's standard of living. Components could be added or removed as new functions were discovered or became obsolete. The preliminary sketches clearly show how the human figure was placed at the centre of a formless object, thus defining the so-called 'compositional rhythm' of the device.

In his writings, Rozenblium was keen to express that such formlessness was radically different from the chaos of material form against which designers battled at this time. 'The desire arises to think in terms of spatial unity, in which the interrelations between man and the object are spatial and the structure of objects

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[91] Ibid., p.59.

Image 21 | Project for a video telephone, L. Burman, Ia. Zlatopol'skii, E. Kashkovskii, Senezh Studio, 1968.

The top-left images illustrate the authors' sculptural experimentation, which ultimately led to this human-centred device. The telephone's adaptability means that it does not cater to the average person, but to people of varying sizes and physical abilities.

Source: E Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine,* 1974 [plate]

is not closed by an inflexible form,'[92] he explained. In overcoming the fixed socio-cultural meanings of closed-form objects, the individual would be free to explore, experiment and produce their own surroundings. In this way, the collective could play a role in the aesthetic constitution of their environment.

By adapting Hansen's open form manifesto, the designers at Senezh studio sought a structural basis upon which to produce 'unity' and overcome 'chaos' in the material environment, allowing for social and scientific-technical progress to slowly change man's relationships with objects. Open form also allowed space for interdisciplinary collaboration and the embryonic forms of collective creative labour proposed by Kantor in *Beauty and Utility*.

Projects such as the video telephone and betatron existed as utopias that demonstrate the possibility of a post-artefactual world of the type proposed by Boris Kushner and Nikolai Tarabukin during the 1920s. Even more important was the example of collective labour set by artists who had successfully collaborated with engineers. Since Karl Iogansen's attempts to restructure the organization of labour at Krasnyi prokratchik in the 1920s, there is no known example of a Productivist intervention in the organisation of labour in the Soviet Union before or after the Senezh experiments of the 1960s. While these projects represented indications of a potential future, they were rooted in the 1960s spirit of industrial reform and collaboration. As an important frontier of scientific research and industrial expansion, Novosibirsk appeared to provide models of

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[92] Ibid., p.60.

collective creative collaboration that would become the norm after the transition to full communism.

However, such utopian projects might still fall victim to accusations of naïve daydreaming that did not take into account present day realities, reflected in the fact that very few of the studio's industrial design projects made it to production. Design was still a marginal and unfamiliar practice to those outside the profession, and much work needed to be done at both VNIITE and Senezh to convince industry bosses of its relevance. The development of theory played an important role in this respect.

Methodological philosophy and the reassessment of artistic projecteering

While we have established that the theoretical and practical foundations of Senezh were related to the development of a new practice for the communist future, what effect did the experiences of developing artistic projecteering have on the conception of the practice as a whole? In order to understand this, I will turn my attention away from practitioners to a group of theorists who attempted to map the interrelationships of design disciplines in the late 1960s.

In 1965, a theory lab was set-up at VNIITE in order to develop historical and theoretical research related to technical aesthetics. The department was home to a group of young philosophers associated with a branch of logic called methodology. Georgii Shchedrovitskii, Viacheslav Glazychev, Oleg Genisaretskii and others developed theories relating to the nature of socialist design and its future

development. While the informal seminars of the Moscow Methodological Circle [MMK] led by Shchedrovitskii during the 1970s became known as an example of semi-dissident underground academia,[93] Shchedrovitskii's work in design during the 1960s is much more in tune with the spirit of creative collaboration during the Thaw (Shchedrovitskii and dissidence is discussed in chapter 5). At this point, methodology combined the new discipline of Soviet sociology with philosophy in order to study new ways of thinking that would emerge during and after the transition to communism. In the words of Shchedrovitskii, the work of methodology, 'began in areas where there was not yet a subject of research. Therefore, we had to build subjects and construct their basic elements….If we needed to construct a theory of cognition, we would ask how concepts are created and introduced, how they are organized and how they work.'[94]

The theorists paid close attention to the way different designers worked and were anxious to develop theories of design that took the experiences of designers into account, rather than simply generating theoretical pronouncements that some designers complained cluttered the pages of VNIITE's periodical *Tekhnicheskaia estetika*.[95] Glazychev and Genisaretskii spent a great deal of time lecturing and observing at the studio, and their interpretation of artistic projecteering is

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[93] For a historical view of Shchedrovitskii and the Moscow Methodological Circle, see Anatolii Al'redovich Piskoppel', 'G. P. Shchedrovitsky – podvizhnik i myslitel', in *Poznaiushchee myshlenie i sotsial'noe deistvie: Nasledie G.P Shchedrovitskogo v kontekste otechestvennoi i mirovoi filosofskoi mysli* ed. N.I. Kuznetsova (Moscow: F.A.S.-media, 2004), pp.11-58 (pp.42-51).
[94] G. P. Shchedrovitsky, *Filosofiia, metodologiia, nauka* (Moscow, 1997) cit. ibid., p.43.
[95] In 1970, a group of designers from VNIITE's Ural branch wrote to the chair of the State Committee to Science and Technology about a range of grievances and inadequacies. This included their pronouncement on the irrelevance of design theory that read: 'The separation of theory and practice…is scientifically unproductive. To see these, you only need to glance at articles in the theory section of the journal *Technical Aesthetics*. Nobody knows who these over-thought, dry and empty publications are meant for.' See 'Letter from workers at VNIITE's Sverdlovsk branch to GKNT,' (1970), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.914 l.5-21 (l.9).

indicative of how the perceived function of Senezh experiments in industrial design changed over time.

In order to predict the future requirements of design theory, methodologists mapped out systems that illustrated the range of social activities required to produce objects. Like many new disciplines of the period, methodological philosophy was rooted in systems theory, which became popular among intellectuals as 'a means for overcoming the limitations of dogmatic conceptual frameworks established by Stalinist schools in biology, physiology and linguistics.'[96] In their scheme, physical entities were known as 'blocks.' Society was the largest block and was defined as the arena for the design, consumption and production of objects.[97] Society would require a range of 'services' in order to achieve its objectives. These 'services' included the development of scientific knowledge and production capabilities, as well as other forms of knowledge relating to the social role of objects and the definition of object typologies.[98] As part of the quest for replacing chaos with unity, this group of thinkers mapped all of the potential knowledge, processes and functions that would be required to produce the harmonious material environment of the future. 'These "blocks" and 'services,"' explains Bizunova, 'were supposed to become the "organs" of design theory that would function as a holistic "organism" or "machine" that would

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[96] Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), p.296.

[97] E. M. Bizunova, 'Dizain 60-kh: poiski kontseptual'nykh osnov (vmesto predsloviia) in *Teoriia dizaina: Teoreticheskie I metodologicheskie issledovaniia v dizaine: Izobrannye materialy* ed. O. I. Genisaretskii and E. M. Bizunova (Moscow: Shkola kul'turnoi politiki, 2004), pp.7-27 (pp.15-16). For a full description of this basic system, see O. I. Genisaretskii, G. P. Shchedrovitskii, Metodologicheskaia kartina dizaina,' (1965) in Ibid., pp.32–43.

[98] E. M. Bizunova, 'Dizain 60-x,' pp.15-16.

support the everyday production of objects in society.'[99] According to some designers, methodology was completely incomprehensible to practitioners. [100] Despite its frequent impenetrability, the changing conceptualization of artistic projecteering within methodology is intriguing because it provides a commentary on how the utopian function of this practice was reassessed during the initial years of experimentation at the studio. As detailed in the previous chapter, artistic projecteering was initially defined as a practice that would take the place of industrial design following the transition to communist society. Technical aesthetics, on the other hand, was defined as a theoretical discipline that would investigate the integration of technology and aesthetics necessary to undertake the practical task of design [*khudozhestvennoe konstruirovanie*] in the present.

In 1965, this difference in temporal articulation was formalised by Kantor in what he called the 'partial theory of design' [*chastnaia teoriia dizaina*] and the 'general theory of design' [*obshchaia teoriia dizaina*]. 'Partial theory of design' was supposed to 'explain the social nature, appearance and laws of development of design in its contemporary form and contribute to a more successful fulfilment of its socio-economic functions.'[101] 'General theory of design' on the other hand, 'must define

[99] Ibid.

[100] For example, Vladimir Paperny who worked at VNIITE during the 1960s later recounted the incomprehensibility of methodological philosophy: *Everything they wrote had formulae. So it was a semi-mathematical way of expressing logical ideas….So I said, 'Maybe I should create some crazy formula... for [my] disaster relief [project].' And I wrote something completely off the wall. [It was a] very complex formula and I said, 'A is the level of destruction. B is damage this.'…I was laughing as I was doing it because it was so crazy. It didn't even look real. And I brought it to Solov'ev and he looked and [said], 'Hmm. That's interesting. Let me study it a little further.' He didn't think I was joking, but I said, 'Fine.' Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't know, a few weeks later, he said, 'Forget this subject.'* Interview with Vladimir Paperny, March 2012.

[101] Karl Kantor, 'Tseli i zadachi programmy,' (1965) in *Teoriia dizaina: Teoreticheskie I metodologicheskie issledovaniia v dizaine: Izobrannye materialy* ed. O. I. Genisaretskii and E. M. Bizunova, (Moscow: Shkola kul'turnoi politiki, 2004) pp.29-43.

the aims, forms and means of constituting the practice of industrial projecteering in the relatively independent sphere of human social practice.'[102]

This means that the general theory of design was to be the theory of total projecteering: a discipline that was supposed to bring about unity in the material environment as the fulfilment and materialization of a societal ideal. The question was, how could the roots of this utopian function of design be discerned in contemporary practice? Could overall material unity really be extrapolated from artists' abstract compositions?

In 1967, the site of the seminars became formally known as the Central Educational and Experimental Studio of the Soviet Union of Artists. In the same year, Glazychev laid out his thoughts on the potential for the new practice in an unpublished book chapter entitled *A Projective for a Map of Design.*[103] Glazychev was interested the social conditions in which ideas are generated, and how they are eventually materialised in large-scale systems of knowledge production. For this reason, he was particularly interested in the mechanisms for extracting new design ideas using fine art methodologies at Senezh. Like Kantor, he agreed that total projecteering should be an activity free from the baggage of history and 'the historically determined conditions of the structure of the division of labour,'[104] in order to allow ideals to flourish without becoming subject to contemporary demands of production and consumption. He divided the process developed at Senezh into two conceptual phases: idea making [*ideirovanie*] and projecteering

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[102] Ibid.
[103] The concept of the projective is explored in Chapter 5
[104] Glazychev, 'Proektnaia kartina dizaina,' p.198.

[*proektirovanie*]. For Glazychev, the ultimate source of ideas was abstract. In the case of Senezh, visual art was the medium of abstract idea generation:

> The activity of creating a general idea can be materialised in any art form or creative activity. This results in a holistic entity that exists independently in abstract space-time, in its own form-structure, in its own language.[105]

If the function of idea making was to come up with a general scheme or solution, the role of artistic projecteering was to express these ideas in a comprehensible material form. The outcome of projecteering was not an object, but a 'project' that existed as 'a concrete product or system expressed in a symbolic, graphic or spatial form.'[106]

The major task for the embryonic design profession, thought Glazychev, was to work out how to bridge the gap between a 'project' and the fully engineered object, product or system. This would require industry to develop the technical and organizational means to put such projects into production.[107] In the absence of economic competition, it was the task of managers in design institutes and industry to turn these utopian ideas into a reality. The purpose of methodology was to play a role in mapping management requirements as the design profession developed. This represented a vision for artistic projecteering that took into account the limitations of Soviet industry but allowed for the possibility of industry's gradual development. In Glazychev's conception, idea-making and

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[105] Ibid., p.199.
[106] Ibid., p.203.
[107] Ibid., p.204.

artistic projecteering were the most important source of aesthetic innovation in the design profession.

From 1968, it appears that artistic projecteering was frequently presented as a discipline geared towards criticism of the present, rather than preparation of the future. Playing on the ubiquitous Soviet practice of 'self-criticism' [*samokritika*], a programme for a colloquium on the new practice explained: 'Artistic projecteering is born in the process of design's cultural self-criticism. It tries to establish the cultural origins and meanings of contemporary design.'[108] In this case, 'self' criticism meant being critical of others within the profession.

This marked the beginning of Senezh studio's development as a site for the production of critical design. As Penny Sparke notes, the term *Critical Design* gained broad usage in the early 2000s, but is of great use in analysing radical design of the 1960s. In Italy, critical design 'sought to provide an alternative to the model of ideal, universally valid design,' and supported individual creativity over custom, rationalism and standardization.[109] Critical design movements of the 1960s that included Archigram in Britain, Haus-Rucker and Coop Himmelblau in Austria, Ettore Sottsass in Italy all engaged aspects of fine art to produce projects critical of contemporary design and their broader implications for social and political organisation.[110] In short, critical design has a primarily discursive

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[108] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Programma kollokviuma "ideia i metod v khudozhestvennom proektirovaniem,"' (1st September 1968), RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2209.

[109] See Penny Sparke, 'Ettore Sottsass and Critical Design in Italy 1965-1985,' in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* ed. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) pp.59-72 (p.60).

[110] On the influence of 60s critical design at VNIITE, see Tom Cubbin, 'The Domestic Information Machine: Futurological Experiments in the Soviet Domestic interior 1968-76,' *Home Cultures* vol. 11, no.1, pp.5-32.

function relating to how the material interacts on social, economic and political realms.[111]

While Western critical designers initially benefited from being outsiders (before often being subsumed into the mainstream), there was no concept of an 'outsider' space in the Soviet system of production. Anything 'outside' was ideologically suspect. Critics therefore saw the need to include critical design practices within a formally defined structure of knowledge exchange. According to Oleg Genisaretskii this would be an essential element of the contemporary design system:

> …the critique of objects…may also arise in the form of design thinking [*proektnoe soznanie*], especially when the artist or designer plays the role of critic…Critical consciousness focuses our attention on the most important things that shape our visual, structural and functional values. It is during the processes of critique that new ideas arise: our judgments are realized in the form of the project.[112]

After 1968, assessments of artistic projecteering continued to place emphasis on its critical function,[113] indicating that the relevance of futurological design concepts at Senezh was as critique of the present status quo and as indicators of alternative social possibilities. It is possible to perceive the interpretation of practice at Senezh

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[111] See Matt Malpass, 'Criticism and Function in Critical Design Practice,' *Design Issues*, 31/2 (Spring 2015), pp. 59-71.

[112] Oleg Genisaretskii, 'Mesto kritiki v suzhdeniiakh ob iskusstve,' (1967-1972), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.935 l.212-220.

[113] See, for example, L. Novikova, 'Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie v sisteme dizaina,' *DI SSSR*, 1972/8, pp.28-30.

during this period as an example of Ricoeur's constitutive utopia: it drives social change by rousing the viewer to overcome complacency in the present manifested in the replication of Western commercial design and advocacy of NOT. By 1968, the project for creating a neo-Productivist material environment had been put on hold, but without ceding the possibility that artistic projecteering could play a role in shaping future society.

External events of 1968 were particularly resonant with members of the artistic intelligentsia who had strong links with central Europe. 1968 was the year that Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia and hopes that something similar to the Prague Spring would arise in Moscow were comprehensively dashed.[114] Literary journals such as *Novyi mir* were subject to increased censorship too.[115] Following the waning of the artistic intelligentsia's influence, a communist utopia and the emergence of creative collective labour also seemed increasingly distant.

The redefinition of artistic projecteering as a critical practice was due to the increasing dominance of design organisations that favoured scientific-and technical aspects of design. From 1968, technical aesthetics cemented its dominance at the head of the state system of design, overseeing eleven regional offices and 1500 SKhKB and design offices located in factories. As VNIITE existed under the aegis of the powerful State Committee for Science and Technology, its dominance was secured as the rhetoric of 'scientific-technological

[114] Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, pp.284-285.
[115] Ibid.

revolution' grew in intensity.[116] Unlike VNIITE, Senezh studio did not shoulder the responsibility of reshaping Soviet industry in order to construct the 'material and technical basis of communism,'[117] or to improve the efficiency of light and heavy industry and improve the quality of goods for domestic consumption and export. Whereas VNIITE's funding relied upon contracts with industry.[118] Senezh received its funding from the USSR Union of Artists and was therefore able to continue as a primarily critical and conceptual discipline concerned with the discursive rather than utilitarian role of objects.

Despite some collaboration with industry that included the realisation of six open form projects,[119] the successful transfer of projects from the studio to industry was only experienced by a handful of attendees. Anecdotal evidence suggests this was because industrial managers were not ready, willing or able to adapt production facilities and processes quickly to accommodate the studio's ideals. [120] The realities of working with Soviet enterprises that had little experience of collaborating with designers sunk in as early as 1966 when it became clear that

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[116] On the role of the technical intelligentsia under Brezhnev, see George W. Breslauer *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1982) pp.193-194.

[117] KPSS, *Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961).

[118] It is reported that in 1971, 60% of VNIITE's funding came from contracts, and 40% from the state. Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.169.

[119] While the studio's greatest number of realised projects was in the field of exhibition design, several open form projects were realised too. These included a nitrogen generator, a machine for extinguishing fires at oil wells, a device for measuring noise and vibrations in collaboration with the Scientific Research Institute for Automation and the Siberian Academy of Sciences, and an injection moulding machine. See Natalia Titova, 'Dvadsat' let Senezhskoi studii,' in *Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: K 20-letiiu TsUES SKh SSSR 1985* ed. V. R. Aronov (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1987), pp.27-35 (p.28).

[120] See TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma zasedaniia khudozhestvennogo soveta,' 16th April 1966, RGALI f.2082 op.2 d.2178 l.36.

even technically realizable projects were of little interest to managers at the majority of local enterprises. [121]

Conclusion

Although a 'production art of the future' never became a reality, the ideals upon which this was based led to the creation of a new set of processes for artists to work in design. Senezh was unique in its attempts to fuse compositional unity in art to the wider environment. The development of a methodology for transferring the ideals of art to reality served as a conduit for the introduction of new ideas and ideals to the nascent Soviet design culture. It led to the provision of a space for artists in design who were increasingly excluded from the knowledge hierarchies associated with technical aesthetics and enabled those with specialist knowledge of space and form to contribute to debates on the concept of socialist labour. In places such as Novosibirsk, designers trained at Senezh had the potential to act as conduits for artistic projecteering and its associated humanist values.

The methodologists' reassessment of artistic projecteering as a critical practice should not be read as an abandonment of utopian aims. This was, rather, a relocation the agency of projects in time. After 1968, the Senezh projects appeared increasingly incongruent with industrial policies that placed greater emphasis on efficiency than Marxist ideals. Whereas the utopian design practices imagined in 1965 were envisaged as directly contributing to the construction of communism, the critical function that took its place could only alter the course of society indirectly. As the doctrine of 'developed socialism' and a more gradual and

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[121] Ibid.

conservative transition to communism became government policy, the extent to which these projects may be considered incongruous to official images of utopia was amplified, and so too was their critical potential. Yet, the conceptual model for the future society in which these projects would exist did not change: the spirit of creative humanism and 'return to Lenin' ideas of the intelligentsia remained the studio's driving force. The temporal recategorization of artistic projecteering around 1968 appears to have had little impact on the formal properties of objects: the betatron, video-telephone and other open form projects all played a dual function of critiquing the present, and providing an image of the future. They were made *as if* the communist future was soon to arrive, highlighting the lack of progress on issues such as alienation of labour that would need to be solved if full communism were ever achieved. It is in this gap that incongruence, and therefore utopian agency of Senezh projects began to emerge.

Chapter 4 | Postmodern propaganda?

Semiotics, environment and the

historical turn 1972 – 1983

> This city, beloved by me since childhood
>
> Seemed to me today
>
> In its December silence
>
> Like my squandered inheritance.
>
> Anna Akhmatova, 1929[1]

In this chapter, I ask how the unlikely field of visual propaganda became a lively field of experimentation and innovation in Soviet design during the 1970s. Switching their attention to urban design, artists at Senezh sought ways to assuage the consequences of prevailing dogma in architecture and planning that privileged efficacy over expression of local identity, and threatened the existence of historic buildings in Soviet cities. Commissions to improve the quality of 'visual agitation' in the Soviet city and factory were seized as an opportunity to introduce a range of new concepts to Soviet design that included semiotics, environment, and uses of history and memory. Their projects share much in common with Western postmodern sentiments: resistance to modernist planning, a focus on semantic

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[1] Anna Akhmatova, 'This city, beloved by me since childhood…' cit *St. Petersburg* by Bradley Woodworth and Constance Richards (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), p.94.

properties of the environment and a turn to the past. As discussed in the introduction, my aim here is to examine the 'postmodernization' of practice at Senezh, which Felicity Scott describes as the formation of new ways of perceiving and intervening in the man-made milieu as a product of socio-political and economic contexts. I argue that the studio's continued focus on design as a facilitator of 'creative humanism' did not conform a logic of crisis and subversion, but was an attempt to re-accommodate the ideals of the Soviet 1960s detailed in the previous chapters. The waning belief in the idea that a reformed socialism might enable a transition to communism in the near future led designers to seek an alternative expression of the values of the Thaw that would otherwise remain a fantasy in an ever-deferred 'radiant future'.

In Soviet visual culture of this period, postmodernism is often associated with 'Sots Art,' a movement that subverted and explored the official idolatry of socialist realism by importing ideas from Western pop art. 'In socialist countries,' explains Aleš Erjavec, 'postmodernism often came into existence as a simple transposition and appropriation of Western or First World postmodernism. However…there was already a fertile ground of orientations, techniques and procedures that ensured its growth.'[2] Sots Artists and Conceptualists often engaged in subverting the banal language of socialist realism and played with the language and symbols of official culture (see introduction). Artists at Senezh similarly rejected the state's propaganda as banal and formulaic, however their responses were radically different to those of 'unofficial' artists as they not only drew attention to the inadequacies of state propaganda, but also engaged with the power structures

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[2] Aleš Erjavec (ed.), 'Introduction' to *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003,) pp.1-54 (p.18).

involved in the production of visual propaganda in an attempt to improve the urban environment.

In this chapter, I propose an alternative trajectory for Soviet postmodernism derived from a combination of Western architectural theory and Soviet semiotics that enabled the reconceptualization of visual agitation in design practice. Despite limited opportunities to realise projects outside of the exhibition hall, artists at Senezh produced models of ideal socialist townscapes that were implicitly critical of everyday experience of the socialist city. Artistic projecteering in the 1970s engaged playful critique of modernist Soviet urbanism that exposed the material consequences of the state's monolithic approach to planning and propaganda. Why did the studio turn away from industrial design in the early 1970s, and why did the official practice of 'visual agitation' become an arena for introducing new concepts in Soviet design culture?

Abandoning industrial design

Following the redefinition of artistic projecteering as a critical discipline in 1968-1972, the studio gradually abandoned working on projects related to industrial design. From June-August 1971, a special seminar was held in Novosibirsk devoted to the design of the urban environment. Artists across Siberia were tasked with improving the design of the city's central street Krasnyi prospekt (see image 22), as well as a housing district, concert hall, a sport complex and park, a school and a collective farm.[3] Only two projects (for a factory that made hydraulic

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[3] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Press-spravka o rabote khudozhnikov Zony Sibiri po khudozhestvennomu proektirovaniiu,' (1971), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.928.

Image 22 | Designs for street furniture on Krasnyi prospekt, S. P. Evladov, A. I. Skvortsov, V. A. Stepanov, P. A. Milovanov, A. C. Ugrimov, S. S. Mosienko and A. I. Tairov, Senezh studio in Novosibirsk, still from black and white documentary film, 1971

In this section of project for the redesign of Krasnyi prospekt, the 7km central street in Novosibirsk, designers created a standardised system of information displays, kiosks, seating and other street furniture. The project was undertaken as part of the second travelling seminar to Novosibirsk (the first was in 1968). Compositional exercises can be seen in the background of the shot. This early urban design project is notable for the use of white card in producing architectural models, which was the convention of the time. While later projects centred on emphasising diversity in the material environment, the production of unified elements of street furniture indicated an attempt to create material unity or synthesis in the urban environment. This demonstration of a coordinated beautification of Novosibirsk's central district presented an alternative to chaos in the urban environment that was a result of the lack of coordination among architects and artists in the city.

Source: Film still from *Sibir na ekrane 34,* Zapadno-sibirskaia st. kinokhroniki, 1971, RGKAFD, d. B-3706

presses) were related to industrial design.[4] Whereas Novosibirsk had previously been the site of some of the studio's most radical redesigning of machines, the new focus on urban design was indicative of a waning interest in industrial design among the studio's leaders. In 1973, the studio abandoned industrial design entirely and held seminars devoted to improving the urban environment in Arkhangel'sk, Sverdlovsk and Ashkhabad.

The possibility that industrial reform would enable the development of varied design practices was dealt several blows by government policy in the years preceding this transition to urban design. From 1968 to 1971, Prime Minister Kosygin (the driver of the 1965 economic reforms) was forced to retreat on several issues, including his promotion of limited market competition between enterprises as a means of incentivizing improvements in efficiency and innovation.[5] He was pressured by the party to reaffirm the leading role of the state centralized plan, which indicated the reduced potential for collaborations between designers and industry outside of sanctioned hierarchies. Brezhnev's decision to switch investment priorities from light industry to agriculture following a poor harvest in 1972 reaffirmed this situation of gloom for designers. His earlier policy of forcing heavy industry to simultaneously produce consumer goods was abandoned at this time.[6]

The limitation of the possible effects of design was also felt at VNIITE. Raymond Hutchings argues that the term *technical aesthetics* limited designers to working on

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[4] Ibid.

[5] George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp.196-199.

[6] Ibid., p.204.

industrial objects at the expense of a holistic approach to the overall design of the environment. As a fringe discipline of science and a fringe discipline of art, he explains 'this causes tensions between the theoretical significance of design in Soviet circumstances on the one hand, and its actual and potential significance on the other. In order to limit or control this tension, the sphere of industrial design is limited…[to] the various aspects of industrial design.'[7]

The challenging conditions for designers in the early 1970s were confounded by an over-reliance on theory and inabilities to adapt quickly in a production environment defined by five-year economic plans. The high theoretical status of science and technology in Soviet ideology also appears to have played a major role in the subjugation of art in Soviet design. While a survey of the quality and type of design work undertaken is beyond the scope of this dissertation, anecdotal evidence confirms that artists were increasingly marginalized at VNIITE after 1968. In August 1970, seventeen artists and engineers from VNIITE's branch in Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) signed a letter addressed to the chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology, VNIITE's parent organization. In the letter, the designers called for the Union of Artists to replace VNIITE as the leading Soviet industrial design organization.[8] In their view, VNIITE and the working practices associated with technical aesthetics resulted in few realized projects, low quality of work, and low morale.

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[7] Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp.233-234.

[8] Letter signed by from 17 artists, engineers and designers at VNIITE's Sverdlovsk branch to the chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology [GKNT] titled 'O strukture khudozhestvenno–konstruktorskikh organizatsii (sluzhebnaia zapiska),' (6th August 1970), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.914 l.5-21 (l.21).

Of primary concern was the fact that, after 1967, artists began to lose their voice in what had initially been established as a multi-disciplinary organisation. VNIITE's designers explained:

> In the early years there were many artists of a creative disposition … there was a greater quantity of artists and architects than engineers. But in the past few years, they have even started firing the artists in groups. The motives for their dismissals vary – most are due to creative differences. The majority of the remaining artists are skilled practitioners of art, but are not trained for independent work on design projects. Engineers with artistic capabilities who have experience of amateur art practice are also being fired. Only 'pure' engineers who are completely unfamiliar with art remain, having absorbed the notion from popular publications that industrial design is a very straightforward activity.[9]

Adding insult to injury, the administration apparently responded to appeals regarding these dismissals by sarcastically explaining that the departing artists would 'raise the level of culture' in the places they ended up.'[10] The problem was exacerbated by standardized work timetables that meant artists were forced to work to inflexible short-term schedules leaving no time for mistakes, meanderings or innovation. If they did not stick to these monthly plans, designers would be penalised, although exactly how is not clear.[11]

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[9] Ibid., l.11.
[10] Ibid., l.12.
[11] Ibid., l.13.

The tendency to enforce rules and strict methodologies was blamed on the fact that VNIITE placed too much emphasis on the generation of theories that were then supposed to be applied to practical work. VNIITE's monthly glossy publication, *Tekhnicheskaia estetika*, was the subject of particular condemnation by the Ural designers for its 'contrived, dry and empty' publications.[12] They complained:

> We have answers to many 'global' themes buried in our archives: "tendencies," "organization and methodology," "interaction," "economic effectiveness." These reports would be harmless if they were not sent to print in the form of popular magazines, recommendations and methodologies. The reader of such magazines gains a clear impression that in order to become an artist-engineer, all you need to do is remember a series of fixed rules: "form follows function," "right angles are beautiful", "green is aesthetically pleasing."[13]

The authors of the letter acknowledged that many within the profession saw the need for designers with talent, experience and taste. However, the wide distribution of publications like *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* was proving catastrophic for the design profession as it convinced enterprise managers that industrial design could be undertaken according to sets of rules. They explained that 'if the chief engineer of a client factory has read such a brochure, it becomes much more difficult…to convince him that something different is required.'[14]

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[12] Ibid.,l.9.
[13] Ibid., l.9–10.
[14] Ibid., l.10.

The disillusionment among the Ural designers was also strongly related to the feeling that the opportunity to create an alternative design culture in socialist countries had been missed. They were aware that many designers in the West including Maldonado were critical of the use of design merely to sell goods. Less than a decade later, designers within the new system of design resorted to superficially copying foreign models and fashions of objects that would often need to be produced within factories that had inferior technological capabilities.[15] Copying foreign design went completely against the principles of a socialist design culture that Soviet professionals knew was the subject of great expectations among leading Western designers. They continued:

> …leading foreign designers have stated many times that they are required to take on such superficial work, but that real design should begin from the inside, with the humanization of the function of an object. They are unsatisfied with the conditions of bourgeois culture…they envy the conditions of the socialist system in which its possible to do what they dream of.[16]

As enthusiasm for industrial design faded, Senezh focused on areas of design that existed beyond the purview of technical aesthetics. At first, this was undertaken somewhat grudgingly. As an entity within the USSR Union of Artists, the studio's leaders were required to justify their position in an organization whose purpose was to produce art that would shape citizens' ideological consciousness.

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[15] Ibid., l8.
[16] Ibid., l.9.

Redefining visual agitation

The shift to urban design was most fully explored in commissions relating to the most ideological sphere of artistic production: the creation of 'visual agitation,' i.e. the slogans, banners and decorations that acted as propaganda in public space. 'Visual agitation' was the subject of a number of seminars at the studio which were initially undertaken, explained Natalia Titova, 'because it gave you the possibility to exist.'[17] In Rozenblium's search for new applications of artistic projecteering, it quickly became a vehicle for the expansion of artistic projecteering into the design of the wider environment. Below, I explore how visual agitation was incorporated into the critical practice of artistic projecteering.

Visual agitation seems an unusual arena for the introduction of new ideas and concepts into design practice. Propaganda of the late socialist era has been characterised as a static, dry art form. For example, Alexei Yurchak has argued that Stalin's death in 1953 contributed to the disappearance of a single authority on ideological language. This led to continual repetition of visual and verbal forms of expression that largely drained it of meaning. He explains how 'from the 1950s on the form and style of visual propaganda became increasingly standardized and centralized.'[18] This meant that monumental artists would quote from a range of 'normalized images' and work with a limited number of approved slogans whose differences were 'only in the scale of the references they made.' Yet, the ubiquity of such practices and the failure of visual agitation to make a psychological impact on the populace was widely acknowledged and discussed in the government and

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[17] Interview with Natalia Titova, Pushchino, October 2013.
[18] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 55.

professional circles. Government level debates on agitation and propaganda work in the 1970s focused on the need for the production of more specialised messages to be presented to increasingly complex and skilled labour force.[19] Most of the ideological work that took place under Brezhnev was focused on increasing production and the achievement of economic goals through improved efficiency. Propaganda was seen also seen as in important means of encouraging scientific and technical innovation. For example, a 1971 declaration stated that 'persistent efforts need to be made to establish an atmosphere of mass creativity and intolerance toward technical and scientific conservatism and stagnation.'[20]

The Union of Artists' legions of monumental and propaganda artists were tasked with the creation of visual agitation projects. Senezh studio was enlisted to run seminars in preparation for two major events: the 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967 and the Lenin's 100th birthday in 1970. In professional circles, these celebrations were seen as having been lacklustre for several reasons; the difficulties of coordinating artists with city architects and ideological organs of local party committees, the inability of monumental artists to think spatially and in terms of environment, and the comparative drabness of the recent celebrations in comparison to those of the celebrations designed by Constructivist artists in the years after the revolution.[21] At several seminars and conferences, Titova gave presentations that highlighted the spatial dynamism and avant-garde spectacle of the celebrations staged during the 1920s: 'Mass festivals were seen as embryonic

[19] Donald V. Schwartz, *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Volume 5, The Brezhnev Years 1964-1981*, (Toronto, Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press, 1982), pp.31-32.
[20] KPSS, 'On further improving the organization of socialist competition' in Ibid., p.193.
[21] SKh SSSR, 'Stennogrammy pervogo rabochego soveshchaniia sektsii oformitel-skogo iskusstva SKh SSSR', (23 – 24 June 1971), Moscow, RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.920.

forms of a theatre of the future, and at demonstrations a large space was set aside for theatricalized moments.'[22] The Constructivist mass festival, whose architectonics were intended as a scripting mechanism for series of events and happenings, was cited as a model of how temporary and mobile architecture could produce new types of human interaction.

Encouraged by government demands for reform of propaganda, the Union of Artists called for a more inventive approach to the production of visual agitation. An order from the Secretariat stated 'it is necessary to muster the energy to overcome standard, formal, expressionless and schematic solutions that lower the quality of visual perception.'[23] The Union of Artists took on responsibility for creating model programmes of visual agitation for seven major construction projects, several of which were passed as commissions to Senezh studio. At a seminar in June 1974, visual agitation schemes were designed for the KamAZ truck factory in Naberezhnye chelny, the Rostsel'mash agricultural equipment company in Rostov-on-Don, the Karagansk Metallurgical Plant in in Kazakhstan and the West-Siberian Metallurgical Factory in Novokuznetsk.[24] The studio continued working on these and other visual agitation projects throughout the 1970s. Titova remembered:

> …we weren't overjoyed about this. But we also didn't refuse, understanding that it might somehow be possible to break the system of

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[22] Natalia Titova in Ibid., l.34.

[23] SKh SSSR, 'Iz postanovleniia Sekriteriata Pravleniia SKh SSSR', *DI SSSR*, 1974/8, p.10.

[24] N. Saveleva, 'Khudozhniki – stroikam 9-oi piatiletki,' *DI SSSR*, 1975/1, pp.18-23.

Image 23 | Visual Agitation at KamAZ, Nabarezhnye Chelny, Evgenii Rozenblium, mid 1970s.

This is an example of how the poor quality of surroundings could undermine the messages displayed as part of standard visual agitation schemes. The message in the background is not entirely legible, but appears to relate to the fulfilment of the tasks set out at a communist party congress.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive

painting portraits [of Soviet officials] and slogans by tying them to the development of the overall environment.[25]

In the family archive of Rozenblium are several photographs that show examples of ineffective propaganda (see image 23 for an example of visual agitation at a factory in Naberezhnye chelny). Speaking about a similar environment surrounding the West-Siberian Metallurgical Factory in Novokuznetsk, Rozenblium explained:

> The factory is technologically impressive, but you could say its surroundings are in a terrible condition: around it are torn up streets, building work is taking place, there is dirt everywhere, the glass in the manufacturing workshops is broken, there is all kind of discomfort. And together with all this you see the slogan "Forwards, to communism!" The environment into which this slogan has fallen completely corrupts the meaning of the text. [26]

By formulating the question of visual agitation as an issue relating to the material *environment*, Rozenblium indicated a potential new direction for urban design that referenced both Soviet and Western avant-garde design practices. The environments of Italian designers such as Joe Colombo, Gaetano Pesce and Superstudio were familiar to Rozenblium through the Artist's Union's subscription to international design and architecture journals. At a 1971 discussion on the future of visual agitation, he proposed disseminating information

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[25] Interview with Natalia Titova, October 2013.

[26] Evgenii Rozenblium in SKh SSSR 'Stenogramma zasedaniia sektsii po obsuzhdeniiu plana raboty sektsii,' (Moscow 1971), RGALI f.2082 op.6 d.1528 l.54-82.

on a major international seminar on 'design of environment' held in Italy due to its emphasis on 'the problem of synthesizing advertising and monumental art, streets and architecture.'[27] In Soviet design discourse, the term environment had previously been used to refer to the creation of an *integrated* material environment in order to overcome the 'chaos of material form.' In this instance, Rozenblium's usage of the term was meant to indicate the overall impression created by the *range* of semantic expression in one's material surroundings. Environment, [*sreda*] was used increasingly over the course of the seventies in Soviet art and design. One critic associated the ascendance of the term in connection with an attempt to 'perceive the mechanisms of the formation and transgression of style in the artistic process, and to establish evidence of the indifferent retreat from the ideal of stylistic unity to unrestrained fragmentation.'[28] In short, the term 'environment' was engaged to facilitate new ways of comprehending diversity in art and material surroundings that was no longer governed by a dominant style: be it socialist realist monumentalism or architectural modernism. It signified the way in which diverse elements come together in space. Just as the conceptualization of an information environment constructed of signs was an important precursor to the advent of postmodernism in Western architecture, [29] semiotics played an important role in the reconceptualization of the Soviet urban environment at Senezh.

Throughout the studio's existence, many lectures were given on the theme of semiotics by 'culturologists' who were part of an informal network of academics

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[27] Ibid.

[28] N. L. Adaskina, 'Khudozhnik i sreda,' *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie 1983*, (Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1984), pp.4-31, (p.8).

[29] On conceptions of 'environment' in postmodernism, see Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics After Modernism*, (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 2007).

led by Iurii Lotman, the cultural and literary historian.[30] Culturology [*kul'turologiia*] developed in parallel with cultural studies in the West, but remained independent of its Western counterpart. Culturology linked the studio to a network of 'parallel science' formed by groups of academics and intellectuals who worked outside official Marxist-Leninist theory. For culturologists, culture was defined as a 'massive network of symbolic systems that structure our perceptions of reality and attributions of meaning.'[31] The study of these sign-systems formed an intellectual orientation devoted to the creation of a 'metadiscipline' that would 'encompass and link the variety of cultural phenomena studied separately by philosophy, history, sociology, literary and art criticism, etc.'[32] Culturologists placed particular emphasis on folklore and myth as expressions of collective consciousness that 'may identify a more general kind of awareness and a readiness or capability for participating in mental activity of a higher order.'[33] While the studio's turn to semiotics meant celebrating the diversity of signs in the material environment, culturologists maintained that the sum total of these signs was a reflection of the society in which they were produced, i.e. they had the potential to express social unity.

Among culturologists, the notion of an environment composed of signs became known as the *semiosphere*. Although not coined by Lotman until the 1980s, it is

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[30] Many of these lectures were eventually published in the journal *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, See, for example, Dmitrii Segal, 'Mir veshchei i semiotika,' *DI SSSR*, 1968/4, pp.38-41 (p.38). The first published use of the term 'culturology' in association with a Senezh urban design project is in an article titled The City of Tikhvin: The Culturological Aspect of Projecteering. Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Gorod Tikhvin: Kul'turologicheskii aspect proektirovaniia, *DI SSSR*, 1974/9, pp.9-14.

[31] Anesa Miller-Pogacar, 'Transculture and Culturology: Post-Structuralist Theory in Late and Post-Soviet Russia,' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Kansas, 1993), p.3.

[32] Mikhail Epstein, 'From Culturology to Transculture,' in *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 15-30, available online at http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/tc_1.html, accessed 31st May 2015.

[33] Ibid. p.9.

useful shorthand for the conception of the interconnectedness of sign systems within culture that was present in his thinking. For Lotman and Uspenskii, culture is a precondition of social existence as 'a generator of structuredness and thus it creates around the human being the social sphere which, like biosphere, makes life–social, not biological– possible.'[34]

However, if both the 'environment' in the West and the 'semiosphere' in the East were largely influenced by studies of semiotics, the sign would necessarily function differently on either side of the iron curtain. In a 1972 essay, Baudrillard defined the relationship of design conceived as environment, to the capitalist marketplace:

> …the environment, just as the *market* (its economic equivalent), is a virtually universal concept. It is a concrete compendium of all of the political economy of the sign.…It is [the] design universe that properly constitutes the environment, which, just like the market, is but a *logic* of sorts, that of the value of exchange (sign). Design is the imposition of models and operational practices of this value of exchange/sign.[35]

In the Soviet concept of the cultural environment or semiosphere, the market cannot be directly analogous to the sign. Mikhail Epstein has pointed out that Marx and Engels saw the pre-communist history of ideas as being in servitude to the economic base, whereas under communism, 'ideology might take the place of

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[34] Iuriii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, 'O semioticheskom mechanizme kul'tury,' 1971, cit. Maxim Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics*, (Saarbrücken: VCM Verlag, 2008), p.154.

[35] Jean Baudrillard, 'Design and Environment,' in E. Ambasz, Harriet Schoenholz Bee, and Gina Rossi (eds.), *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*. (New York: MOMA, 2006), pp.62-63.

economics as the basic structure of the whole society.'[36] According to Epstein, this reversal did in fact take place under Soviet socialism and it was 'ideas, not economics [that] determined material life and produced the "real."'[37] The implication for design is that the man-made environment in a socialist state can only be conceptualised as a reflection of that society's ideals. An example of this phenomenon can be identified in an anecdote told by a designer called Sobolev who was having difficulty obtaining permission to renovate a local park:

> There is a park of culture and leisure in the town [of Balashiki], but the park there contains nothing except for a small snack-stand and a billiard hall…What did I do? … I went to the town's party committee…[and] I showed them a park from the American Disney magazine. They all liked it. Doubts were expressed though, that it was too nice, and that we were not up to it. I said, "Don't worry, its propaganda for the American way of life." All of a sudden, the party leaders were trapped and said, "We'll commission you to make a park – propaganda for the Soviet way of life!"[38]

Here, Sobolev appealed to ideas of cold war competition and presented both Disneyland and his park as propaganda – as manifestations of a society's ideals. In the anecdote, Sobolev describes the *performative* dimension involved in having his park commissioned: the requirement that he speaks to officials in a highly codified language. Sobolev's anecdote demonstrates a phenomenon Alexei Yurchak has

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[36] Mikhail Epstein, 'Relativistic Patterns in Totalitarian Thinking: An Inquiry into the Language of Soviet Ideology, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Occasional Paper no. 243.' (Washington, 1991), p.77.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Sobolev in TsUES SKh SSSR 'Stenogramma zasedaniia sektsii po obsuzhdeniiu vystavki dekorativno–oformitel'skogo iskusstva i dizaina,' (1981), RGALI f.2082 op.6 d.1546 l.56-57.

described as 'performative shift.'[39] In this case, the act of performing using appropriate language associated with ideology provides a setting for negotiation about the new park. Yurchak argues that these performative rituals '*enabled* the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life'.[40] Sobolev's anecdote indicates the emergence of a semantic field of experimentation specific to the late Soviet period that was explored at Senezh studio in the production of visual agitation.

Visual agitation schemes produced at Senezh in 1974 show how the studio's main strategy was to integrate visual agitation with the surrounding environment in order to simultaneously reflect and inform the culture of the workers. At the KamAZ automobile plant, this was achieved through integration of visual agitation with landscaping and planting of the surrounding territory (image 24-25). In an exhibition held after the seminar, the artists showed 'multiple portraits, drawings and sketches of workers, their daily life, labour and leisure,' which demonstrated how they tried to, 'get to know the psychology of both the collective and each member as closely as possible, to delve into their lives, aspirations and interests.'[41] Visual agitation was reinterpreted as a reflection of the culture of labour that would need to include, 'everything required in order that each member of the workers' collective can feel at home.'[42] At KamAZ, cultural information in the form of 'memorial installations, landscaped areas for

[39] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It was No More,* p.25.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Saveleva, 'Khudozhniki - stroikam 5-oi petiletki,' p.20.
[42] Ibid.

Image 24-25 | Visual agitation for KamAZ Auto Plant. I Arkhipov, R. Safiulin, N. Boboshko, E. Timokhin, M. Berdnikov, I. Savin, V. Desiatkov, M. Mukhamedianov, G. Ivanov, V. Nikolaev, V. Babeev. Project led by E. Rozenblium. Consultants: A. Bokov and A. Televich. Senezh Studio, 1974.

In contrast to the models produced for Novosibirsk, the designs for KamAZ Auto Plant presented concepts for visual agitation in the factory, rather than an accurate representation of a finished project. This section of the project included proposals for linking the factory workshops with green space, integrated with a display system above. These systems are intended to script the movement of the eye and the body across a large territory in order to ensure the factory is perceived of by the worker as one single entity. The presence of individual zones and squares, as well as a museum were intended to reflect the diverse needs of the workers and provide space for communal activities as well as individual reflection.

Source: N. Saval'eva, 'Khudozhniki – stroikam 9-i piatiletki,' *DI SSSR* 1975/1, pp.18-23

relaxation, and a museum,'[43] were integrated with information systems and screens that would allow quick effective communication with workers.

In this conception of environment, the individual's subjectivity is at once formed by the information he receives from the environment, while his way of life and practices are a factor that determines the creation of the surrounding environment. Visual agitation was reconceptualised as a feedback loop that enables the expression of collectively agreed principles, as opposed to a series of unidirectional messages directed from state to citizen. This constituted a critique the prescriptive messages and slogans that characterised visual agitation in the factory. The range of media and environments was a reflection of the life of the collective, rather than an imposition from above. Furthermore, workers would be presented with a choice in how they engage with visual agitation. This expressed a desire to democratise the material environment by drawing from the sum-total of individual experiences, as opposed to the image of the idealised worker that had originated in the Stakhanovite movement of the 1930s.

Conservation of architectural heritage

Visual agitation could also be used to challenge, rather than promote official state policies. Historic town centres were threatened by the official policy of rolling obsolescence in housing that would require the continual demolition of old housing stock and its subsequent replacement with modern buildings.[44] As these buildings came under threat of demolition, this endangered their incumbent links

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p.375.

to the pre-Stalinist and pre-revolutionary past. While some reconstruction of historic buildings and churches had taken place after the war with the approval of Stalin,[45] little protection was in place for vernacular architecture such as wooden merchants' houses.

In 1979, the studio exhibited a project for the reconstruction of the city centre of Naberezhnye chelny. The city grew rapidly when the KamAZ Automobile Plant opened in 1976 and new housing districts appeared to house the factory's workers. This project, which was part of the studio's collaboration with local industry to produce 'visual agitation,' saw the construction of a range of model cityscapes that explored the relationship between vernacular wooden architecture and new housing districts. While the benefits of post-war mass housing construction were undisputed (some 38,284,000 apartments and individual homes were constructed between 1953 and 1970),[46] the status of mass housing as a mass-manufactured product left many newly constructed areas appearing almost identical. Rozenblium observed how, 'A legion of bulldozers arrives and levels the square, upon which commences the construction of a district. The uniqueness and inimitability of the specific environment with which it is imperative to work is being destroyed[47]' (image 26).

A documentary film shot at the studio proclaimed, 'The artists propose surrounding the old quarter with earthen ramparts to form an amphitheatre.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life After Stalin*, (Washington DC and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Baltimore University Press, 2013), p.5.

[47] Evgenii Rozenblium in, TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma …opyta TsUES SKh SSSR v oblasti proektirovaniia sistemy nagliadnoi agitatsii,' Moscow, 1974, RGALI f.2082 op.6 d.1524 l.77.

Image 26 | Photograph of a wooden house in the process of demolition, Naberezhnye chelny c.1979.

Rozenblium opposed the demolition of wooden merchants houses that were seen as an important factor in determining the local character of a city.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive.

Image 27 | 'Museification' of Naberezhnye chelny city centre. Project Led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio c. 1978.

This image shows the design of museum exhibitions within restored buildings in the city centre. The open-sided buildings demonstrate the link between urban and exhibition design: the two major areas of design activity undertaken at Senezh after 1972. The design process at Senezh was not about the production of new buildings, but using design to engage citizens with existing heritage.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive.

Image 28 | 'Museification' of Naberezhnye chelny city centre. Project Led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio c. 1978.

Modern apartments stand above the old town centre of Naberezhnye chelny where former merchants houses are given over to museums and other cultural institutions. Both parts of the city can be viewed from the amphitheatre to the right of the photograph

Source: Rozenblium family archive

Golden domes and roofs glisten below as a symbol of our historic past – the sacred origins of our present and future.'[48] (images 27-28) The Senezh projects were focused on exploring the relationship between newly constructed mass housing blocks and pre-revolutionary housing as a means of stimulating local identity. Titova explained how the emergence of new space between housing blocks emerged as a new opportunity for artists interested in the concept of environment:

> When this space emerged, it somehow needed to be tamed. It became clear that the local authorities who would just place swings in one corner didn't have the ability to undertake this work.[49]

In image 28, a modern housing block overlooks the old centre, which is retains its status as the main hub of social interaction. 'Today's standardized house does not and cannot fulfil the role of the main element that comprises the inimitability and individuality of the city,'[50] Rozenblium explained. As a mass-produced product, panel housing could not reflect local identities as its production had little to do with the will of the local collective. New housing was also an urgent necessity, and Rozenblium saw urban design as means of fostering a sense of communality in new cities. The role of expressing local identity would, 'not be fulfilled by the house, but by the street, yard, park, space within the neighbourhood, the square, i.e. environment.'[51]

As the studio moved into the territory of urban design, Rozenblium appointed a

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[48] *Dizain*, dir. by N. Afanas'ev, [On colour film] Moscow (1979), Russian State Cinema and Television Archive, [RGAKFD], d. 27000.
[49] Interview with Natalia Titova, Pushchino, 2013.
[50] Rozenblium, in TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma …opyta TsUES,' l.74.
[51] Ibid.

group of young architects as consultants and lecturers who were well versed in the latest developments in foreign architecture. Andrei Bokov, Aleksandr Skokan, Aleksandr Rappaport, Vladislav Gudkov and Evgenii Asse brought knowledge of architects and theorists who challenged orthodoxies of modernist city planning in favour of a more diverse understanding of environment.[52] In a recent interview, Asse commented:

> My appearance at Senezh coincided with an active appearance and elaboration of postmodern aesthetics in the West and particularly in America. In some sense this turned out to be very resonant with what I was doing at the studio…not because it was related to some sort of parody of classicism, but because it was related to a particular type of ornamentally and a liberation from a strict modernist canon. So when I showed some works by Charles Moore, they showed interest not because it was a pastiche of the renaissance, but because they were fun and represented a specific type of intervention into traditional modernist language.[53]

Theorists including Aldo Rossi[54] in Italy, Kevin Lynch,[55] Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter[56] in the US, and Gordon Cullen and Nikolaus Pevsner's townscape movement in the UK were all known by this group of architects for proposing alternatives to modernist city planning.[57] As Matthew Aitcheson has noted, movements such as townscape stood 'at the junction of two major streams of post-

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[52] Interview with Evgenii Asse, Moscow, 2013.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Oppositions Books, 1982), p.60.

[55] Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1960)

[56] Rowe, Colin, and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1978)

[57] Interview with Evgenii Asse, Moscow, 2013.

war development: the transition from modernism to post-modernism, and the rise of "urbanism" and its perception as the supreme question of architecture in the period.'[58]

Soviet conceptual architecture of the 1960s had generally been dominated by high-modernist proposals such as those proposed by New Element of Settlement group [NER].[59] In a 1972 lecture at Senezh, Andrei Bokov questioned architecture's links to futurology, and called for architecture to shift its focus towards the production of an environment whose unity would materially reflect a harmonious society:

> Being guided by the experience of urban development and following historical parallels, it is possible to state with conviction that the permanent splitting-up and disintegration of the city indicates the feebleness of its creators and a decline of material culture…Without diminishing the importance and role of 'City of the Future' projects, we are trying to confine our references to more direct and easily perceivable examples from contemporary practice that at times do not emerge from the broadcast doctrine but nonetheless can be interpreted as analogous to a unified city.[60]

The Italian Renaissance square was heralded as a model site of collective urban life. By breaking down the barrier between home and city, 'the revealed spaces, novel in image, function and form…keep in mind the multifarious and

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[58] Matthew Aitchison, 'Townscape: Scope, Scale and Extent', *The Journal of Architecture*, 17/5 (2012), pp.621-642.

[59] See Jerome M. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1975).

[60] Andrei Bokov, 'Moi dom – moi gorod' Moscow, (1972), RGALI f.2082 op.3 d.935 l.115.

Image 29 | 'Museification' of a housing district in Tol'iatti, Senezh Studio, 1977

This model was presented as part of an exhibition called *Fragments of City Life* that was hosted in Tol'iatti in 1977. Tol'iatti had undergone rapid expansion since the 1966 agreement with Fiat to construct the factory that would produce Lada cars. The city's rapid expansion at this time threatened smaller settlements in the area.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive.

complicated, the abounding nuances of large and small, old and new, individual and communal.'[61]

Whereas state planners had expected communities to form in micro-districts around shared facilities such as dining and schooling,[62] the model cityscapes produced at Senezh highlighted the need for cultural elements that would facilitate social cohesion through shared local identities. After a range of models had been exhibited at Naberezhnye chelny, the city's Executive Committee signed a declaration for the preservation of several buildings that had previously been scheduled for demolition.[63] Similar projects in Tol'iatti also engaged the model as a campaign tool against the demolition of urban heritage (image 29).

Rozenblium's approach became known as the 'museification' of the urban environment. Many local towns and cities contained museums that were conceived for the purposes of 'visual agitation,' – to create a sense of local pride and belonging. For Rozenblium, who had designed such exhibitions since the 1950s, 'museification' could stimulate an active relationship between the individual and their surroundings. In one account of the Naberezhnye chelny project, the city centre is presented as 'a particular type of museum, a museum that lives in a contemporary way, because the preserved buildings are given over to the city's various cultural institutions.[64] While museum environments were

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[61] Ibid., l.116.

[62] For a discussion of this phenomenon of removing public services from the home to stimulate community feeling, see Susan E. Reid, 'Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, vol. 47, no.1/2 pp.250-251.

[63] TsUES SKh SSSR. 'Otchet o rabote tvorcheskoi gruppy Tsentral'noi uchebno-eksperimental'noi studii SKh SSSR D/D "Senezh",' (1979), RGALI f.2082 op.6 d.1558 l.13.

[64] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma tvorcheskogo seminara "Povyshenie ideino–khudozhestvennogo urovnia nagliadnoi agitatsii,' (1975), RGALI f.2082 op.6 d.1529 l.69.

typically designed to communicate a limited number of narratives about a place or theme, the transformation of the city into a museum could not be as precisely engineered.

Retrospectivism, memory and history

One of the major cultural developments of the Soviet seventies was the so-called 'historical turn,' which saw themes of nostalgia and memory emerge in art and literature. The manifestation of retrospectivism and nostalgia was broad and had different significance for a range of groups. It was often tied to a latent nationalism that was bubbling up in the multi-ethnic USSR, as in the work of the 'Village Prose' writers.[65] Susan Reid has drawn attention to one of the best-known official artists of the day, Tatiana Nazarenko, who engaged the genre of history painting in order to initiate 'dialogue between now and then.'[66] Nazarenko specifically engaged with the topic of memory in the city in her painting *Moscow Evening* (1978) (image 30), where 'the city is an architectural palimpsest, where new buildings mix with old, the material record of human activity and habitation over time.'[67] In the decorative arts too, themes of renaissance carnival became common expressions of the 'retrostyle.'[68]

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[65] See Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[66] Susan E. Reid, 'The 'Art of Memory': Retrospectivism in Soviet Painting of the Brezhnev Era,' in *Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992* ed. M, Cullerne-Bown and B. Taylor (Machester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.161-188 (p.164).

[67] Ibid., p.174

[68] Nikita Voronov, 'Stil' detskikh grez,' *DI SSSR*, 1981/1, pp.24-26.

Image 30 | Tatiana Nazarenko, *Moscow Evening*, Oil on Canvas, 1978, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

Source: The Artist

Where official accounts of history were constantly subject to revision in accordance with the government's political objectives,[69] personal and collective memory could potentially stimulate links to the past absent from official textbooks. Furthermore, liberalisations of the 1960s had 'undermined the persuasiveness of earlier interpretations of history, [and] many groups in the Soviet union sought to legitimize their existence by constructing new historical continuities.'[70] The city could become a vessel of what Wertsch calls a 'distributed version of collective memory' whereby 'a representation of the past is distributed among members of a collective, but not because of the existence of a collective mind in any strong sense.'[71]

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym distinguishes between restorative nostalgia associated with the government and the nationalists' projection of an idealised part, and reflective nostalgia. Whereas restorative nostalgia 'evokes national past and future,' and uses the past to indicate stability in the present, reflective nostalgia 'is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude.'[72] The Senezh projects express a kind of reflective nostalgia that focuses on collective memory composed of individual histories tha indicates the presence of a subjective historical consciousness that may be activated within the city. By engaging collective memories and alternative histories, it might also be possible to construct alternate ways of living in the present.

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[69] See James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2002), p.81.

[70] Denis Kozlov, 'The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography and Doubt 1953-91,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2/3 (2001), pp.577-600 (p.578).

[71] Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p.21.

[72] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.49.

For culturologists too, a self-proclaimed enthusiasm for "archaism" suggested an alternative use of semiotics to the 'scientific' modelling systems proposed by the structuralists of the 1950s and 1960s.[73]

> By conceiving of culture as a "collective memory" of things that resist time, Lotman and his colleagues defined the object of their research as something larger and deeper than any of its contemporary interpretations and appropriations… Simultaneously they provided their readers with a wealth of analogies to think about the Soviet present without directly confronting it.[74]

Asse has also noted a particular affinity among architects with the writings of Italian Marxist Also Rossi,[75] whose theories provide a degree of continuity between native ideas of collective memory and Western theories of architecture and planning that resisted high modernism. In *Architecture of the City* (1966), Rossi argued for an urbanism that would take into account how collective memory might inhabit the fabric of the city's buildings. He interpreted the architectural artefact within the 'psychological construct of collective memory' that has the potential to supersede history.[76] Rossi's ideas relating to collective memory in the city made a case against modernist planning while emphasizing the notion of *collective* social identities in the city: it is 'both a product *of* the collective and a design *for* the collective. In both cases the *collective subject* is the central concept.'[77] According to Rossi, the collective memory of the city is materialised in

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[73] Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs*, p.60.

[74] Ibid. p.64.

[75] Interview with Evgenii Asse.

[76] Peter Eisenmann, 'Editor's Introduction,' in *The Architecture of the City* by Aldo Rossi, (Cambridge, Mass.: Oppositions Books, 1982), pp.3-11 (p.7).

[77] Ibid. p.9.

monuments: those elements of the urban fabric that persist through time. The monument's permanence is 'a result of its capacity to constitute the city, its history and art, its being and memory.'[78] Modernist experiments in communal living of the 1920s and the introduction public services in housing districts of the 1970s to stimulate neighbourliness[79] had led many architects to assume that modernism was a guarantor of social cohesion among members of a collective. The championing of collective memory could potentially contest the assumption that solely sharing in the activities of daily life stimulates the formation of collective identities.[80]

This was a radically different engagement of history to that seen in socialist realist historicism under Stalin. One of the prime functions of socialist realist historicism was the generation of images of a radiant future [*svetloe budushchee*] rooted in national traditions. Catherine Cooke has shown that the neo-classical Russian country estate was an important model for future architecture because they combined human-scale interiors and a confident, rational use of space with an expression of national spirit by their peasant-serf designers.[81] Socialist realist historicism was primarily about producing images of the future in buildings that could constantly 'embody and transmit messages and myths to audiences who were themselves "moving forward" as their political consciousness and aesthetic sensibilities developed.'[82] This was a future-oriented rather than a retrospective

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[78] Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, p.60.

[79] Victor Buchli explores the fate of concepts associated with collectivity in Soviet modernist architecture in Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*, (Oxford and New York: Berg,1999).

[80] The contestation of this understanding of collectivism in the city is a common theme of critiques of Soviet planning during the 1970s. See, for example Aleksandr Riabushin, *Nauchno-tekhnicheskii progress, urbanizatsiia, zhilishche*, (Moscow: VNIITE, 1974).

[81] Catherine Cooke, 'Beauty as a Route to "The Radiant Future": Responses of Soviet Architecture,' *Journal of Design History*, 10/2, pp.137-160 (pp.152-156).

[82] Ibid., p.143.

use of history. At Senezh, on the other hand, the preservation of historical sites was intended to connect individuals to a past that was absent official histories. By nurturing collective memory in the city, Senezh artists produced a democratic gesture of allowing citizens to choose how they engaged with history and their surroundings.

Theatricalization

From November 1982 to January 1983, participants made a series of theatrical models and tableaux that presented an 'artistic conception for the improvement of the city urban environment of Kolomna.' Kolomna, first recorded in 1177, is the site of buildings that date back to the 16th century. The city is home to a fortress, a monastery, and various churches and stone houses built during the eighteenth century. In the years after the revolution, Kolomna was the location of the first Soviets of workers' deputies and was the site of the construction of the first Soviet steam trains and tractors.[83] Seven groups of designers worked on projects that dealt with various cultural hotspots: the castle (kremlin), the old city centre, newly built micro districts, the locomotive factory, the organisation of the city's 'system of museums,' elements of visual agitation and part of a collective farm.[84]

In a briefing document produced by the studio, it was made clear that the city should to be treated as a 'complicated historically formed organism' that would be partly achieved by working according to Rozenblium's theme of 'museum-city.'[85]

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[83] Kolomenskii GK KPSS, Otdel agitatsii I propagandy, 'Predlozheniia k postanovke resheniia zadach "muzei-gorod" v aspekte vzaimodeistviia dizaina I arkhitektury,' Rozenblium Family Archive, Kolomna, 1982.

[84] TsUES SKh SSSR 'Khudozhniki gorodu: XVII vystaska rabot tvorcheskoi gruppy Tsental'noi eksperimental'noi studii soiuza khudozhnikov SSSR, Kolomna-Senezh-Kolomna, Nov 1982 – Jan 1983.' Rozenblium Family Archive.

[85] Ibid. p.2

Image 31 | A stage for mass festivals at the Kolomna Kremlin. N. Glushich, G. Glushich, G. Kats, A. Borin, L. Kozachenko, V. Shevchuk. Consultants: A. Bokov, V. Gudkov and V. Egorov. Project led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio, 1982

The influence of theatre set design is evident in this design for a stage at the centre of city life. This type of theatricality conceived as agitation is nostalgic for the way models of living were presented in Constructivist mass festivals of the 1920s. However, the style more closely resembles contemporaneous theatre design that also underwent a historical turn during the 1970s.

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive

In this instance, however, the relationship of this type of design to human *behaviour* was emphasised in the brief. The artists were instructed to:

> …find an organic fusion of the life and behaviour of the individual with the sphere of production in the city, laying bare the origins of emotional-aesthetic notions that spur the city's inhabitants on to an active way of life. Here we have in mind colourful historical facts that can make an impression, like events, monuments, memorials, posters and slogans with authentic content of past and present life in the city.[86]

The artists focused an activating the city's heritage by encouraging use of public space in the historic centre (image 31), advocating the preservation of historic areas of the city and preserving a level of visual continuity between the historic centre and new housing districts (images 32-33). The city's communal spaces were conceptualised as a series of stage sets that safeguard the complex dramaturgy of city life.

"Theatricalization" [*teatralizatsiia*] became a popular theme among Moscow architects during the 1970s. Drawing particular inspiration from the Italian Baroque ensembles,[87] study of the 'juxtaposition urban and theatrical space'[88] gave new insight into the popular theme of human behaviour and communication in communal space. In *Rabelais and His World*, a favourite text of the Thaw intelligentsia, Mikhail Bakhtin wrote about the role of games during the

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[86] Ibid.

[87] For example, an exhibition entitled "Theatrical Space in 15th-17th Century Florence" was staged at Moscow's Pushkin Museum from March-April 1978.

[88] Aleksandr Rappaport, 'Prostranstvo teatra i prostranstvo goroda v Evrope XVI-XVII vv.' in *Teatral'noe prostranstvo: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii 1978* ed. E. Danilovoi, (Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1979), pp.202-214 (p.202).

Images 32-33 | New microdistrict in Kolomna. V. Trifonov, F. Iatsik, N. Balalaeva, A. Petrosian, N. Telegina, A. Berdianskikh. Consultants: A. Bokov, V. Gudkov and V. Egorov Project led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio, 1982.

Source: Rozenblium family archive.

renaissance as 'liberated the from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities.'[89] Architect Aleksandr Rappaport believed that the creation of theatrical urban space could transform temporary ludic behaviour into a permanent feature of daily life:

> The juxtaposition of…behaviour and environment creates a new quality that frees the individual from overt mimetic and ludic functions, and transfers play from an external to an internal level…opening up new horizons of ludic existence.[90]

Whereas projects led by Rozenblium had previously resembled architectural models, the use of perspective in the Kolomna project suggests that they are to be viewed face on, as a theatre set on a proscenium stage. They are made of paper and card, and typically represent the spirit of a particular environment rather than a detailed representation of how it may appear in reality. Unlike architectural models, their purpose is not to *explain* a concept but to demonstrate how citizens' behaviour in the urban environment is influenced by their surroundings.

The group tasked with designing visual agitation in Kolomna planned how the city would function as a stage for the various parades and celebrations that form the rituals of the Soviet calendar. The parade in image 34 takes a route past successive epochs of city architecture: from panel housing to wooden merchants housing and the silhouette of the historic centre. None of the buildings in the foreground have a stable presence: they are connected to ropes that could haul

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[89] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by H. Iswolsky, (Bloomington IA: Indiana University Press, 1984) [first published in Russian in 1965], p.235.
[90] Rappaport, 'Prostranstvo teatra i prostranstvo goroda,' p.208.

Image 34 | Elements of visual agitation in Kolomna. Sh. Sakiev, S. Anadurdyev, I. Maksimov, L. Aksenova, V. Erofeev. Consultants: A. Bokov, V. Gudkov and V. Egorov. Project led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio, 1982

In this highly theatrical design, the impermanence of the surroundings is made apparent, as buildings are reduced to scenery that may be removed at any point. The citizens' banners are also empty, ready for a new message to be written upon them. Unusually for projects led by Rozenblium, this project drew attention to the impermanence of the current status quo by ironically revealing the theatrical mechanisms that exist 'behind-the scenes.'

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive

them off stage at any moment. The notion of urban environment as a materialization of historical events is manifested in the statue of Lenin: the supreme signifier of Soviet power after the 1917 October revolution. Like the surrounding buildings, Lenin is connected to ropes and may move around and freely associate with other symbols from the past. He may also be hoisted out of view at any moment. The dominant symbol of Soviet power is revealed to be temporary, as are the surrounding buildings.

Over 50% of those who attended exhibitions staged by the studio were local officials or professional architects, artists and designers,[91] and models were intended to influence individuals who have power over the urban environment. Ironically, the project of generating awareness of oneself in relation to material and cultural surroundings manifests itself as a new form of 'visual agitation,' which circumvents ossified verbal and visual languages of the Soviet ideological codes. Several former participants have commented how this education enabled them to approach ideological commissions in an innovative way, which led to significant material rewards.[92] Senezh participant Igor El'chenko explained:

> We were workers of the ideological front. The government commissioned everything we did. We earned good money at that time. And when we started to create original things, we received more commissions, because we did it differently, in a new way.[93]

[91] Karl Kantor, *Pravda o dizaine: Dizain v kontekste kul'tury doperestroechnogo tridtsatiletiia 1955-1985*, (Moscow: ANIR, 1996), p.197.
[92] Interview with Evgenii Golubtsov and Il'ia Artemenov, Kazan', April 2015.
[93] Interview with Igor' El'chenko, Novosibirsk, April 2014.

El'chenko's comment is curious because it implies that it was possible to lead some formal innovation in the official realm of propaganda production. In fact, it appears that it was precisely *because* of the 'standardization of discourse…epitomized in the ubiquitous ideological posters and slogans that covered urban space,'[94] that artists had the opportunity to develop a new approach. Through participation in the seminars, artists learned how to generate new visual codes within the framework of 'official' projects. It showed that a degree of innovation was possible within official art if justified according to the norms of ideological language.

Conclusion: Postmodern propaganda?

In a 1981 article published in the Union of Artists' journal *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, Nikita Voronov hoped to explain the 'style of childish reverie' of 'clowns, fools, signs of the zodiac, masquerade and theatre' that had colonized the decorative arts.[95] This was a reference to new trends in the decorative arts that saw restaurants and public spaces bedecked with renaissance and carnivalesque elements. Whereas many critics ascribed the historical turn in the arts to the popularity of Bakhtin, Voronov attributed these phenomena to the psychological necessity of adapting to the conditions of modernity.[96] The official policy of 'scientific-technological revolution,' as a guarantor of social progress did not match up to realities of environmental damage and pollution, the existential threat of the Cold War and memories of World War Two. According to Voronov, the processes of globalization of style and the increased individualization of the

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[94] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More,* p.37.
[95] Voronov, 'Stil' detskykh grez,' p.24.
[96] Ibid.

modern subject in daily life (e.g. moving into individual family apartments) led artists to seek values of identity and collectivity in the past and to create the sense of comfort and security they felt as a children.[97]

Reid has commented that the work of painter Tatiana Nazarenko should be considered postmodern in a chronological sense, 'as an attempt to diversify and humanise the design of the environment in a reaction against the monotony of functionalism which had dominated since the beginning of the sixties.'[98] Nazarenko's 'postmodernism' is intriguing because she reacts to the manifestation of modernity in her surroundings, but does not directly subvert the visual codes of painting (which was still dominated by socialist realism). In fact, her work has been read as an attempt to expand the vocabulary of official art. Much Soviet art that has been categorised as 'postmodern' subversively engages the vocabulary of socialist realism, as Mark Lipovetsky explains:

> 'In the West, postmodernism arises from the deconstruction of the monolithic, hierarchical culture of modernism and the canonized avant-garde. The only equivalent to such a monolith in Russian culture is Socialist Realism; therefore, postmodernism is restricted to the art of reflection on the ruins of Socialist Realism, that is, Conceptualism and Sots Art.[99]

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Reid, 'The Art of Memory,' p.170.

[99] Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue With Chaos*, (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p.234.

Like Nazarenko, Rozenblium and Senezh artists directed their protest against the realities of socialist modernity rather than the fantasies of socialist realism. Their tactics linked them closely to Western architects who embraced diversity in the built environment. Denise Scott-Brown recently stated that her work was postmodern but not PoMo (i.e. it was not nakedly commercial or self-indulgent) and was based on the 'arts, humanities, and social sciences of the 1960s and before.'[100] Similarly, designers at Senezh studio did not draw from the pervasive ironic culture of the Soviet 1970s. As Epstein explains, the Soviet semiosphere was unique in its potential to be an environment composed of *ideas.* These microenvironments were populated by the ideals of a generation who matured in the idealistic environment of the Khrushchev Thaw and sought ways of expressing possible social alternatives to the reality of the Brezhnev era Soviet Union.

The models produced at Senezh do not simply subvert and attack – their goal is to articulate alternative approaches to the production of urban space. Their utopian value is evident in their incongruence to the official ideology of scientific-technological revolution that guaranteed the mass production of panel housing, but not the development of a humane environment. Rather than abandoning utopia, as did the 'paper architects' in the 1980s,[101] (see chapter 2), designers at Senezh studio sought social alternatives in the past. Yet, the strategy of campaigning to protect historic buildings was undertaken by showing alternative ways of living that might prevent the demolition of buildings in the *present.* The model cityscapes can therefore be read as a form of utopian activism designed to

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[100] Denise Scott Brown, 'Our Postmodernism,' in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970 – 1990,* ed. Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp.106-111 (p.111).

[101] See Alexandre Rappaport, 'Phantasy versus Utopia,' in *World Cities and the Future of the Metropoles: International Participations* ed. Luigi Mazza, Electa, (Milan: XVII Triennale di Milano, 1988), p.229.

protect, through visual and discursive means, against the excesses of urban modernisation that was deemed dehumanizing. For Rozenblium and his colleagues, a socialist utopia would be a true reflection of collective experience that could not be imposed from above. In campaigning for a democratised access to the past and to personal histories, Senezh artists attempted to inject humanity into a utopian experiment that had strayed off-course.

Chapter 5| The afterlife of optimism

> My verse will reach you
> across the peaks of ages,
> over the heads
> of governments and poets.
>
> -Vladimir Maiakovskii, 1930[1]

This chapter examines an alternative trajectory of the legacy of the Thaw to the strategies retrospectivism and museification outlined in the previous chapter. Below, I consider the afterlives of 1950s and 1960s futurological design, and how the concept of the future found new expression in design culture of the 1970s and 1980s. Here, I examine the concept of the 'projective' as an alternative to 'museification' in artistic projecteering, and explain why despite the repressive tendencies of the Brezhnev government, designers continued to create critical projects that imagined alternative forms of social existence. Rather than adhering to tendencies of historical fantasy and allegory in late Soviet culture, Senezh designers drew on historical knowledge in order to materialize their ideas in the hope that they may be relevant in the future. This included a renewed importance placed on historical figures whose influence was felt beyond their time, with particular influence placed on the great inventors Leonardo Da Vinci and Vladimir Tatlin. At Senezh studio, designers led by Konik emphasized the need to continue to look to the future, or risk subjugating human creative ambition to the

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[1] Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'At the top of my voice,' from *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry* trans. Max Hayward and George Reavey (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), available online at https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/mayakovsky/1930/at-top-my-voice.htm [accessed 9th November 2015].

constricting realities of daily life. In order to do so, they produced what Fred Turner has termed multi-media 'surrounds' that could train new methods of perception that would produce new types of 'democratic' consciousness. Influenced by new understandings of multi-media, Senezh participants imagined environments designed to enable the individual to practise new ways of thinking that would emancipate them from an authoritarian outlook on life.

Environment and the 'museification' debate

Issues surrounding the relationship of artistic projecteering to time and historical progress were hotly debated following a 1981 exhibition entitled *We are Building Communism*, at Moscow's Central House of the Artists [*TsDKh*].[2] It was the first time an exhibition had brought together design projects from across all republics of the USSR from a range of institutions including the Union of Artists, *Khudozhestvennyi fond* [artists' foundation], and *SKhKB*. The six hundred projects on display constituted a broad overview of the state of Soviet design culture and were divided according to the urban, agricultural, civic institutional, factory and domestic environments.[3] It was particularly unusual for industrial products to be displayed alongside monumental art, interiors and other aspects of design more familiar to the Union of Artists. The staging of such a large exhibition in a prestigious venue was indicative of how the concept of 'environment' had become a mainstream concern for artists, architects and designers.[4]

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[2] The exhibition was organised by Evgenii Rozenblium and V. Shpak .
[3] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma zasedaniia sektsii po obsuzhdeniiu vystavki dekorativno–oformitel'skogo iskusstva i dizaina,' (1981), RGALI f.2082, op.6, d.1546 l.8.
[4] See Konstantin Rozhdestvenskii, 'Mnogoobrazie Sovetskogo Dizaina', *DI SSSR*, 1981/9, pp.1–3.

Had the environmental turn enabled the preservation of the ideal of an integrated material environment that might express the harmonious societal relations? Or were the concepts associated with 'environment' so nebulous as to obscure the objectives of the socialist designer? Did 'environment' promote the creation of an 'inseparable spiritual and material world,'[5] or had the term become, as art critic Natalia Adaskina saw it, 'ubiquitous, amorphous, many sided and fickle'?[6] If the ambitions of the design profession in the 1960s had been characterized by single-minded approaches that promoted the creation of the material environment of socialism; the environmental turn described in the previous chapter signalled the maturing profession's awareness of greater complexity in the material environment. As I have shown, the concept of environment was a useful tool for overcoming the fragmentation of architecture, monumental art, visual agitation and urban planning that was a result of centralised bureaucratic structures. The ambiguity and flexibility inherent in the term had been instrumental in Rozenblium's success in uniting the disparate practices of urban planning and visual agitation under the umbrella of artistic projecteering.

However, some designers were critical that the environmental approach lacked an intrinsic programme of social change that had formed the core principles of artistic projecteering during the 1960s. The Senezh models of historic city centres were primarily activist statements aimed at limiting the damage done by Soviet modernity in the present, but did contribute to an image of future society. Technology was conspicuously absent in many of Rozenblium's projects.

[5] Ibid. p.1.

[6] N. L. Adaskina, 'Khudozhnik i sreda,' *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie 1983,* pp. 5-31 (p.7).

Following the opening of *We are Building Communism*, a mood of nostalgia for the 1960s futurological and social mission of design permeated a meeting of Union of Artists' members. Having been presented with many second-rate copies of Western products at the exhibition, veteran architect and designer Iurii Somov complained, 'At our exhibition I didn't see one work that revealed the future of the environment we inhabit…why is there no apartment ten years in the future?'[7] Karl Kantor, whose aim in founding Senezh had been to oversee the creation of a socialist material culture, described what he saw as a failure of the profession to design fundamentally different types of objects to those produced in capitalist countries; stating, 'I think we should try once more to make design for people in a way that fundamentally differs from Western design.'[8] Natalia Titova lamented the fact that artists working on 'integrated urban environments' were still only producing 'glorified notice boards'.[9] In her view, the condition of material surroundings was indicative of a disappearance of ideals among artists and society at large.

Karl Kantor also had little positive to say about Evgenii Rozenblium, the man with whom he had worked to create Senezh studio. Since the early 1970s, the studio had focused its attention on urban and museum design. Kantor instinctively disagreed with Rozenblium's recent strategy of urban 'museification,' which he observed, 'for some reason brings to mind an analogy with mummification.'[10] Kantor was not alone in perceiving museification as a form of regressive retrospectivism and an abandonment of the futurological orientation and return to

[7] TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Stenogramma zasedaniia sektsii po obsuzhdeniiu vystavki dekorativno–oformitel'skogo iskusstva i dizaina,' l.43.
[8] Ibid., l.50.
[9] Ibid., l.30-31.
[10] Ibid., l.50.

Leninist ideals that had characterised the left-wing Soviet intelligentsia of the 1960s. Comrade Kostin said he feared 'museification of the entire country,' an ossifying reversal of Lenin's 1921 famous proclamation on electrification. [11]

In his speech, Kantor labelled museification a 'Potemkin type of design.'[12] Like the facades erected by Potemkin to distract Catherine the Great from the general poverty of Russia, museified environments might act as simulacra that mask rather than reveal the truth of daily life. Instead, Kantor implored designers to draw inspiration from great inventors of the past: in particular the Russian cosmist Nikolai Federov and from Vladimir Tatlin.[13]

'Projectivism' and design

Tatlin and Federov had both featured in an exhibit at *We Are Building Communism.* This was a model *Cosmic Cultural Centre* (1981) created at Senezh that same year. As I explain below, the project reflected on the nature of human cultural creativity and used official narratives of Soviet achievements in space exploration to argue for the relevance of designing for the future, despite the frustrations of the present. Continuing the theme of overcoming hegemonic historical narratives, the artists used display techniques that encouraged the imaginary viewer to construct their historical own narratives from the exhibits on display: thus stimulating the critical consciousness of the audience.

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[11] Ibid., l.66.

[12] Ibid., l.48.

[13] Ibid., l.46-52

The centre was imagined as space to stimulate discussion and activity relating to the cosmos. The models were created at a seminar led by Mark Konik. Konik had devised the courses in colour and composition at the studio after participating in some of the early Senezh seminars. He originally trained as a theatre designer in Tashkent, and later became Kantor's de-facto 'apprentice.'[14] From the mid 1970s, Konik also started to lead seminars, and a fierce rivalry broke out between him and Rozenblium that was never resolved. As director of the studio, it fell to Natalia Titova to maintain a cordial relationship between the two. She has explained that they complemented each other intellectually and were strongly influenced by one another despite their mutual animosity. For her, 'Rozenblium forever remained an architect, and Konik was an artist in projecteering'[15] which could be perceived in his 'sculptural mentality [that] defined the philosophical direction of his projects.'[16] In other words, Konik at this time was led by the ideals of art, while Rozenblium's became increasingly pragmatic.

The *Cosmic Cultural Centre* consisted of a series of cylinders that would float above terraces landscaped to represent various corners of the world in different epochs: from the medieval square to a Japanese rock garden. The cylindrical form, designed to resemble a space ship, would preclude the creation of a conventional museum display of exhibits arranged in linear fashion. Exhibits were hung from cables (some of them moving) that extended in multiple directions.[17] (see image 35) The display mechanism was designed to enable visitors to explore the history

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[14] Natalia Titova used the word *uchenik* to define their relationship. Interview with Natalia Titova, Pushchino, September 2013.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] For a full description of the project, see O. Kabanova, 'Proekt kul'turnogo tsentra "Kosmos"'
(1986) in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi* ed. Mark Konik (Indeks Dizain: Moskva, 2003) pp.184-185.

Image 34 | Elements of visual agitation in Kolomna. Sh. Sakiev, S. Anadurdyev, I. Maksimov, L. Aksenova, V. Erofeev. Consultants: A. Bokov, V. Gudkov and V. Egorov. Project led by E. Rozenblium, Senezh Studio, 1982

In this highly theatrical design, the impermanence of the surroundings is made apparent, as buildings are reduced to scenery that may be removed at any point. The citizens' banners are also empty, ready for a new message to be written upon them. Unusually for projects led by Rozenblium, this project drew attention to the impermanence of the current status quo by ironically revealing the theatrical mechanisms that exist 'behind-the scenes.'

Source: Rozenblium Family Archive

of man's relationship to the cosmos without being overloaded by information. Crucially, the visitor was not instructed to follow a single narrative about the history of space exploration, but had the opportunity to produce their own narratives from the multitude of images spanning myth, history, science fiction and science fact.

In doing so, the designers challenged the official technologically determinist dogma of scientific-technological revolution. Rather than explain the Soviet Union's success in space exploration as a primarily scientific, technological and ideological achievement, the *Cosmic Cultural Centre* told the story of the cosmos as a cultural construct dating back to the beginning of the human race. Sculptural representations of the ancient Egyptian conception of the universe, a reconstruction of Breughel's image of the Tower of Babel (1563) and an exhibit on medieval astronomy and modern rockets communicated the message that scientific thought is the product of a collective creative and cultural imagination. The idea was that, 'by wandering through the galleries, the visitor gradually crosses from the world of myth, fairy-tale and utopia to the world of modern science.'[18] The display mechanisms would mean that the viewer's perception of information change depending upon where they stand. It would be the viewer's prerogative to internally produce a narrative from the information and images they were presented with.

An exhibit composed of photographs and texts devoted to Nikolai Federov (1829-1903) straggled the boundary of myth an science. Federov is best known as the

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[18] Ibid., p.185.

father of Russian cosmist philosophy and as the mentor of Konstantin Tsiolkovskii (the first man to calculate mathematical formulae for sending satellites into artificial orbit.)[19] Federov's writings, summarized in *The Philosophy of the Common Task* [Filosofiia obshchego dela], deal principally with the question of mankind's salvation. In the late nineteenth century, when scientific advances were causing swathes of the intelligentsia to turn to atheism, Federov's idea was that man should meet God half way by using science as the instrument of his own salvation. He thought this could be achieved by directing science towards overcoming death, followed by the resurrection of all souls who had ever been alive.[20] As there would not be enough space on earth for all of these resurrected bodies, man would need to colonize space. Mankind's grand project would eventually allow for humans to be 're-created from the least trace of uncovered ancestral dust,' in the outer cosmos, where 'bodies might be reengineered so they could live under conditions that could not now support human life as it is known.'[21]

Russian cosmism gathered steam as a 'hybrid ideological concept,'[22] in the 1970s. At the heart of this partly scientific, partly mystical phenomenon was Federov's mentee Tsiolkovskii, whose 'cosmic philosophy' was elaborated in a series of publications between 1914 and 1931.[23] Historian of Soviet space culture Asif Siddiqi has observed the changing uses of Tsiolkovskii's story from the 1960s to the 1970s. He explains that the space cult in the 1960s decade had relied upon a

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[19] George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Federov and His Followers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.10.
[20] Ibid., p.50.
[21] Ibid., p.49
[22] Michael Hagemeister, 'The Conquest of Space and the Bliss of the Atoms: Konstantin Tsiolkovskii,' in *Soviet Space Culture: Cosmic Enthusiasm in Socialist Societies,* ed. Eva Maurer, Julia Richers, Monica Rüthers & Carmen Scheide (London: Plagrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.27-41 (p.30).
[23] Ibid.

combination of an invented narrative of the founding fathers of space travel, and a narrative of the future benefits of space exploration to broader society. Notably, the present was absent from that narrative due to the secrecy involved in the Soviet space programme.[24] This, he explains, 'delivered a teleological story to the masses on the history of the space programme, one that eliminated contingency from the story and gave Soviet cosmic enthusiasm a motion geared towards a singular goal that conflated the utopia of socialism with the utopia of spaceflight.'[25]

This conforms to Mannheim's conception of the socialist-communist utopia whereby historical experience becomes a strategic plan. 'Only through the union of a sense of determinateness and a living vision of the future was it possible to create an historical time-sense of more than one dimension,'[26] he explained, positing that the present can be understood in a socialist-communist utopia in relation to the definition of past and future:

> The socialist "idea", in its interaction with "actual" events, operates not as a purely formal and transcendent principle which regulates the event from the outside, but rather as a "tendency" within the matrix of this reality which continuously corrects itself with reference to this context.[27]

[24] Asif Siddiqi, 'From Cosmic Enthusiasm to Nostalgia for the Future: A Tale of Soviet Space Culture,' in *Soviet Space Culture: Cosmic Enthusiasm in Socialist Societies,* ed. Eva Maurer, Julia Richers, Monica Rüthers & Carmen Scheide, (London: Plagrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.283-302 (pp.283-284)

[25] Ibid., p.283.

[26] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp.220-221.

[27] Ibid.

As Siddiqi sees it, the collapse of optimism about the socialist future during the 1970s caused a shift in the Soviet citizen's understanding of time:

> In the 1970s, when popular fascination with Soviet space achievements began to wane, these two threads of past and future began to merge. Soviet space rhetoric no longer looked to the future as bright and inviting; instead there was now a kind of nostalgia for the future, a fascination for the halcyon achievements of the 1960s that communicated an undeniable melancholia, a nostalgia for a time when the future was possible.[28]

The use of a display technique to break down this narrative is indicative of the need to find new agency for the forefathers of Russian space travel. In this case they were used to re-examine the role of myth and idealism in the creative imagination. Kantor's nostalgia for Federov was not driven by the imagery of the Soviet space-programme: he was attracted to cosmism due to Federov's concept of projectivism that oriented processes of invention in time.

Kantor was particularly enthused by the concept of the 'projective' as a way of conceiving the significance of artistic projecteering in ideologically conducive conditions. He quoted Federov's pronouncement in *The Philosophy of the Common Task* that, 'the idea is not at all subjective, nor is it objective, it is projective. The project is determined by freedom and the greater good.'[29] Federov's concept of the projective is closely linked to its etymological cousin projecteering [*proektirovanie*], whereby technology is seen as an important instrument of man that

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[28] Siddiqi, 'From Cosmic Enthusiasm to Nostalgia for the Future,' pp.284-285.

[29] N. F. Federov, *Filosofiia obshchego dela* vol. 1 (Vernyi, 1906) cit. Karl Kantor, 'Dizain bez illiuzii,' *DI SSSR*, 1981/10, pp.15-18 (p.17).

must be appropriately guided by advances in culture and society. George M. Young explains the cosmist concept of projectivism:[30]

> "Projectivism" is Federov's bridge between, and alternative to, idealism and materialism; it is the task of realising ideas in the material world. Projectivism is an epistemology for artists rather than for critics, for engineers rather than for theoretical scientists, for −urgists rather than for −ologists. The projective imagination, then, is creative in the most literal sense. Imagination in Federov not only allows us to perceive the essence of the universe but provides an image, an icon, a model for our project of refashioning the cosmos.[31]

The projective orients the temporal aspect of utopia towards mankind's fulfilment of its mission, which Federov believed to be the overcoming of death and the colonization of the universe. Technological and spiritual advancement towards the integration and wholeness of humankind can only be achieved by exercising the knowledge of the generation who lived before us. For Kantor, Federov's ability to conceptualise the relevance of his thought beyond the backwards conditions of late Tsarist Russia could inspire creativity in Brezhnev's USSR. He explained:

> In a…bureaucratic land of autocratic oppression, an awe-inspiring project for total resurrection and immortality was devised, of which exploration of

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[30] Federov's projectivism is unrelated to projectivism in Western philosophy which is related to "projecting" cognition onto our experience of the world. Richard Joyce, "Moral Anti-Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/moral-anti-realism/ (accessed 18th November 2014).

[31] Young, *The Russian Cosmists,* p.79.

the Cosmos was only a small detail. It was created quietly, modestly and with no claim to individual authorship but without indulging in half-formed intuitions, dreams, thoughts or measures.[32]

Federov's writings had not only been the subject of suppression in Tsarist Russia: the 1970s and 1980s saw intense debate over the appropriateness of publishing Federov, and *The Philosophy of the Common Task* only appeared in a heavily redacted form.[33] Kantor's thinly veiled allusion to designers' conditions in Soviet Russia emphasized the necessity of continuing to produce utopian design: design that would continue to imagine better forms of social existence in a technological society. Vladimir Sokolov, who participated in the *Cosmic Cultural Centre* project, saw its critical potential as analogous to the Strugatskii brothers' science fiction books that were read by millions. Demonstrating that a design project was grounded in science was an important way of avoiding open conflict with the authorities:

> 'It wasn't the right thing to become a dissident at that time…much of the work appeared abstract and conceptual, but the guys there worked very well with the ideology…. They did the right thing because in principle closing the studio would have been like shooting fish in a barrel.'[34]

Konik's exhibition project expressed nostalgia for the socialist-communist utopia and its strategic use of time. Unlike the Strugatskiis, who used allegory as a form of

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[32] Kantor, 'Dizain bez illiuzii,' p.17.

[33] See N. K. Gavriushchin, 'A byl-li "Russkii kosmizm"?' *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki,* 1993/3, pp.104-105.

[34] Interview with Vladimir Sokolov, Irkutsk, April 2014.

critique to overcome official censorship,[35] Senezh studio elaborated on its own utopian strategies developed since 1964. Whereas allegory acts through critical replication of the present conditions, the 'projective,' guarantees the utopian status of its product by opening a window to an alternative future through the imagining of alternate forms of social existence.

The *Cosmic Cultural Centre*, with its focus on the relationship between myth making and scientific achievement did not seek to replicate the teleological technical world-view that accompanied much rhetoric of the space race. Its representation of space culture showed artists' utopias as constituent elements of scientific progress. Federov believed holy icons to be 'projective models' that might act as 'portals to a higher reality,'[36] and designers at Senezh found their own windows to the future. They saw projective models in great works of art and design.

Icons of the future

As part of the *Cosmic Cultural* Centre project, Vladimir Tatlin's *Letatlin* and *Monument to the Third International* were replicated as iconographic representations of invention (see image 36). Over the previous five years, the resurrection of Tatlin in the imagination of the Soviet intelligentsia served as an example of how unrealized design projects resonated beyond their time. As part of the *Paris-Moscow 1900-1930* exhibition brought to Moscow's Pushkin Museum by the Pompidou Centre in 1981, a reconstructed Letatlin floated above the heads of visitors and a reconstructed Tatlin tower stood in the museum courtyard (image 37).

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[35] See Elena Gomel, 'The Poetics of Censorship: Allegory as Form and Ideology in the Novels of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky,' *Science Fiction Studies*, 22/1 (1995) pp.87-105.
[36] Young, *The Russian Cosmists,* p.80.

Image 36 | 'Letatlin' and the 'Monument to the Third International' at the Cosmic Cultural Centre, Senezh studio led by Mark Konik and the consultants R. Seifullaev, V. Glazychev and P. Polushchuk, 1980.

The positioning of these figures above a suspended walkway shows how art and its ideals must be included within histories of science, invention and exploration. The juxtaposition of these images against a photographic backdrop alludes to the possibility of their continuous re-contextualisation, and status as popular icons that transcend the circumstances of their creation.

Source: Mark Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, 2004, p.189.

Image 37 | Letatlin on display at the *Paris-Moscow* exhibition, Pushkin Museum, 1981.

Source: Karl Kantor, 'Dizain bez iliuzii,' *DI SSSR* 1981/10, pp.15-18.

Tatlin was already well known among designers at Senezh, initially thanks to Larissa Zhadova who had delivered lectures on the Russian avant-garde at the studio since its inception.[37] In 1977, Rozenblium and his students designed and staged the first public exhibition of Tatlin since the 1930s. It was held at the House of Literature[38] in Moscow and combined materials from the Central State Archives of Literature and Art, the Tretiakov Gallery and some smaller museums.[39] The centrepiece of the show was a reconstructed model of the *Monument to the Third International*. Its construction was overseen by architect Tevel' Shapiro who had participated in the construction of the original model in 1921.[40]

Since the late 1970s, Tatlin's tower has been reconstructed and reinterpreted by artists and architects as a symbol of revolution, change and ingenuity. Works include Iulii Perevezentsev's series of tower drawings[41] (1977), Leonid Sokov's *Mother and Child* (1986)[42] Iurii Avakuumov and Iurii Kuzmin's *Red Tower* (1986-1988),[43] Il'ia and Emilia Kabakov's *The Palace of the Projects* (1995-2001).[44] Svetlana Boym hints at the idea of the projective in her analysis of the tower's ability to

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[37] Larissa Zhadova was the first person to research Constructivism during the Thaw, even before the eminent historian Selim-Khan Magamedov. See early issues of *DI SSSR* and *Tekhnicheskaia estetika.*

[38] It was possible to stage the exhibition at the Union of Writers' building because Zhadova's husband Konstantin Simonov was an extremely influential writer, editor and communist party member.

[39] Some materials from the exhibition catalogue are reproduced in Larissa Alekseevna Zhadova, *Tatlin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), pp. 437-443. See also the film *Kakaia interesnaia lichnost'* dir. By D. Chukovskii, Tsentral'noe TV, 1977. Russian State Cinema and Television Archive, [RGAKFD], d. 34978.

[40] V. Loginov, 'Like a Poem in Metal,' *Pravda,* 22nd May 1977 cit. *Tatlin* ed. Larissa Alekseevna Zhadova, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988) p.442.

[41] See Iuriii Gerchuk, 'Iulii Perevezentsev,' *Sovetskaia Grafika 77* (Moscow 1979) pp.84-92

[42] See Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press; 2008), p.64.

[43] Y. Avvakumov and Y. Kuzin, "Red Tower 1986-1988," Russian Utopia: A Depository, Available online at http://www.utopia.ru/english/item.phtml?id=167&type=graphics&sortby= date&start=300? [accessed 18th November 2014].

[44] Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern,* p.68.

move between the boundaries of art and life, a relationship that forms the basis of its later re-interpretation in paper architecture and non-conformist art. Boym writes: '"Project," in the case of the tower, was not an end in itself, but neither was it an impasse. It was a crucible of possibilities and inspirations, not a utilitarian blueprint.'[45] This relates closely to Ricoeur's concept of the constitutive utopia that is a conscious product of the social imagination that may simultaneously act in constructive and destructive ways.[46]

The later artworks inspired by Tatlin's tower incorporate the construction as a symbol or as a framework to be altered in order to comment on what is normally understood as a failed project of socialist modernity. The projective ideal is located only in the original tower, not in its offspring. In later interpretations, the tower is a sourcebook for the exploration of utopia, nostalgia and memory that might variously be incorporated into a broader artistic statement. At Senezh, on the other hand, Tatlin's tower remained an apotheosis of the ideal project. The value of the tower was in the process of its creation rather than the end result. Rozenblium wrote:

> Tatlin's unbuilt tower is an example of "pure" artistic projecteering. If the artist creates a project, its significance inevitably transcends the boundary of a particular given task…it retains its vital significance even without being built.[47]

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[45] Ibid. p.23.

[46] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986) p.3.

[47] Evgenii Rozenblium, *Khudozhnik v dizaine: Opyt raboty tsentral'noi uchebno–eksperimental'noi studii khudozhestvennogo proektirovaniia na Senezhe* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p.17.

At the 1977 Tatlin exhibition, one commentator immediately grasped the significance of the monument and its associations with creative freedom that reaches beyond the present, declaring, 'the whole of it is like an upward thrust of the dialectical spiral of history conceived by the author as a symbol of revolutionary liberation…it captivates by its synthesis of both the rebellious and life-asserting spirit of the revolution.' [48] This expressed longing for an emancipatory art that could only exist in semi-official spaces such as Senezh.

Democracy underground

The marginality of 'parallel science' and its role in forming individual consciousness was explored in a 1977 design for an aptly named *Underground Cultural Centre* (images 38-42). This was a representation of an alternative universe of knowledge outside of state controlled media that could be freely explored by the individual. The imaginary centre was situated below ground close the official cultural institutions of the Pushkin Museum, 'Leninka' State Library and the Lomonosov State University.[49] The visitor enters through an open book in a typical derelict courtyard and descends a staircase devoted to Renaissance humanism. The visitor would then arrive in a labyrinth of tunnels through which they travel between fragments of civilization hidden in the earth. The labyrinth also provides access to spaces intended for a range of creative activity and communication. These includes clubs, offices, studios, a café, a disco, exhibition galleries, a library, restaurants, cinema halls, theatres and shops. There is a space devoted to Leonardo Da Vinci conceptualized as a 'hymn to the future,' where

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[48] 'A Tower-Monument,' *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7th November 1977 cit. Zhadova, *Tatlin*, p.443.
[49] Ironically, this is now the site of a giant underground shopping centre constructed during the 1990s.

Images 38 - 39 | Underground
Cultural Centre, Senezh Studio,
Moscow, 1977.

The visitor enters through a
book, which acts as a portal to
another world. The staircase they
descend allows the viewer to
absorb the value of renaissance
humanism. The use of
photomontage and bricolage
expresses the underlying
message of the project: that man
should be free to assemble their
own narratives in order to
understand their own
relationship to the collective and
human culture.

Source: Mark Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi
masterskoi*, 2004, p.189.

Image 40 | Structural fragment of Underground Cultural Centre, Senezh Studio, 1977

The labyrinth of staircases and tunnels underscores the visitor's free choice to link ideas across time and geographical space. The photograph underscores the tenet of artistic projecteering that the interconnection of knowledge can often only be expressed in an abstract and spatial manner.

Source: Mark Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, 2004, p.166

Image 41 | The *Gargantua Café*, Underground Cultural Centre, Senezh Studio, 1977.

This *Rabelais* themed café is one of many moments when the visitor is invited to experience the carnivalesque and freedom from social hierarchies and everyday moral convention.

Source: Mark Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, 2004, p.166

visitors could feel themselves to be 'a direct descendent of the spiritual values of Renaissance experience.'[50] Travelling further, possibly through a pyramid where one could take part in Egyptian sun rituals, the visitor might find themselves in a medieval crowd described in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (republished in 1965), where he introduced his theory of the carnivalesque – a state of being where social hierarchies disappear and sacrilegious events may go unpunished. The visitor might then stumble across a 'Telecollage' of screens showing live broadcasts from capital cities from across the planet to help the visitor comprehend their 'one-sided view' of the world.[51] Throughout the cultural centre, studios and theatres enable visitors to produce creative responses to the experience of visiting the centre, which was designed to 'give our contemporaries the possibility of an experimental sojourn in the history of culture and to give him the reason and means to experience the diverse and accessible modes of historical consciousness.'[52]

The construction of an environment where the viewers are encouraged to move freely and construct their own meanings can be understood in relation to what Fred Turner has coined the 'democratic surround.'[53] While democracy was not explicitly discussed at the studio, it is possible to trace the concept of the democratic individual and their environment to influential thinkers and designers in the USA.

Turner describes the democratic surround as a type of media environment that arose as a result of debates among the American left that began in the 1930s in

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[50] Mark Konik, 'Ob odnom proekte,' in *Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: K 20-letiiu TsUES Shx SSSR 1985,* ed. V. R. Aronov (Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1987) pp.90-107 (pp.97-98).

[51] Ibid. p.101

[52] Ibid.p.93.

[53] Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychadelic Sixties* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Image 42 | Display of simultaneous television broadcasts in the Ungerground Cultural Centre, Senezh Studio, 1977.

This is perhaps the studio's clearest expression of the concept Fred Turner has called 'the democratic surround' (see main text). Simultaneous television broadcasts from across the globe allow the viewer to simultaneously comprehend the diversity of perspectives on global culture, as an antidote to Soviet mass media. The physical structure of the globe produces a 'surround' in which the viewer is forced to physically redirect their gaze to actively absorb information. A grey ring displaying the names of international organisations physically holds the globe together. Visible in this shot is the United Nations, and the International Council of Societies of Industrial design, whose congress and Interdesign workshops were important events for enabling direct communication and partnership across the iron curtain. In the bottom-right, we see figures dancing. One important aim of the centre was to enable the visitor to creatively interpret what they had seen.

Source: Mark Konik, 'Ob odnom proekte,' *DI*, 2001/1, p.53.

reaction to the rise of fascism (and to a lesser extent State socialism) in Europe, and the threat it posed within America. The American left was concerned by the psychological manipulation of the German populous using mass media. In his book, Turner shows how World War Two exhibitions at MOMA, happenings at Black Mountain College, and the presentation of the USA as a multi-racial and free state was expressed spatially, in what he calls 'surrounds.' These spaces came about partly thanks to the influence of former Bauhaus tutors including Bayer, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius and Albers. A similar technique to that employed in the Senezh telecollage can be seen in Herbert Bayer's walk-in globe, designed for the 1943 MOMA exhibition *Airways to Peace* − which placed the viewer at the centre of the earth and encouraged them to change their perception on the earth as a single, and potentially peaceful, entity (image 43). This was an early attempt to spatially stimulate what thinkers like Margaret Mead viewed as the psychology of democratic citizens. Turner explains:

> Part of this work meant training the senses in the arts of seeing and hearing the social world. But it also meant training a deeper faculty, one that could perceive the layers of order underlying society, nature and the material world. These layers might be formally invisible to the senses, but they could be sensed nonetheless, in the process of interaction.[54]

Central to this concept of the democratic individual is the idea of process, as 'to be free, individuals need not enjoy unlimited choices. Rather, they needed to enjoy unimpeded access to the *process of choosing* from the possibilities arrayed before

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[54] Ibid., p.66.

Image 43 | Walk-in globe, Herbert Beyer, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1943.

This globe is an early example of what Fred Turner calls a 'surround,' in this case encouraging the viewer to gain a birds' eye view of the globe and reflect on the inter-connectedness of world cultures. It was the same Bauhaus approach to psychological perception at Senezh that led to the creation of a similar globe (image 42).

Source: Unknown Photographer, *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, 11/1 (1943) p.9

them.'[55] A classic example of this can be seen in Charles and Ray Eames' seven-screen documentary film *Glimpses of the USA* that was shown in Moscow during the 1959 American exhibition in Moscow. The USSR became a key target for such installations as, following the defeat of the Nazis, it was the Soviets who were most prone to the effects of mass media and propaganda that could produce authoritarian personalities. The installation, which showed documentary footage portraying a range of aspects of life in the USA was designed to present the Soviet viewer with an alternative to mass-propaganda and train the viewer in developing a democratic consciousness, as 'only by surrounding the eye with new images and offering the individual a chance to link them together…could designers ask individuals to become psychologically whole.'[56]

The idea was absorbed by members of the Soviet design community, including the film-makers Iurii Sobolev and Iurii Reshetnikov. Sobolev and Reshetnikov were responsible for producing a multi-screen installation for the 1975 congress of ICSID [International Society for Councils of Industrial Design], hosted by VNIITE in Moscow (see image 44). This Eames-inspired production was intended to be shown before each session of the congress, and though a saturation of images, encourage the viewer to critique the design profession's close relationship to consumerism.[57] The display included themes explored two years later in the *Underground Cultural Centre*: images from Renaissance paintings, advertisements from 1975 consumer goods catalogues and live television broadcasts.

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[55] Ibid., p.123
[56] Ibid., p.256
[57] Andres Kurg, 'The global design crisis and the multimedia programme for the ICSID '75 international design congress in Moscow,' *Designing Socialist Modernity*, London, 22nd May 2012, Unpublished Conference Paper.

Image 44 | Rehearsal of multi-media presentation for ICSID, Iurii Sobolev and Iurii Reshetnikov, 1975.

This multi-screen installation allowed the eye to drift between the present and the past so that the viewer forms their own historical narratives from a selection of inputs decided by the authors.

Source: Anna Romanova and Galina Metalichenko-Soboleva, 'The Islands of Yuri Sobolev,' Moscow Museum of Modern Art. Available online at http://www.mmoma.ru/en/exhibitions/ermolaevsky/the_islands_of_yuri_sobolev/ [accessed 30th October 2015]

The Senezh project replicated this idea but added a degree of spatial dynamism that links back to theories of psychological perception explored at the Bauhaus. This arrangement followed the logic of the studio's compositional exercises that encouraged the artist to develop a deeper understanding of the attribution of meaning within space. Thus, a direct link between the American concept of the democratic personality developed in the 1940s, and the notion of the individual as a member of a collective at Senezh can be established through the history of three-dimensional multi-media 'surrounds.'

Konik's project proposed the active formation of new types of knowledge that self-consciously alluded to the fact of its development 'underground.' This can be seen in the fact that Sobolev and Reshetnikov's multimedia presentation was only shown in a rehearsal, before the authorities confiscated the materials. In the late Soviet period, 'underground' referred to discussions at kitchen tables, at after-hours university discussion groups or in the district boiler rooms (which were often physically below the earth) where individuals could work as technicians a couple of nights per week and spend the rest of their time pursuing other interests in unofficial academia, art or music.[58]

Ironically referring to these projects as 'easel projecteering' [*stankovoe proektirovanie*] Konik wrote, 'We designed projects as if they were addressed to ourselves and

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[58] On the phenomenon of the boiler room technician [*kochegar'*] see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 2005) pp.151-155.

designed for ourselves.'[59] This was a group of intellectuals who did not identify with Soviet official culture, but with what Maxim Waldstein has defined 'parallel science' that saw itself as 'a moral community of "high" and non-official culture bearing intellectuals.'[60] Senezh acted as a node in this lively network of unofficial culture that included culturology and methodological philosophy. At Senezh, interaction with guest speakers from across the 'parallel sciences' and humanities played an important role in knowledge production. Titova explained how the interaction between guest speakers and the designers themselves was an importance part of knowledge production not only for designers, but for the lecturers themselves: 'Everything they wrote came into being at these lectures…we were witnesses to the creative process of these people who created their works before the eyes of the audience.[61]'

The Underground Cultural Centre would act as a form of surround that mimicked the conditions of Senezh studio, where designers from provincial cities were presented with an array of new forms of knowledge. The active formation of new types of cultural perception could only exist within certain niches, away from the influence of mass media and top-down propaganda. However, like the 'labyrinth' that connected the different zones of the centre: the theatres, libraries and studios – these niches were connected and formed an underground eco-system of knowledge and creative practice.

Maiakovskii square as a theatre of future urbanity

The *Cosmic Cultural Centre* and *Underground Cultural Centre* both express nostalgia for

[59] Mark Konik, 'O sebe i svoem dele' in *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi: Senezhskie opyty* ed. Mark Konik (Moscow: Indeks dizain, 2004) pp.13-35 (p.17).
[60] Maxim Waldstein, *The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics* (Saarbrücken: VCM Verlag, 2008), p.10.
[61] Interview with Natalia Titova, Moscow, October 2013.

the Thaw, when the free discourse that was necessary to creatively construct a new socialist society seemed possible. Yet, the retreat from the futurology and utopianism of the 1960s did not preclude an optimism that the ideals of the Thaw may return in the future. While aspects of the utopias produced during the Thaw that presented alternative futures were resurrected in Konik's projects, they also reflected on the fragility of such hopes. A project designed for Maiakovskii square questioned whether the Thaw had been an illusion. As a location for the sharing of 'underground' knowledge during the Thaw, it became an important site of dissent following arrests of intellectuals who gathered on the square. The 1977 project explored the nature of information exchange in the urban environment by proposing a technologically advanced environment of the future that was simultaneously informed by contemporaneous perceptions of the Renaissance city. It formed part of a commentary on the necessity to continue to design for future generations despite the malaise and inertia of the government. It was also vicariously linked to the repression of theorist Georgii Shchedrovitskii – thus linking the fate of the Soviet design profession to issues of dissent under Brezhnev. His story is illuminating in the way it links intellectual dissidence at the end of the Thaw to issues of public space and to the loss of the futurological impulse in Soviet design. Before I proceed to a visual analysis of the project, it is necessary to provide background information about the repression of Shchedrovitskii and his relationship to the square and its history as a site of free assembly during the Thaw.

Under Brezhnev, the futurological impulses of the Thaw were officially replaced by the doctrine of developed socialism which was 'viewed as a long-term intermediary stage preceding the emergence of full communism,' and was 'devoid

of the tone of quick-paced, voluntarist activism which marked the Khrushchev years.'[62] The decline of futurological thought in the design profession was closely linked to the silencing of liberal reformist intellectuals across the sciences and humanities. Prognosis had been seen as a key part of design activity at VNIITE during the 1960s and early 1970s.[63] Attempts were made to integrate sociological research with design by the sociologist Iurii Levada and the institute VNIIKS who studied future consumer need through demographic research and consumer surveys.[64] Gordon L. Rocca's study of the Soviet Scientific Forecasting Association shows how a broad range of activities in social forecasting that developed during the late 1960s were followed by a series of purges of social scientists from 1971-1975 whose predictions had violated party dogma. [65] If social scientists' contributions had inspired a range of futurological design projects in the late 1960s, the party's reassertion of ownership of the future in the following decade would imply that futurological design could not deviate from planned forecasts.

The fate of Shchedrovitskii vividly demonstrates the brutal crushing of the ambitions of future-minded intellectuals during the Thaw. As discussed in chapter 3, Shchedrovitskii was the figurehead of the Moscow Methodological Circle, whose informal seminars constituted a native school of logic in philosophy. His project of mapping the epistemological requirements of the design profession was halted following his dismissal from VNIITE in 1969, ostensibly for writing an

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[62] Donald R. Kelley, *The Politics of Developed Socialism: The Soviet Union as a Post-Industrial State* (New York, Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.4.

[63] See Aleksandr Riabushin, *Nauchno-tekhnicheskii progress, urbanizatsiia, zhilishche,* (Moscow: VNIITE, 1974).

[64] See Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, vol. 47, no.1/2, pp.227-68 (pp.250-251).

[65] Gordon L. Rocca, '"A Second Party in Our Midst": the History of the Soviet Scientific Forecasting Association,' *Social Studies of Science,* 11/2 (1981), pp.199-247.

article published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* entitled *Demonstrative science or self-deception?* In the article, he argued that Soviet sociology remained an ill-defined and purposeless subject, thus rendering contemporaneous empirical research meaningless. In short, he meant that if the results of sociological studies had to conform to pre-existing party dogma, there was no reason to carry out the research. As a result of this article and his connection to dissidents described below, he was prevented from publishing a series of books on pedagogy and logic, as well as two monographs on design methodology he had been preparing at VNIITE with his colleagues Oleg Genisaretskii, Viacheslav Glazychev and Vitalii Dubrovskii.[66] In 1969 he was given a job at Senezh studio, where he continued to work on design methodology until he found a new job in 1974 (see image 45).

Shchedrovitskii's dismissal was not a result of his critique of Soviet sociology. He was also linked to dissident writers of the Thaw who attempted to communicate their ideas in public space. His former students Iurii Galanskov and Aleksandr Ginzburg, advocates of public free speech, were sentenced to hard labour in a high profile 1966 show trial.[67] These advocates of free speech had been active organisers in unsanctioned meetings that took place on Maiakovskii Square during the Thaw.

On 28th June 1958, a statue of the futurist poet Maiakovskii was unveiled on the square. As Chantal Sundaram has explained, the Maiakovskii legend animated may of the contradictions of the Thaw. The intelligentsia lauded him for his

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[66] See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap, 2009), p320. This work of Shchedrovitsky and his colleagues was finally published in 2004 in O. I Genisaretskii and E.M. Buzunova (eds.) *Teoreticheskie i metodologicheskie issledovanie v dizaine: Izbrannye materialy* (Moscow: Shkola Kul'turnoi Politiki, 2004).
[67] Galanskov was sentenced to seven years, while Ginzburg received five.

sincerity and creativity, as well as the contempt he showed for the regime in his refusal to adapt to Stalin's cultural policies. For the government of the late 1950s, he reflected the need to loosen ideological control, as well as the risk that this might 'open a "Pandora's box"' of more significant challenges to the regime.[68]

On the day of the statue's unveiling, invited individuals read aloud the poetry of Maiakovskii in a 'literary concert.' After the official part of the celebrations were over and encouraged by the limited liberalisations that had taken place in the years since Stalin's death, young people continued informally reading the poetry of Maiakovskii as well as that of other poets whose work had either been banned or not approved by the censors. Vladimir Bukovskii, a leading dissident of the 1960s and 1970s, remembers the significance of the readings taking place in the city:

> A multitude of incredibly diverse people began to assemble on the 'Maiak' (Maiakovskii square)…There were young people everywhere who were interested in unofficial and semi-official poetry. The poetry readings right there on the square, in the middle of the city, produced an extraordinary atmosphere.[69]

What began with the reading of unsanctioned poems developed into a regular open-air meeting for the reformist youth of the Thaw. The square facilitated the formation of different groups of individuals interested in unofficial aspects of

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[68] Chantal Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture: The Soviet State and the Maiakovskii Legend 1930-1993,' (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2000), p.186.

[69] Vladimir Bukovskii, 'Gaid-park po-sovetskii,' in Liudmila Poliskova, *My predchuvstvie… predtecha…: Ploshchad' Maiakovskogo 1958–1965* (Moscow: Zeven'ia, 1997) pp.8–22 (p.9).

history, philosophy and politics and many other subjects. Additionally, the square was among the first sites in Moscow where samizdat literature was regularly circulated. The act of participating in an unsanctioned mass meeting in a high profile public space must have been thrilling. However, after news of these gatherings had reached the foreign press in 1961, the KGB put an end to the meeting and denounced the leaders in the press.

Among those who attended meetings on the square were Shchedrovitskii's former students Iurii Galanskov and Aleksandr Ginzburg. They were members of the literary group SMOG, who revived meetings on the square in April 1965 in the form of political demonstrations where members of the group demanded 'the right to discuss ideas freely and to set up their own press [and] the release of [Vladimir] Bukovskii, who had been imprisoned in a psychiatric institution for organizing a protest of the 1965 arrest of the dissident writers Siniavskii and Daniel.'[70]

Shchedrovitskii became entwined in this affair when Galanskov and Ginzburg were themselves arrested for the samizdat publication of *The White Book*, which contained transcripts of Siniavskii and Daniel's 1966 show trial, an event which signalled the end of the Thaw in the eyes of many. In 1968, Shchedrovitskii was expelled from the communist party for signing a letter in support of his former students. This was an immediate prelude to his forced exit from VNIITE over his article on the state of Soviet sociology for *Literaturnaia gazeta.*

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[70] Sundaram, 'Manufacturing Culture,' p.226.

The 1977 project led by Konik imagined the reconstruction of Maiakovskii square (now known as Triumphal square) in central Moscow.[71] The design for the square took its inspiration from the theatres that surrounded it. The approach to the theatres was reconfigured and decorated with murals of Shakespeare, a court jester and a cherub. The square itself was to be covered in a layer of golden blocks that could be raised and lowered by pneumatics. A coloured light was positioned on each of the blocks. Like in other projects, the projecteers alluded to the street culture of the renaissance: figures cut out from Breughel's *Children's Games.* The project thus blended high technology with images of Renaissance urban life (see images 46-49).

The square was conceived as a site of information exchange and embodiment of information networks that extended far beyond the reach of the party. In an article about the project, Kantor questioned whether modern mass media precluded the need for a public square. Kantor cited mass communications as a reason for the decline of the square as a site of collective communication where one might be informed of important events and gain a general feeling of belonging to an urban collective. He wrote:

> Today, in order to enter into enter into universal communication, man
> must turn to sources of mass information – to radio, television and
> newspapers. And to do this he doesn't need to go to the square, but leave it

[71] Archival material indicates that a project for the square was commissioned in 1975 and exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial of theatre design of that year. However, it seems likely that Konik's project was a later follow-on project undertaken at a subsequent seminar for a research institute for spectators' and sports facilities. See TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Doumenty o rabote sektsii (otchety, spravka, svedeniia) Imeetsia otchet o rabote sektsii s maia 1973 g. po ianvar' (1975), RGALI f.2082, op.6 d.1533, l.8.

Image 46 | Overview of a project for Mayakovsky Square, Senezh Studio, 1977

On the right is the redesigned courtyard that links the several theatres on the sight. In this version, the main square on the left is presented as a series of golden slabs. The project followed the reconstruction of the square when Moscow's Garden Ring road was redirected underneath the square, as shown in the model.

Source: Mark Konik, *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi*, p.149

Image 47 | Theatre Courtyard adjacent to Mayakovsky Square, Senezh Studio, 1977

Source: Karl Kantor, 'Proektnaia ideia ploshchadi,' *DI SSSR* 1977/6, pp.19-27.

Image 48-49 | System of Pneumatic Blocks on Mayakovsky Square, Senezh Studio, 1977

The coloured system of pneumatic blocks is an example of an adaptable environment according to the principles of 'open-form.' The changing coloured lights would also enable the mood to be changed depending upon the occasion. The use of light and colour was part of an attempt to bring theatre back into the street.

Source: Source: Karl Kantor, 'Proektnaia ideia ploshchadi,' *DI SSSR* 1977/6, pp.19-27.

and remove himself from the spiders' web of anonymous contacts. Breaking himself away from the limited and spontaneous gathering of people on the square, in domestic solitude, man finds the possibility of entering into enriching, albeit indirect contact with the entire world. In order to do that, man no longer needs a square.[72]

Although he was ostensibly discussing advances in telecommunications technology, Kantor was referring to the removal of critical discourse from the public sphere to the private sphere. Maiakovskii square had been an important site for the sharing of knowledge that was repressed during the Stalin years and lay dormant in the dispersed collective memory. During the Thaw, it had briefly been a site of open and free public discourse that indicated possible future models of social interaction. At the other end of the scale was television, which the authorities feared would engender passivity in the viewer because it required no engagement with the physical world.[73] Kantor tapped into these publically voiced concerns about the effects of mass media and television on the collective, but did not explicitly refer to the differences between state controlled media, mass public events such as parades and festivals, and the gathering of dissidents that took place on Maiakovskii square during the Thaw. The reader could infer that the urban environment may enable citizens to escape the influence of mass-media (i.e. propaganda) through participation in alternative information networks that formed in public space. In common with the projects described in chapter 3, theatre was used as a model for proposing experimental modes of human interaction in public space.

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[72] Karl Kantor, 'Proektnaia ideia ploshchadi,' *DI SSSR*, 1977/6, pp.19-27.
[73] Kristin Roth-ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.205.

Theatricalization was associated with a romanticised view of the Renaissance square that had become a mainstream subject of interest among architects whose retrospectivist tendencies were criticised by the likes of Kantor and Konik. In 1978, for example, an exhibition was staged by the Italian historian Vittorio Franchetti Padro in Moscow's Pushkin Museum entitled *Theatrical Space in 15th-17th Century Florence*.[74] At a conference held to coincide with the conference, the liberating effects of theatricalized spatial configurations was highlighted by several speakers who examined the role of the square as a stage in Europe and Moscow between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[75]

However, the ideal of the Renaissance city also tapped into discourses on the ideal of humanist collectivity that, the reader could infer, was denied by the authorities' grip on public space and life. Art historian Maria Beliaeva explains how, 'in this decade a young generation of artists turned to metaphor and intellectual play, to mysticism and the theatricalization of reality to aesthetic and narrative [*siuzhetnyi*] retrospection.'[76] In the design for Maiakovskii Square, theatricalization of the environment was supposed to facilitate human interaction and the discovery of culture, ideals and knowledge. Kantor wrote that 'The humanist culture of the Renaissance…is one of the most radical destructions of ancient tradition in history. It is a culture that elevates the individual above culture…[77]' The Thaw

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[74] *Teatral'noe prostranstvo vo Florentsii XV–XVII vekov.* See E. Danilovoi (ed.), *Teatral'noe prostranstvo: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii 1978* (Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1979) p.4

[75] See A. G Rappaport, 'Prostranstvo teatra i prostranstvo goroda v Evrope XVI-XVII vv. in ibid. pp.202-214 and B. B. Mikhailov, 'Ploshchad' I stsena v Moskve XVIII veka,' in ibid. pp.253-262

[76] Maria Baliaeva, 'K novomu iazyku stankovogo iskusstva 1970-1980-e gody,' in *Ot avangarda do postmodernizma: Mastera iskusstva XX veka* ed. Lidiia Iovleva (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia tret'iakovskaia galereia, 2006), pp.151-2 (p.151).

[77] Karl Kantor, 'Rennesans i my,' *SI SSSR*, 1988/1, pp.29-30.

was a time for the rediscovery and reinterpretation of ancient cultures. The circulation of suppressed books, poems, and histories on Maiakovskii square in the 1960s was perceived as analogous to the rediscovery of antiquity during the Renaissance.[78]

The presence of figures cut and pasted from Breughel paintings therefore forms part of an archaist academic discourse among those in the parallel humanities that engaged discussions of the past in order to critique the present. While those invoking the Renaissance in a purely retrospective sense were accused of creating a 'style of childish revelry;'[79] the use of figures from Breughel's *Children's Games* links an idealized past with a utopian future. In the imaginations of the designers, this was linked to the idea that the square could become a dynamically transforming stage that would produce multiple settings for interaction between individuals.

While the Breughel figures represent an idealisation of the Renaissance urban collective; the system of pneumatic blocks and lights upon which they were placed resembles a modern multi-media environment. The 'stage' they in habit resembles a theatre designed by Polish architect Oskar Hansen, whose development of the reform modernist strategy of open form had inspired Rozenblium to apply this concept to industrial design during the 1960s (see chapter 3). The unrealized design for the *Józef Szajna Studio* (image 50) in Warsaw was composed of a series of movable platforms that could be adjusted to meet the specific needs of a production. This was designed to facilitate Szajna's "Open Theatre" concept of

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Nikita Voronov, 'Stil' detskikh grez,' *DI SSSR*, 1981/1, pp.24-26.

Image 50 | Model for the *Józef Szajna Studio Theatre*, Oskar Hansen, Warsaw, c.1975.

This model, exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial for theatre design was a likely influence for Konik's return to open form in the concept for Mayakovsky Square. The concept of open-theatre was to blur the boundary between spectator and actor. This dynamic space was supposed to be housed in Warsaw's monumental Palace of Culture and Science.

Source: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and Igor Hansen.

breaking down the fourth wall and removing 'any borders between actor and spectator.'[80] At the Szajna Studio, technology was engaged in theatre as an 'affirmation of life.'[81] His shows 'used music, sound, life, gymnastics, rituals and baroque visual inventions to explore the relationship between biography, creativity and history,'[82] in events that sound very much like the multimedia 'happenings' that were by then a mainstay of US counterculture. It is likely that designers at Senezh knew of Hansen's design after its exhibition at the 1975 Prague Quadrennial of theatre design[83] where an earlier iteration of the Maiakovskii square project had been exhibited.[84]

Here emerges a partial continuity between the concept of open-form at the studio in the 1960s and its use during the late 1970s. In both circumstances, open form is a means of liberating the individual personality from the monumental, and allowing the environment to adapt to support the needs of the individual. The difference in approach can be seen in the total absence of interest in non-artistic labour in Konik's project. Open form became a potential means of supporting communication between individuals in a manner assisted by technologies that produce a heightened theatricality, and thus heightened awareness of the social construction of human interaction.

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[80] Aleksandra Kędziorek, 'The Studio Theater,' in *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism On Open Form, Art and Didactics* ed. Aleksandra Kędziorek and Łukasz Ronduda (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014), pp.167-168.

[81] Tony Howard and Tomasz Łubienski, 'The Theatres of Jozef Szájna,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 19 (August 1989) pp.24-263 (p.258).

[82] Ibid., p.259.

[83] Materials in Rozenblium's personal archive suggest that he visited the Quadrennial at least once, in 1979. On theatre architecture exhibited at the Prague Quadrenniale, see Vladimir Adamczyk, 'Theatre Architectrue at the Prague Quadrennial,' in *A Mirror of World Theatre: The Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991* by Vera Ptáčková (Prague: Theatre Institute Prague, 1995) pp.329-360 (p.336 on Hansen).

[84] See TsUES SKh SSSR, 'Dokumenty… s maia 1973 g. po ianvar' 1975 g,' l.8.

This theatrical concept of adaptable urban space thus extends the concept of the surround from a curated media environment to an endlessly adaptable space that can facilitate the production of new types of knowledge. Whereas a surround is a controlled environment where the individual is *trained* as a free-thinking member of society, the theatrical space of Maiakovskii square is less determinist in the social interaction it facilitates: the individual does not choose from a series of messages presented by the artist, but is free to engage in the information networks manifested by the assembled public. It was precisely this type of uncontrolled interaction that worried the authorities, even at the height of the Thaw.

The scheme is also projective, in the sense that it could be of no use in present social reality. The system of pneumatic blocks proposed for Maiakovskii Square would allow the urban environment to adapt in response to changing political climates. It maintains continuity with the Studio's activities during the 1960s by arguing that technology retains its potential to be a humanizing force – in this case by allowing the urban fabric to adapt to form stages for speeches and performances alongside intimate public space that might be required in the event of another Thaw. The technology could only function in the event of a liberalization of public life and discourse, otherwise the stage would move without purpose. Its absurd physical and colour transformations would expose the limitations of free speech. Only a liberalization of public life could change the functionality of the project from discursive to utilitarian.

Conclusion

The three projects discussed in this chapter articulate the temporal aspect of Mannheim's socialist-communist utopia, where the future is consciously prepared in the present, in continual reference to the past. The necessity of continuing to design for the future is evidenced through the inclusion of ideas and motifs from the past, demonstrating the transmission of cultural knowledge through time. The fact that these projects could not be realised at the time of their invention reinforces their temporal articulation. Like Tatlin's tower or Da Vinci's flying machine, the projects were valid as materializations of the collective minds of those who constructed the models. Defending their practice (and by extension the entire discipline of artistic projecteering) against accusations of infeasibility, Kantor explained, 'It has an active effect on our relationship to reality, helping us to internally comprehend our cultural ideals.'[85]

The temporal strategy engaged in each of these projects articulates a relationship where the past is valued as a repository of ideas that may be borrowed from and added to by the present generation. In the present, landscapes of free speech and cultural discovery highlighted the current impossibility of meeting in public and freely circulating information. The fact that these projects could not be built due to the cultural and political climate guarantees their utopian status. However, the principle of the surround demonstrates the possibility that for the time being, design could play a role in training free-thinking sensibilities. Designers at Senezh continued to hope that one day they could design a world that reflects the wishes

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[85] Kantor, 'Proektnaia ideia ploshchadi', p.27.

of a collective composed of individuals capable of constructing their own understandings and narratives of the world in which they live.

Conclusion

> In the past twenty years we have seen highs and lows, illusions and the
> fulfilment of dreams, grief and the joys of creating one of the most complex
> artistic professions that has come to be known as artistic projecteering. In
> short, everything in life that is not written by historians but by direct
> participants will reveal that each of us has our own heroes, our own
> perspectives and our own memories…
>
>   - Natalia Titova, 1985[1]

When I began this project, my aim was to write 'a history' of Senezh studio. This task quickly revealed itself to be as impossible. What was the studio, and what would a history of it look like? Is Senezh studio a physical location? A meeting place? The people who attended? Its leaders? Its bureaucratic structure? The broader practice of artistic projecteering? The initial phase of the project involved a long search for materials in periodicals and personal collections in the hope of reassembling elements of the visual record of the studio's history that had disappeared in the early 1990s. In this respect I can only claim partial success: there is much more work to be done in reconstituting the studio's archive. In the projects I encountered, only a fraction of which are covered in this dissertation – I quickly realised I was being led by my own bias. From today's perspective, Konik's sincere approach to designing for an emancipated future might appear more noble and courageous than Rozenblium's projects that highlight the necessity to agitate urban preservation within the possibilities of the Soviet system.

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[1] Titova, Natalia, 'Dvadsat' let Senezhskoi studii,' in *Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: K 20-letiiu TsUES SKh SSSR 1985* ed. V. R. Aronov (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1987), pp.27-35 (p.27).

While I do not claim to have written the type of unbiased historical account imagined by Titova in 1985, I hope that my engagement with theories of utopia has at least provided a model upon which to fairly assess the aims and objective of different projects within the complex political and ideological environment of late socialism.

In particular, this method has revealed the need for great sensitivity in understanding how artistic projecteering, as a medium for expressing ways of humanising daily existence, strategically engaged time as a means for articulating alternative ways for the project to influence broader human consciousness. Studies of Soviet art and architecture have often sought to emphasize the abandonment of utopianism during the 1970s – which gave way either to irony, fantasy and semantic games.[2] A purely visual analysis of Senezh studio may have led to a similar conclusion: the earnest attempts to create Marxist machines during the 1960s are visually disparate from the museified environments and multimedia surrounds designed at the studio during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the repeated usage of methods such as open form is indicative of the continuity of the studio's ambition to promote the 'humanization of technological civilization,' not just between people and things, but 'through the humanization of relationships'[3] among people.

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[2] On conceptual artists' use of irony to expose 'truth in the midst of the official public life,' see Boris Groys, 'The Other Gaze: Russian Unnoficial Art's View of the Soviet World,' pp.55-89 in Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp.55-89. For secondary literature on fantasy in relation to paper architecture, see Heinrich Klotz (ed.,) *Paper Architecture: New Projects from the Soviet Union* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989). See also Ines Weizman, 'Dissidence Through Architecture,' *Architecture and Culture*, 2/1 (2014), pp.7-12.

[3] Karl Kantor, *Krasota i pol'za: Sotsiologicheskie voprosy material'no–khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1967), p.181.

A clearer understanding of such strategies emerges when projects are considered as *constitutive utopias.* The constitutive utopia was Ricoeur's attempt to define the social agency of utopias that exist as the 'result of a discourse of a group' rather than as 'a kind of literary work floating in the air.'[4] A utopia that constitutes new social realities is determined by its incongruence to ideology – and it is within this polarity that Ricoeur locates the social imagination.[5] In the case of Senezh studio, the critical agency of the social imagination is determined by degrees of incongruence to ideology and mainstream design practice. At Senezh, artistic methods were engaged as a humanist alternative to a technical world-view; however the target of these utopias changed depending on when and how it was thought alternative social realities could emerge.

My engagement with Mannheim and Ricoeur was an attempt to find conceptual tools with which to decipher the agency of Senezh projects. However, it is important to consider potential broader implications of these theories. The expressions of social imagination in Senezh projects were not merely those of a rarefied group of intelligentsia – they constituted the discourse of a group. The fact that this enthusiasm was felt more beyond the confines of the studio is evidenced by early work on machines of physical and scientific labour that were developed in collaboration with Siberian factories and the Siberian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The collective production of Senezh projects in groups of up to 30 artists also reveals a will to engage design as a means of constituting social change through the materialization of social imagination. The artists were often poorly trained prior to their arrival at the studio; however the

[4] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p.274.

[5] Ibid., p.3.

shared sincerity and idealism that had its roots in the culture of the Thaw artists to produce collectively authored alternatives to present-day social realities. The fact that the studio operated within a network of 'parallel science' indicates the currency of these ideas within a substantial section of the educated population too.

By reading critical design, architecture and urbanism as expressions of social imagination, we can better understand their potential meanings for a broad section of society who would not have considered themselves dissidents merely because they were communicating critical ideas. This thesis has introduced many examples of projects developed in an official institution that were critical of official policies and even promoted human rights. The sphere of action in which the studio existed meant communicating with individuals and organisations that included near-dissidents such as Shchedrovitskii, but also district and city officials, and propaganda commissions. The facility to use visual expression in a way that could engage all of these groups demonstrated the will and capability to speak to the social imagination of broad sections of society. Where critique and promotion of human freedoms during late socialism are frequently labelled as dissident *behaviour*, a focus on utopian *content* tells us more about shared aspiration and strategies for enacting change. In a challenge to existing histories, this case study indicates that the production of utopias continued after the Thaw and into the 1980s.

While the concept of the 'social imagination' is useful for making the argument for the broader relevance that projects developed at the studio, it is also somewhat vague. As Bruno Latour contends, the concept of 'the social' (let alone its

imagination) is perennially unstable.[6] The methodology engaged in this thesis supports the argument that Senezh was more significant than a niche site of design practice, however the precise extent of its relevance is unknown. When we talk of a 'social imagination,' to whom are we referring? While a group architects and designers could probably be more or less defined, phrases such as 'artistic, left or reformist intelligentsia,' have fuzzy boundaries, as do the terms 'parallel science,' and 'dissident.' However, the concept of social imagination may be useful in studies of late socialism, for the time being at least, as it draws together practices that overlap the dichotomies of 'official' and 'unofficial' culture, or 'conformist' and 'non-conformist' art. Further research is required to understand how the concept of a social, or utopian imagination could be used to interpret the nature of late socialist design, art, architecture, literature and science.

The full influence of Senezh within socialist design is also yet to be determined. Aside from training approximately 1500 artists from cities across the former USSR, the studio held travelling seminars in the USSR and abroad.[7] A seminar in Hungary provided inspiration for the establishment of the annual Zsennye Design Workshop in 1978, which exists to this day.[8] The relationship between Senezh studio and the later paper architects is also a rich ground for exploration, as is a full account of the influence of artistic projecteering at VNIITE and in various regional design offices. How did artists returning from seminars influence their colleagues and local design activities? What influence did the studio have on design education?

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[6] See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[7] Locations included Novosibirsk, Arkhangel'sk, Baku, Minsk and Chernovtsy in Bulgaria
[8] The history of Zsennye is covered in András B. Szilágyi and Lelkes Péter, **Design 35:** *Zsennyei Műhely – 1978–2013 (*Budapest, 2014).

A study of artistic projecteering inevitably foregrounds critique of Soviet design culture. While the studio's campaign against man's subservience to technology acts as a corrective to heroic narratives written about Iurii Solov'ev and VNIITE,[9] it also masks some of the latter organisation's achievements in ergonomics, anthropometrics, improving consumer goods and promoting the value of design to Soviet citizens and the government. The studio employed many VNIITE designers as consultants,[10] and the conceptual boundaries between the two organisations are not necessarily as stark as Senezh studio's projects and critiques imply. Further research into the history of VNIITE will help to better determine the relationship between artistic projecteering, theories of technical aesthetics and the practical projects of artistic engineers.[11] Artistic projecteering should be viewed as part of the eco-system of Soviet design .

Aside from the contributions of this thesis to an understanding of utopianism in late socialism, it is necessary to consider the significance of this study to global design history. Artistic projecteering in the Soviet Union reflected the material possibilities of a major world system whose decline was far from inevitable. Senezh was an important conceptual engine for Soviet design through its influence on

[9] One recent book positions VNIITE at the pinacle of histories of ergonomics M.M Kalincheva, E. V. Zherdev, A. I. Novikov, *Nauchnaia shkola ergodizaina VNIITE: Predposylki, istoki, tendentsii stanovleniia* (Moscow: VNIITE, 2009), Others including Lavrentiev and Nazarov are lightly critical of VNIITE's complex 'design programme,' but have not explored the problems of the organisation in detail. However, they do draw attention to VNIITE's experimental section that was closer in mentality to Senezh. See Alexander N. Lavrentiev and Yuri V. Nazarov, *Russian Design: Tradition and Experiment 1920-1990* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), pp.76-34.

[10] These include Viacheslav Koleichuk, Evgenii Asse and Aleksandr Ermolaev

[11] Some progress has already been made in this area. See Margareta Tillberg, 'Design of Electric/Electrical Systems in the Soviet Union from Khrushchev's Thaw to Gorbachev's Perestroika', *Baltic Worlds*, no. 2 (2010) pp.36-40. Also, Ekaterina Lavrent'eva, 'Proektirovanie posredstvom teksta. VNIITE. 1970- - 1980-e', in *Rakursy*, ed. A. S. Varantov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia, 2012), pp.197-245

designers and writers (particularly in *DI SSSR*), and as a forum for philosophers and historians, it is possible to claim that it has global significance.

As the 'Soviet Ulm' of the 1960s, its aim was to achieve what designers like Maldonado working in capitalism could not: the production of 'harmony' in the material environment through collective labour and using planned economy to design objects based on their expediency, rather saleability. The fact that this spurred a revival of Productivist practices and artistic interventions in the organisation of labour is highly significant for the study of avant-garde revivalism after the Second World War.[12] The adaption of Oskar Hansen's open form to industrial design methods is also important, as it demonstrates the extended influence of architects associated with Team Ten who sought to reform modernism. Hansen's anti-monumentalism appealed to Soviet designers initially for its potential in producing machines that would not alienate the worker. The ideal of the individual and collective configuring their own surroundings emerged again as a symbol of democratic gathering on *Maiakovskii Square*. Senezh provided the conceptual and material means required for adapting anti-monumentalist principles to the Soviet Union.

Similarly, the question of Soviet postmodernism discussed chapter 3 contributes to our growing understanding of postmodernism as a global phenomenon. Following Felicity Scott,[13] who positions the emergence of post-modern architecture largely in relation to the emergence of new understandings of semiotics and environment,

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[12] This was the subject of a 2013 conference in Princeton entitled *Illusions Killed By Life: Afterlives of (Soviet) Constructivism.* The conference was in important moment in helping me to situate Senezh in the context of avant-garde revivals.

[13] Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics After Modernism*, (Cambridge MA: MIT press, 2007).

I show that native semiotics and culturology produced new understandings of complexity in the Soviet material environment that had a significant impact on artistic projecteering. Whereas Soviet non-conformist art and paper architecture tend to adhere to Western conceptions of postmodernism,[14] the propaganda projects, museification and theatricalization of the proposed urban environment at Senezh reflected changes in the conscious perception of the material environment. Does the definition of postmodernism as the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' obscure the 'cultural logic of late socialism' and the strategies designers proposed to influence the formation of the late socialist subject? How far can postmodernism be expanded and defined as a global phenomenon?

While the project of design history has been concerned with questions of globalization and intercultural exchange, the question of postmodernism has not been one of its major concerns. For example, the two major recent volumes on this theme, *Global Design History* (2011)[15] and *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization* (2016)[16], contain no explicit discussion of postmodernism as an aspect of global design.[17] The project of global history (as opposed to world history) follows many postmodern principles related to resistance of hegemonic cultural forms in its aim to 'avoid Eurocentrism, reject the dichotomy of modern and traditional cultures…[and] acknowledge the heterogeneity of the globalizing process, the interaction of the local and the global,

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[14] Aleš Erjavec (ed.), 'Introduction' to *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003) pp.1-54 (p.18).

[15] Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley (eds.), *Global Design History*, (London: Routledge, 2011).

[16] Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei, *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in and Age of Globalization*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016)

[17] Likewise, Victor Margolin's monolithic *World History of Design* (2015) follows a narrative that ends in 1945. Victor Margolin, *World History of Design*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015)

and to incorporate existing local, regional and national histories.'[18] But, as D.J. Huppatz has proposed, design history's preoccupation with modernism is 'significant hurdle' to the development of global design history due to its focus on the vanguard of social as well as scientific and technological progress.[19] This, he explains, has led to design historians following the dictum of 'first the West, then the Rest' – although he notes that this has been challenged by scholars including Reid and Castillo who have focused on the interconnectedness of modernist design across the iron curtain.[20]

My focus on the *process* of 'postmodernization' was due to the need to better understand forms of aesthetic and socio-technical investigation that emerged from a reaction to modernity outside of the main centres of postmodern culture. This takes us beyond Jameson's definition of postmodernism as a 'new type of social life' in consumer society or multi-national capitalism,[21] by shifting focus back to the intellectual search for alternatives to high modernism. This approach therefore challenges the reproduction of the 'West and the rest' dichotomy in histories of postmodern design that inherit from modernism the tendency to define design cultures in terms of economic and technological advancement.

The selective embrace of Soviet postmodernism as Sots Art, Moscow Conceptualism and Paper Architecture [22] is based on tendencies in 'Western

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[18] D.J. Huppatz, 'Globalizing Design History and Global Design History,' *Journal of Design History*, 28/2 (2015), pp.182-202 (p.188).

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid*, p.182, 192-193.

[21] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society,' (1982), in *Modernism|Postmodernism* ed. Peter Brooker, (New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 163-179, (p.165).

[22] See Introduction and Chapter 4 of this thesis. Also, Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue With Chaos*, (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p.234.

culture' to relativize other cultures culture according to its own priorities. As Ziauddin Sardar has contended, postmodernism follows modernism as a project of hegemonic Western culture which 'gloss[es] over the politics of non-western marginalisation in history by suddenly discovering Otherness everywhere, and arguing that everything has its own kind of Otherness by which it defines itself.'[23] As an example, the popularity of Sots Art in the West may be explained by the fact that it demonstrates the relativity of empty symbolism in Soviet Propaganda and Western advertising by placing them in the same semantic field. For the Western viewer, this opens the possibility of inhabiting another fantasy world where the symbols of advertising are the constructs of a totalitarian brand-scape. The viewer sees what they want to see.[24] Sardar's contention is that the post-modern choice to construct one's own reality is a privilege of parts of western society, while most of the world 'does not even have the choice not to be *victims* of postmodernism' i.e., there is a lack of financial and conceptual means to escape the forms of reality imposed by postmodernism.[25]

If Sots Art suggests that propaganda, as well as consumerism might be instrumental in bringing about the 'death of the subject' [26] through the highlighting of homogenized existences, then Senezh studio's construction of alternative model realities constitute the simultaneous acknowledgement of and resistance to this phenomenon. Rozenblium and Konik's projects display an attempt to rescue individual subjectivity in the environment of late Soviet propaganda. Rather than descending into postmodern cynicism, artists at Senezh

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[23] Ziauddin Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture,* (London and Stirling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998), p13.
[24] *Ibid.*, p.9.
[25] *Ibid.*, p.20.
[26] Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society.'

sought ways to restructure environments in a way that might enable citizens to reassemble their own subjectivities: through engagement with local history, theatricalizing urban space, or standing within a surround of televisions to grasp relative ideological forms of broadcast mass media. It learns from Productivist efforts to create a material environment that uses spatial techniques to overcome inertia in the consumption of goods and information.

If postmodern culture relates to the individual's ability to produce their own reality in a world no longer governed by concepts of truth; such phenomena must be examined beyond Europe and the US if we are to move beyond a 'West and the rest' formulation of postmodernism. In order to achieve this, one potential course of action may be to examine the historical development of environments beyond the worlds of business and leisure that typify accounts of postmodern design during the development Western neo-liberalism from the 1970s. How have postmodern ideas shaped the design of religious, political and media environments for those who Sardar sees as the *victims* of postmodernism?

The world of Senezh certainly was a victim of the changes that came about during and after perestroika, which have not been explored during this dissertation, however I will present a speculative conclusion to the project below. The forces of consumerism, business and branding started to play a greater role in defining design during this period. From the late 1980s, design was once again on the government agenda, and more research must be undertaken to understand how designers at Senezh reacted to the legitimisation of private enterprise according to a 'cooperative' model. Whereas design previously existed within state

organisations like VNIITE, the SKhKB, Khudozhestvennyi fond, and Senezh studio; various cooperative enterprises emerged in the fields industrial design, fashion and architecture that sought to locate their practice into areas not covered by state organisations.[27] Design was suddenly needed to service the economic ambitions of the new government: in 1987 the Soviet government aimed to treble consumer goods production by the year 2000,[28] and that same year the Soviet Deputy Premier Ivan Silaiev predicted the transformation of that profession's fortunes when he stated, 'There is a need for design everywhere, and our industry is ready to shower the designers with commissions.'[29]1988 saw the launch of a Russian language edition of Italian design magazine *Domus,* complete with adverts for exotic Western products and materials. In the same year, McDonalds Canada signed a deal in which they would have a 49% stake in bringing the Golden Arches to Moscow,[30] potentially closing the gulf between commercial and political symbolism of branding and propaganda discussed above. 'Dizain', previously dismissed as the undesirable capitalist alternative to technical aesthetics or artistic projecteering, finally gained its official recognition in the Soviet Union of Designers.[31]

As I have described in this thesis, critical design practices undertaken at Senezh relied on the ability to navigate the structures and codes that governed artistic

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[27] In industrial design, this included Azrikan Design Studio in Moscow and Mad Design Studio in Leningrad, Trans-Dizain in Fashion and Stuio TAF in Architecture. For an overview of some major studios, see Constantin Boym, *New Russian Design*, (Rizzoli: New York, 1992).

[28] Hugh Aldersey-Williams, *World Design: Nationalism and Globalism in Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), p.106.

[29] Boym, *New Russian Design*, p.28

[30] Tauno Tiusanen, *Post Communist Capitalism and Capital: Foreign Investors in Transitional Economies,* (Commack, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 1996), p.74.

[31] This appears to have been more evolution rather than revolution. The head of the organisation was Iurii Solov'ev. See Dmitry Azrikan, 'VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?' *Design Issues,* 15/3 (1999), pp.45-77.

production in the late Soviet period. As this increasingly became the focus of their work, their existence was destabilised during perestroika. A cursory examination of projects undertaken in the final years of the studio suggests no systematic attempt to discover new contexts for artistic projecteering in the economic and intellectual liberalizations of perestroika. A September 1989 article for *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo* on 'strategies and tactics' in artistic projecteering indicates that Rozenblium aimed to continue to produce models and exhibitions using his earlier methodologies. The images accompanying the article show intricate paper models in the style produced since the mid-1970s at Senezh, with little concession to the political and economic climate of perestroika.[32]

Konik, on the other hand, retreated from the sphere of design to fine art. In the following issue of *DI*, he published an article entitled *Projecteering disappears when there is nothing to hope for,*[33] where he argued for the necessity of taking a pause to reconsider what projecteering is for. At a time when the aims of society were being transvalued, Konik saw the danger that projecteering may stagnate by retaining the values it had developed under late socialism instead of taking time to assess the newly emerging structures that may facilitate a humanistic projects in the future. One of the studio's final projects was a 1990 installation entitled *A Quiet Conversation Among Things* [Negromkii razgovor veshchei].[34] Following the discovery of an abandoned home in the countryside close to Moscow, artists from Senezh decided to remove the objects from the house and created a series of installations that explored the psychology of Soviet home life. Nobody knew why it had been

[32] Olga Kabanova, 'Evgenii Rozenblium,' *DI SSSR* 1989/9, pp.29-30, Evgenii Rozenblium, 'Khudozhestvennoe proektirovanie: strategiia i taktika,' *DI SSSR* 1989/9, pp.30-33.

[33] Mark Konik, 'Proektirovanie ischezaet, kogda ne na chto nadeiat'sia,' *DI SSSR* 1989/10, pp.2-5.

[34] For an account of this project, see O. Kobanova and M. Konik, 'Negromkii razgovor veshchei,' in Mark Konik (ed.) *Arkhiv odnoi masterskoi* (Indeks Dizain: Moskva, 2003), pp.240 – 247.

abandoned, or why the family who had inhabited the home left so many things behind. What kind of life had been lived by the inhabitants? Why were these objects that included furniture and photographs, left by the family? The act of producing this installation explored the agency of material artefacts as witnesses to daily life. This indicates a mood of introspection during this 'second Thaw' that contrasts the energy of the 1960s that saw the utopian revival of avant-garde Productivism.

I have been unable to corroborate any account of the closure of Senezh studio in archives, interviews and publications. Hearsay evidence suggests that the rivalry between Konik and Rozenblium grew during this period, however a lack of verifiable information leaves open the question of whether it would have been possible or desirable to save the studio beyond the demise of the USSR.

In April 2014, I sat with the artist Vladimir Sokolov in his Irkutsk studio where he showed me images of the kitschy nightclub interiors he designed for the local mafia in the 1990s. It struck me how far this was from the idea of the 'project' that aims to transform human consciousness (beyond brief moments of inebriation), and how hierarchies of taste and morality in the material world were radically shaken at this point. As economic shock therapy brought economic losers and winners, foreign goods, property speculation, gang violence and new possibilities for emigration – the sincere humanist values of Senezh studio appeared rather distant. Design in the post-Soviet context underwent simultaneous restriction and expansion: the possibility to make and build for the oligarchy or foreign companies was exchanged for the moral integrity of the unrealized project.

Perhaps Konik was correct in 1989 when he noted that projecteering is impossible without knowledge of the structures that govern the materialization of social ideas[35] – even if those structures are highly flawed.

Critical Soviet Design: Senezh studio and the utopian imagination in late socialism is about the rearrangement and re-use of ideas in changing ideological contexts. Despite the existence an authoritarian government and limited ability to travel, ideas and concepts could still move through space and time. Research into Constructivist heritage saw the revival of Productivism in theory and practice, while encounters with Western architectural literature helped generate strategies for the preservation of urban heritage. On each occasion the projects commented on a specific feature of daily life: be it poor scientific or labour equipment, the destruction of urban heritage or the inability to associate freely in public space.

This thesis, I hope, has highlighted examples of 'Off-Modern' thinking - 'engaged in a double movement between theory and practice, between imaginary architecture and material experience.'[36] Senezh studio was unique in its capacity to draw together ideas from across time and space and articulate them in collective expressions that simultaneously critiqued the material conditions of daily life and offered better alternatives. The continued relevance of such techniques can be seen in contemporary practices associated with design activism, critical design and interaction design. Perhaps one day, aspects of the late socialist imagination may fulfil their projective potential and inspire the construction of environments that facilitate the harmonious and free interactions of humanity.

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[35] Konik, 'Proektirovanie ischezaet.'

[36] Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008) p.37.

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