Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow: Contesting the Social and Material World

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Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow

Contesting the Social and Material World

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In 1928–1929 the architects Moisei Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis designed and built an apartment block to house the bureaucrats of the Russian Ministry of Finance, the Narkomfin RSFSR, headed by Commissar Nikolai Miliutin (Figure 1). This seemingly ordinary commission was based on two important facts: Ginzburg was the most celebrated architect of the Constructivist movement in Soviet Russia, and the client, Commissar Miliutin, was one of the most influential theoreticians of town planning, author of the classic work on Constructivist town planning, *Problemy Stroitel'stva Sotsialisticheskikh Gorodov* (Problems Concerning the Construction of Socialist Cities).[1] The conception, construction, and occupation of the complex, spanning the years 1928 to 1930, came at a critical and highly contentious moment in Soviet history when the rising tide of Stalinist totalitarianism was creating major tensions in Soviet society. The history of this building and its site—its conceptualization and subsequent occupation over the years—literally came to embody the strained and contradictory dynamics of Russian social and political life. At different times the Narkomfin Communal House was the site where various groups and individuals vied with one another to shape the material conditions of social life: Bolshevik intellectuals, Stalinist bureaucrats, Khrushchev-era homemakers, and 1990s capitalist land developers. Contentions about the material forms of social life were the impetus for creating the revolutionary architectural forms of the Narkomfin Communal House, with its promise of the good life. It is these very same contentions that still shape this site and its social promise.[2]

Previous histories of the Narkomfin Communal House tended to ignore its position in the landscape, its relation to surrounding buildings, and the broader social context in which it was situated. There has been no opportunity to understand the building properly, even since the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result, the Narkomfin Communal House has been reified and described as an exquisite Constructivist volume severed from the physical, social, and political landscape in which it was formed. Socialist historians, including Selim Khan-Magomedov and Ernesto Pasini, have been keen to gloss over the impact of Stalinism on the site in order to assert a more pristine, sanitized, and humanitarian Leninist vision.[3] Other writers, in particular Jean-Louis Cohen, have been more concerned with Narkomfin's impact on the development of European modernism (Le Corbusier in particular), further isolating the building from its social and physical context.[4] The result has been a more unified and coherent history of the Narkomfin that ignores its complex, contradictory, and highly contentious history. The history presented here is not of a single exquisite Constructivist form but of several building episodes that conceived the Narkomfin while attempting to realize the ideals and promises of socialism in different ways.

When the Narkomfin Communal House was commissioned, the aspirations of the Russian architectural and artistic avant-garde came as close as they ever would to identifying with the power structures of the Soviet government. This was a remarkable period, marked by the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932), with its breakneck drive toward the industrialization of the Soviet economy, and the Cultural Revolution, which sought to restructure cultural and social life. The revolutionary Soviet state attempted a radical restructuring of the social and material world based on Marxist economic theory. Within this schema, an artifact or particular building type could be understood only in terms of the economic and social structures that produced it. Capitalism could be viewed as producing a particular kind of material culture with its own building types, such as the American skyscraper, whose size and shape are determined by capitalist land speculation. Soviet communism, based on communal (state) ownership of land in the name of the people, would by this logic produce radically different building types and social formations. Thus the architectural profession received an unprecedented mandate to realize a new material world based on revolutionary principles of state ownership and communist labor relations. One of the most significant architectural innovations during this period was the so-called communal house, or *Dom Kommuna.* Of these, the Narkomfin Communal House is considered to be one of the most sophisticated examples.

The *Dom Kommuna* represented the most complete attempt

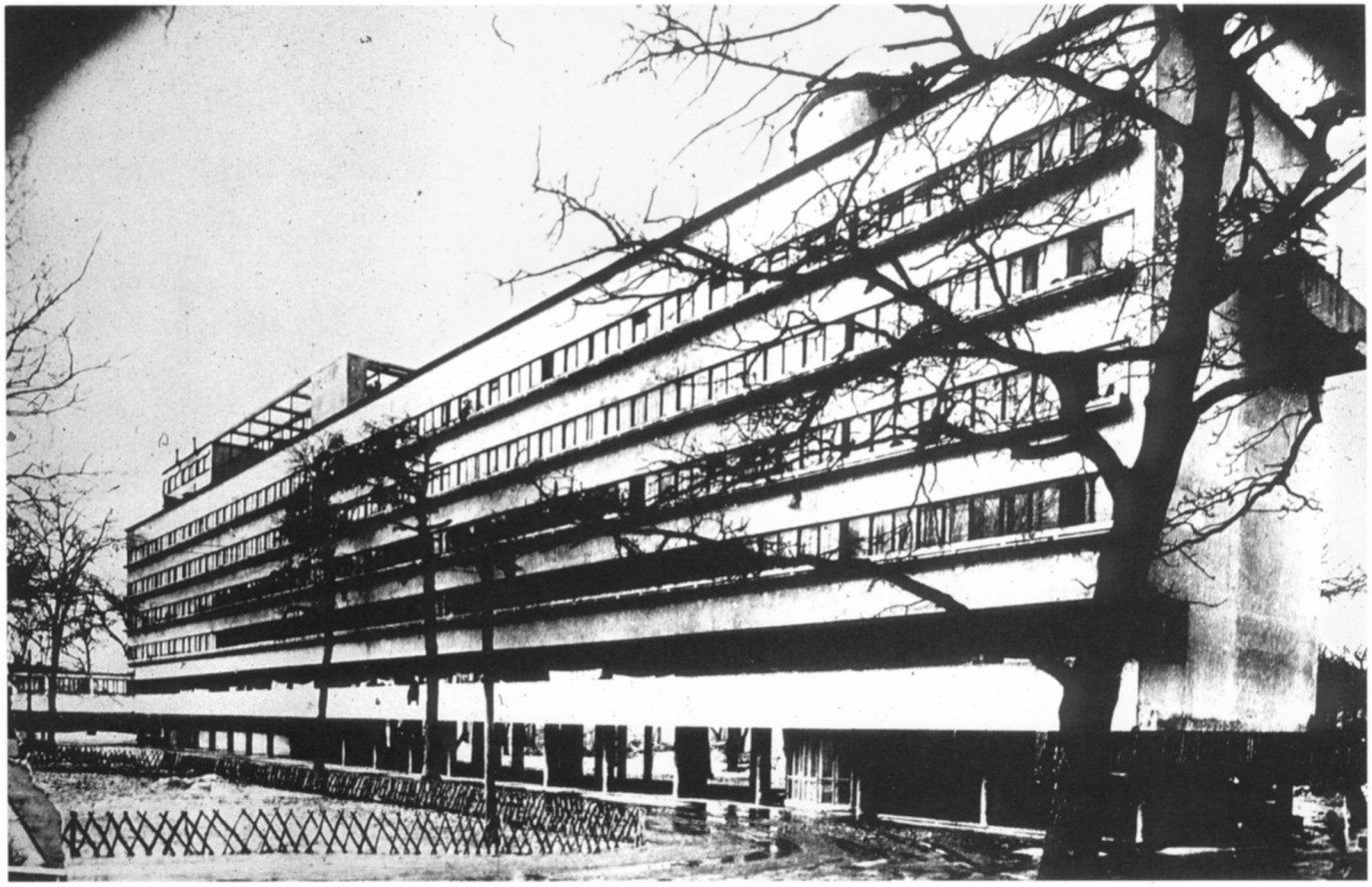


FIGURE 1: View of the Narkomfin Communal House living block, early 1930s

to restructure daily life and the material world according to revolutionary Marxist principles. The consensus among Marxist social reformers of daily life (*byt*)[5] was that without a radically new material culture and economic infrastructure based on socialist principles, the old prerevolutionary order would exert its influence and inhibit the development of socialism. As this infrastructure was just being realized through the First Five-Year Plan and the Cultural Revolution, there was a great deal of room for discussion, innovation, and experimentation.

Some reformers of daily life, notably followers of the cooperative housing movement, attempted palliative measures within the remnants of prerevolutionary architecture. Other reformers, such as the architectural group OSA (*Ob'edinenia Sovremennikh Arkhitektorov*, or Union of Contemporary Architects), headed by Ginzburg, sought to address the issue of the new *byt* by creating an entirely new rationalized architecture and material culture based on communist theories of industrialized production and on patterns of consumption guided by socialist ethics.

However, the various groups of reformers and architects were searching for the one appropriate, ultimate answer to the problem of realizing the new *byt*. The spirit of Soviet political and revolutionary action was characterized by the Leninist principle of "democratic centralism." A plurality of opinions and approaches was actively encouraged within party life until such time as a position could be formulated and a "general line" could be taken and uniformly applied without dissent. This "general line," in turn, would dominate and direct all subsequent action, discarding and discrediting all previously offered solutions. The contentiousness of debates on architectural solutions to the reordering of the material world and *byt* reform should not be underestimated.[6] All the creative voices and various approaches to reordering daily life and the material world were competing with one another for recognition by colleagues and party functionaries for the perfect resolution and enactment of socialist and party principles.

Within this highly contentious setting, the OSA emerged as the most prominent and successful architectural group in realizing its solutions to the problem of *byt* reform. From 1926 to 1930, its journal, *SA* (*Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* [Contemporary Architecture]), was the most prominent architectural publication and the only one dedicated to architecture during the period of the First Five-Year Plan.[7] The commission set up in 1928 to create standardized housing types for the STROIKOM (Building Committee of the Russian Republic) represented the height of OSA influence over the direction of Soviet architecture during the First Five-Year Plan.[8] No other architectural group or movement had managed to occupy

such a powerful and influential position and to enjoy the favor of both party and state.[9] However, it must be noted that the state adopted the guidelines it commissioned only to a limited extent, partly because of the small amount of state-sponsored housing built during this period and partly because of changes in state policy and structure affecting *byt* reform movements in 1930 and the rising tide of Stalinist totalitarianism.[10] Only six projects embodying the STROIKOM guidelines were realized, the most notable of which was the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow.

The Narkomfin Communal House was designed to be a prototype for all subsequent state housing in the Russian republic. Its program and household types were determined by the STROIKOM, an investigative research committee founded in 1928, which was funded by the Soviet Russian government and headed by Ginzburg. The Narkomfin was designed according to this program to accommodate approximately two hundred people in households of varying social structures.[11] The site chosen was along the Garden Ring Road on the grounds of two prerevolutionary aristocratic mansions in one of the most prestigious areas of Moscow.

The original program of the Narkomfin Communal House called for four separate buildings (Figure 2).[12] The first, principal, and largest structure, the living block, was a long horizontal building that accommodated all the various types of living units specified in the STROIKOM guidelines (F, 2-F, and K types, along with dormitory units) (Figures 1 and 3). The second structure, the communal block, was connected to the living block by a covered bridgeway. This building accommodated most of the collectivized aspects of everyday life: the kitchen and dining room, gymnasium, and library (Figure 4). The third structure, the mechanical laundry building (*prachechnaia*), housed the communal laundry facility (Figure 5). A fourth, and never built, round building was to have housed the communal crèche.

The Narkomfin Communal House was not designed as a fully fledged *Dom Kommuna* but as a "social condenser" of the transitional type. It could accommodate preexisting bourgeois living patterns (K and 2-F units) while easing the transition of individuals to fully communist F units. The mix of units based on both bourgeois and communist social patterns was not an expression of tolerance for living patterns of different economic systems. Rather, the Narkomfin Communal House had a specific teleology in mind, one that moved toward communal organization, as represented by the F unit. This was to be realized by the more socially advanced individuals experiencing the edifying effects of the architecture of the Narkomfin Communal House. Thus architecture and material culture were believed to have an explicitly denotative and transformative power exemplified by their ability to represent and then induce a particular form of social organization. The individual

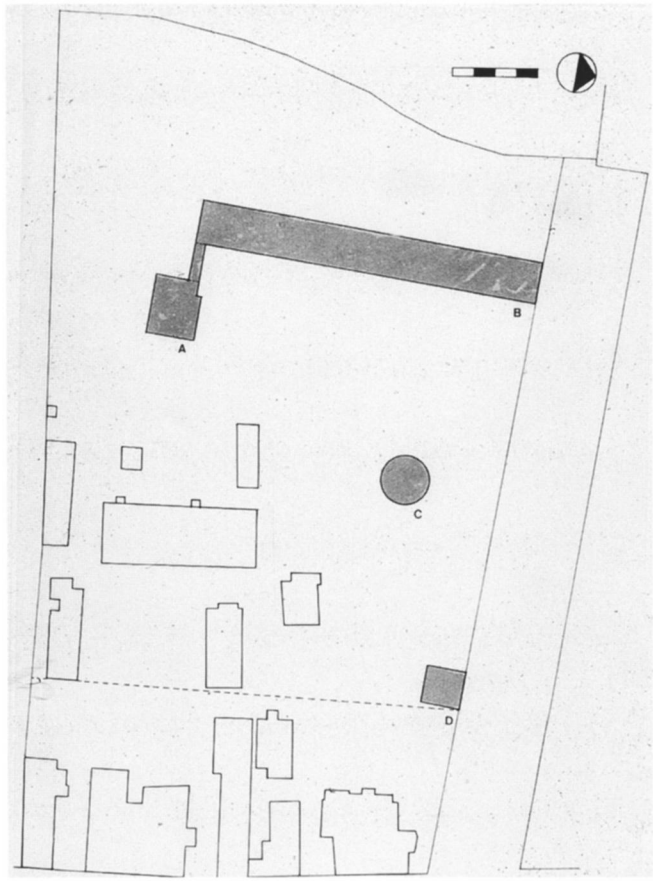


FIGURE 2: Proposed site plan for the Narkomfin Communal House, 6 August 1929: (A) communal block; (B) living block; (C) crèche; (D) mechanical laundry building. Author's drawing after the original, 1990

inhabitant was believed to be basically passive, unable to resist the transformative powers of material culture and eventually likely to submit to the teleology of material forms.

Before turning to the construction of the Narkomfin Communal House in 1929, it is necessary to examine briefly the history of the debates concerning the revolutionary restructuring of daily life and their subsequent impact on the development of this building in order to appreciate the contentious social dynamics that would be unleashed by its conception. From the beginning, the OSA group's proposals for *Dom Kommuny* embodied some of the most radical principles of the Marxist reordering of the material world and *byt* reform. At the same time, OSA designers, unlike other social reformers, appreciated the difficulty of making the transition from bourgeois to socialized living patterns. The very first *Dom Kommuna* designed by OSA in 1927, the A-1 *Dom Kommuna*, contained three unit types (A, B, and C).[13] The A units accommodated nuclear families, with individual kitchens and baths; the B and C types were for heterosexual couples and single individuals in units with shared, fully communalized kitchens, dining rooms, baths, and a children's crèche (Figure 6).[14] All these units were provided with built-in closets and beds that folded up into the

FIGURE 3: View of the west facade during construction, 1929

FIGURE 4: Winter view of the communal block with bridge, early 1930s

walls. The individual units could be combined or segregated as family structures changed, thereby allowing a capitalist bourgeois family in a fully independent and segregated A unit gradually to disperse and then be integrated at the level of the commune and its shared facilities. The A-1 *Dom Kommuna* thus would ease the transition to a collective life in cells occupied by one or two individuals, with all other aspects of life—eating, dining, exercise, and child rearing—socialized into the public sphere. The inclusion of A units for bourgeois nuclear families was not a concession to or recognition of pluralistic social formations, but rather an acknowledgment of the difficulties involved in realizing fully socialist collective forms and the need to help bourgeois families to move toward collectivized living patterns.

OSA's second *Dom Kommuna* of 1929 developed out of the group's work with the STROIKOM, later published in *SA*.[15] This proposal was for a visionary *Dom Kommuna*, to be achieved in the near future when the bourgeois nuclear family would have withered away and full-scale communism had been realized. Unlike the A-1 *Dom Kommuna*, the STROIKOM *Dom Kommuna* was based on a fully socialist collectivized schema of one thousand individuals living in their own 6-meter-square sleeping cabins with shower, sink, and toilet shared by every two cabins.[16] This community was to be further divided into three groups according to age: birth to eight years, eight to sixteen years, and adults over the age of sixteen. Except for sleep (and presumably procreation), solitary intellectual work, and personal hygiene, all activities would be conducted communally: eating in the common dining rooms, working in the studios and libraries, physical exercise in the gymnasia, and relaxation in the common rooms, reading rooms, and surrounding park, with child care provided in the communal children's quarters and crèches.

In this respect, the STROIKOM *Dom Kommuna* represented the height of OSA and *byt* reformist attempts to realize socialist living patterns, differing only in detail from similar proposals for *Dom Kommuny* by the OSA group. However, the published version of this proposal shows the first waverings in print of OSA's confidence in such undertakings, as well as the internal conflicts that would ensue. After a long discussion of the virtues of the *Dom Kommuna* project and how it represented the full realization of socialism in architectural terms, the text ended with a defensive qualification: "In this scheme, there may be a series of mistakes, undeveloped and incomplete solutions. But this should in no way diminish the importance of pursuing this question [the new *byt*] before the working class, architects, builders and state enterprises working in this field."[17] By 1929, as in other fields of *byt* reform activity, an unease regarding the viability and legitimacy of these reforms became evident, prefiguring the crisis and demise of *byt* reformist practices in the early 1930s when the narrow interests and social base of the avant-garde gave way to the more populist concerns of the expanding and increasingly authoritarian Stalinist bureaucracy.[18] The state apparatus was beginning to swell with the influx of new cadres, primarily of worker and peasant origins, whose vision of the material terms of socialism was radically different from the ascetic vision of the avant-garde and closer to the materialism of the prerevolutionary period, with its emphasis on consumption and the pleasures of bourgeois domestic life.[19]

These conflicting visions were manifest in the architectural debates of the period. By 1929 attacks on OSA and the dominant Constructivist school, which had emerged in the mid-twenties, became more shrill and gained momentum within architectural circles. The oppositional group VOPRA (All-Union Society of Proletarian Architects), formed in 1929, had achieved considerable influence over the development of the architectural profession.[20] VOPRA agitated for sweeping changes in the fervent spirit of the Cultural Revolution and the First Five-Year Plan.[21] The group called for a more rapid "proletarianization" of the architectural profession and demanded that architectural students of proletarian origin be admitted and advanced over students of bourgeois origin.[22] Initially VOPRA's architectural designs were decidedly modern-

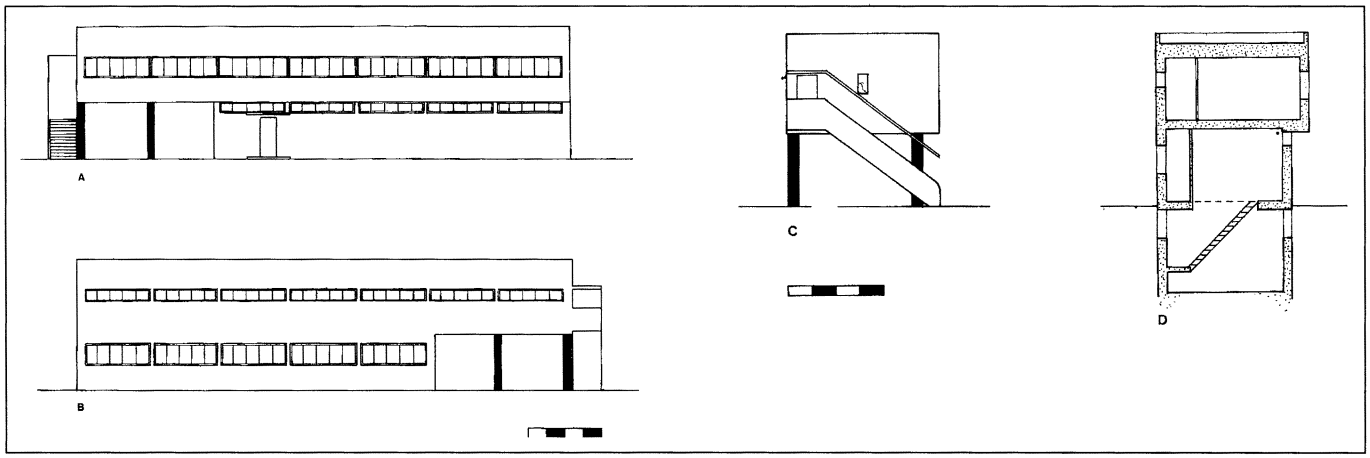


FIGURE 5: Mechanical laundry building: (A) east elevation; (B) west elevation; (C) north elevation; (D) east-west section, c. 1928. Author's drawing after the original, 1990

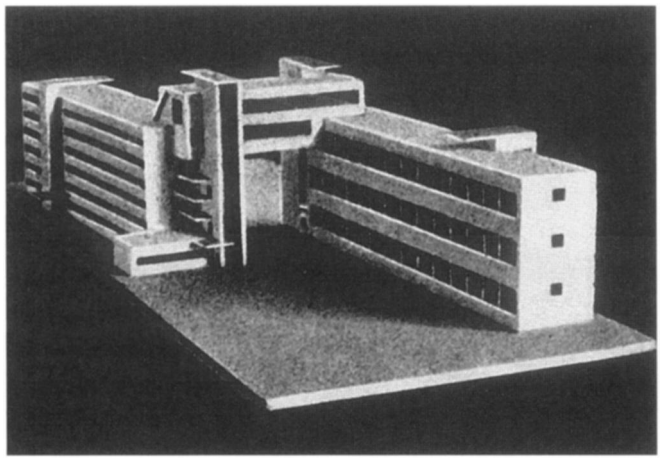


FIGURE 6: A-1 *Dom Kommuna*, from *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 4-5 (1927): 130

ist in appearance, similar to those of the OSA group.[23] Later on, however, VOPRA architects developed a distinctly "Stalinist" style based on classical and other historical sources, as many former members of the OSA group eventually did.

In 1929 several major practitioners in the OSA group, students of Ginzburg, Mikhail Barshch, Mikhail Siniavskii, and Nikolai Krasilnikov, were expelled from VKhutemas (Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios) for "academic passivity."[24] The party was restructuring the architectural curriculum to address the more immediate and pragmatic needs of industrialization, leading the impatient bureaucracy to forsake members of the profession who did not attempt to conform to this emerging "general line." By 1930 VKhutemas was dissolved, and architectural training was delegated to the architecture faculty of Moscow University. VOPRA, in the meantime, relentlessly attacked Constructivism for its "formalism" and rejected it as "a collision between the psycho-ideology and habits of the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia," which had "arisen on the basis of financial capitalism."[25]

In 1930 the architectural profession veered toward outright repudiation of OSA's *byt* reformist program. The 16 May 1930 decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, "O rabote po perestroike byta" (Concerning Work on the Restructuring of Daily Life), reprinted in *SA* (1930), explicitly condemned the full socialization of family life envisioned in schemes such as the STROIKOM *Dom Kommuna* and called for the reassessment of *byt* reform.[26] Calling for only a partial socialization, it asked the SNK (Council of People's Commissars) of all the union republics to come up with proposals in fifteen days for the creation of settlements of individual houses for laborers, thus entirely rejecting the idea of fully collectivized living patterns.[27] Although laundry facilities, dining rooms, bathhouses, schooling, and day care were to be collectivized, the segregated petit-bourgeois hearth where nuclear families would live and rear their children was to remain intact. Attempts to socialize child rearing and to reduce the private sphere to the vestigial minimalism of the private cell of the STROIKOM *Dom Kommuna* were categorically condemned.

The question for OSA and other *byt* reformers in the first half of 1930 was what to do in these considerably changed circumstances. Appropriately, the articles published along with the reprint of the Central Committee directive in *SA* appeared under the heading "Where to go?" ("*Kuda idti?*"). This issue of *SA* was an awkward attempt to come to terms with the new directive. OSA *byt* reformers suddenly found themselves in opposition to the party's direction for the construction of socialism and the reordering of the social and material world. To uphold their beliefs regarding the appropriate direction of *byt* reform would be to repudiate the party and its stewardship in the creation of socialism, thereby undermining the validity of the Soviet socialist project.

The only option, without compromising the entire Soviet socialist project, was to conform to the party directive in the spirit of "democratic centralism" and adjust the group's beliefs and rhetoric appropriately. As a result, the *SA* editorial repudiated ideas expressed in earlier issues and echoed the criticisms of the Central Committee's 16 May directive: "In the

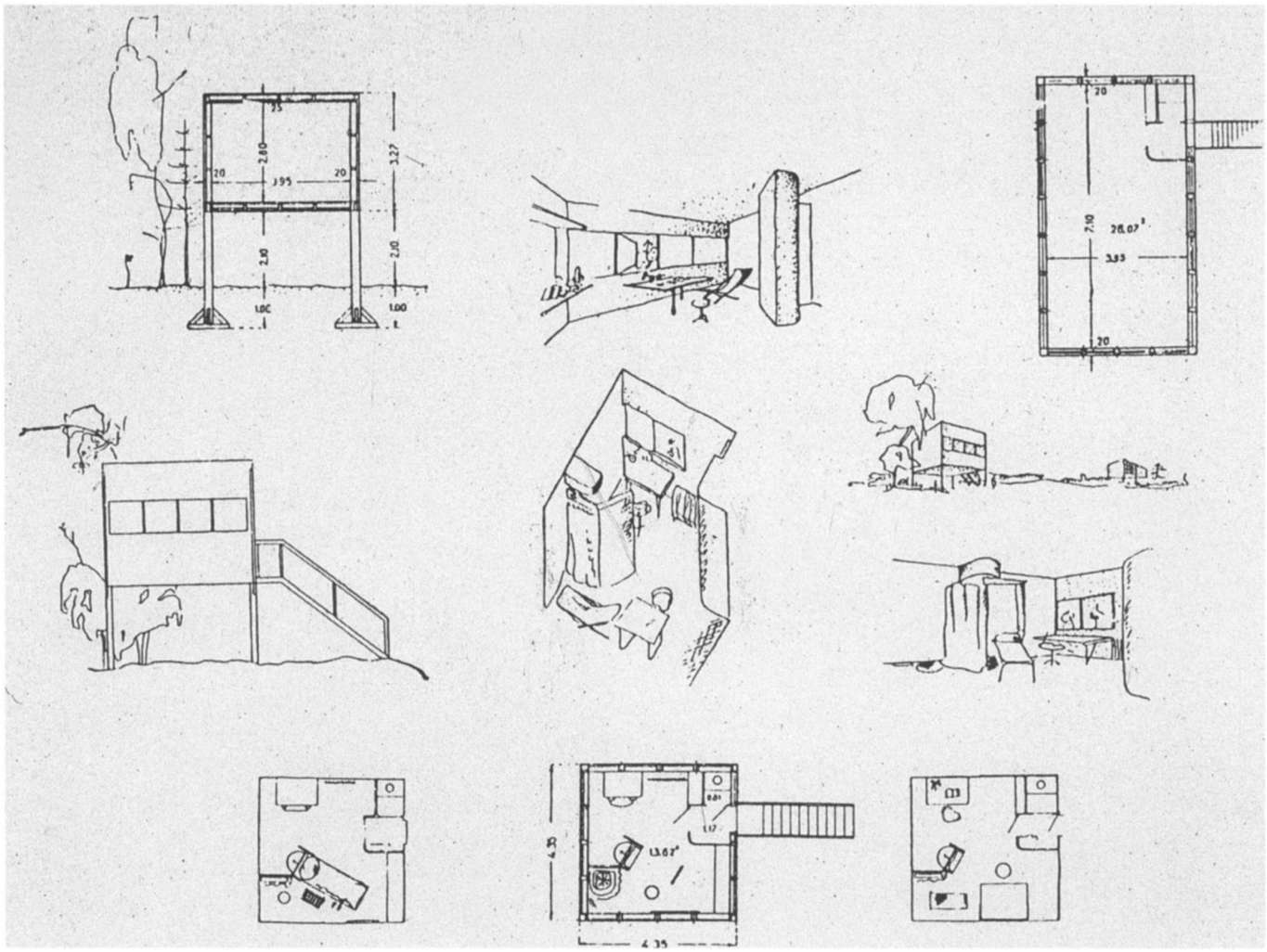


FIGURE 7: *Magnitogor'e* proposal, from Moisei Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 149

fight with the old way of life one cannot do battle with directives and schematics. All our mistakes in the last 7–8 months of heated debate are technical and economic mistakes—due to a poor appreciation of Marxist theory, and an uncritical relation to pronouncements, projects and suggestions."[28]

Architecturally, the OSA attempted to redress its "mistakes" with new disurbanist settlement schemes that, with almost algebraic exactness, inserted the party directive's requirement for dispersed housing into established formulas for the new socialist *byt.* This resulted in the highly original disurbanist Green City proposals of Ginzburg and Mikhail Barshch and the *Magnitogor'e* proposals of Barshch, Viacheslav Vladimirov, Mikhail Okhitovich, and Nikolai Sokolov. They first attempted to address the perennial Marxist concern about the relationship between town and country by calling for settlements of individual dwellings to be distributed along transportation arteries in a linear fashion. These units, it was argued, reflected the user's individual needs and responded to the new concern for flexibility expressed in the 16 May directive. The authors categorically rejected the imposition of standardization on the consumer's domestic space as "mistaken and harmful."[29]

The *Magnitogor'e* proposal (Figure 7) further atomized the communal house by setting individual dwellings in the landscape and connecting them by transportation arteries to communal centers with library, dining, sports, medical, and crèche facilities. The authors emphatically rejected the notion of a *Dom Kommuna,* declaring that the *Magnitogor'e* proposal was "Not a Communal House but a commune of homes" ("Ne Dom Kommuna a kommuna domov").[30] Both proposals articulated a new set of objectives: to accommodate individual tastes and needs and "above all . . . concern oneself with the consumer needs of the proletariat, and not with the transition to new modes of production."[31] This statement in particular echoed the shift to Stalinist populist sentiment in the guise of "consumer needs" and at the expense of elitist avant-garde principles. The units were to be flexible, located and expanded at the will of the individual inhabitant. "Taste changes, culture changes, prosperity changes; the dwelling also should

grow and change."[32] The locus of personal development was to be the individual unit and the domestic sphere, no longer to take place at the level of the commune, as in the proposals a few months earlier. "One's personality could develop fully and completely in no other place except one's own home."[33]

The plurality of social forms embodied in earlier *Dom Kommuny* schemes served to facilitate the idea of the "social condenser," which accommodated preexisting bourgeois forms in order to engineer their evolution into socialist ones. The *Magnitogor'e* proposal, on the other hand, openly declared a plurality of housing forms a virtue in itself and not a temporary measure: "no one bothers those who chose to live as a family, or a commune, alone or as a couple, etc."[34] All these aspects of the *Magnitogor'e* scheme, the authors declared, "are entirely appropriate to preexisting living patterns and concretely relevant to the conditions of place and time."[35] With this statement, the authors felt they had satisfied the requirements of the Central Committee directive.

Throughout these new discussions the issue of consumer choice, rarely discussed earlier, stands out. Sparked by the Central Committee directive, the new concern for pluralism, the individual, and consumer choice prefigured Lazar Kaganovich's claim in 1931 that the preexisting urban order was, de facto, socialist rather than a "vestige" of capitalist forms. Socialism, it was claimed, had been achieved; the proletariat was in power and a new Stalinist bureaucracy flush with fresh cadres was not to be denied the rewards of the good life because a group of elite avant-gardists of questionable class background felt the material conditions were not appropriate.[36] Pluralism in living arrangements, embodying both bourgeois and socialist patterns, previously believed to threaten infection of the social body and inhibit the construction of socialism, was now seen as the essence of cultural progress. The *Magnitogor'e* proposal promised: "Personal taste is not only free in food and dress, but also in the character of the home."[37]

Whereas in the late 1920s the domestic sphere was to be tightly regulated (if not entirely obliterated), it was now suddenly viewed by some of the most committed architectural *byt* reformists as the locus of individual growth, pluralistic development, and cultural progress.[38] More importantly, as these responses to the Central Committee directive testify, a populist form of pluralism was to reign supreme; socialist living formations were not to be regulated from above by "directive measures" but were to be determined from below by individuals themselves, according to their own needs, tastes, and desires. The demand for focusing energies on the drive to industrialization could not permit the total restructuring of the landscape and the disruption of existing urban infrastructures. Policy makers and *byt* reformers begrudgingly had to make do with the prerevolutionary material legacy. Thus Stalinism very pragmatically, in terms of what was physically and fiscally possible as well as popularly expedient, strategically recoded the material world inherited from before the revolution.

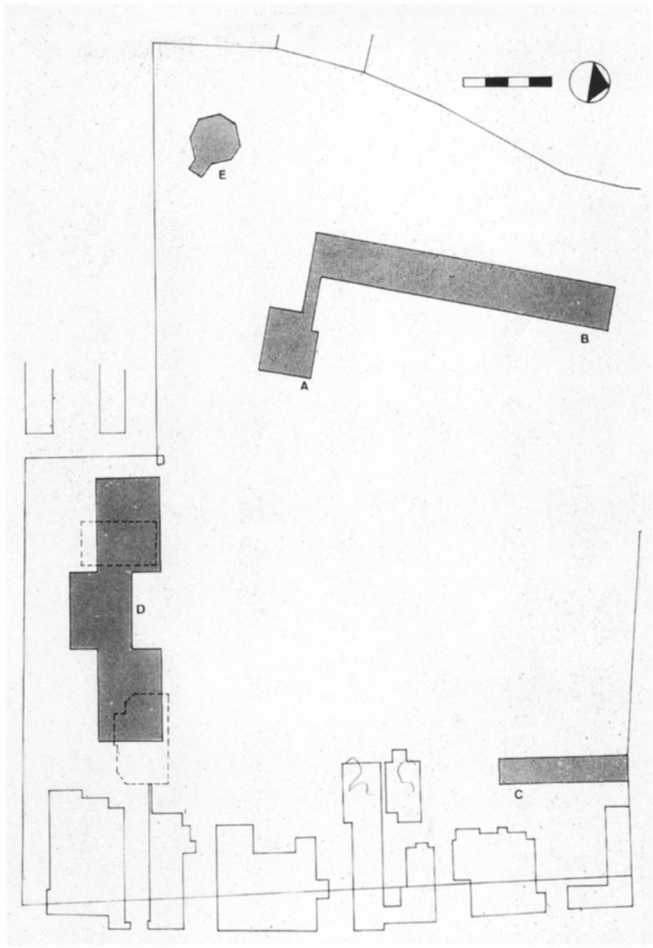


FIGURE 8: Narkomfin Communal House site plan, 15 May 1933, with the Garden Ring Road to the east at bottom: (A) communal block; (B) living block; (C) mechanical laundry building; (D) proposed Leontovich scheme for the second phase; (E) nineteenth-century octagonal pavilion. Author's drawing after the original, 1990

It was within this cacophonous and highly contentious environment that construction of the Narkomfin Communal House began in 1929. The site chosen—lots 113 and 115 on the Garden Ring Road—was to exert particular influence on the original concept and subsequent development of the complex. Named after the medieval monastery popularly known as Novinskii (dissolved in the eighteenth century), the site had been developed in the early nineteenth century with two large Neoclassical houses and outbuildings. These houses faced the Moscow Garden Ring Road (Figure 8) and had a large park at the rear looking out onto what was still countryside.[39] Toward the end of the nineteenth century the service buildings of the houses were screened off from the park by a large U-shaped pavilion, and the park itself was developed into a separate and distinct Arcadian landscape.[40]

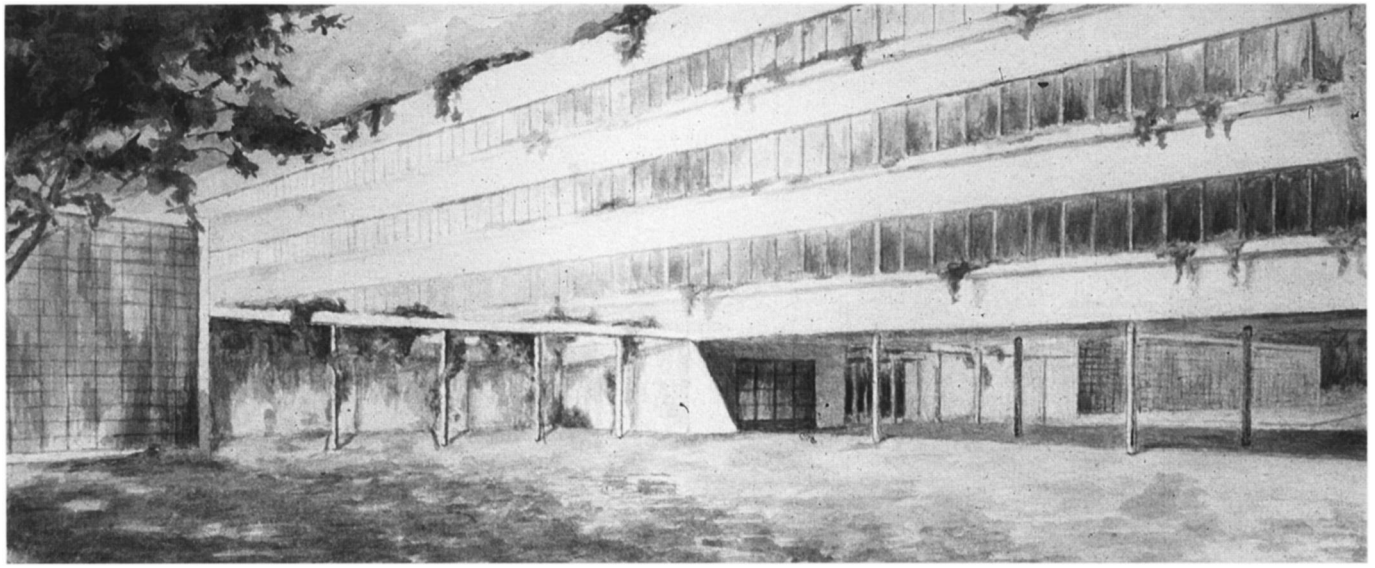


FIGURE 9: Nikolai Miliutin, sketch of a *Dom Kommuna*, ink and watercolor on paper, late 1920s

With the nationalization of all urban landholdings in 1918, lots 113 and 115 became the property of the Bolshevik state under the control of the municipal Soviet.[41] The buildings were converted into communal apartments to accommodate the influx of labor on the eve of NEP (the New Economic Policy, 1921–1926) and the initiation of the First Five-Year Plan. The majority of the outer service buildings related to the management of the prerevolutionary grounds were gone by 1929.[42] However, the memory of the Neoclassical park and pleasure pavilion impressed itself on Ginzburg, and his incorporation of them into the site of the Narkomfin Communal House reflected a continuing Romantic sensibility in his work and that of the Constructivist movement in general.

The idealistic cultivation of a "natural" realm, unspoiled by the industrializing capitalist city, was a theme of long-standing importance in nineteenth-century planning and architecture. For Marxists, rejection of the ill effects of the capitalist city and resolution of the contradiction between town and country were central to the possibility of reform. Marxist Constructivist architects, therefore, were greatly inspired by the overlapping social and spatial concerns of Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement in England and the post-Enlightenment tradition of town planning in general.[43] Within the Moscow architectural community, oscillation between a complete rejection of the capitalist city and the possibility of a socialist urban space was vociferous and extremely frustrating to state officials, who sought immediate and realizable solutions to the management of urban growth and the creation of housing. In his writings in *SA*, Ginzburg struggled at length with the problem of the preexisting capitalist city in a developing socialist society and was a leading voice in the urbanist/disurbanist debates of the late 1920s, which struggled to come to terms with this long-debated problem.[44]

By the time of the construction of Narkomfin, a certain compromise championed by Ginzburg and Miliutin was gaining currency. This compromise called for linear cities of high density ranged along communication and transportation lines, combined with urbanized high-density settlements intersecting with unspoiled countryside. Miliutin developed several solutions to this problem, while Ginzburg's work attempted similar compromises.[45]

Early drawings of the Narkomfin show the complex devoid of an urban context, a fragment of the projected linear cities of Miliutin and Ginzburg (Figure 9) placed within an unspoiled sylvan landscape. The Novinskii site proved an ideal setting for realizing such a prototype for socialist housing. Its Neoclassical park, a metaphor for an Arcadian environment, where the contradictions of post-Enlightenment life were obviated and masked, continued to serve as such for the Narkomfin Communal House, which became a kind of Constructivist *folie* representing a future Arcadia, as opposed to the "antique" Arcadian *folies* of earlier Romanticist park settings. The Narkomfin Communal House and its park served as a prototype for the soon-to-emerge socialist *byt* set down in the midst of urban twentieth-century Moscow, promising a future/past devoid of alienation, conflict, and contradiction—a place "where the peasant can listen to the songs of larks," and where "the combines of habitation, dense and compact, permit their inhabitants to enjoy gardens, expanses of greenery, and the collective spaces of sport and relaxation."[46]

The Constructivist *folie* was not meant to inspire bourgeois liberals and to relieve them of the melancholy caused by the contradictions of industrial life. In a socialist society these *folies* were intended to edify the laboring masses, to provide them with the sentimental education with which to realize their true selves, so long denied them by the contradictions of capital-

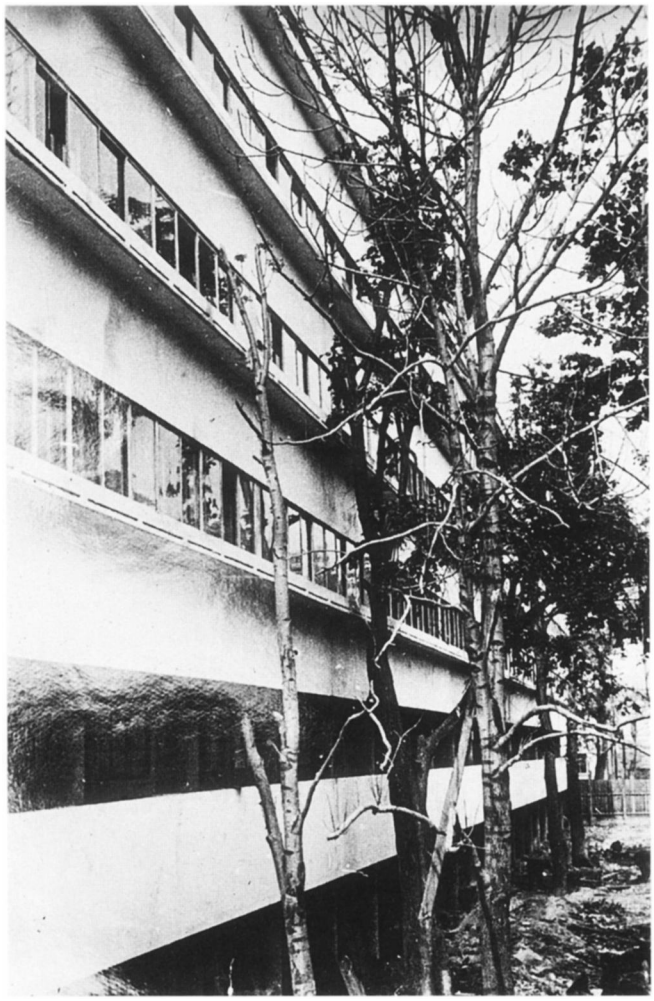


FIGURE 10: View of the living block shortly after construction

ism. Responding to Le Corbusier's comments that peasants were not interested in the Arcadian pleasures of bourgeois yearnings, Ginzburg wrote in defense: "You write that the peasant does not appreciate flowers and does not listen to the songs of larks. Well of course, he does not have the spirit for such when he is overburdened by work. We want our peasant to enjoy the songs of larks. And we know that for this we must ease the burden of his work and introduce culture into his life."[47]

The romantic Arcadian tradition was clearly in Ginzburg's mind when planning the site of the Narkomfin, which he reinterpreted in a Constructivist idiom. Retaining the original park, he inserted the Constructivist complex within it amid the trees (Figure 10). The living block was elevated on black Corbusian pilotis echoing the black trunks of the trees (Figure 11). These made a direct reference to the origins of classical architecture itself: the trunks of the primordial hut that the pilotis attempted to replace. It was a return to the primordial tree house of Rousseauian fantasy and the mythical origins of twentieth-century modernist architecture.[48] The plan offered the promise of a communist paradise, a society devoid of social contradiction in which individuals could achieve their full potential in an integrated, unalienated, and unimpeded Arcadia. Here some of the ambitions of Ginzburg's Green City proposal could be realized: "The windows open accordion like and transform the living cell into an open terrace, surrounded by greenery. The sense of a room is lost: it becomes a platform integrated within nature."[49] Thus an architectural setting was established that would foster the creation of a society where, according to Karl Marx in *The German Ideology*, "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, [where] society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."[50] This Arcadian vision was gently satirized by Le Corbusier in a sketch of a figure seated within a tentlike platform on stilts next to a tree that he described as an "*expression symbolique*" of disurbanization.[51]

Indeed, Ginzburg very consciously preserved the park. The location of preexisting trees on the site was scrupulously noted in the 1929 plans to ensure that a minimum number of trees would be cleared to make way for the new building. Ginzburg justified this practice to the Moscow Building Directory (Moskovskoe Upravlenie Stroitel'stvo) as an economy measure that simultaneously preserved the integrity of the park.[52] Photographs taken soon after construction show that the architect and builders were sensitive to the original park, apparently selecting trees for surgical removal and inserting the building tightly within the landscape in order to realize this Arcadian Constructivist ideal (Figures 10, 11, and 12).[53]

The built landscape differed considerably from the plan of 1929, which was composed of straight driveways that emphasized and facilitated a speedy convergent approach by car and highlighted the linearity of the long horizontal living block, behind which meandering paths and benches harkened back to the Arcadian idyll of the prerevolutionary park (Figure 13). None of these elements was realized (nor was the crèche in the middle of the site). Instead, an asphalted road led up to the main entry, where there was a plaza.[54] A postconstruction site plan of 1933 (Figure 8) shows the Narkomfin building without any of the roads that would connect it to the Garden Ring Road, but the ground plan of a new Stalinist apartment house projected for the site is indicated (Figure 14), illustrating the shape of things to come, as well as the extent to which the outbuildings on lots 113 and 115 had been removed and the Arcadian landscape enhanced.

Having established the material preconditions for achieving an Arcadian socialism, the realization of *byt* reform at the level of the dwelling unit at the Narkomfin was gradual. There were two types of 2-F (nuclear family) units: one with split

FIGURE 11: Winter view of the Narkomfin Communal House, early 1930s

levels consisting of full kitchen, bath/toilet, and dining room on the first entry level, and two 5-meter-high rooms (one for sleeping and one for living) on the lower second level. Single-level 2-F units had the same configuration.

However, unlike either of the F or K units, these lacked the spatial or visual qualities linking the inner spaces to the commune and park beyond, which had inspired Ginzburg's vision of a "platform integrated within nature." Instead, as in a typical prerevolutionary bourgeois apartment, all the rooms were visually and physically separated from one another by walls and doorways (Figure 15). Consequently the visual connection and dynamism between rooms characteristic of F and K units were lost, as was better air circulation.

The nine K units along the first corridor of the living block were designed to accommodate preexisting bourgeois domestic arrangements. These units were entirely self-sufficient and did not depend on the communal spaces of the complex. On the first floor each unit had a small but completely separate kitchen and a large, 5-meter-high common room (Figure 16). Along the window in the corner nearest to the entry of the common room was a large piloti (Figure 17). This feature established the fixed point about which the unit was placed within the structural scheme of the building while functioning visually as the focus of the common room. Upstairs were three more rooms along an open gallery looking down into the large common room. Room B, the largest, was designed as a bedroom. It opened onto the gallery and also had exposed pilotis (two flanking either side of the bed), which created a niche enclosing the conjugal bed within the open scheme of the mezzanine and common room.[55] Room C was another bedroom entirely closed off from the rest of the apartment and presumably used as the children's bedroom, to judge by the single bed in Ginzburg's drawings.[56] Room D was similarly sealed off and accommodated a full bathtub and sink as well as a separate cabinet for the toilet.

The K unit, like the F unit, attempted to diffuse the dwelling's domestic spaces visually and physically out into the commune and park, according to Ginzburg's socialist Arcadian vision. However, it is significant to note the separation of open and public spaces from private and closed ones. In the K unit, as in the F unit, the common room and sleeping niche open onto one another. Ostensibly this was an attempt to contradict the enclosed, withdrawn, and private sphere of the bourgeois bedroom. Both K and F units display an understanding of public space within the domestic environment, as diffused into the world of nature and socialism beyond the walls of the unit.

In addition, in both the K and F units the kitchens, bathing facilities, and toilets (and in the K unit also the children's bedroom) were closed off from view within the apartment.

Both units pursued similar strategies for the ideal expression of socialist domestic space, with a large common area for work and a niche for sleeping. Spaces for functions defying socialized living patterns were literally hidden from public view, such as the separate room for children not sent to communal crèches and the individual kitchens used to prepare food at home rather than in communal dining facilities. These were domestic spaces behind closed doors. What one sees in the public areas of these domestic spaces are what were considered to be the ideally socialized aspects of the remaining domestic realm. Everything else that could not be socialized either for reasons of propriety or the retention of bourgeois patterns was safely hidden from view within these domestic spaces.[57]

The articulated K units were never described in the STROIKOM guidelines nor in any of the literature by Ginzburg or his students or commentators. I have called them articulated K units because of their formal similarities with K units. There were only two along the southern half of the southern stairwell, one of which was occupied by Ginzburg's family. They were significantly larger and more elaborate than

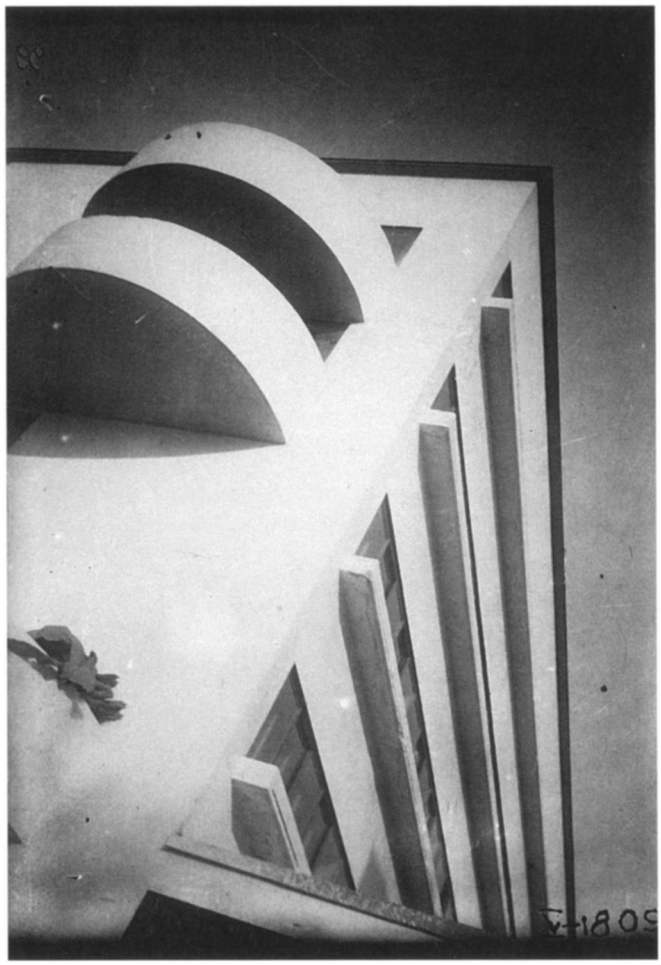


FIGURE 12: Semicircular balconies at southern end of Narkomfin, early 1930s.

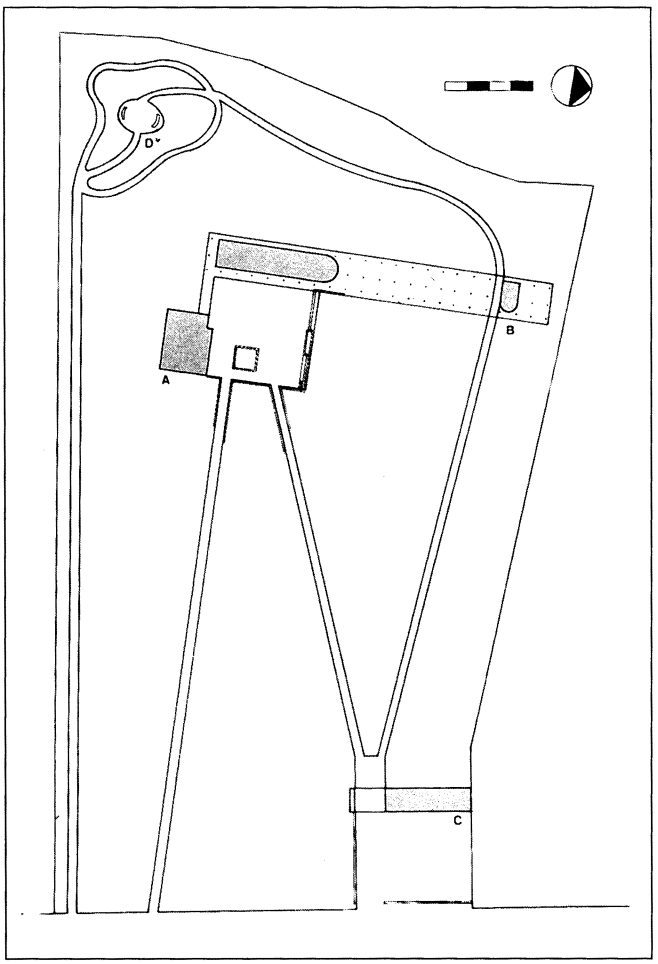


FIGURE 13: Proposed site plan: (A) communal block; (B) living block; (C) mechanical laundry building; (D) lookout point, c. 1928. Author's drawing after the original, 1990

regular K units, with an additional toilet and a room on the ground floor that served as a formal dining room. On the second level they retained the same arrangement of rooms as in a conventional K unit. The two articulated K units were provided with large half-circular balconies. In one, a single balcony was accessible from the first-floor common room (this was Ginzburg's own apartment). The other unit had two balconies on each floor (Figure 12). In all other respects, the articulated K units were similar to ordinary K units.

The built Narkomfin differed in a few significant details from the original drawings for it. On paper it was a rectangular volume, supported on black pilotis, with circulation provided by two truncated oval solids that penetrated the long rectangular volume from the ground level up through the roof to create a rooftop solarium. Preliminary drawings show the simplicity of this scheme and the harmony of its proportions (Figure 18). In built form the solarium was replaced by a two-story volume housing four dormitory units and a penthouse designed by the commissar of finance, Nikolai Miliutin, for his own family (Figure 19).[58] This configuration dramatically changed the original proportions and program, creating

FIGURE 14: Second-phase House of the Council of People's Commissars designed by the Stalinist classicist Leontovich, 1935

dwelling units that were disengaged from the top circulation spaces designed to encourage inhabitants to mingle and to engender a sense of collectivity.[59]

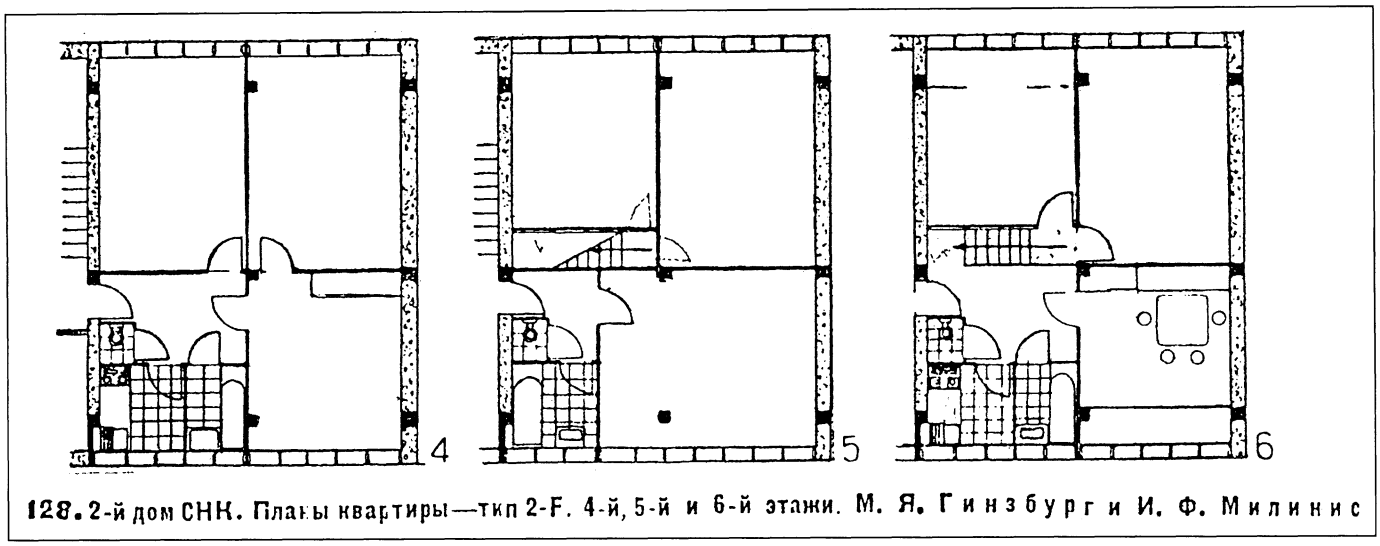
Twenty-four fully collectivized F units were ranged along the second corridor of the living block. Designed for an individual or a couple who either did not have children or had placed them in the crèche of the *Dom Kommuna* located in a separate building on the site, they were the ultimate expression of collectivized life and the new *byt*. These units did not contain a kitchen, though they did have a small niche (Figure 20) that could accommodate a stove for reheating meals or preparing tea. If necessary, to ease the transition to collective living, these niches could be fitted with Frankfurt-style minimal kitchen units (Figure 21).[60] However, upon the realization of a fully socialist *byt*, the kitchen niche would be unnecessary and could easily be removed. Basically the only functions of daily life accommodated in the F units were sleeping, personal hygiene (there were shower cabinets with sinks next to the sleeping niches and separate toilets by the entries), and private intellectual work in the spacious 5-meter-high common room (Room A, Figure 20).[61]

The common rooms (rooms A) of the F units were provided with very large windows. By contrast, the sleeping niches (rooms B) had long horizontal strip windows extending the length of the eastern wall. The location of the windows in the F units ensured that morning light entered the sleeping niche and evening light filtered through the trees of the park into the large windows of the common room.

The layout ensured that the common room and sleeping sphere opened out to one another visually as well as spatially (Figure 20). According to Ginzburg and his colleagues, this open arrangement was necessary for the hygienic circulation of air through the two rooms and the windows on either end. The only enclosed spaces in the F units of the Narkomfin Communal House were the shower and toilet. Some variations of the F unit contained rods for curtains that could, if required, be drawn to separate the sleeping niche and common room.[62] The different heights of these spaces—the sleeping niche was 2.2 meters high and the common room 3.60 meters high—created a dynamic interior space. Different volumes and color schemes suggested sleep and "burrowing" in the low-ceilinged sleeping niche and more vigorous activities characteristic of the waking hours in the high, bright space of the common room.[63] More significantly, the large windows and design of the unit as a whole ensured that inhabitants of the Narkomfin Communal House would not be cut off from the natural and social world surrounding it. The F unit attempted to diffuse every possible element of the petit-bourgeois hearth, which *byt* reformers characterized as striving as much as possible to sever its connections with the outside world, physically, visually, and socially, outward into the collective spaces of the Narkomfin, and even farther into the sylvan environment of the park surrounding the complex. Literally and metaphorically, these spaces promoted the maximum integration of the physical and social self with the commune and with nature, ensured by the socialist revolution.[64]

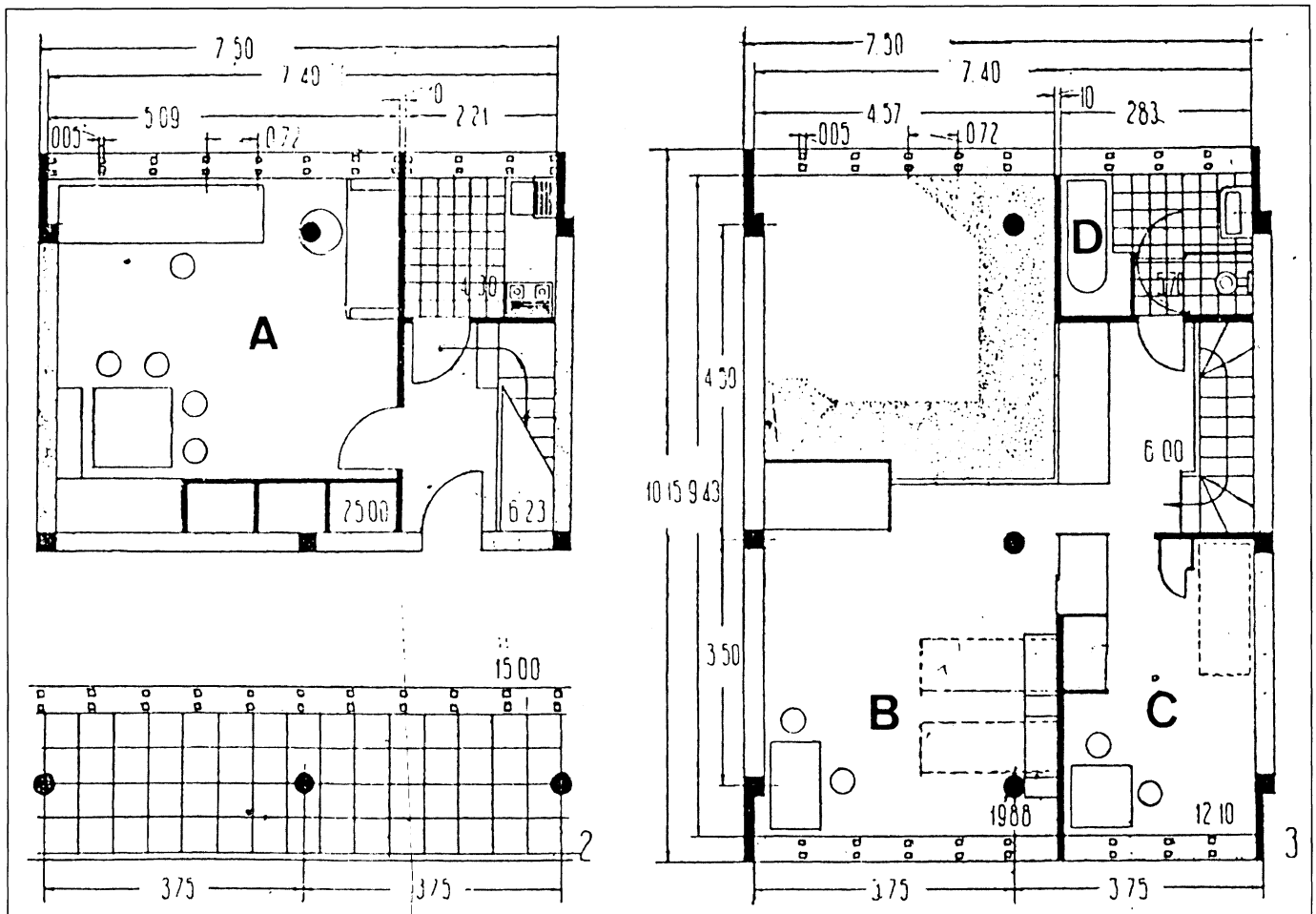
The different published and unpublished unit types accommodated in the Narkomfin Communal House were at odds with one another, going well beyond the requirements of a "social condenser." They embodied the contradictions of Soviet social life emerging under Stalinism, from the commissar's plush penthouse to the laborer's compact dormitory room. These contradictions, not easily accommodated and explained in terms of a transition from bourgeois to socialist living patterns, literally provided a "snapshot" of these conflicts while the dwelling units were being built and the concepts they embodied were being discussed in the pivotal period 1929–1930.

The living units were connected by a bridge to the communal block of the Narkomfin Communal House (Figure 22). This block consisted of two double-height stories; on the first was a gymnasium with showers, toilets, and dressing and storage



128. 2-й дом СНК. Планы квартиры—тип 2-F. 4-й, 5-й и 6-й этажи. М. Я. Гинзбург и И. Ф. Милинис

FIGURE 15: 2-F-unit plans, from M. Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 104



130. 2-й дом СНК. Планы квартиры—тип К. 2-й 3-й этажи. М. Я. Гинзбург и И. Ф. Милинис

FIGURE 16: K-unit plans: (A) common room; (B) conjugal bedroom; (C) child's room; (D) bathroom, from M. Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 105

room, connected via an observation platform on the open gallery to the bridge connecting to the second-floor corridor of the living block. The upper level of the communal block contained the dining room, with a rest area and reading room on the open gallery (Figure 23) and kitchen and related service facilities below. According to Ginzburg, the glazed north elevation of the communal block was originally intended to have movable and detachable glass doors (Figure

FIGURE 17: K-unit interior, common room with pilotis, postwar period

24), so that in warm weather communal activities could be entirely open to the park's greenery and fresh air.[65] Because of cost, however, most of the fenestration had to be fixed, preventing Ginzburg from realizing his concept of a socialist Arcadia, where social and economic formations would be in harmony with the natural order.

The mechanized laundry, or *prachechnaia,* was one of the few aspects of the program fully realized. It was built according to plan and used as a laundry until the mid-1960s. In the original site plan (Figure 13) it functioned as a sort of gatehouse, facing out onto the Garden Ring Road, through which one passed by car under the archway formed by pilotis toward the living block.[66]

The children's crèche was the only part of the program never realized. Here the children of the community were to have spent their days and nights under the watchful eyes of a professionally trained staff, leaving their parents (especially mothers), who lived nearby, free to pursue their work and political lives unencumbered by childcare.[67] However, the project for the crèche apparently received little attention from Ginzburg, Milinis, and their client, Miliutin, even though Ginzburg reported in 1932 that in the early years of occupation all the free space of the communal block was given over to the children's crèche at the expense of the gymnasium, rest area, and summer dining room.[68] Furthermore, in the early years, the dining area on the roof of the communal block was used as a summer sleeping area for some of the children of the complex.[69] Despite changes to the program, these actions affirmed the continued importance of communal childcare for *byt* reform.

These changes to the program nonetheless indicate that the material world described by the Narkomfin complex was hotly contested. Miliutin, who commissioned the Communal House in 1928, distanced himself, probably more than any of his other colleagues, from the trajectory of earlier *byt* reforms. His book *Problemy Stroitel'stva Sotsialisticheskikh Gorodov,* written in the year the Narkomfin Communal House was completed, and in the wake of the 16 May Central Committee directive, was an attempt to declare publicly his allegiance to the new party directives.[70] Although, in accordance with the Central Committee directive, he rejected the "mechanical" elimination of the bourgeois family, Miliutin still argued for the eventual dissolution of the nuclear family into collectives and disputed recent critical rejection of this idea.[71] While advocating minimal cells without kitchens, as in the *Magnitogor'e* and Green City proposals, he rejected *Dom Kommuny* and the suggestions of "those comrades who attempt to assign the sole role of sleeping cabin to the living cell, and who relegate all other functions to collectivized buildings."[72] Miliutin equated the collectivized *Dom Kommuna* with "only a formally modified pattern of the petit-bourgeois dwelling" and rather ungraciously concluded (in bold script) that the "transformation of the dwelling unit into a mere toilet is the ideal of the middle-class architect!"[73] In the end, Miliutin proposed a settlement prototype for a linear city that almost literally replicated Ginzburg's Narkomfin *Dom Kommuna,* except for the transitional bourgeois K and 2-F units.[74] For all the condemnation of *Dom Kommuny,* Miliutin merely gave a new name (or rather no name at all) to an old *Dom Kommuna* (the Narkomfin Communal House).

One should be careful not to condemn what might appear to be the repudiation of earlier *byt* reforms and the unjust condemnation of close colleagues. By 1930 the environment within the architectural profession had become intolerably hostile toward *byt* reformers. By 1930 the VKhutemas school of architecture, most intimately associated with OSA, was closed down, and in 1931 the journal *SA* was replaced by the more centralized and state-controlled journal *Sovetskaia Arkhitektura.* Reading Miliutin's rather tortured rhetoric, one finds it difficult to ascertain if he is mocking, sincere, or desperate; very likely he was all three at once. It is particularly clear that for Miliutin, as for others, these rather painful rhetorical manipulations were evidence of an effort to preserve *byt* reforms in an increasingly hostile political environment.

Ginzburg's *Zhilishche,* published in 1934 (although written in 1932), appeared after the demise of *byt* reforms and the Constructivist movement in architecture.[75] In this work he distanced himself from the entire project, casting the five-year undertaking of the by-then extinct OSA group in historical terms as a period of "experimentation" that "suffered from extreme conclusions and schematic solutions."[76] His tone, unlike Miliutin's, is sober and forgiving of the "experimentations" of a bygone era. He defends the STROIKOM *Dom*

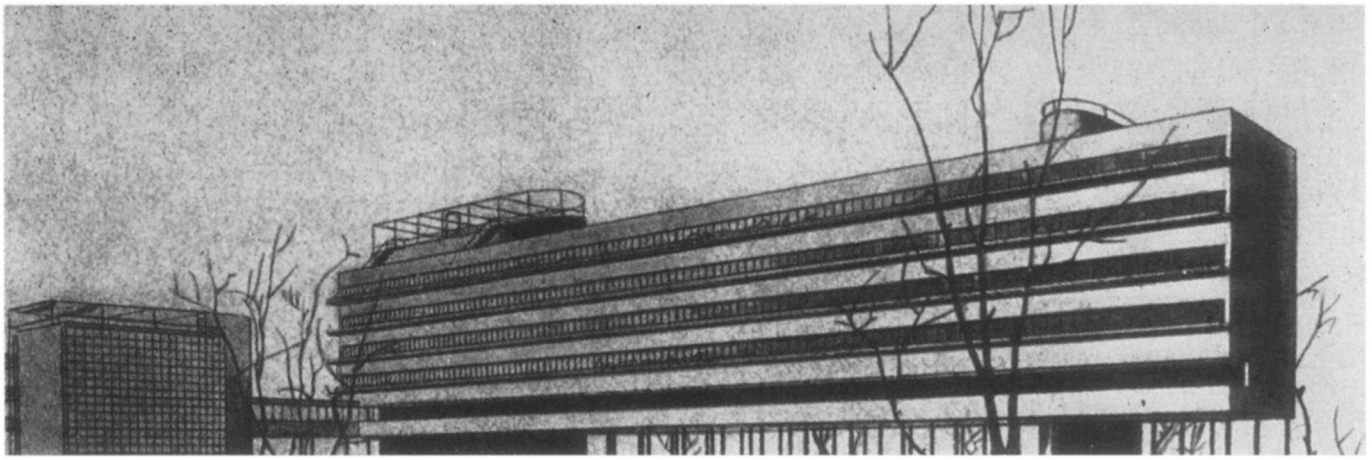


FIGURE 18: Proposed perspective of the Narkomfin Communal House, with original roof-garden scheme before construction of Nikolai Miliutin's penthouse, from M. Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 81

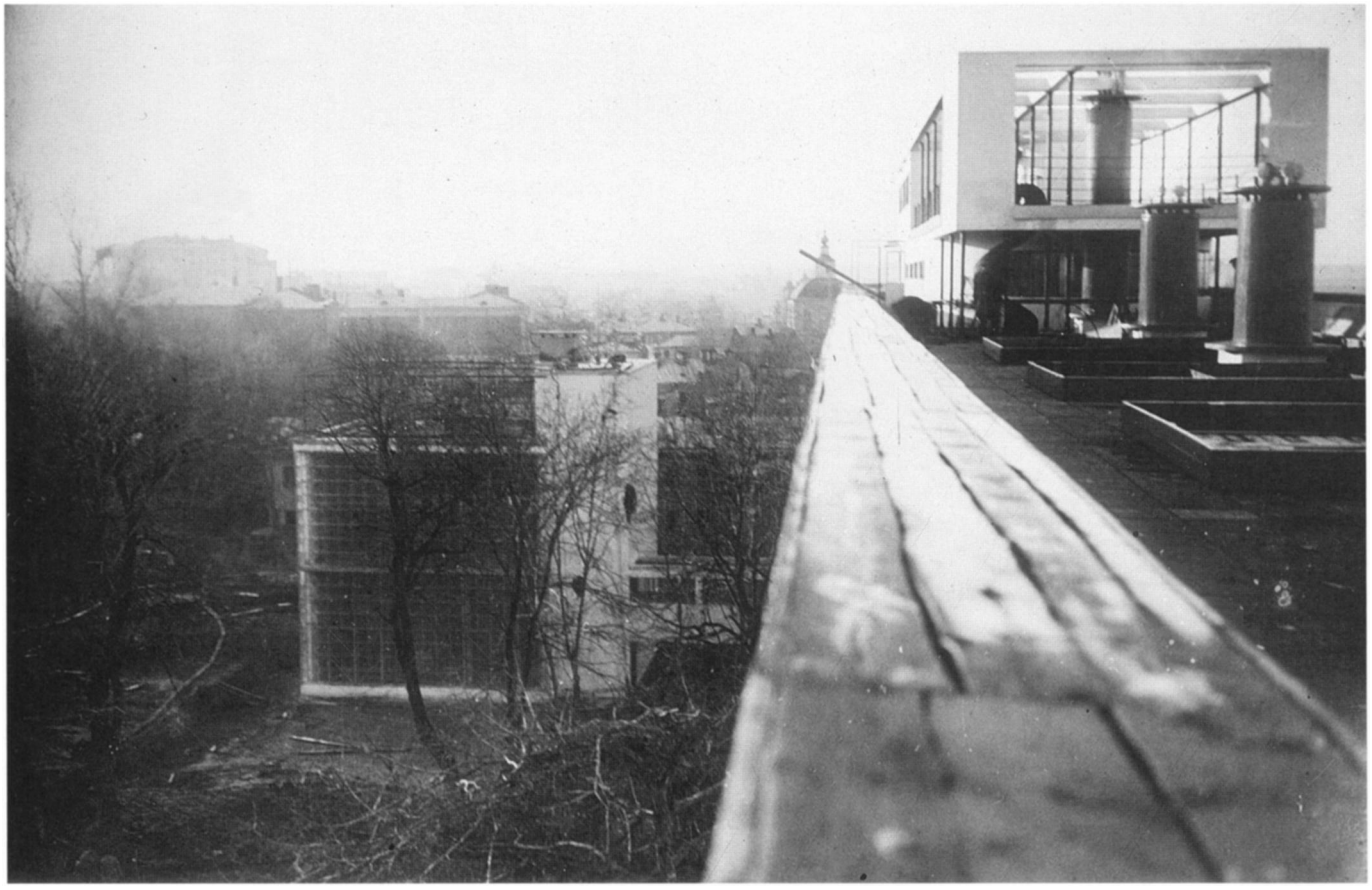


FIGURE 19: View from the roof garden/solarium, with communal block after construction, 1930

Kommuna developed under his supervision as "the most logical expression of the differentiation of living processes."[77] However, he does acknowledge that the project had already begun to suffer from "a lack of understanding of the meaning of self in a socialist collective."[78] Yet Ginzburg did not hesitate to slander some of his now officially reviled colleagues.[79]

Ginzburg also joined in the categorical critique of the *Dom Kommuna*, including his own work, as the "universal normalization of the order of life; [where] everyone without exception lives the same, there is no plurality, either in economic conditions, or in the conditions of daily life. All difficulties related to daily life appear already resolved and brought to conform to a standard. The forms of socialist life are not understood in dialectic terms, in movement, but in some sort of uniform and unchanging order . . . only in the sleeping cabins is the self allowed to develop."[80] Here Ginzburg joined the chorus of

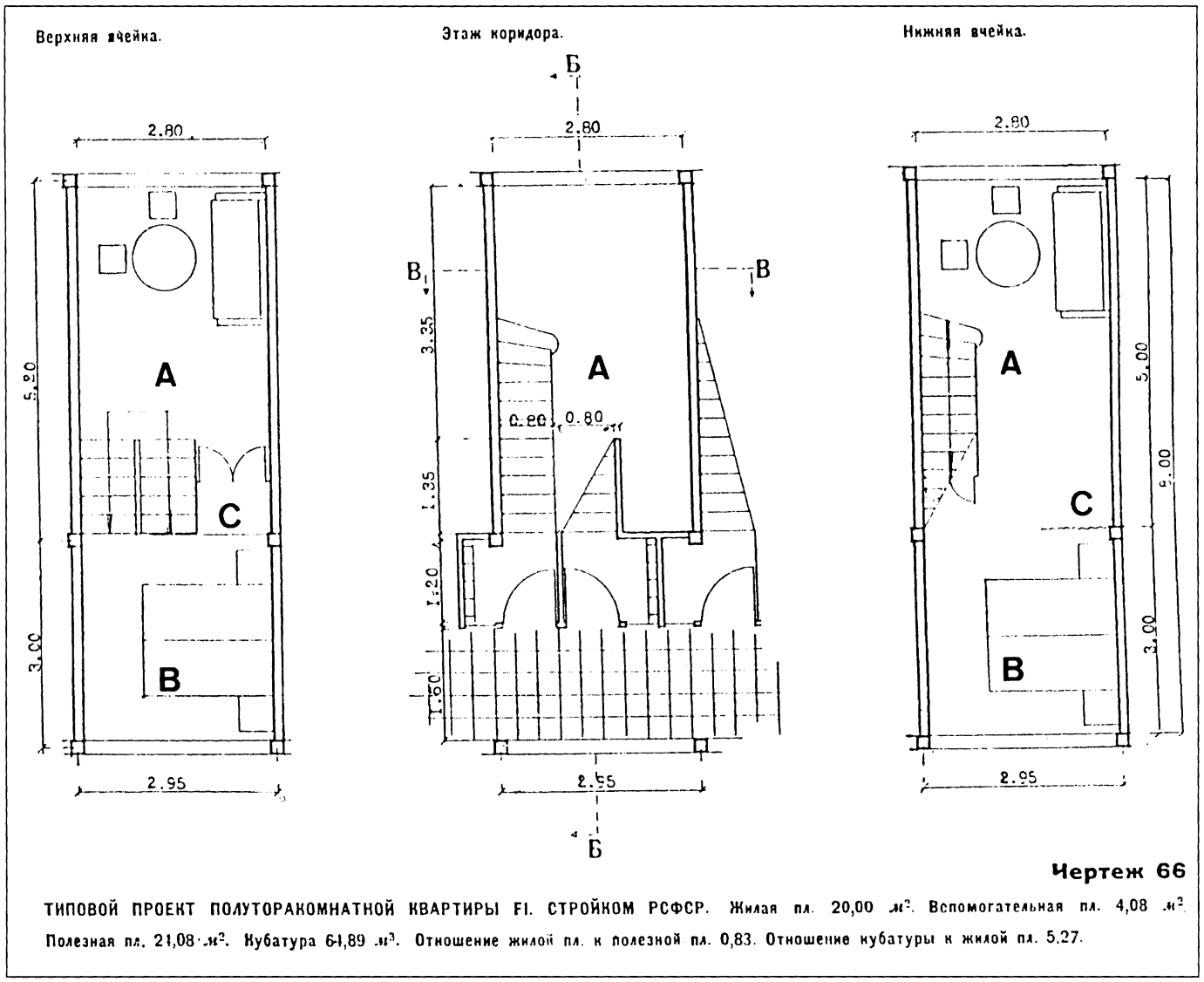


FIGURE 20: F-unit plans: (A) common room; (B) sleeping niche; (C) niche for removable Frankfurt-style kitchen, from STROIKOM (1930), 19

critics of *byt* reforms in calling for a shift toward pluralism and a revalidation of the domestic sphere as opposed to the commune as the locus for the development of the socialist self. He went on to criticize this division as unbalanced: "In such a manner in these examples of *Dom Kommuny*, the life of an individual is split [*raskolota*] into two unequal spheres; the small individual sphere (to which only sleep is given) and the larger social sphere (to which everything else is given)."[81] Ginzburg reminded his readers: "In the frenzy towards the realization of communism with *Dom Kommuny*, it was forgotten that the battle with animalistic individualism and the petit-bourgeois family is the battle for the liberation of the new socialist self, for the preconditions of that self's utmost and thorough development."[82] He concluded that these experiments reflected the conditions of an earlier, entirely different time (in fact only two years earlier). Since that time, Ginzburg claimed in a veiled reference to the recent upheavals within the architectural profession and the rise of the Stalinist state, "the scale of problems has changed, as well as the organization of their solutions. Demands have arisen not only in new housing, but in hundreds of densely populated areas."[83]

These political and social conflicts were even more evident in the second unexecuted phase of development on the Narkomfin Communal House site. This second block of housing, to be built perpendicular to the Narkomfin along the southern edge of the park, was to house employees of the SNK (Council of People's Commissars),[84] the larger bureaucratic entity into which the institution of the Narkomfin was absorbed as a consequence of Stalinist centralization of the state apparatus. This project was designed by Ginzburg with a new co-architect, G. A. Zundblat, in 1929, a year after the Narkomfin *Dom Kommuna*. Unlike its predecessor, this structure was in no way a *Dom Kommuna*, but rather an ordinary apartment house consisting of two levels of sixteen STROIKOM D units.[85] Separate, and physically unconnected to the Narkomfin communal block (Figure 25), the proposed second house of the

SNK was clearly a repudiation of the *Dom Kommuna* idea. Yet despite the increasingly "correct" (i.e., bourgeois) social formations it embodied, the project was conceived in a distinctly Constructivist idiom (a rectangular volume raised on pilotis) that was soon denounced as "leftist" and did not survive the convulsions of the architectural establishment and the consolidation of the Stalinist state. Ginzburg and Zundblat's proposal was never realized, and the project was given to a "Leontovich" in 1935, an architect more in touch with the changing times.[86]

As early as 1930, when it was built and first occupied, the Narkomfin already appeared somewhat archaic. The mix of units based on different social formations lacked any definitive direction toward F-type collectivized units. At the same time, the completion and occupation of the Narkomfin Communal House must have seemed a triumph for *byt* reformists and the OSA group in light of the hostilities they were experiencing at the hands of other groups and their loss of position within the architectural profession and the Stalinist restructuring of the state apparatus. This triumph was short-lived. Only two years later, in 1932, the highbrow arts newspaper, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, vilified the complex in quasihistorical tones as a vestige of the old way of thinking.[87] The building became an embarrassing reminder of discredited "left" and "Trotskyite" thinking. By the time of Ginzburg's defense in 1932, the Narkomfin Communal House had already been relegated to the dustbin of history as a peculiar and archaic manifestation of a bygone era.[88]

In the early 1930s the Narkomfin itself was subsumed under the Council of People's Commissars. Disregard for the original architectural conception and the dire need for housing in Moscow at this time resulted in the rather brutal administrative dismemberment of the complex of buildings. The living block remained more or less intact, but the communal block was considerably altered, used for various ministerial purposes, most notably as a printer's workshop. The bridge connecting the two buildings was sealed off and the space converted into dormitories for laborers employed by the Council of Ministers.[89] In the mid-1930s the area below the pilotis of the living block was filled in to accommodate six apartments with conventional prerevolutionary floor plans. In 1961 Ginzburg's laundry facility was transferred to the Moscow City Council's local housing administration (ZhEK no. 6) and later converted into offices.

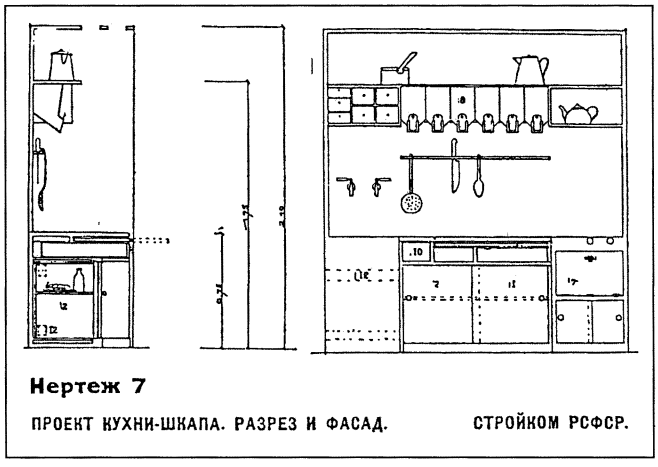


FIGURE 21: Plan and elevation of minimal kitchen

FIGURE 22: View shortly after construction of the living block connected to the communal block by a covered bridge

In the wake of Khrushchev's "thaw" and the party's rejection of Stalinism in the late 1950s, a residents' committee renounced the Stalinist legacy and attempted to revive the collectivist spirit of the complex and the community it housed. The committee actively petitioned for the reintegration of the old complex and the revival of its social program to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967.[90] The authorities never permitted this. The complex remained unchanged and continued to decline through Brezhnev's "period of stagnation" until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

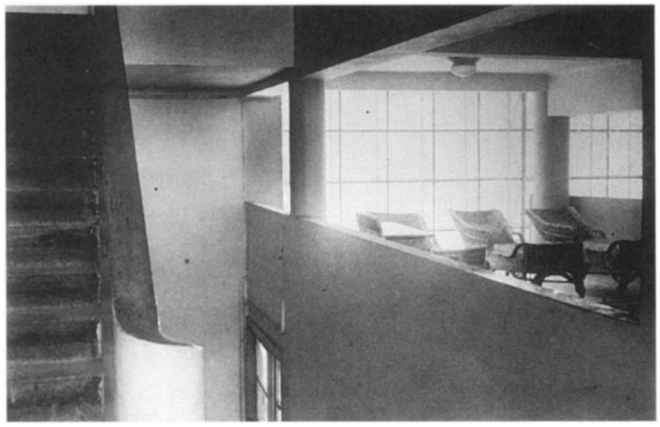


FIGURE 23: Interior view of the rest area in the mezzanine of the second floor overlooking the communal dining room, 1930s

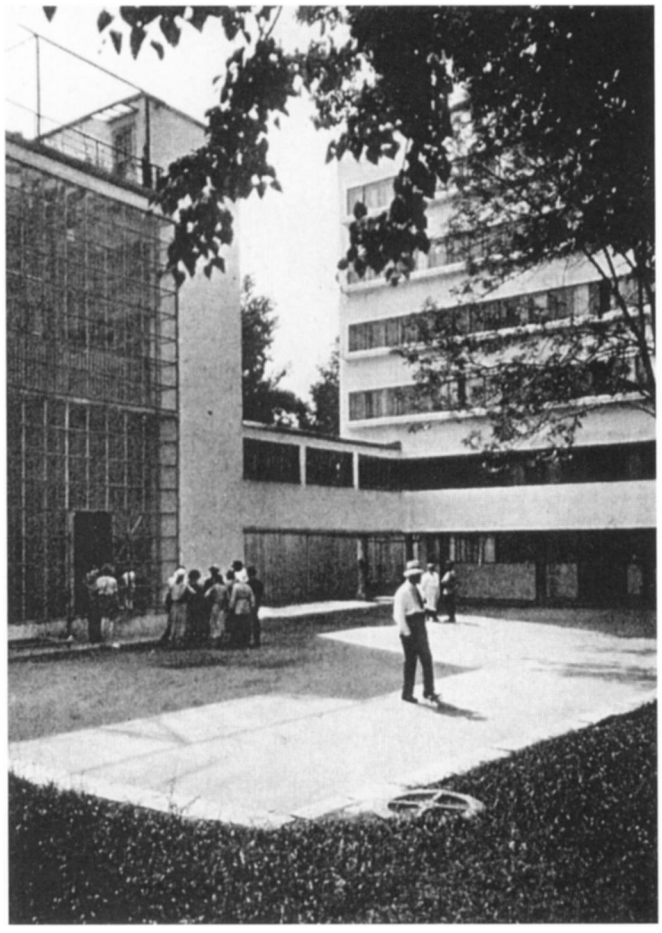


FIGURE 24: View of the communal block with windows opening onto the park, 1930s

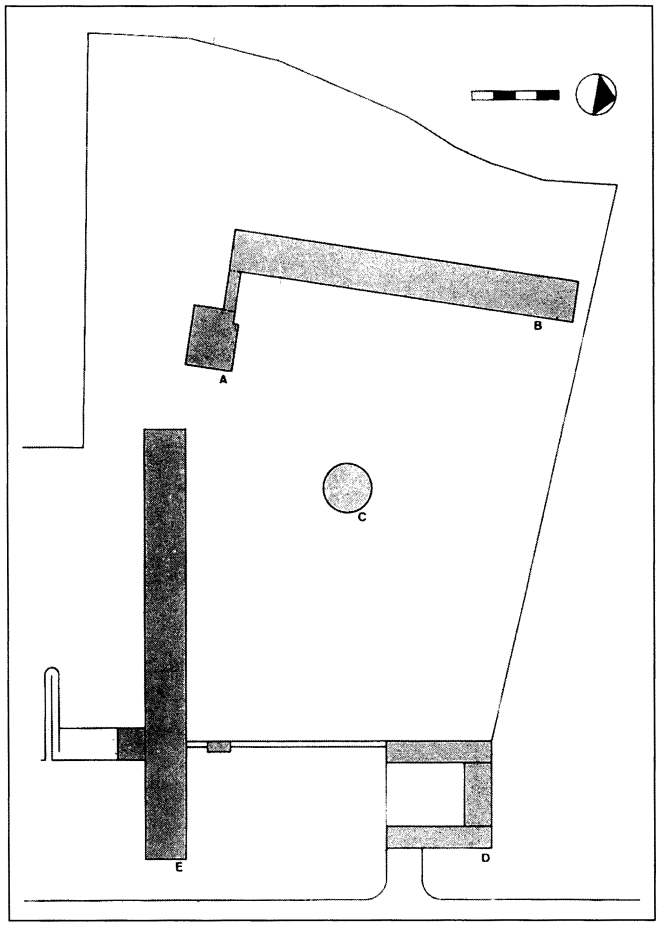


FIGURE 25: M. Ginzburg and G. A. Zundblat, proposed site plan of the second phase showing the second house of the Council of People's Commissars: (A) communal block; (B) living block; (C) crèche; (D) mechanical laundry building; (E) second house of the Council of People's Commissars, c. 1929. Author's drawing after the original, 1990

Today the successor to the Council of Ministers owns the communal block. The Moscow City Council owns the living block and leases the laundry facility to one of the new postcommunist business enterprises. Attempts have been made to convert the units of the living block into corporate housing for foreign businesses.[91] At the same time, the house museum of opera singer Feodor Chaliapin, which occupies the remaining Neoclassical buildings of the original site, is said to be contesting the ownership of the entire area in an attempt to reconsolidate the original prerevolutionary lots 113 and 115 for its own use.[92] The centrality of the site in Moscow, just off the Garden Ring Road and overlooking the American Embassy compound at the back, makes the complex of the Narkomfin Communal House very attractive in the burgeoning real estate market of post-Soviet Moscow, with many interests scrambling for its control. Indeed, the fragmented ownership and the uncertain and contested future of the site reiterate its history, where competing concepts of social and material relations contentiously engaged in an effort to realize the promise of the good life.

Notes

[1]Nikolai Miliutin, *Problemy Stroitel'stva Sotsialisticheskikh Gorodov* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1930).

[2] Much of the research for this article was supported by a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board. I am particularly indebted to Nadezhda Afanasieva, Vladimir Ginzburg, and Ekaterina Miliutina for their kindness, generosity, and trust in allowing me access to their family papers. In

addition, I am very grateful for the help of R. E. Krupnova and her research into the early history of the Narkomfin site, which directed me to the correct archives. Catherine Cooke provided support and inspiration in the course of research into this site, for which I am very much in her debt. To Ian Hodder I owe great thanks for having nurtured me through the larger research from which this article stems. Finally, however, I am most indebted to the families who have lived and are currently living in the Narkomfin Communal House. It is to them that I dedicate this article.

[3] See Selim Khan-Magomedov, *M. Ia. Ginzburg* (Moscow, 1972), and Ernesto Pasini, *La "casa-comune" e il Narkomfin di Ginzburg* (Rome, 1980).

[4] See Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier et La Mystique de l'URSS* (Brussels, 1987).

[5] *Byt*, loosely translated as daily life, is an ethnographic term relating to the totality of quotidian behavior. It refers to every aspect of daily life: food, clothing, domestic material culture, and family life. It can also be understood as the English word "lifestyle," with the additional sense of the ideological underpinnings of quotidian behavior and material culture. *Byt* reformers and theoreticians here refer to a very loose, amorphous group of professional writers and activists concerned with the conditions of daily life, or *byt* and dedicated to the realization of communism in Soviet society. They were committed to the principle of democratic centralism. Thus their rhetoric may appear pluralistic as that debate was encouraged until such time as a "general line" could be pursued and filtered down the social hierarchy. During the Stalinist period such a general line was avoided in order to ensure a modicum of popular support and integration (see Victor Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House, Moscow: the Material Culture of Accommodation and Resistance," Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1996, 165, 176, and idem, *An Archaeology of Socialism* [Oxford and New York, forthcoming]). *Byt* theoreticians and reformers ranged from philosophers, cultural critics, literary writers, artists, household advisers, and architects to party functionaries of various sorts. They were not unlike domestic reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who similarly ranged from socially active housewives to philosophers and architects. Usually the term *byt* is uncritically understood because of its generality and ubiquity across several disciplinary concerns during the Soviet period. See Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 68–162, for a broader contextual discussion of the significance of the concept of *byt* for this period, and idem, " Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," *Journal of Design History* 10 (1997): 161–176, for the postwar era.

[6] See broader discussions of these debates in Paul Willen, "Soviet Architecture in Transformation," M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1953; Hugh D. Hudson, Jr., *Blueprints and Blood* (Princeton 1994); Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-garde: Theories of Art and Architecture* (London 1995); idem, " The Town of Socialism" Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1974; and Milka Bliznakov, "Soviet Housing During the Experimental Years, 1918 to 1933," in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age*, ed. William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble (Cambridge, 1993).

[7] Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-garde: Art and Architecture* (London, 1983), 40.

[8] The results of this research were compiled in the STROIKOM guidelines for state housing in 1930. See STROIKOM, RSFSR, *Tipovye Proekty i Konstruktsii Zhilishchnogo Stroitel'stva* (Moscow, 1930).

[9] Khan-Magomedov, *Ginzburg*, 81.

[10] The industrialization drive was expensive and assumed priority over all other social projects. *Byt* reform, as well as other issues related to women's welfare, was sacrificed as a result of perceived economic priorities. See Barbara Evans Clements, "The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel," *Slavic Review* 15 (1992): 485–496, for a discussion of the collapse of the women's movement under Stalinism; and Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 83–90, which relates this collapse to other spheres of *byt* reform affecting architectural construction.

[11] Moisei Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 82.

[12] This drawing and all other original drawings from the Moskovskii Gosudarstvenyi Istoricheskii Nauchno-Tekhnicheskii Arkhiv (hereafter abbreviated MGINTA) have been redrawn by the author, as this archive was unable to provide reproductions of the originals at the time this research was conducted.

[13] The A-1 *Dom Kommuna* was entered in a competition and exhibition of *Dom Kommuny* organized by OSA in Moscow in 1927. See *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 4–5 (1927): 125.

[14] Ibid., 130, and Khan-Magomedov, *Ginzburg*, 79.

[15] The proposal was published in part in 1929 in *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 4 (1929): 122–128, and then published in full in the 1930 STROIKOM guidelines, STROIKOM, *Tipovye Proekty*, 44–54.

[16] STROIKOM, *Tipovye Proekty*, 53.

[17] Ibid., 54

[18] See Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 83–90.

[19] For a broader discussion of the social and material aspirations of the new men and women of the Stalinist period, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928–1939," *Slavic Review* 3 (1979): 377–402; Lynn Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivisation* (Oxford 1987); Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time* (Cambridge 1976), 17–23; and Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 163–188.

[20] VOPRA was a militant student organization at the time of the Cultural Revolution, enjoying ever-increasing state support. See Hugh D. Hudson, Jr., *Blueprints and Blood*, 118–135, for a thorough discussion of its activities.

[21] See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), and Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (Oxford, 1989), for broader discussions of the social effects and events of the Cultural Revolution.

[22] For a broader discussion, see Willen, "Soviet Architecture," and Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*.

[23] Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 110–114.

[24] The first recorded instance of the expulsion of a student from VKhutemas architectural school for hiding class origins occurred in 1929. See Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 124 –125.

[25] *Pechat' i Revoliutsiia* 6 (1929):125, quoted in Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood*, 125.

[26] See *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 1–2 (1930), which was dedicated to the question of socialist settlements.

[27] *Pravda*, 29 May, 1930.

[28] *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura*, 1–2 (1930): 5.

[29] Ibid., 23.

[30] Ibid., 41.

[31] Ibid., 1.

[32] Ibid., 48.

[33] Ibid., 55–56.

[34] Ibid., 44.

[35] Ibid., 48.

[36] See n. 19.

[37] *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 1–2 (1930): 48.

[38] Ibid., 1–3 (1930): 7.

[39] For a considerably more detailed history of the site, see R. E. Krupnova, "Istoriko-arkhitekturnaia i graficheskaia Kharakteristika Pamiatnika," *Eskiznyi Proekt Revstavratsii: Poiasnitel'naia Zapiska i Graficheskaia Chast'*, tom 3, kniga 1, Ministerstvo Kul'tury RSFSR, Ob'edinenie 'Rosrevstavratsiia' (Moscow, 1990).

[40] Of the two estates, prerevolutionary documentation is known only for lot no. 113. The earliest surviving site plan from 1825 shows a medium-sized Neoclassical mansion facing the Garden Ring Road, with several outbuildings behind the porticoed main building, with which it is clustered on the eastern half of the site. Toward the western half there is no indication of structures or landscaping. An 1858 site plan shows roughly the same arrangement, with the addition of a freestanding square-shaped building in the wooded eastern half, which evidently served as a pleasure pavilion. This plan credits the buildings as the work of the architect "Bove," presumably Osip Bove (1784–1834), the chief architect of the post-Napoleonic reconstruction of Moscow. This would confirm the earlier Neoclassical layout in 1825 and the high probability of Osip Bove or his offices as the original architect(s). An 1890 site plan (MGINTA, folder 323, document 10) shows the addition of a prominent new building: a fairly large pavilion in the shape of a halved octagon with a roofed, open gallery looking out onto the park and what now appears as a hexagonal-shaped structure labeled a "pavilion" at the approximate location of the earlier structure indicated on the 1858 site plan. The entry to the large pavilion was at the rear of the service buildings of the main house, with the pavilion's gallery facing out onto the park. The pavilion effectively split the site in half. Previously there was only the gradual tapering of the service buildings into the park, which in turn gently sloped downward to the small pavilion on the bluff. With the construction of the 1890 large pavilion, the park was visually and physically separated from the rest of the buildings of the estate. The formal element of

the large pavilion screened the views of the service buildings from within the park while creating a more contained Arcadian landscape separate from the service buildings. Approximately 73 percent of all the trees on the site can be dated to between 1879 and 1914. This concentrated period of planting within the park indicates the creation of a separate and distinct Arcadian landscape initiated by the construction of the 1890 pleasure pavilion.

[41] Jonathan Hazard, *Soviet Housing Law* (New Haven, 1939), 9–10.

[42] Survey plans from 1929 show the parks of the estates on lots 113 and 115, along with the majority of their outer service buildings apportioned off to form the new lot for the development of the Narkomfin Communal House. The remaining sections of lots 113 and 115, containing the main buildings of the prerevolutionary estates, were merged into one (these buildings were later merged to form the Chaliapin museum). The 1929 survey plan shows a considerable number of trees of the prerevolutionary park remaining. There are 204 trees, the vast majority of them (79 percent) dating to before 1914.

[43] For a thorough discussion of the influence of the Garden City movement on Soviet architects, see Catherine Cooke, "Russian Responses to the Garden City Movement," *Architectural Review* (June 1978): 353–363.

[44] See also Ginzburg's individual dwellings in his Sotsrasseleniia project for Gosplan, RSFSR, in Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 155–169.

[45] See Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, and Khan-Magomedov, *Ginzburg*.

[46] See M. Ginzburg, *Revolutsia i Kultura*, quoted in Anatole Kopp, *Architecture et Mode de Vie* (Grenoble, 1979), 25.

[47] Ginzburg, *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 1–2 (1930): 61–62.

[48] Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 60.

[49] Ginzburg and Mikhail Barhsch, *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 1–2 (1930).

[50] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: a Reader*, ed. Jon Elster (Cambridge, 1986), 180.

[51] See Le Corbusier, *La Ville Radieuse* (1935), quoted in Jean-Louis Cohen, *La Mystique de l'URSS*, 171.

[52] MGINTA, folder 10024, document 6; see also STROIKOM, coauthored by Ginzburg, concerning the importance of preserving unspoiled landscapes in site planning. STROIKOM, *Tipovye Proekty*, 45.

[53] The presence of the late-nineteenth-century pavilion on the western bluff overlooking the Moskva River, with its Arcadian prospects, was also incorporated into the original scheme of 1929 by means of a clearing with curving benches that creates a lookout approached by meandering paths leading to and away from it. Similarly the placement of the Narkomfin's bold semicircular balconies at the southern end of the building responded to the views enjoyed by the original nineteenth-century pavilion, raising them higher into the air, framing views of a sixteenth-century church and the vista that sloped downward to the banks of the Moskva.

[54] See Figure 24, dated 1935.

[55] Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 105.

[56] Ibid.

[57] This would seem to indicate an element of restraint on Ginzburg's part and a retention of some aspects of prerevolutionary propriety, unlike Kuzmin (see *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 3 (1930): 14–17) and Nikolaev (see Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 146).

[58] The penthouse shares many elements with K-type apartments. It consists of one large two-story main room with open gallery. The entry is on the ground floor, with a separate kitchen and a main two-story room. The second floor accommodates two bedrooms, two closets, and a large open gallery that leads onto a balcony on the western side. The penthouse is also distinguished by a number of architectural features from other K-type units. The ground-floor kitchen opens through a cabinet designed by Miliutin himself onto the main living area (Ekaterina Miliutina, personal communication). The upper open gallery area, which is a bedroom in ordinary K units, is projected here as an office/lounge space with built-in planter and solitary pilotis overlooking the main living area. There are no exposed pilotis in the main two-story space, as in the other K units. As the penthouse was constructed (apparently as an afterthought) within the perimeter of the outer curtain wall of the main building, it missed the opportunity to incorporate a pilotis in the main living space, used to such great architectural effect in ordinary K units. Instead, the load-bearing pilotis were incorporated within the partition walls. On the whole, the arrangement is unique when compared with other K units and represents a variation of the STROIKOM K-unit type on the part of the architect Miliutin. The apartment as built has remained unaltered throughout the occupancy of the living block, carefully preserved by Miliutin family members who resided there until the apartment was abandoned in 1975.

[59] The dormitory units next to the entrance to the penthouse were derived from analogous prototypical units of the STROIKOM (*STROIKOM, Tipovye Proekty*, 50, 53), co-authored by Ginzburg. However, they do vary in the placement of the shower, which is directly derived from Miliutin's prototypes for linear cities, with showers shared by units (Miliutin, *Problemy Stroitel'stva*, 83). At the end of this row of dormitory units is a spectacular glass-enclosed semicircular space that looked out over the roof garden/solarium.

[60] The Frankfurt kitchen was developed by Grete Lihotzky as a minimal kitchen for mass housing. See Susan R. Henderson, "A Revolution in the Women's Sphere: Grete Lihotzky and the Frankfurt Kitchen," in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (Princeton, 1996): 221–253.

[61] There were two types of F units. In the first, the staircase from the second corridor led down to one level comprising both common room (room A) and sleeping niche (room B). These units had even numberings and were designated by a black door along the corridor. The second type was accessed up seven steps from the corridor to the common room, followed by a turn in the steps and a further seven steps up to the sleeping niche. These units had odd numberings and were indicated by a white door along the corridor. The arrangement of units above and below the level of the corridor was an innovative space-saving device that doubled the number of units on two different stories that could be serviced by a single corridor. Le Corbusier adopted this configuration for his *Unité d'Habitation* projects many years later.

[62] Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 127,129.

[63] Ginzburg, with Hinnerk Scheper of the Bauhaus, conducted various color experiments at the Narkomfin to determine the effects of color on the perception of space. Ginzburg describes the results in *Zhilishche*, 88–96.

[64] For further discussion of F units, see Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 84, and STROIKOM, *Tipovye Proekty*, 35, 55–61.

[65] Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 84

[66] MGINTA, folder 10024, document 124.

[67] Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 82.

[68] Ibid., 82-83; V. M. Ginzburg, interview with author, 1990, and Elena Rabinovich, interview with author, 1990.

[69] V. M. Ginzburg, interview with author, 1990.

[70] Miliutin dutifully provides a full transcript of the 16 May directive in his appendix. See N. A. Miliutin, *Problemy Stroitel'stva*, 124.

[71] Ibid., 66, 75, 76.

[72] Ibid., 81 82.

[73] Ibid., 82.

[74] Individual cells for couples and single individuals were arranged along a long glassed-in corridor, with a separate cube-shaped building housing communal facilities, which jutted out perpendicularly at regular intervals. See Miliutin, *Problemy Stroitel'stva*, 99–102.

[75] See editor's preface in Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 6.

[76] Ibid., 7.

[77] Ibid., 138.

[78] Ibid., 138.

[79] Ginzburg attacked Kuzmin's highly regulated *Dom Kommuna* proposal as an "absurd" extension of reformist *byt* practices and likened his proposal to "Prussian army barracks" (Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*, 7).

[80] Ibid., 142.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 148.

[83] Ibid., 144.

[84] The SNK was renamed the Council of Ministers in 1946.

[85] Khan-Magomedov, *Ginzburg*, 108.

[86] A 1935 photograph of the building found in the archives of the Muzei Istorii i Rekonstrukstii Moskvy [2952 (Φ) 0] attributes the design of the building to an architect mentioned only as "Leontovich."

[87] *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 11 August 1932.

[88] Ginzburg, *Zhilishche*. Following the Constructivist project, the understanding of the landscape rapidly changed in the course of five years; the planning of the Stalinist classicist apartment house for the Council of People's Commissars by Leontovich took place in 1933–1935. A 1949 photograph of the radically altered park attributes its design to Leontovich. Photos from 1935 and 1936 of a

segment of Leontovich's new park suggest it was created at the same time as his new apartment building, which faced out onto the park and was perpendicular to the Narkomfin. Most of the trees of the nineteenth-century park had been removed and new ones planted according to a more formal geometric plan. Eventually two allées of lime trees were cultivated that led up to the two entries of the main living block. These allées were aligned with bordered grassy areas and manicured bushes, while a formal garden lay in front of the heavy classical facade of the new Stalinist apartment building. In keeping with this formalist "taming" of the previously free-form nineteenth-century park, an asphalt road was placed alongside the Narkomfin living block. Old trees, so carefully accommodated in the original construction, were removed. The old tree line was pushed away from the house and separated by a low border of fencing, shrubbery, and an asphalt road.

[89] Domovye Knigi, REU-9, Krasnopresnenskii Raion, Moscow, Ulitsa Chaikovskovo 25, Dom 1 (1930–1992). Also see discussion in Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 191–192.

[90] Afanasiev Archive, document 32, page 2. See also discussion in Buchli, "The Narkomfin Communal House," 301–304.

[91] *Arkhitekturnyii Vestnik* 2 (1995): 4.

[92] The last occupant of the prerevolutionary mansion on the site was Feodor Chaliapin, the world-renowned opera singer. Later on during the Soviet period the mansion was turned into a house museum in his honor.

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Figures 2, 5. Original drawing in Moskovskii Gosudarstvenyi Istoricheskii Nauchno-Tekhnicheskii Arkhiv (hereafter abbreviated MGINTA), folder 10024, document 124

Figure 6: *Sovremennaia Arkhitektura* 4-5 (1927): 130

Figures 7, 15, 16, 18. M. Ginzburg, *Zhilishche* (Moscow, 1934), 149, 104, 105, 81

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Figures 20, 21. STROIKOM (1930), 58

Figure 24. D. Arkin (1935), 25

Figure 25. Original drawing in MGINTA, folder 10024, document 102