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Project of a house-commune for Anzhero-Sudzhensk as a part of the Soviet utopian discourse of the late 1920s and early 1930s*

Projekt domu komuny dla Anżero-Sudżenska jako część radzieckiego dyskursu utopijnego z przełomu lat 20. i 30. XX wieku

Abstract

During the ideological war waged by the Bolsheviks, housing was an important front, significant as a field in which the contemporary discourse found its material manifestations. The present article discusses an example of a literal interpretation of the radical ideology of the period: the project of a Siberian house-commune by Nikolai Kuzmin. The project was an attempt to transplant a utopian (linguistic) idea directly into an architectural complex. Although Kuzmin had assumed that the project would be implemented, in fact it was not feasible and never began to exist outside the realm of discourse.

Keywords: Nikolai Kuzmin, house-commune, the Soviet avant-garde, utopia, discourse

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Budownictwo mieszkaniowe stanowiło ważny front toczonej przez bolszewików wojny ideologicznej, stając się miejscem materialnego zamanifestowania ówczesnego dyskursu. W niniejszym artykule omówiono przykład dosłownego zinterpretowania radykalnej ideologii tego okresu: projekt syberyjskiego domu komuny autorstwa Nikołaja Kuźmina. Propozycja ta była próbą przeszczepienia utopijnej (językowej) idei bezpośrednio do przestrzeni kompleksu architektonicznego. Mimo przekonania Kuźmina o realności zaproponowanego projektu, w rzeczywistości był on niewykonalny i nigdy nie zaczął funkcjonować poza sferą dyskursu.

Is it possible for architecture to severe completely its ties with the past? Architecture makes use of its own collection of texts and quotes texts from this pool, while being rather impervious to the influence of other idioms, especially non-visual. In this context, modern architecture ventured a radical change: an attempt to create a completely new idiom, not so much by redefining the aesthetics of decoration (which it rejected) as by introducing rationally implemented modifications of architectural structure and assigning new functions to rooms and buildings. In this process, a significant role was played by the demands of the Soviet avant-garde because of the context in which they were voiced: the new political, social and cultural reality that emerged in the wake of the Russian Revolution. In the 1920s and 1930s, a new architectural idiom is born, shaking off the burden of the past. It must be said, however, that it also did not emerge out of nothing, drawing heavily upon the Soviet social, political and anthropological discourse.

House-Commune

Utopian concepts of society and space have a rich history, but their innovation was often limited to function instead of form; the most evident example are Fourier's phalanstery, which recreated the form of the residences of the nobility. An unprecedented architectural development, whose novelty lay not only in function, but also in the aesthetic idiom of form, were the projects of house-communes, created in the USSR at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s[1]. They combined the ideological principle of making life entirely "communal" with an ascetic and functional aesthetics. Contrary to many earlier utopian concepts, it was an attempt to forge a brand new spatial idiom in order to express and shape a new social reality.

At this point, it must be observed that for the most part the Soviet projects of house-communes did not go as far as to leave the past completely behind. The above remark holds true not only for communes established spontaneously after the Revolution and using the existing premises, but also for new projects, which were not as bold as to break off the ties totally. Although those projects introduced certain elements of communal life (usually a canteen, a club, a library or a laundry) and took pride in being called "house-communes", they were not actually communes, because they had not abandoned the idea of the private "ownership" of living space; instead, they made only recreation space communal and expanded the sphere of public services, transferring onto the

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[1] The trend is usually believed to have occurred in the years 1926–31, although earlier – less radical – projects also existed (Khazanova 1970, pp. 106–113).

community some of the traditional tasks of a private household. For this reason, the most famous realizations, such as Narkomfin building in Moscow (1928–1930) or Uraloblsovet building in Sverdlovsk (1930–1933)[2], are only semi-collectivized "transitional housing", intended as a temporary solution before authentic house-communes are constructed[3]. A modern form concealed compromised functionality.

Eventually, a revolutionary project of making life uncompromisingly communal was drafted – but not in the capital, but in the far-off Siberia. Its author was an architecture student from the Tomsk Technological Institute (TTI), Nikolai Kuzmin (1905–1985)[4].

Kuzmin's project of a house-commune for Anzhero-Sudzhensk gained fame mainly because of the theoretical dissertations that accompanied it, published mostly in the constructivist periodical "Sovremennaya Arkhitektura". Although the texts are an integral part of the project and are the only form in which it actually existed, our discussion of the textuality of the project will not focus on analyzing the texts but rather on the project itself, as it was a part of contemporary discourse.

Red Taylorism and the private space

In the theoretical section of his project, Kuzmin included an analysis of the specific methodology used by a "proletarian architect", for which he coined the term "scientific organization of life", or NOB (Russ. Nauchnaya organizatsiya byta)[5]. The term alludes directly to the methods of "scientific management", or Taylorism, which in the Soviet Union was referred to as "scientific organization of work", NOT (Russ. Nauchnaya organizatsiya truda) and denoted "precisely calculated organization of work"[6]. Surprisingly, Fordism and Taylorism enjoyed amazing success in the USSR. Despite his initial hostility, Lenin, after seizing power, appealed to transplant those concepts to the Land of the Soviets[7]. Also Stalin urged to implement the American practical attitudes in the Soviet organization of work[8].

Kuzmin openly admitted to his American inspirations and to having studied Fordism[9]. His direct inspiration was "the Russian Taylor" – Aleksey Gastev (1882–1939),

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[2] Khan-Magomedov 2001, pp. 360–367.

[3] "We found it absolutely necessary to create a number of points that **stimulate** a transition to a higher form of social life, but **do not decree this transition**" (emphasis by Ginzburg), Ginzburg 1934, p. 68. All translations by K. Nędza-Sikoniowska and P. Gruchała, unless otherwise noted. Author thanks Paweł Gruchała for his help with the translation of this paper.

[4] Nendza-Shchikoniovska [Nędza-Sikoniowska] 2017. Kuzmin's proposal was his graduation project (Kuz'min 1928–1929, No 2201, BMHSA).

[5] Kuz'min 1930, sheets 14–16.

[6] Gastev 1966a, p. 156.

[7] Lenin 1973a, pp. 18–19; Lenin 1973b; Lenin 1969.

[8] Stalin 1947.

[9] Kuz'min 1928a, p. 104.

a poet (sic!)[10] and the leader of the Central Institute of Labour, an institution responsible for the methodology of work training, theoretical and practical analyses of work management processes and their popularization (periodical titled "Organizatsiya truda"). Aimed at maximizing time-effectiveness and minimizing costs, NOT recommended eliminating all superfluous movements, reducing complex structures to simpler ones, and making activities rational.

Identifying culture as discipline and learned practice is vital element in Gastev's thought. In his opinion, the role of a "disseminator and agent of culture" was to be performed "not by a teacher, a missionary, or a public speaker, but by an assembly technician"[11]. Thus, he goes a step further than Proletkult, which postulated to place art in the hands of factory workers. For Gastev, work itself becomes art and should be the main focus and essence of the new culture.

Kuzmin's project attempts to apply a functional method of work management in a completely different domain: that of human everyday behaviour and private life, by implementing an architectural design. The Soviet culture did not stop at a factory and "Red Taylorism" knocked on private doors, using Kuzmin as its herald[12].

The schedule of life process

The chronocyclegraph – a method used in work management to allocate the exact time needed to carry out particular actions – was employed by Kuzmin to create the "life process" schedule (Russ. bytovoy protsess)[13]. The architect planned everyday tasks for every age and gender group of the house-commune dwellers with to-the-minute accuracy (6.00 waking up, 6.05 exercises, 6.15 morning toilet…)[14].

Ostentatiously inhuman and mechanistic[15] Kuzmin's social engineering was much more sophisticated in fact[16]. Anticipating the criticisms, Kuzmin emphasized the following point: "Time is not allocated in order to ration human movement. Man is not an automaton. This time I planned for the architectural organization of the commune"[17]. Kuzmin claimed his work was only an attempted to create an "ideal type" (Max Weber) of dweller as a helpful methodological tool. A similar approach was adopted by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky while designing her famous Frankfurt kitchen (1928), a project known also in the USSR[18].

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[10] Gastev wrote mainly prose poetry. His legacy includes a volume titled *Poetry of the Worker's Blow*, (*Poeziya rabochego udara*), Petrograd 1918, which had several (extended) editions.

[11] Gastev 1964c, p. 206.

[12] Nędza-Sikoniowska 2019, p. 343.

[13] Freydin 2005, p. 51.

[14] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 15, verso; Nędza-Sikoniowska 2019, pp. 339–340.

[15] The schedule is even compared by scholars to Zamyatin's Table of Hours (Stites 1989, p. 202; Sadowski 2005, p. 117).

[16] Nędza-Sikoniowska 2019, p. 341.

[17] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 15, verso.

[18] Yakobson [Jacobsohn] 1928.

And yet, it is doubtful that the "life process" schedule was a mere aid in designing. The schedule was to be reflected directly in the distribution of rooms in the planned architectural complex[19]. The very structure of the building assumed a certain usage, thus preventing a dweller from "self-willed" creating of his daily schedule. It is also no coincidence, that Kuzmin placed the schedule in the wider context of the "scientific organization of life" (NOB), a theory that advocated a large-scale social and anthropological transformation[20].

Diagram of life

Kuzmin intended to link the structure of the distribution of rooms in the complex not only to the roster of daily activities, but also to the dweller's "journey" from birth, through the day-care centre, the kindergarten, the school, and the workplace to the old people's home. To do so, he created a circular diagram, which he called a "diagram of life" (Russ. grafik zhizni), of the dwellers grouped according to age and gender (Fig. 1)[21]. Categorization into age groups was of crucial importance for the project, because the architect's ambition was to create a rational schedule of human relationships from cradle to grave. What follows is that the diagram of life was a step even more radical than the detailed schedule of everyday life, because it aimed at a sweeping anthropological transformation of this Siberian community.

The design of the building is an outcome of reconciling the so-called diagram of life with the diagrams of dynamic connection[22]. Although Kuzmin could justify the arrangement of rooms in accordance with the daily schedule by arguing that his design went forward to meet the requirements of the workers' way of life (reflected by the sequence of rooms: bedroom – room for exercising – bathroom – canteen, etc.), this argument does not apply to the inclusion of the diagram of life in his design. The ordering of buildings in Kuzmin's complex did not correspond to the structures of Siberian miners' lives, but instead was intended to change them. Categorizing the rooms according to their function, and especially providing separate bedrooms for each age group (with children separated from their parents!) was supposed to revolutionize the conditions in which humans live.

In fact, the project is an unprecedented attempt to transfer the ideology of the social and anthropological revolution from the domain of discourse onto real architectural substance. At this point, it is worthwhile to trace the dependencies between these domains.

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[19] Based on the schedule, the architect elaborated the so-called diagrams of dynamic connection between various elements (i.e. rooms) of the building (Russ. grafiki dinamicheskoy svyazi), see: Kuz'min 1930, sheet 16.

[20] Nędza-Sikoniowska 2019, pp. 341–342.

[21] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 15, verso.
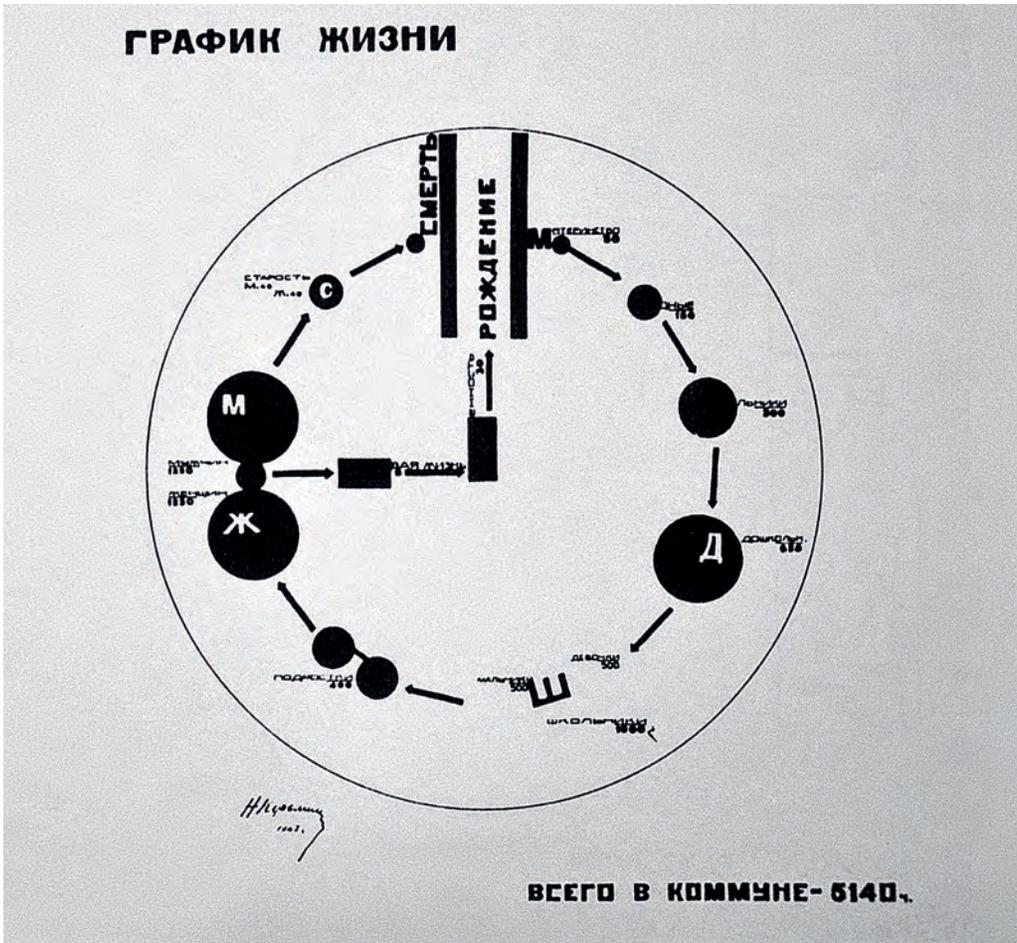
[22] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 16, verso.

Fig. 1. Diagram of life
Source: Kuz'min N. 1930, *Problema Nauchnoy organizatsii byta*, "Sovremennaya arkhitektura",
№ 3, sheet 15, verso. Signed as Kuz'min.

A new form following new functions

In Kuzmin's project, the modernist form-follows-function dogma is implemented to the highest possible degree: architectural form is intended to constitute a literal (material) realization of an ideological tenet. If we assume that the function of the architectural sign is the signified in semiotic terms (with the form being the signifier), in this case the "function" does not refer simply to the purpose of a given room or building, but to the aspirations to shape human behaviour with a view to creating an adequately perceived socialist community.

The agenda of social and political objectives, some of which were utopian, whilst others were actually implemented in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, was reflected

completely in the functionalities of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk house-commune, moulded in a form not only consistent with modernist aesthetics, but also being a tangible realization of ideological assumptions. This project is a text not only because it "remained on paper" in the form of drawings with accompanying commentary and statement of the author's opinions. What calls for a semiotic analysis here is not the new aesthetics itself – albeit abounding in meanings – but the literal enclosure of the ideological text of the age within the boundaries of a single complex of buildings.

The signified of Kuzmin's project has two complementary poles. On the one hand, it belongs to the discourse of the period (which is a typical layer, providing a broader context), but on the other hand it reflects the author's personality. On the one hand, the house-commune was intended to realize specific, rationally motivated postulates, but on the other hand it embodied a utopia, which is one of the most literary form of social text.

Collectivist thinking

The Bolshevik vision of anthropological revolution was not without an emancipatory element: a belief in the huge potential to improve human body and will, but this aspect concerned humans conceived of as the humanity rather than an individual. Nikolai Kuzmin's project is also immersed in collectivist thinking as it underscores the absolute importance of the harmonious functioning of a community with the smoothness and efficiency of a machine. The uppermost objectives of the project are to make all spheres of human existence communal to the greatest possible degree and to achieve unification of life:

> Everything is communal. From sewing on buttons, through repairing pants (no longer a wife's task), to finishing with cleaning the rooms. The workers get up from their sleep and leave the bedrooms. The beds are folded onto the walls. Special personnel cleans the rooms. When the worker goes to sleep after a day of hard work at the mine, he will find the bedroom prepared, cleaned, and ventilated[23].

Kuzmin's interest is not only in the economic dimension, but also in bringing about a profound social change. In his opinion, the flaws of a capitalist society (egoism, greed, alienation from community, domestic violence, alcoholism, enslavement of women, etc.) are to a large extent a result of housing conditions. The architect levels harsh criticism at the current housing project of the Soviet state, consistently accusing his contemporaries of two "anachronisms": treating a family as a separate unit detached from the community and designing flats with kitchens. He argues that space must be transformed and mistakes of the past must not be repeated[24]. Collectivism was expected to create a sense

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[23] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 16, recto.
[24] Kuz'min 1928b, pp. 82–83.

of equality and solidarity, but in Kuzmin's case it was primarily a unifying factor. Miners do not possess their own money, their entire wages are pooled together to finance all expenses of the house-commune. Clothing and food is also identical for each of the age groups[25].

Crucial to the arrangement of buildings within the Anzhero-Sudzhensk experiment (Fig. 2)[26] is the idea to place the communal objects in the centre, and the bedrooms – separate for the different age groups – at the peripheries of the complex. Not only because of silence. Sleeping – an entirely individual act – was pushed to the margin.
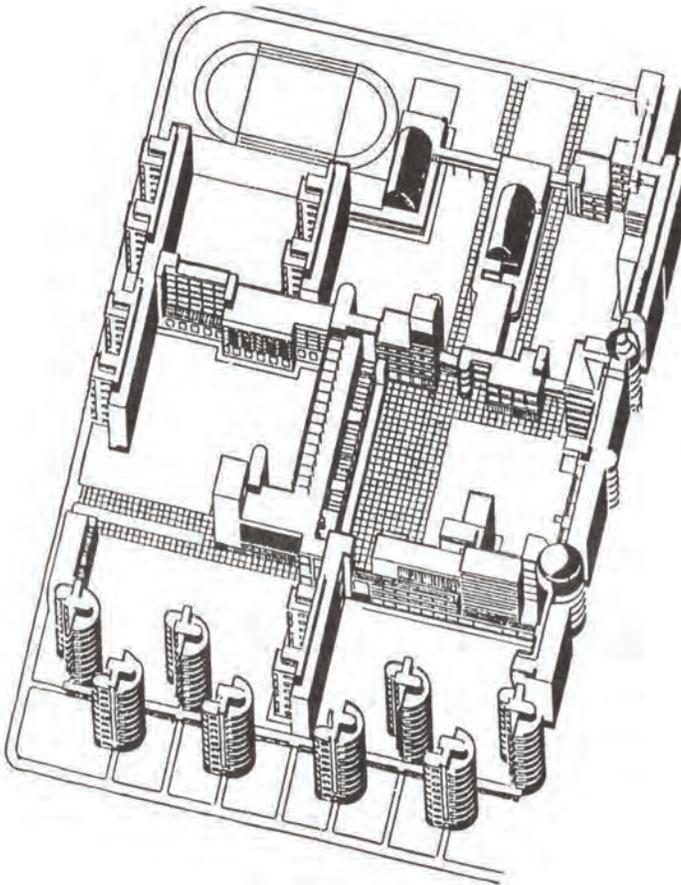

Fig. 2. Project of a house-commune for Anzhero-Sudzhensk
Source: Kuz'min N. 1930, *Problema Nauchnoy organizatsii byta*,
"Sovremennaya arkhitektura", № 3, sheet 16, verso.
Signed as Kuz'min.

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[25] Nendza-Shchikoniovska [Nędza-Sikoniowska] 2017, p. 128.
[26] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 16, verso.

The central position of the club, which replaced the Orthodox temple with its cultural and social functions, provides a central axis around which the lives of all members of the community revolve, determining both the rhythm of their everyday existence and the course of their journey through life. Ivan Nevsgodin aptly compared Kuzmin's project to a clock face[27]. The distance between the Club and each set of bedrooms is designed to be as short as possible. All buildings "lean towards it", the paths used by the dwellers always direct them towards the centre. It takes less time for parents to reach a reading room than to reach their child's bedroom. In their daily movements and in their journey through life, dwellers of the house-commune always turn their face to the community.

The science of human machine

An element of contemporary discourse that is most evident in Kuzmin's project is the gradual dehumanization of the human being, subjected to a rational creation by politicians, scientists, and eventually artists.

The mechanical philosophy was part of the avant-garde attitudes, including the circle of architects, which had formative influence on the young student from Tomsk. Mikhail Barshch, one of the leading exponents of constructivism, appealed to architects, urging them to shoulder some of the responsibility for the collective efforts to increase human productivity by using a labour psychophysiology ("a new branch of technical knowledge – the science of human machine") in their projects[28].

It is also difficult to overestimate here Gastev's influence on Kuzmin. In both, Gastev's poems and social activity he called for creating the new man – not only steeped in the new ideology, but also with a body and movements characterized by mathematical perfection:

> Go engineer the philistine.
> Hammer geometry into their necks.
> Logarithms to their gestures.
> . . .
> Brain-machines – loading.
> Cinema-eyes – installation.
> Electronerves – work.
> Artery-pumps, swing[29].

Gastev's transhumanism ventured beyond the limitations of an artistic project into the field of anthropology. This is because one of the ideas he expanded was the so-called

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[27] Nevzgodin 2005, p. 55.
[28] Barshch 1928.
[29] Gastev 1964a, p. 192, 193. Gastev's coinage "cinema-eye" ("kino-glaz") was used by the film director Dziga Vertov as the title of one of his films (1924) and an experimental film technique.

biomechanics, perceived as the science of perfecting the movements of a factory worker (and a citizen) using a machine as a model (V. Meyerhold was also inspired by Taylorism). Further development of biomechanics was to become an objective pursued by the Soviet nation[30].

Gastev's vision is as political as it is lyrical. Identifying the most efficient movements with scientific methods, followed by teaching them to the worker through exact repetition – like Pavlov's conditioned reflexes – was expected not only to guarantee efficiency, but also to achieve order and harmony, which are the activist's primary objectives. Human movements were to become uniform, the energy of the human body was to be scrutinized and regulated by science, the processes of nourishment should be perceived by investigators as supplying power to a machine. To quote Gastev's appeal: "There must be nothing sacred here. The field must be completely revolutionized"[31].

Gastev's preferred fashion of comparing a human being and society to a machine is alarming. Although such analogies are acceptable in the images he conjured in his poetry, the fact of applying the same metaphor in his post-Revolution public activity as a columnist and organizer is obviously disturbing[32].

This move "from words to action" is vital for understanding the connections between Kuzmin's project and the contemporary discourse, in which Gastev, to whom Kuzmin referred so directly, was a prominent figure.

In the beginning was the Word

Despite the fact that after the Bolsheviks had gained control Gastev made a conscious decision to gradually abandon poetry and focus on his involvement as an activist, he would never actually separate the two strains of his activity, emphasizing that his work as an organizer "was determined by his artistic activity"[33]. He referred to the Central Institute of Labour as his "last artistic creation"[34]. From the very onset of his public activity, Gastev combined these two extremely divergent domains. His literary works belonged somewhere in the border area between poetry and prose, and were strongly charged with political and social content. Kuzmin drew freely upon Gastev's syncretism in his writings, in which the scientific and technical discourse merges with the discourses of journalism, historiography and ideology. Even more importantly, however, both authors aspired to transplant the utopia that flourished in their writings to the real world existing outside the realm of language, giving it the form of scientific organization of work or an architectural project.

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[30] Gastev 1966b, pp. 44–50.

[31] Gastev 1966b, p. 47.

[32] Even during his lifetime, Gastev received criticism from his contemporaries for being obsessed with the idea to create human robots. According to Bogdanov, in Gastev's vision machines have divine qualities, whereas in reality they should be subjected to human will (Bogdanov 1924, p. 49).

[33] Gastev's statement made in 1924 (Gastev 1964b, p. 28).

[34] Bakhrakh etc. 1966, p. 6.

At this point, we cannot ignore a significant episode in Kuzmin's biography. As a young man, he had a short-lived interest in writing poetry. Although he did not become a poet, we know that by writing a revolutionary poem he won a scholarship that enabled him to study at university[35]. This fact is noteworthy as a proof that Kuzmin not only had a technical imagination, but also possessed an imaginative capacity of a poet. Moreover, the episode speaks volumes about the time in which writing a poem could open the door to studying a technical field. The Soviet state needed not only engineers, but also ardent believers in the new utopia.

In both Kuzmin's and Gastev's writings, poetic visions merge with rational demands to increase efficiency, be it of industrial production or everyday activity. The compatibility of the two is not surprising as artistic imagination had been an inherent part of utopian discourse since the times of Plato. In Kuzmin's and Gastev's work, we find a coherent vision of an individual and culture, the relationship between society and authority, historical experience and the desirable objectives of the Soviet state. At the same time, each author's work bears unique traces of his personality, which strikes a note of discord in a vision whose fulfilment is allegedly determined by historical necessity.

Like his modernist contemporaries, Kuzmin denounces the notion of architect as an inspired artist. It must be borne in mind, however, that although for some authors (e.g. Adolf Loos) the architects should be engineers aware of the nature of their tasks rather than artists focused on themselves and their work, Kuzmin is willing to impose a much greater burden on his profession: the duties of a thinker and social activist. In his own words:

> In contrast to the previously prevalent definitions of architecture as an art, based on the intuitive, inspirational activity of the architect, aimed at creating abstract artistic forms (different systems), it is necessary to define architecture as the science of the class-based organization of the processes of life and production by material and technical means[36].

As we can see, Kuzmin has a different perception of the role of an architect, who, despite having relinquished artistic ambitions, is not content with the status of an engineer. The objective he undertakes is to create a new society and a new man by architectural means. Apart from proficiency in engineering, an architect must be well-versed in sociology, psychology and, last but not least, be aware of the political agenda of the state. For this reason, Kuzmin supplements his project with theoretical writings, in which he analyzes individual and collective behaviour and puts forward social and political demands.

Gastev argued that relinquishing literature in favour of social activity was a sign of the post-Revolution period, requiring him to abandon fantasizing for specific

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[35] Kuz'mina, Taranin 2005, p. 5.
[36] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 14, recto.

involvement[37]. This was not tantamount, however, to rejecting literature altogether, but rather to blending it with political ideas. The time had come when the utopia could materialize rather than exist only on paper. Art had become social engineering. Culture had become practice. Soviet literature was supposed to become the engineering of the human soul – Kuzmin thought in a similar way about the tasks of architecture, thus combining it with literary art.

Utopia – between fiction and reality

It is remarkable to what extent the Anzhero-Sudzhensk project transcends reality. Rather than a mere design of a building, Kuzmin's attempt brings to mind an artistic creation of a fictional universe, inhabited by fictitious characters, behaving in a strictly planned way. Although Kuzmin apparently wants to listen to the future dwellers and declares to take their needs into account[38], he is in fact not a negotiator, but an omnipotent author who is completely in control of the written word and squeezes the future dweller's horizon to fit his own.

The critical side of a utopia can be matter-of-fact, rational and capable of penetrating insights[39]. The positive side, in spite of a high level of detail, is usually a delusion or a dream, as the very term "utopia" suggests. Its utopian nature – understood as its impossibility – means that it is not a dangerous ideology, but rather food for thought, pure toying with ideas to challenge the established patterns of thinking and thus to open new perspectives.

The dangerous moment comes, however, when the utopia gives up the element of intellectual play, refuses to be called a delusion, and is no longer content with the role of the "exercise in sociological imagination"[40]. Using Karl Mannheim terminology, utopia tends to "burst the bonds of the existing order"[41], but at a moment of its realisation it becomes an ideology, thus a strategy. At that moment, the utopia no longer draws upon science, but instead usurps its status.

This quality of being suspended between literature and architecture, between word and action, was the reason why Kuzmin's project caused such a stir among his contemporaries (e.g. Nadezhda Krupskaya)[42] and continues to baffle researchers today[43]. Not because of its utopian nature, which would not have been enough, but because of its fusion of utopism and reality.

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[37] Gastev 1964b, p. 30.

[38] At Kuzmin's "outline of an architectural planning" public participation is an important part of the process (Kuz'min 1930, sheet 14; Kuz'min 1928–1929, No 2201, BMHSA, sheet 3).

[39] Pańków 1990, p. 171.

[40] Szacki 2000, p. 12.

[41] Mannheim 1954, p. 173.

[42] Khan-Magomedov 2001, p. 147.

[43] Nendza-Shchikoniovska [Nędza-Sikoniowska] 2017, p. 129.

Ou-topos

Refuting the accusations of those who claimed his project was a utopia, Kuzmin from the very start insisted on its rationality[44]. Even after the authorities had rejected his proposal, the architect did not change his opinion. Kuzmin's daughter recollects the following:

> My father did not consider his work utopian. Simply, "the time wasn't right" (as he would say) for these ideas to be realized. He was an idealist who lived in a world of his own and in the world of his work with students. He had nothing to do with the (especially local) authorities, and the other way round[45].

Kuzmin proposed a vision that was modern, but not – as he himself emphasized – futuristic. From a practical viewpoint, his project was absolutely feasible, the architect had thought even about the slightest details. The project was supplemented with precise calculations concerning the cost of constructing and utilizing the complex[46]. Also, Kuzmin dissociated himself from his colleagues, because their graduation projects were mere fantasising and academic theorizing for its own sake[47]. He deliberately selected a specific place, community and task to escape the curse of the utopia. He failed.

Although referring to empirical facts, Kuzmin's key assumptions rested on ideological fallacies, unproven accounts, and deceptive manipulations of the propaganda[48]. He wished his project to be grounded in reality, but its underlying beliefs were wrong, which later had a decisive influence on making his proposed solutions utopian. In a way typical for the modern thinking of his age, Kuzmin based his belief in the feasibility of his theoretical project on its alleged rationality and on his courage to reject the established modes of thinking.

Would the project have succeeded in reality? How would individuals have functioned in a space where everyday existence was scheduled so oppressively? What would their relations with their "neighbours" have been like? Would they have rebelled? If so, would their opposition have been conscious, or would they have reacted instinctively by negating the imposed rules and transforming them to suit their real needs? Kuzmin was not to learn, because despite a multitude of plans, not a single

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[44] Kuz'min 1928b, p. 83.

[45] From a letter to author from Kseniya Kuzmina of 18 April 2016 [*Letter* 2016]. Officially, however, Kuzmin had to agree with the criticism (see Kuz'mina, Taranin 2005, p. 8).

[46] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 16, verso; Nendza-Shchikoniovska [Nędza-Sikoniowska] 2017, p. 129.

[47] Kuz'min 1930, sheet 14, recto.

[48] The young student's conviction was not based on his own observations, but on the propaganda, which spread idyllic visions of communes arising spontaneously in the countryside, allegedly emerging in large numbers during collectivization (Kuz'min 1930, sheet 15, recto). Also, he quotes factory workers, ostensibly demanding the construction of individually-owned houses to stop (Kuz'min 1928b, p. 82).

house-commune – making life wholly communal, designed as a whole, and replacing divisions of ownership with divisions of function – was constructed in the USSR. Kuzmin's proposal was ill-timed, because the authorities soon changed their stance[49].

The rejection of Kuzmin's project was a moment typical for the history of Soviet "paper architecture". As the projects never materialized, we can only analyze the designing stage, often supported, if not dominated, by commentary. Of all artistic fields, architecture makes the creator the most dependent on the client's whim. On the contrary, the art of words offers absolute freedom of imagination and does not require compromise. What follows is that Soviet architectural utopias combined the matter-of-fact substance of a technical design with authorial freedom of imagination. However, unlike the Soviet authors of many utopian projects from the 1920s or of the paper architecture of the 1980s, who never intended to implement their ideas and treated them only as an intellectual experiment and a form of artistic self-expression, Kuzmin was determined to see his idea materialize and was convinced that it was feasible. Against the author's intentions, his failure lends his project utopian – and anti-utopian – features.

Apart from being an individual vision, created by a student from Tomsk, the Anzhero-Sudzhensk project of a house-commune was also a kind of collective work, a product of the Soviet culture of the 1920s. As Vladimir Paperny put it, "Kuzmin only pushed to its logical extreme one of the intentions of the so-called Culture One, which aimed at destroying the family and replacing it with a collective"[50]. Some scholars disagree with this view, arguing the Kuzmin's idea was not a consequence, but rather a distortion of the architectural and social projects of the period. In what is perhaps the most radical formulation of this argument, Vigdaria Khazanova claimed that for many decades the Tomsk project had become a "routinely quoted, cliché example of a crying-out--to-heaven-for-vengeance defilement of the idea of collective housing"[51]. Nevertheless, the exponents of both approaches agree that Kuzmin's concept is inseparable from the times in which it originated. It reflects the key points of the Bolshevik agenda: the collectivization of life, the emancipation of women, subjecting life to work, the struggle against private ownership, and the ideological tasks of the party and an architect.

The rejection of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk project was not only a failure of a bold-minded individual. The project originated in a specific context of the early Soviet culture and shared its fate. The radical transformation of the Soviet society by means of

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[49] As early as several months after his graduation exam, which took place on 1 December 1929, house-communes were condemned by the Central Committee of the CPSU in a resolution titled *On Our Work to Transform Life* of 16 May 1930 (published on 29 May). The resolution condemned the 'leftist' idea of an uncompromising, bottom-up and immediate collectivization of all spheres of life (*Postanovleniye…* 1984).

[50] Papernyy 2001, p. 145.

[51] Khazanova 1980, p. 177. Interestingly, Khazanova's compelling book as a whole seems to contradict this statement, listing impressively many examples of extreme projects from the period.

architecture finished before it started in earnest. The classical and traditional elements, such as ornaments on buildings and conservative views on the family and the society, soon will regain favour with the authorities. The revival of modernist architecture during Khrushchev's era will not be accompanied by social experiments: this time, a radical form will be devoid of radical content.

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