

Expired Monuments: Case Studies on Soviet-era Architecture in Latvia through the Kaleidoscope of Postcolonialism*

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In this article, I use the tools of postcolonial theory in order to explain the processes of architecture and its understanding in the time of the Soviet occupation. Carried out under the influence of socialist ideology, architecture in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic became more artificial and deformed in comparison to the 'original' – the Soviet Russian example. Notions such as 'our own' architecture and the 'other' were present in architectural thinking. These features could be found in all three periods of architectural development in Soviet Latvia: during Stalinism (mid-1940s – mid-1950s), in the modernism revival (late 1950s – 1970s) and in the regional architecture that regained its prominence within a framework of postmodernism (1980s – early 1990s). This approach brings into focus a set of questions: how appropriate is it to apply the postcolonial theory to the studies of art history and architecture of the Soviet era; what features allow one to do so; how does postcolonial theory affect the analysis of styles and aesthetics of certain movements in architecture etc.?

Introduction

Why do we honour one monument but forget another in terms of destroying or undervaluing it? Why does a certain house remain in collective memory, whereas another is cast into the shadows? Who decides that one building is good and beautiful, but another is ugly and devoid of value? I have decided to denote Soviet-era architecture with the term 'expired monument', i.e. architecture which has failed: that which was good for someone/something in the past, but whose meaning has recently changed.

Since I have been working on the research of Soviet-era architecture in Latvia, I have realised that too little has still been done to introduce new or different research methodologies, approaches and interpretations on this subject. When looking for a possible theoretical framework that would help to explain the complex body of ideological,

* I want to thank the translator Jānis Frišvalds for his effort in preparing this article.

aesthetic, sociological and even psychological relations that formed the architectural processes and particular buildings, I started to focus on postcolonial theory. In this article, I deal with some case studies in order to explain the processes of architecture and its understanding in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), starting from the 1940s Soviet occupation and moving onwards by using tools of postcolonial theory. In doing so, I still bear in mind a set of questions which arise: how appropriate is it to apply the postcolonial theory to the studies of art history and architecture of the Soviet era; what features allow one to do so; what are the main questions when dealing with the post-Soviet space and its visual culture; how does postcolonial theory affect the analysis of styles and aesthetics of certain movements in architecture etc.?

Postcolonial studies historically have been applied to the experience of such countries and territories as Latin America, Africa, India, the Middle East etc., or so-called 'Third World countries', non-Western or minority zones which at one point in history were colonised by countries now collectively seen as Western Europe. However, in recent times, several scholars from different fields, including cultural theory, anthropology, literature and history, have tended to use the principles and vocabulary of postcolonial theory in order to explain processes within the post-Soviet space, considering this region to be equally subject to 'colonial' influences not only during the time of the Soviet Union, but also during the era of tsarist Russia and even earlier. The attention to former Soviet Republics as spheres of discussion of postcolonial theory gave rise to the article 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique' by David Chioni Moore,¹ who proposes and argues the possibility of applying the postcolonial perspective in exploring the post-Soviet space.

Postcolonial theory could be a powerful vehicle in analysing architecture. To this end, some connections have already been made, for instance, in the series *Thinkers for Architects* (2010), which introduces Homi K. Bhabha's ideas in regard to architecture.² Bhabha deals with such notions as hybridity, ambivalence, binary oppositions, the Third Space and other key concepts in the field of postcolonial studies. The book serves mostly as a guide in explaining the core of postcolonialism and how it would affect thinking on architecture. Although it does not elaborate on the subject matter in great detail, the book helps to explain the set of problems which could be brought into focus by the means of applying postcolonial theory, regardless of the lack of ready-made solutions and answers.

The role of architecture within the socialist system

A special role was applied to architecture in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Architecture would create not only a new physical space, but also a mental space that could serve as a medium between the idea and its implementation.

1 D. C. Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique*. – Baltic Postcolonialism: On the Boundary of Two Worlds – Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics. Ed. V. Kelertas. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006.

2 See F. Hernandez, *Bhabha for Architects*. (*Thinkers for Architects*.) London, New York: Routledge, 2010.

Architecture would be referable to the concept of space. This approach is grounded in post-structural theory. For instance, the theoreticians David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, who have written widely on Russian and Soviet-era culture, claim that space within the Soviet system was a socialising project that undertook the formation of a new person or moral subject. New ways of organising the home, the workspace or the street were meant to produce new social relations that would, in turn, produce a new consciousness.³ As they put it:

In Soviet discourse, ordinary spaces could become, by analogy with Clark, 'Great Spaces' through a connection with the 'grand spatial narratives' of socialism. Thus a steel foundry could figure as the 'forge of communism'; a house commune as a microcosm of the socialist order; and a children's after-school facility as a paradigm of the communist 'city of the future'. At the same time, 'social justice', as conceived by Marxist ideology, demanded the 'democratization' of space. Even the 'Greatest Spaces' – whether the new 'people's palaces' of culture and education or landmark sites in Soviet history such as the Winter Palace in Leningrad – were 'everyday' in the idealized sense projected by the socialist regimes that they were to be used and possessed by all.⁴

From the very first years of the Communist regime, huge attention was focused on culture as one of the most important components of the new public life. It was viewed as a measure of welfare. The phenomenon of the palaces of culture maintains architecture's significance within the process of Sovietisation. The visual form of the palace of culture incorporated references to classical traditions, especially the form of the classical temple, which inspired the feeling in visitors of a quest for the presence of an ideal and distinct spirituality: the bright and happy future of socialism. The origins of the palace of culture can be found in workers' and village clubs, otherwise known as 'people's houses', which served as a base for the spread of culture within the socialist system. At the same time, they were places for mass agitation and the organisation of free time.⁵ Clubs were a useful weapon with which the state could control the masses. Workers' clubs were supposed to form a fertile network, which was declared as one of the main tasks of socialist construction at the 8th Party Congress in 1919. In the first two years of the existence of socialism, no less than 7,000 workers' clubs were formed in Russia. It was emphasised that these clubs had to become propaganda centres and that the creativity of the working class had to be developed in them. Architecturally, their form was based on the form of communal cultural complexes, such as the first palaces of labour and workers' palaces.⁶

The historian Anders Åman indicates that, from the earliest days of socialism, the main objective was the rejection of Western architecture. The new architecture had to

3 D. Crowley, S. E. Reid, *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*. – *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*. Eds. D. Crowley, S. E. Reid. New York, Oxford: Berg, 2002, p. 3.

4 D. Crowley, S. E. Reid, *Socialist Spaces*, p. 8.

5 A. Kopp, *Town and Revolution: Soviet Architecture and City Planning 1917–1935*. New York: G. Braziller, 1970, p. 434.

6 A. Kopp, *Town and Revolution*, p. 434.

be 'national in form and socialist in content'. Important, salient characteristics were determined by 'experience from the Soviet Union', but national form had to be worked out separately in each country.⁷ As Åman puts it:

The new architecture which, after a time, began to emerge in the people's democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, was often being taken to illustrate the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. This is not untrue, but the term *de-Westernization* is more accurate. [...] Rejection is the starting point, but after this an old idea, associated with the form chosen, can be revived and adapted to a new political situation.⁸

If rejection is *degree zero*, from which the new society can be built upon, then I would like to state that it leads to resistance. Everything that is left behind – history, traditions, etc. – becomes the 'other', from which one has to shut oneself off. Crowley and Reid make a very interesting observation, saying that the socialist regimes were aware that if monuments and monumental space influenced people's mentality, the monuments of the *ancien régime* could not be left in peace, but had to be either reconfigured or torn down and replaced.⁹ The point is to look forward – to the future – and not turn back. That explains why, under the Soviet occupation, both architecture and the visual arts became obsessed with the language of the monumental and utopian. A lot of grandiose projects were conceived, but most of them were left on paper, because of their unrealistic visions. Many of them can be described as disregarding traditions and historical heritage, e.g. in the case of wooden houses from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which generally were deemed to be worthless. I will not elaborate on the term *de-Westernisation* in great detail, but one should note at this point that it includes ambivalence, where one side is accepted and another is forbidden.

Stalinism versus modernism and its ambivalence

Carried out under the influence of socialist ideology, the processes in architecture in the LSSR became more artificial and deformed in comparison to the 'original' – the Soviet Russian example. The Party's attempts to create a new architecture, which would be 'socialist in content and national in form', aroused a persistent struggle within local society and led to endeavours to create explicitly 'Latvian' architecture, which in most cases became a hybrid, marrying the Party's orders with Western influences and local traditions. These features could be found in all three periods of architectural development in Soviet Latvia: during Stalinism (mid-1940s – mid-1950s), in the modernism revival (late 1950s – 1970s) and in a regional architecture that regained its prominence within a framework of postmodernism (1980s – early 1990s).

7 A. Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, p. 254.

8 A. Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era*, p. 255.

9 D. Crowley, S. E. Reid, *Socialist Spaces*, p. 11.

Åman analyses Stalinism versus modernism in terms of ideology, claiming that in the beginning modernism was the movement of the political left, but that later it was taken over by the right.¹⁰ As he puts it:

Due to its rejection by Socialist Realism, Modernism in Eastern Europe became what it otherwise would never have become: *an aesthetic of resistance*. This it became to a much greater extent than in Western Europe, where from the 1950s onwards, Modernism was increasingly accepted, attaining almost official status. [...] And yet there is one field in which Modernism in Eastern Europe has lost this symbolical meaning, namely, architecture.¹¹

Although Åman's argument is applicable throughout the whole architectural history of Soviet Latvia, I would argue that locally this situation was not so clear. The time-frame during which an attempt to implement Stalinist stylistics in architecture in Latvia took place was just too short, i.e. around ten years, from the mid-1940s till the mid-1950s. In many cases, it was either very organically synthesised with local features, or was introduced as a foreign body. During Stalin's time, the Party's position was clear and most of the architects who worked with modernist language were under pressure but, regardless of that, in many projects one can find a living tradition of pre-war modernism and its language. The traditions could not take on their previous forms and strength, but they survived the censorship of Stalinism until the revival of Soviet modernism, and until modernism and Stalinism met each other in peculiar ways.

The first case study on which this argument has been based is the fishermen's collective farm *Zvejnieks* ('Fisherman'), for which the general plan, as well as outstanding examples of a school, residences and a palace of culture, were designed by the local architect Marta Staņa (1913–1972). This project has not been fully evaluated and studied before now due to its peripheral character, but it can be viewed as a phenomenon of the 1950s (fig. 6–7). Staņa was one of the greatest modernist architects to have worked in the LSSR, although for many years she remained in the shadow of the great male architects of the era. The 1940s – 1950s is the period which can serve as a reference point for a new view on Staņa's contribution to the history of Latvian art and architecture. First, this is the period when Staņa obtained her education as an architect at the Latvian State University's (LSU) Faculty of Architecture (1936–1945) and was deeply influenced by the personality and signature style of her tutor, the architect Ernests Štālbergs, who was a passionate defender of modernism. During that time, she formed and cemented her views on the logical tending and continuation of the traditions of functional and rational architecture. Secondly, during the 1950s one of Staņa's earliest and most notable designs evolved, i.e. the general plan for the *Zvejnieks* collective farm.

Here I must digress slightly. Štālbergs was one of the rare individuals who dared to represent modernism openly during the Soviet era, and through his ideas, battled against the orientation of Stalinism towards the adaptation and application of

10 A. Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era*, p. 248.

11 A. Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era*, p. 258.

historical styles. He was the dean and a professor at the LSU Faculty of Architecture, and until 1950 headed the architecture design studio 'C', where, in addition to Staņa, many other Latvian architects studied. Under Štālbergs's guidance, Staņa took part in a number of design competitions including the project to design a victory monument in honour of the Great Patriotic War (1945, with Arturs Reinfelds and Jānis Ginters), the Hotel *Rīga* project (1947, with Ginters, Jānis Līcītis, et al.), the Republican Stadium project for Victory Square (1947, with Reinfelds, Ginters, Līcītis and Roberts Traniņš), etc. A constant presence in these competition submissions was Štālbergs's signature style, characterised in architectural terms by the simplicity and clarity of structural forms, logic and functionality, and visual linguistic minimalism – qualities which also became important for Staņa.

After the closure of the architecture faculty in 1950, Staņa turned her attention to drafting and designing interior elements and furniture. From 1951 she worked at *Kolhozprojekts*, designing collective farms. During this period, she received a commission from the fishermen's collective farm *Zvejnieks*, which was founded in 1947. Its basic sectors were fishing and fish processing. At the start of 1950, within the framework of a five-year plan, major construction was planned at the collective farm to make it an important and modern centre with public and residential buildings. Staņa worked on the farm project for almost ten years during the 1950s (the general plan was approved in 1951¹²). The main building, which was to serve as the centrepiece and 'heart' of the new collective farm, was the palace of culture named *Zvejniekciems*, a 'new palace of light'¹³ (finished in 1956).

The architecture of the palace of culture is a peculiar example of the era. At first, it seems like quite a typical example of Stalinist architecture: a four-storey building, planned in the form of a square, a massive, heavy construction with an accented entrance section without excessive ornamentation and with minimal decoration on the façade, where the emphasis is placed on the material, proportions and silhouette. At the centre of the overall territorial complex, the building plays a dominant role and testifies to the authoritarian period during which it evolved. The entrance section is emphasised with a colonnade, which is characteristic of Stalinist architecture and palaces of culture in particular. The application of materials is interesting, because the colonnade's columns are made of unplastered bricks, creating textural games which allude to the traditions of national romanticism. This principle of façade decoration is atypical of characteristic Stalinist-style building.

The successful functionality of the building is ensured by the building's half floors, with passages from one floor to the next, which made it possible to include as many rooms as possible in the plan, creating large windows and broad, well-lit rooms, particularly the large auditorium, which is considered to be the heart of the palace of culture. Interior details, such as the decorative solutions for the upper rims of columns, lighting solutions, chairs and ornamental elements which are included in the design of the rooms etc., provide evidence of Staņa's abilities as a designer and her attitude

12 Siguldas zonālais valsts arhivs (Regional State Archive of Sigulda), coll. 78, ref. 1, file 12, p. 22.

13 P. Dzintars, *Skultes zvejnieku artelis 'Zvejnieks'* [Skulte Co-operative Association 'Zvejnieks']. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1954, p. 53.

towards the building not as a shell, but rather as a whole entity in which each detail is important in creating the overall image of the building. In designing buildings, Staņa almost always designed the arrangement of the interior right down to the smallest details. She recruited students from the Riga High School of Applied Art to assist her in creating the applied arts elements and decorative motifs incorporated within the interior of both the palace of culture and the school nearby. She helped to establish a design approach involving what was labeled 'an ensemble': all elements of a building work together in a harmonious unity, as opposed to the more individualistic author-style maintained by the Latvian State Art Academy.

In spite of the fact that the building's silhouette can be seen from a distance and the greenery zone gives the driveway section a representative role, there is a distinct sense of intimacy once you reach the building. Unlike other Stalinist buildings, this one does not repel the visitor. On the contrary, it is inviting. Stalinist architecture is characterised by 'withdrawal' or 'rejection', in the form of their enormous dimensions and peculiar disproportionate proportions, which usually give rise to a feeling of fear. Alleys, promenades and parks, created as processional routes which you have to traverse to arrive at buildings, increase this feeling of distance. In this instance, Staņa achieved the opposite effect: in the case of the *Zvejniekiems* palace of culture, this 'distance' is transformed into a moment of 'intimacy'. The building is organically incorporated into its surroundings and rendered logical and close to the environment. This could be one of the reasons why the palace of culture retains its original functions today: it serves as a meeting point for local residents, offering them educational and cultural activities, like an axle around which public life revolves.

Alongside the palace of culture, Staņa constructed the school building and the residences for schoolteachers in *Zvejniekiems*, which also can be considered to be a successful example of the importance of taking human living conditions and needs into account, as well as the creation of an ecological environment. All of the examples can be described in terms of modernism and functionalism.

Right from the outset, Stalinism was 'other', not welcomed in local architectural processes; although it was the official style of socialist ideology, de-Stalinisation rendered it more alien than the ideology itself. This happened with some public buildings which during their construction process were subjected to shifts inside the Party and eventually did not receive the plaudits originally expected. An outstanding example is the Palace of Culture of the State Electrotechnical Factory (in Latvian *Valsts Elektrotehniskā fabrika*, hitherto referred to as VEF), which was to be one of the last and most overdue projects of Stalinist architecture (fig. 8–10). Its construction took almost ten years, from 1951 till 1960. The project was designed by the architect Nikolai Sementsov, who came from Russia. This building was a point of reference for subsequent culture palaces to be built not only in Latvia but in other cities of the Soviet Republics, for instance, in Tallinn, Perm and Omsk.

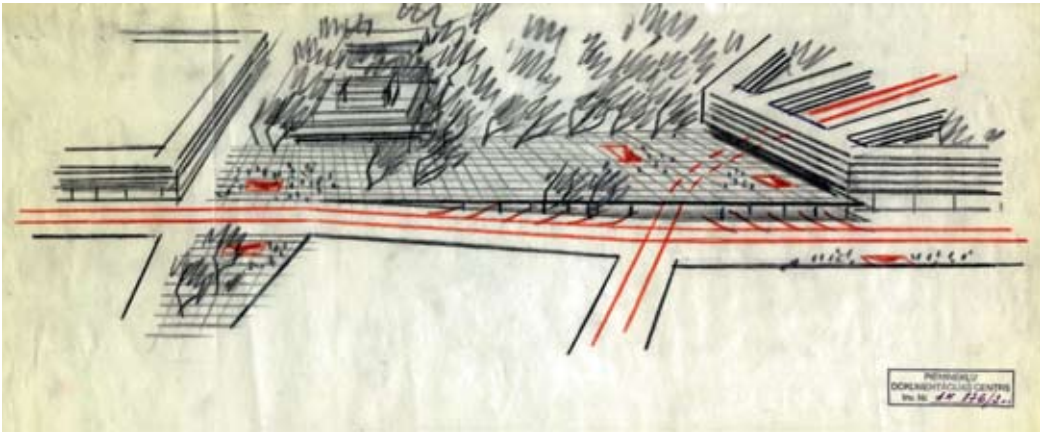
The palace was to be an annex to the VEF factory, which was then one of the largest in the whole of the USSR. In the 1960s the VEF factory produced seven radios and five telephones every minute. In those years, two out of three telephones produced in the USSR came out of this very factory. For a factory of such size, it was a matter of honour

to have its own palace of culture, a place where, in accordance with Soviet ideology, workers could relax after a gruelling shift, as well as learn. Therefore, the VEF palace of culture was meant to be on a grand scale, with auditoria for theatre performances and films, a library and recreation rooms, special interest club rooms and even sports halls. The surroundings were also intended to be the most prosperous, a whole complex encompassing residential areas for the factory employees.¹⁴ It was to have its own subway station too but, because of public protest, the underground railway was never built in Riga. In the end, only the palace of culture was realised.

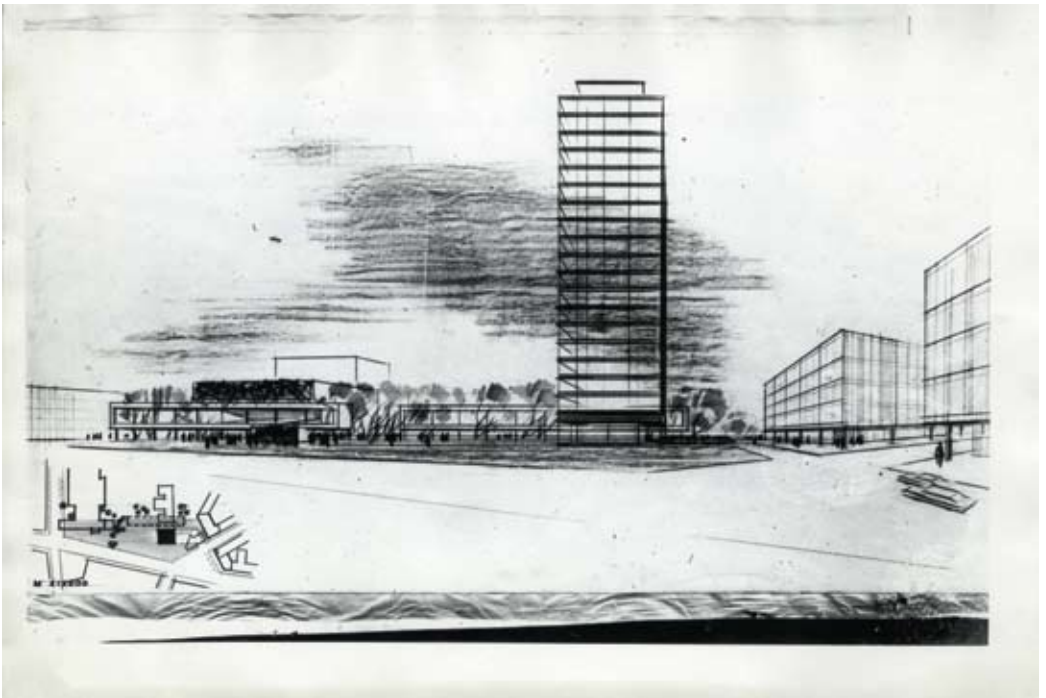
From the front, the VEF palace of culture building has a sturdy rectangular silhouette with a pedestal at the entrance, which is adorned by a row of heavy colonnades, as if greeting the visitor with a wide smile. Although the architect did his best to capture the gravitas of neo-classicism and the elation of classical temples, the shape of the building turned out to be quite awkward and stiff. An attempt was made to add an air of lightness by relieving the silhouette with two wing-like protuberances on each side but, in the end, this only added extra weight to the already heavy building. The façade was decorated with recognisable Latvian ethnographic symbols, such as the circular sun motif, the lithe herring-bone pattern of a pine needle and stylised bubble broaches, all looking like appliqué work cut out of paper. However, the down-to-earth character and robustness of the building seems to fit in with the local architectural ideals, which had always respected simplicity and clarity of form.

The implementation of projects of such a grand scale was brought to a halt midway in 1955, because great changes were taking place in Soviet architecture and in the economy as a whole. When Nikita Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party after Stalin's death, he turned sharply against the policies of his predecessor, which resulted not only in a shift in the attitude towards works of Stalinist art and architecture but also in the construction process itself. One of these actions was the decree 'On the elimination of excesses in project design and construction' (*Об устранении излишеств в проектировании и строительстве*), which, as the name suggests, called for the rejection of the practice of the previous decade, which had been characterised by wastefulness and extravagant stylistics. But, to support the goals of Khrushchev, it was a time for industrial revolution. Due to the 1955 decree, the VEF palace of culture became an 'expired monument' – out of place and forever misunderstood – like a ghost from the past, a constant reminder of traumatic aspects within the collective memory. In the context of the surrounding territory, consisting mainly of impersonal blocks of 'new-architecture' and historicist buildings from around the turn of the twentieth century, the palace seems lonely, out of place and forever misunderstood. Even before it was finished, it was perceived negatively by both Latvian architects and society itself, which marked it with 'otherness'. Despite this fact, today the VEF palace of culture, unlike many of its less fortunate comrades of their day, has not been vandalised, or turned into an office building, nightclub or shopping centre. It still functions as a culture centre, with a quite busy schedule of dance, theatre and exhibition activities, both for professionals and amateurs.

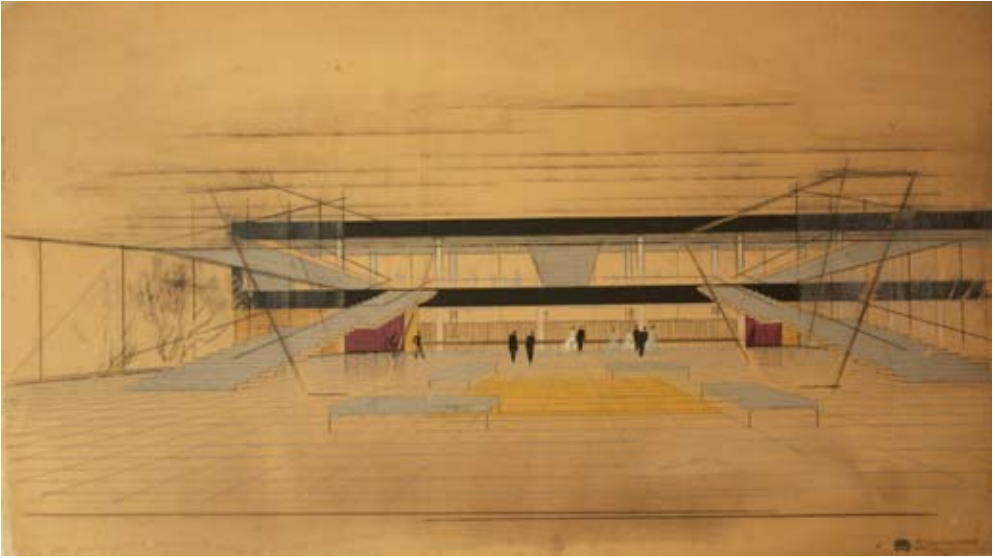
14 Top jaunā Rīga. – Literatūra un Māksla 1951, no. 47, p. 6.



1. Marta Staņa. Sketch of the Daile Theatre building and its surroundings. Latvian Museum of Architecture, no. S876/3.



2. Marta Staņa. Sketch of the Daile Theatre building and its surroundings. Latvian Museum of Architecture, no. S1149.



3. Marta Staņa. Sketch of the interior of the Daile Theatre building. Latvian Museum of Architecture, no. 3792-S11.



4. Marta Staņa. Sketch of the façade of the Daile Theatre building (1961). Latvian Museum of Architecture, no. S1158-16.



5.

Daile Theatre building.
Photo: Latvian Museum of Architecture, no. S1180.



6.

Zvejniekiems Palace of Culture.
Photo: Archive of Zvejniekiems Palace of Culture.



7. Zvejniekiems Palace of Culture.
Photo by Maija Rudovska, 2010.



8. VEF Palace of Culture.
Photo by Aivars Holms, 2008.
Monument Documentation Centre of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection, Republic of Latvia.



9.

Logo of the VEF Palace of Culture.

Photo by Aivars Holms, 2008.

Monument Documentation Centre of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection, Republic of Latvia.



10.

Interior of the VEF Palace of Culture.

Photo by Aivars Holms, 2008.

Monument Documentation Centre of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection, Republic of Latvia.

Stalinism was perceived as the 'other' and thus international modernism was identified with liberation and creative freedom, but in some sense it became a legal form of resistance too. Modernism provided a chance to speak in the same language as the West did, in a contemporary language, even though it meant closing one's eyes to the fact that the West was already tired of cubes and glass walls and that it was seeking a new language. Sometimes the language of international modernism was identified with nationalism or at least with a language which in its simplicity and minimal forms could be more open to national routes. But this statement brings up a lot of questions around the subject.

Designed by Staņa in collaboration with Tekla Ieviņa, Imants Jākobsons, Harolds Kanders and others, the Daile Theatre building in Riga serves as a good example of the problems of Soviet modernism and its role in opposing Stalinism (fig. 1–5). The decision to build a new theatre house was taken in 1949¹⁵, due to the urgent need for a new place for the Daile Theatre troupe, led by its founder, the artistic director Eduards Smiļģis. An area in the city centre (on Brīvības Street) was chosen, where a block of wooden houses from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries initially stood and which were subsequently torn down for the purposes of the construction of the new building. Staņa initially planned the building to be a very clear, simple and geometric structure, with accents on horizontality and minimalism in its visual language – a pure modernist example. She did not want any specific, small details or decorations to be applied to the whole structure; for instance, the ticket booth and the large relief (made by the sculptor Ojārs Feldbergs, symbolically a torch brought to the people by the theatre) on the upper side of the building, which were added later after discussions with other architects. The initial idea was to transform the whole area, to make it one of the most vibrant points in the life of the city, including a skyscraper at the right side of the building, which would be a reference to the Intourist Hotel (now called the Hotel Latvia) some blocks away. All these massive, utopian plans were part of the architectural thinking, which was more focused on the future than the past: completely the same approach as for Stalinist architecture, only different in its visual language. As, for example, one of the architects, a co-author of the city planning, puts it: 'Along with new content, new contemporary forms will also appear on Leņiņ's Street [Brīvības Street]. The only question is whether there will be enough new buildings and new forms for them to dominate the old ones.'¹⁶ The Daile Theatre building was one of the new ones.

The building process took around eighteen years and was finished only in 1976. Staņa did not live to see it. During its construction, a lot of changes were implemented and Staņa's initial idea was altered several times. Some recommendations were accepted from a group of critics, others from participants in the competition. That happened not only because Staņa was one of the rare women architects within a field dominated by men, but also there was a need to include more national character in the building's visual image and shape. Therefore, the Daile Theatre building took on a much more

¹⁵ Latvijas Valsts Arhivs (The State Archives of Latvia), coll. 273, reg. 1, file 157, p. 2.

¹⁶ J. Lejnīeks, Riga, kuras nav [Riga that is not here]. Riga: Zinātne, 1998, p. 180.

hybrid character. Until very recently, its architecture has not been valued highly, but that attitude has changed in the last few years, when Soviet architecture and especially Staņa's legacy has been brought into the light.

This situation of modernism as 'our own' and Stalinism as 'foreign' shows the observation made by many theoreticians, that 'colonised' countries take up the view of themselves as being inferior and evolve their identity around that; striving to achieve 'normality'. In this case, modernism was identified with normality in contrast to Stalinism, which was and still is perceived as the 'other', despite the fact that Soviet modernism was also implemented in the Baltic states by political means, i.e. Cold War ideology, and it actually was the same 'other' as Stalinism, only in different shape and form. Meanwhile it was approached differently, related to Western culture: the goal that subjected places were striving for.

The European perspective and not-yet-the-sameness

Researchers in post-Soviet Latvia put all their efforts into dismantling Soviet meta-discourse, supposedly exposing its lies and creating a 'truthful' perspective that was pro-national instead. That mostly happened during the 1990s, the 'restoration' period, when the most complete information on Soviet architecture was provided by the local researchers/architects Jānis Krastiņš, Ivars Strautmanis, Jānis Lejnieks and others. The published sources from the 1990s displayed the typical reasoning of early post-Soviet period: Soviet architecture, especially Stalinist examples, was described in terms of 'being not yet equal': insufficient in many aspects and underdeveloped. Authors delicately stated that architectural examples and styles of the Western world were of a higher quality and more benchmark-like, and that the local versions – which had been retarded by socialist ideology, and political and economic factors – had to look forward to the Westernised standard and keep track of its topical tendencies. For example, there is a still dominant tendency in discussions of the architectural heritage of the Stalinist era to approach it as something not good enough, improper and ugly, or even not architecture at all. Thus, in his recent book on the well-known Latvian architect Modris Ģelzis, the Latvian architect and researcher Jānis Lejnieks, who is quite prominent in local architectural life, writes:

Soviet architecture during the Stalinist era was leaden; buildings were infested with quotations, similar to official cultural life...[---] Architecture had no emotions; its direction strove to attain some ideal model of the past or a thaw. Moreover, the view of the past was restricted to ancient, renaissance and classical examples, excluding the recent heritage of the 20th century.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, this attitude had already been brought into being by the Soviet regime. As the cultural theoretician from Sweden Irina Sandomirskaja states:

17 J. Lejnieks, *Patiesa forma. Tīrs stils: Modris Ģelzis. Arhitekts* [True form. Clear style: Modris Ģelzis. The architect]. Rīga: Neputns, 2007, p. 40.

...the empire of the USSR.... ... saw their subjects as 'not-as-yet-same', developing towards the 'same-as' with the evolving socialist world system. It was precisely this logic of hegemony that the USSR used as a justification for its occupation after World War II, for its interventions in the left movements in the West, and for its political and military presence in the Third World.¹⁸

Although more recent research conducted in the West shows that the processes in art and culture during the Soviet regime had their own characteristic traits and developmental logic, thus legitimising the assessment of them as a unique and self-sufficient phenomenon of equal value, local minds still tend to distance themselves from this topic. In some cases, sentimental memories take root, or – what is greatly envisaged in a newer generation – there is a maintaining of distance, as with something 'exotic'. As David Chioni Moore puts it:

This postcolonial compensatory pull plays out differently in post-Soviet space, since postcolonial desire from Riga to Almaty fixates not on the fallen master Russia but on the glittering Euramerican MTV-and-Coca-Cola beast that broke it. Central and Eastern Europeans type this desire as a *return* to Westernness that once was theirs.¹⁹

One must be precocious when using postcolonial theory, although it derives from the colonised countries' aim of presenting a more organic perspective on themselves. Their history most probably would differ greatly from the one written by the West, but still it goes to the same extreme by maintaining the hierarchy and highlighting notions of 'centre' and 'periphery', and thus resembles the approach that the Western hegemony once used. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, criticises the approach which considers Western norms, categories, models, concepts and values, above all, to be universal and thus applicable to other regions, cultures etc. He fiercely opposes the idea of the Western world being the highest level in the course of progress, and the westernised life-style being something other cultures must look up to. Chakrabarty asserts that capitalist ideology and 'modernity' came into existence in Europe and were disseminated in other parts of the world through the colonisation process, and therefore must always be explained via a European perspective.²⁰

There are several current publications on history and issues of East European space in which their authors try to avoid using the distinction between East and West by considering, from the perspective of social constructiveness, that this particular division is a historical construct. There still exists an operational division between 'Europe' and 'Eastern Europe', as if the former is the 'normal' version which does not need to be ex-

18 I. Sandomirskaja, *One Sixth of the World: Avant-garde Film, the Revolution of Vision, and the Colonization of the USSR Periphery during the 1920s (Towards a Postcolonial Deconstruction of the Soviet Hegemony)*. – From *Orientalism to Postcoloniality*, Ed. K. Olofsson. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2008, p. 9.

19 D. C. Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?*, p. 21.

20 D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 8.

plained by placing any additional designator; it is old and established and, compared to it, the 'new' Europe which has appeared – the Eastern part – is not yet established, stable or prosperous enough to be part of 'Europe' in 'Old European' terms. Eastern Europe is not seen as fundamentally different; it is seen more as the 'other' or 'not yet the same', an area that has not attained the 'sameness' that can be related to architectural history and its analysis.

Conclusion

I would propose avoiding the analysis and interpretation of Soviet architecture, as well as the whole Soviet cultural heritage, from the 'not yet' category. However, one must admit that the concept of subordination or inferiority expressed in this 'not yet' concept is still present in the minds of post-Soviet people, in state identity, and in perception, and therefore it should be taken into account. A new perspective is possible if these post-Soviet cultures can be evaluated as cultures that do not imitate, but create versions or satiated variations, instead of failed copies.²¹ This approach originates from the proposals of many postcolonial thinkers, including Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt. Bhabha's 'Third Space' or 'hybridity' is an attempt to locate culture, '...to 'spatialise' the liminal position it represents; in other words, it gives a certain tangibility to the in-between space where hybridisation occurs, and from where hybrid designations emerge.'²² The Third Space eliminates inferior – superior oppositions. It has been introduced in order to overcome historically, socially, politically etc. constructed dualities. As Henri Lefebvre puts it, when speaking of the production of social space, it is possible to stand for the difference, to be against the homogenised society, fragmentation and hierarchies that define the nature of capitalism. The Third Space is a political choice and a meeting place for all peripheralised or marginalised subjects, wherever they may be located.²³ Mary Louise Pratt, in her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, employs the ethnographic term 'transculturation' to describe '... how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what the dominant culture visits upon them, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone.'²⁴ Bhabha's 'Third Space' could be another approach as well.

In my opinion, the focus should be on the unique components – structures and points of intersections – which have influenced the development of local material, bearing in mind and taking into consideration the specific conditions of formation:

21 As proposed by the Swedish ethnologist Karin S. Lindelöf: K. S. Lindelöf, 'If We Are to Become Like Europe...': Identity Formation, Cultural Citizenship, and Variants of Femininity Among Young Women in Contemporary Poland. – *New Subjectivities: Negotiating Citizenship in the Context of Migration and Diversity*. Eds. D. Golańska, A. M. Różalska. Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2008.

22 F. Hernández, Bhabha for Architects, p. 90.

23 E. W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality*. – *Communicating in the Third Space*. Eds. K. Ikas, G. Wagner. London, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 51.

24 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 7.

needs and possibilities characteristic to a particular place and time. This means not evaluating specific material as superior or inferior, but as a phenomenon that has its own exclusive development, as well as its own individual and unique characteristics.