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NARKOMFIN HOUSE

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As part of the Cultural Revolution restructuring of cultural and social life, the architectural profession received an unprecedented mandate to realize a new material world based on revolutionary principles of state ownership and communist labor relations.

The Narkomfin House designed by Ginzburg was an attempt to restructure daily life and the material world 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. The Narkomfin House was also designed to be a prototype for all subsequent state housings.

To accommodate the programs determined by the STROIKOM (an investigative research committee funded by the government), the Narkomfin was composed of four separate buildings: a living block accommodating approximately 200 people in households of varying social structures, a communal block connected to the living block by a covered bridge, a communal laundry facility and a communal crèche which was never built. With the various building types, the Narkomfin was designed as more of a social condenser than a dom kommuna where preexisting bourgeois living patterns could be accommodated to ease the transition of individuals to fully communist life style.

The living block consisted of two types of F units and one type of K unit. F units were fully collectivized, containing no kitchens (had niches to accept a Frankfurt style kitchen unit if necessary). Common areas had large windows while sleeping areas had small ones. The only enclosed areas were the shower and toilet. On the other hand, K units were designed for preexisting bourgeois domestic arrangements. They were self-sufficient and didn’t depend on communal spaces. With accordion like windows, the units attempted to diffuse the domestic spaces visually and physically out into the commune and park. In both F and K units, the kitchens, baths and toilets were closed off from view within the apartment, and both gave a large common area for work and a niche for sleeping, hiding non-social functions.

Connected to the living block, the communal block consisted of two double-height stories. On the first level was a gymnasium with shower, toilets, dressing and storage, and the upper level had the dining room, rest area, reading room and a kitchen. The communal block was designed to contain all the collectivized aspects of life.

Ginzburg self criticized that in Narkomfin, the life of an individual was split into two unequal sphere; the small individual sphere (to which only sleep was given) and the larger social sphere (to which everything else was given).

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Victor Buchli, Moisei Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow: Contesting the Social and Material World, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (June 1998), 160-181.