This text gives a glimpse of a hitherto unknown design discourse during the Cold War – from both sides of the Iron Curtain – by exploring the 1975 Congress of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), held in Moscow. Sweden sent a big delegation to Russia. More than forty of the small country’s top designers and influencers participated, which was more than twice as many as usual to these international design congresses. Thanks to reactions published about the events in journals on design in Sweden and in the Soviet Union, archival material, and the author’s own interviews with the delegates from Sweden who participated in Moscow, as well as one-off exclusive backstage witnesses from the local staff of the host organization during the ongoing congress, Moscow 1975 is experienced through the eyes of contemporary witnesses. The essay gives new insights into the world congress in design and illustrates the international atmosphere during the Cold War.

**KEY WORDS:** ICSID, design, disability, ergonomics, human rights, VNIITE, Gosplan, KGB, Sakharov, Cold War.

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**But we refused to be scared into silence**

**SWEDISH DESIGNERS’ COLD WAR VISIT TO ICSID ‘75 MOSCOW**

by Margareta Tillberg

Mister President! Ladies and Gentlemen! Fellow Comrades! On behalf of the Soviet organizing committee, please allow me to welcome the participants and guests of the IX Congress of the International Council of Societies of Artist Construction who have come here from all ends of the planet. It is a great honor for our scientific and technical community that ICSID chose the capital of our Motherland for this congress.1

It is 10:07 on Monday morning on October 13, 1975. Dzhermen Gvishiani, government representative for international relations of science and technology and the powerful State Planning Committee Gosplan, taps the microphone as he looks at the auditorium from the stage in the Rossiya Main Concert Hall — rumored to be the best concert hall in the country in the newly built luxury Hotel Rossiya next to Red Square and the Kremlin. We are now in Moscow — the capital of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), at the same time the capital of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
The Swedish delegation departed from Stockholm’s Arlanda Airport on Saturday afternoon on October 13, 1975. On Sunday morning the group left the Finnish capital of Helsinki in a Soviet aircraft bound for Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport. In spite of the geographical proximity—less than an hour by air across the narrow Baltic Sea—this was a rare visit from Sweden to its big neighbor. Moscow is eager to impress. The place to do it in the new Hotel Rossiya ICSID ’75 Moscow. From the editorial office and music listening on headphones in a comfortable setting. The audience did not want to miss a word from the elegantly dressed Sigvard Bernadotte (1907–2002) as Chairman, with the family Sigvard Bernadotte (1907–2002) as Chairman, family Sigvard Bernadotte (1907–2002) as Chairman, as Chairman, as Chairman, as Chairman, of the get-together cocktails of the luminaries of the international design world on a brief exotic visit behind the Iron Curtain.

The context in which to understand the ICSID ’75 Moscow congress is as a part of the cultural communication during the Cold War. The world had been divided into two separate competing blocs since Yalta, 1945, manifested by 1965 by the erection of the Berlin Wall. Ballet performances and ice hockey championships turned into Cold War battlefields. Two superpowers’ every whim was followed by the rest of the world, including Scandinavia—a few sparsely populated countries in the northern periphery of Europe squeezed in between the two blocks, where the “communists” in the “East” and the “capitalists” in the “West” fought for two centuries.

In 1975, when the world followed Apollo 18 and Soyuz 19 on TV, watching a moment of fragile détente when Soviet cosmonauts and US astronauts shook hands—far out in space. But the hi-tech vanishing was thin. In Sweden, industry was at its peak, and the Soviet leadership was aware of this. Industrial design was thus an important arena in which to become updated with international developments. With the world market becoming a platform for professional designers to participate in peace building and détente during the World War II, by way of creating a relaxed setting where the superpowers could talk and interact together without war. The USSR very much wanted to be a part of this international cooperation.

The first ICSID World Congress took place in Stockholm in 1959. With industrial designer and member of the Swedish royal family Sigvard Bernadotte (1907–2002) as Chairman, ICSID ’75 was a success. Sigvard Bernadotte was elected ICSID President for the period 1961–1965. From then on, biennial congresses with international workshops and seminars were arranged. ICSID became the perfect arena for the exchange of knowledge of industrial innovations. The networking by the James Bond–like world improving designer aristocracy soon turned ICSID into an international platform. Successively, the ICSID congresses developed into something of—at least in the designers’ world—similar dignity to the Olympic Games.

In 1983, ICSID was granted special consultative status with UNESCO in order to use “design for the betterment of the human condition”, to quote the protocols of the ICSID Paris Congress, UNESCO headquarters, June 1967—a wording which suggests ambitions far beyond the factory workers’ concrete working conditions on the shop floor by the conveyor belt. The expression “human condition” was hardly a coincidence considering the quite impressive reading lists ICSID compiled for the professional designer, that included literature on active life and labor such as that of existentialist philosopher Hannah Arendt. But how was the designer to improve the circumstances for the human condition? ICSID suggests: “The function of an industrial designer is to give such form to objects and services that they render the conduct of human life efficient and satisfying.”

So—what is the ICSID, really? Monica Bommar (1929–2014)—editor-in-chief of the Swedish language journal Form, spokesperson for design in Sweden under the auspices of Svenska Sjöfartsinstitutet (Swedish Handicraft Association)—puts it somewhat dramatically: “as an inclusive Anglo-Saxon gentleman’s club and developed into a kind of international United Nations for questions about design.” A historian interested in design during the Cold War (with my additional a bird’s-eye perspective, as it were, thanks to the time passed as well as the internationalization of design), I was not surprised to find out that a central tenet of “human condition” was to find the expression: “The designer, as being informed by decades of research made on this topic by hundreds of scholars” I make the interpretation: “We have to understand the designer to improve the circumstances for the human condition?”

The host for the ICSID ’75 Moscow congress was VNITE, a Moscow-based institute for industrial design, assigned to handle national and international design connections. The Russian acronym VNITE—Vuzonemitsu-Nauchno-Izdavatel’skyi Institut Tekhnicheskii Estetiki—means, in translation, the All-Union VNITE branches in the major places for heavy industry in the Soviet Union, all connected to Moscow (here with the Russian spelling used during the Soviet era): Leningrad (Russia), Baku (Azerbaijan), Sverdlovsk (Russia), Khabarovsk (Russia), Vilnius (Latvia), Minsk (Belarus), Kiev (Ukraine), Kharkov (Ukraine), Tbilisi (Georgia), Erevan (Armenia), Bakú (Azerbaijan), Sverdlovsk (Russia), Khabarovsk (Russia).
SARPANEVA STEPPING OUT FROM A LONG BLACK LIMOUSINE DRESSED IN LARGE WOLFSKIN COAT.

The tired Swedes saw the Finnish star designer Timo Sarpaneva stepping out from a long black limousine dressed in large wolfskin coat. For the female participants a little pink folder was found in ICSID ’75 Moscow congress registration kit.

The word about Sarpaneva’s successful show at the Exposition of the Achievements of the People’s Economy (VDNKh), spread like a fire. Many newspapers had written about it long before its opening. Everybody talked about it. The guest book witnesses to visitors from Samarkand to Tula who express their gratitude for the simple and beautiful items. Within two weeks, the exposition had been visited by “tens of thousands Muscovites and visitors to the capital.” Sarpaneva’s “Ily” and “Kalinka” glasses with a frosted and bark-like surface were made for the Russian market and soon became highly sought after gifts among high ranking nomenclatura officials.

With its more than three thousand rooms for 380 guests, Hotel Rossiya was one of the biggest hotels in the world. The best rooms had a view of the nearby Red Square and the golden onion cupolas of the cathedrals in the Kremlin. Entering the hotel, visitors were treated to a host of legacies of the women delegation (the women) found an extra treat in the form of a little pink folder in their ICSID ’75 Moscow congress registration kit.”

Among the fifteen members of the delegation were textile star designer Astrid Sampe (ICSD ’75 Moscow registration no. 0923), Louise Carling-Fougstedt, textile designer of numerous printed kitchen towels shown at the H55 exhibition in Helsinki (registration no. 0923), Anna Maria Hoke, textile and interior designer responsible for the textiles in most of Goyard’s churches, who cooperated with Astrid Sampe for the 1939 New York World Fair (registration no. 1253). Also in the group were Eva Ralf, responsible for exhibitions from Sweden at the Council of Industrial Design in London, in 1935, who worked with Sampe at the N.K. Textile Chamber (Moscow registration no. 0960) and Anna Maria Hoke, textile and interior designer responsible for the textiles in most of Goyard’s churches, who cooperated with Astrid Sampe for the 1939 New York World Fair (registration no. 1253). 

The friendly human-oriented congress name “Design for Man and Mankind” pointed to a humanitarian approach different from the technocratic machine world of Charlie Chaplin’s Mod- ern Times. This was the convoluted approach was one of the reasons, that the Swedes became curious and wanted to make the effort to go to the Soviet Union (despite the enormous amount of paper work demanded to maneuver through the humiliating and controlling bureaucracy to get a Soviet visa). It was largely thanks to Lennart Lindkvist (1930—), designer and director of Svensk Form (ICSD ’75 Moscow congress registration no. 0423) who had managed to enthuse an impressive number from the Swedish designers’ community join an adventure to Moscow. He phoned his designer colleagues and convinced them of the worth and importance of showing an effort – this was a once in a lifetime opportunity to look behind the facade. Who knows what achievements the Russians have made? Let’s go there and see for ourselves! For the first time, an exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences was to take place with colleagues on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

On October 12, the Soviet aircraft finally landed at Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport. Officials in greyish green uniforms had hours at their disposal to conduct controls. By the time the bus with the Swedish contingent that had registered for the ICSID ’75 Moscow congress was ready to depart from the airport, it was already dark. The warm Indian summer had turned into frost. The smell of cheap cigarettes and Belomorканal, mothballs and low octane petrol, was the sign they were now behind the Iron Curtain. The journey from the Swedish capital to the capital of Russia and the Soviet Union had taken more than thirty hours. Arriving at Hotel Rossiya a few minutes before midnight, the tired Swedes saw the Finnish star designer Timo Sarpaneva stepping out from a long black limousine dressed in large wolfskin coat. Sarpaneva was famous as the first foreign designer from the capitalist West ever to have a separate exhibition in the Soviet Union: “an event of course of exceptional significance” 77
Swedish Consumer Agency) including the book Boating on the River (advice for settling in to your first home) reprinted in eleven revised editions (no. 0940); Jane Bark (1931— ) fashion illustrator [Advice for settling in to your first home] reprinted in eleven editions (no. 0932), Mike Stott, (no. 0963); Per Olof Wikström, professor of design methodology at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, and chair of Swedish Industrial Designers (SID) 1975–77 ICSID’ 75 Moscow registration no. 0967).

In everyone’s congress kit: food coupons Lux (which included a big bottle of vodka and a bottle of champagne to be shared by three people), tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre, the State Circus and to the Inns, as well as three people), tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre, the State Circus and to the Inns, as well as the subsidized restaurants that were included in the Soviet Cold War era, the Soviet Union, very little was known about Swedish design. The only article on Swedish design to appear in the Soviet media for a long time was a brief, dry report in Tekhnicheskaia estetika on the goals of the Quality Plan were already to be reached. Soviet society has had a few years of economic growth, and the people are convinced that the forthcoming exchange of ideas will be fruitful for the future development of the humanitarian side of the man-machine constellation. 25

While the delegates from the Swedish group tried to orient themselves in the very big hotel, in other parts of the city, staff members of the host organization VNITE made their final preparations for the upcoming event.

Soviet design and the State Central Planning Committee Gosplan

Five countries have such a heroic past in the USSR when it comes to design. But what had become of the noble beginnings of Russian constructivism’s self-proclaimed “designers for the everyday” since the heyday of the 1920s? In the 1930s, Engels and the Arts & Crafts movement with its socialist roots, the aim was to make work more bearable for the industrial proletariat. But what about the fruits of all the efforts made since the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers’ state was founded as the Soviet Union in 1922? No one knew.

The true situation was an official secret. Many millions of prisoners had been in the camps. Every other family had a family member who had either died or returned home but remained silent about what they had experienced. 2 At least until the story by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about the long working day of the GULAG prison of Ivan Denisovich was published in 1962 during the short thaw, with some moderate relaxation from the authoritarian state control. When Solzhenitsyn’s first-hand experience of the forced labor camps were published in Russian, a witness to the cruel conditions at the GULAG in the “workers’ state”, it was a shock.

What did “Made in the USSR” look like in 1975? No one knew, neither in Sweden (nor anywhere else). And vice versa. In the Soviet Union, very little was known about Swedish design. The only article on Swedish design to appear in the Soviet media for a long time was a brief, dry report in Tekhnicheskaia estetika on devices for home use, compiled by a translator. 23 Not intentionally, perhaps, but any small initiative in Soviet society that could be expected to be acknowledged. The Soviet Union had a lot on its plate.

In the USSR, with its centralized system for planning and (re-)construction, the means to shape the world to become accessible for bodies with various functionalities and odo/abilities, was in the hands of a few decision makers. How bodies physically interact and negotiate with structures in society could be easily changed by the State Central Planning Committee – Gosplan – the designer, so to speak, of the entire production of mass goods. That was the plan. That was the goal. The focus of the five-year plans for 1946–1950 and 1951–1955 was reconstruction after WWII.

Amazon.com launched in 1995; also called The Five-Year Plan for Quality – was an enormous leap since it focused not only on what should be produced, but also how the production was to be carried out. The quality of working conditions was to become better. For the people of the USSR, this was a promise for a better future – within reach. By 1980, in less than five years, the goals of the Quality Plan were already to be reached.

Gosprom representative Dzhemshid Gvishiani’s close involvement in design issues raised hopes for action. His opening address for the ICSID’ 75 Moscow congress, “Design in the service of the people”,4 paved the way. The whole concept and the international presence raised hopes for increased focus on the humanitarian side of the man-machine constellation.5

“We count on your active participation in the congress, and are convinced that the forthcoming exchange of ideas will be fruitful for the future development of design”. 6 With these words, Dzhemshid Gvishiani officially opened ICSID’ 75 Moscow on Monday morning, October 13, and handed the microphone to Yuri Soloviev (1920—2013), director of VNITE. Tall, good-looking and well versed, Soloviev was locally known in Moscow as ‘the aristocrat’. “Strong state control”, declared Soloviev in his plenary speech from the podium in the Rosyysa main congress hall, “is the prerequisite to execute operative decisions on questions of such importance and complexity as the welfare of human beings and society”.7,8 So – what could possibly go wrong? All the prerequisites for betterment were there: the power in the hands of a few, the good will for implementation in practice, the pragmatic Soviet logistic models to make dreams become reality that had even been awarded the Nobel Prize. What did this reality look like? How was it in real life?

Organic flaws in the economy

Soviet industry was in a stagnant, constant crisis ever since Stalin had accused consumer and human friendly economists of “sabotaging” the expansion of heavy industry in the 1930s. Thus, there was little left for design to work on. Moreover, a long misanthropic tradition had to be dealt with. In the words of the renowned Soviet-American sociologist and political scientist Vladi-

Pereostrikova leader Mikhail Gorbachev, “for the last attempt to improve economic performance initiated in 1986” is credited by Sli-
haptenko to be the one “who created the state quality system”.9 But this attempt also failed, as had earlier efforts – to which the Gosplan VNITE efforts (albeit not mentioned by Slihaptenko) that we describe here – belong.

One contributing factor to the system's failure was an overload of control, an overload of ineffective bureaucracy, instead of finding the real remedy. Slihaptenko: “The Soviet leaders were aware of the weaknesses in the mechanism of perfor-
mance”, and sought to remedy them by way of external mecha-
nisms of control. “By 1980, no less than 10 million people, about
30–50 percent of all employees, were enrolled as social auditors.”
And “once again these inspectors went into collision with man-
gers, which aroused the hostility of the party committees”.36

ON JUNE 2,1962, the workers at the Novocherkassk Electric Loco-
motive Plant finally dared to go on strike. Their modest pleas-
dings were for salaries high enough to occasionally afford some
meat for dinner, and some flexibility from the functionaries in
charge of public transportation to adjust the timetables to ac-
commodate the needs of the nightshift workers who did not
want to have to walk all the way home anymore. The bus timeta-
dles did not fit with the work schedule of the factory with 12
000 workers. But instead of meeting these very reasonable demands
that one would have thought would not
have been too difficult: “They shot into
a completely calm crowd”, stated Anatoly
Zhirinov in 2017, fifty-five years later, to
Meduza correspondent Danil Kadyrov, who documented eye witness accounts of
the Novocherkassk massacre, the capital of the
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On the eve of the Holodomor, the Soviet authorities had an “explicit anti-Cossack
policy was the major theme around which everything revolved.
With the extraordinarily important mission to bring creativity to
the stagnant industry, to make Soviet products more user-
friendly and more appealing, VNIITE director Yuri Soloviev ac-
tioned in all the spheres of society: For the drivers of combine harvest-
ers on the fields of wheat and corn stretching from horizon to
horizon, and the long-distance pilots and drivers of airplanes, trucks, and trains.
And numerous war veterans adding to the needs for all kinds of empowering tools,
including replacement limbs and better prostheses. However, with its inclusive
view of a society designed for everybody, the work by VNIITE was rather the excep-
tion than the rule.
Ergonomics, defined as the science of
labor, was a task that coincided with the
UNESCO-ECDU definition of its mission: “de-
sign for the betterment of the human condi-
tion”, mentioned above. At VNIITE, ergonomics was important.
Even key, Vladimir Munipov (1933–2001), head of the Department of
Ergonomics, was vice-director of the whole institute. As described
in one of his many articles in Tekhnicheskaia ezhegodnica, Munipov
equaled quality with user-friendliness which equalled the science of
labor.35 Science was the foundation of the Soviet state ideology, and
in this way Munipov skillfully presented ergonomics as the firm
scientific basis for the changes that were so urgently needed for in-
dustrial production.36 But only with the 195 five-year plan from 1975
to 1980 were these requirements at last made explicit, established
by General Secretary of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev as
“The Five-Year Plan for Quality”.37 This really seemed to be a promise
for a better life. The rulers in Moscow had it all in their hands – and
the peoples in the vast Soviet Union had patiently waited for even
the most modest improvements in their lives.
The friendly human-oriented congress name “Design for Man
and Mankind” was VNIITE’s idea. It clearly shows the worldview of
the institute: Human well-being in society – large through – design.
The plenary themes to be presented in the Rossiya Concert Hall
were: Design and State Policy, Design and Science, Design
and Labor, Design and Leisure, and Design for Children. The
parallel sessions included topics such as communications, educa-
tion, developing countries, disaster relief, design promotion and
design for the handicapped and the ageing.38 Design and state
policy was the major theme around which everything revolved.
To formulate suggestions for change in the way in which the
industrial production was to be carried out was a great challenge
that the large industrial conglomerates did not welcome.39 The
changes interfered too much with the way production was or-
ganized and would cause initial dips in productivity which
was deemed unacceptable, since the directors received their bonuses
only if the pre-formulated plan was over-fulfilled. A catch-22 situa-
tion. Absurdly enough, the state financed institute with the duty
to propose changes for the betterment of the working conditions
turned into a place for disuse for simply proposing solutions
that were uncomfortable for the people in power to act upon.
The demands for change were too challenging for the corrupt
leadership who instead drowned any suggestions for innovations
in tons of documents in the insurmountable bureaucracy.
VNIITE had become an institute of resistance – simply by doing
its job. And this really needs to be stressed; therefore I repeat
it again: paradoxically enough – VNIITE was a scientific research
institute financed by the state.

Ergonomics – key for the self-image of
good Swedish design
Ergonomics was (and still is) important for the self-image of
Swedish design. Under the motto “Design for all”, Sweden
promoted its trademark as an inclusive society, consciously
designed for both rich and poor; catering for not only well-
functioning bodies – but for everybody. It is no coincidence
that the cover of the first book on Swedish Design History11 shows
the hugely successful and best-selling ergonomic coffee pot for Scan-
dianavian Airlines. The “SAS pot” was designed by Maria Berkt-
zon (b. 1946) and Sven-Eric Juhl (b. 1940).
The ICSD ‘75 Moscow heading “For Man and Mankind” was
appealing to the Swedes. The care for the user’s well being was
an interest that the designers from the Swedish group shared
with the designers at VNIITE. The theme that the Swedish group
had chosen for its participation thus fit very well in the overall
concept of ICSD ‘75 Moscow.

THE SWEDISH GROUP
had prepared two presentations for ICSD ‘75
Moscow, both of them on ergonomics. In practice, ergonomics

“I SEE A FUTURE where we can
move from a world of industrial
production to a world of
service-oriented production, where
people work as designers, produ-
cers, engineers, and other profes-
sionals who take the responsibility for
the whole process.”

The pioneering angled kitchen knife for people with weak hands made by Maria Berkt-
zon and Sven-Eric Juhl. Ergonomic Design Group for Gustavberg manufacturer, pro-
duced from 1973. The knife was presented by Maria Berktzon at the ICSD ’75 Moscow
session “Design for the handicapped and the ageing” on Tuesday 14 October 1975.
human factors, industrial psychology or whatever you want to call it) is about designing tools, devices and equipment that have been adapted to fit human bodies with various needs.

In Moscow, in addition to the key lectures in the main concert hall on state policy, science, labor, leisure and design for children, the parallel sessions (four at a time, running concurrently) included staff members of VNIITE. Juhlin had applied and showed slides of both the process and the gripping tools for people with weak hands. In the presentation, disabled to elaborate tools for home use. The very important Soviet Union was a place where self-sufficiency was not allowed.

According to Lennart Lindkvist and Maria Benktzon,40 in the late 1970s Soviet readership, many of whom lived in far off industrial cities and censoring, not much more than the usual empty phrases the speeches. The obstacles the real author behind the speeches name was not mentioned officially; instead Dzhermen Gvishiani, backstage at Hotel Rossiya was all. Everything was censored… No real meetings or discussions were allowed to take place, and we had to run up an escalator that was out of order. It felt awkward, absurd, and humiliating. Try it yourself.

VNIITE housed somewhat more angry voices. The house periodical Tekhnicheskaia estetika was important for spreading the word about the activities at VNIITE. Tekhnicheskaia estetika had been issued once a month since 1964 with a recurring circulation. By 1975, it was almost 30,000.44 The impression I have from interviews with the editorial staff is that the many lectures presenting the latest news in the design field, the congress delegates – foreign and local – were to discuss and socialize for a few days. That is how the editorial board imagined (and wanted) the congress to be, to get some glimpses from behind the front stage.)

The cover for the September issue of Tekhnicheskaia estetika shows a photo of a group of people sitting on low chairs around a table, cautiously collaborating to solve a problem. In the green background, the congress topics are printed in Russian and English. With a nod to Frank Gehry’s cardboard chairs, VNIITE designed cardboard boxes. Igor Bereznov and Yevgenii Bogdanov had made cardboard furniture that was placed in the hotel lobby. As conversation pieces shown on the cover – to sit on.

During the ICSD congress, ordinary staff like myself who were not party members were never allowed to attend the plenary sessions. We sat secluded in the basement, like firemen ready to march out and help the big bosses in case of emergency. This has burnt into my memory, since every time someone needed assistance, we had to run up an escalator that was out of order. It felt awkward, absurd, and humiliating. Try it yourself.

The cover of the September issue of Tekhnicheskaia estetika.

There was no bustling and lively interaction among like-minded professionals or discussions about what had happened. All the preparations and arrangements had been done, without any discussion with the foreign designers on their brief visit to the capital, in the room where they shared with her husband and small daughter in a communal flat (bath, toilet and kitchen co-inhabited with unknown people).

Svetlana Silvestrova (b. 1936) was an adept English-speaking journalist who had recently moved to Moscow with her husband, designer Dmitry Azrikan (b. 1934) who was hired at VNIITE for his innovative ideas on how to effectively re-organize oil and petrol distribution with petrol stations for the private car owner that even looking and pleasant. The couple came from the international petrol and port city of Riga on the Caspian Sea. Recently hired, the erstwhile reporter then became a member of the editorial board of Tekhnicheskaia estetika. Silvestrova wanted to annotate the occasionally quite rigid and dull layout of the periodical (page after page illustrated visual) of Tekhnicheskaia estetika with more personal portraits, interviews, and photos (she was the author of the pages with images of the designers, and much more). In spite of the obstruction of their work, the VNIITE staff succeeded in collecting an abundance of material from the guests: photos, typed presentations, and more. Sveta Silvestrova.

We had material for many full issues to come. But nothing came to be. We were not allowed to publish any of the lectures from the congress. Nor the full answers to the questionnaire with the two questions that were posed to the international designers. We were only given permission to publish eight edited answers. That was all. Everything was censored... No real meetings or discussions were allowed to take place, and we had so much looked forward to learning from other places. There was no bustle and no excitement among the like-minded professionals taking place that we had so much looked forward to.

Post-congress reactions from the editorial board referring to be silenced. The Tekhnicheskaia estetika editorial board editors avoided asking about their feelings about what had happened. All the preparations they had done – they did not want it all to be in vain. All the hopes for interaction with the colleagues from all over the world, and in the larger perspective – hopes for a motherland...
The ICSID congress was maybe nothing more than a big theatrical spectacle staged for internal purposes in order to put the spotlight on design issues. What was the conclusion? That the East had a system but no design, and the West had a design but no system.26

The goal was to liberate the masses from heavy, physically and mentally degrading work on dark, smoky and dirty shopfloors. Labor was to be lifted to a higher technical level in light, well-ventilated and beautiful industries and laboratories, for a happier cultured life.27

You feel at home here. It’s similar to Scandinavian design schools… bustling, full of life… An exchange with our design schools in Scandinavia with students from Stroganov could be extremely valuable.28

Maria Benktzon, who met the audience from the congress stage in Moscow with her presentation “Design for all”, won numerous prestigious red dot design awards and became a professor of ergonomics in Stockholm. In her obituary for Henrik Wahlforss (1949—2016) “who infused ergonomic design in Sweden with energy when he moved to Stockholm from Helsinki”, she recalled his vision for a future “Norden 2030” published in 1982, in which he “hopes for a human, resilient society built around small-scale communities in the United Nordic Countries.”29

FROM THE SWEDISH REPORTING on the 9th ICSID congress in Moscow we move to take a hopscotch view of an event of international importance with repercussions for the October days in Moscow 1975: the Nobel Peace Prize announcement October 9, 1975.

Only a few days before the ICSID ’75 Moscow congress was to take off, the Nobel Peace Prize for human rights activist Andrei Sakharov was announced. This course created newspaper headlines worldwide. Sakharov was the nuclear physicist who had developed the most powerful atomic weapon to have ever been detonated, before beginning to fight for peace and disarmament. On what levels had this news become known behind the Iron Curtain? In Moscow even! Of course, the top bureaucrats knew. Of course, the Organs of the State Security (KGB) knew. But the rest? Did they know about the goings-on in the world? What sources of information were available to them? What was known in Moscow about the Peace Prize? Did the man on the street, even in Moscow, the capital, let alone far away in the provinces, know who Andrei Sakharov was? Or was this kept a secret from the citizens who had only access to state-controlled media?

The news had loud international repercussions and the Soviet leaders changed the premises for the Moscow congress entirely at the very last moment. A shock went through the congress before it had even started. Of course, the foreign guests to Moscow knew. All the staff of the host organization VNIITE that I have interviewed confirmed that the changes in their congress contributions were severely censored. That they had to change the entire program at the last minute. Already mentioned above, the experimental slide show on sixteen screens, was cancelled. According to VNIITE director Yuri Solvelev “the telephone lines ran hot all night”.

Dmitry Azrikan, one of the few local staff members from VNIITE allowed to make his own public congress presentation, said: “All the visual material we had prepared was cancelled. We were not allowed to show anything, only to talk.” The impressions given the Swedish delegates was that: “It all seemed very improvised.”

Dmitry Azrikan, who has always been very patient answering my never-ending rows of questions (we have been in continuous contact since February 2008)30 last said (when I contacted him
Emotional and heart wrenching letters written by Andrei Sakharov to his wife Svetlana in 1990. The letters detailed his desire to go to the West, his wishes for his wife to join him, and his hope for a better future for their children. The letters also expressed his fear of the KGB and the dangers of staying in the Soviet Union. He wrote: "I'm sick and tired of this life, of being under surveillance, of being afraid every day that I might be arrested. I want to live where I can be free, where I can express my thoughts, where I can work without being interrupted. I want to be with my family, to be able to see them grow up and to love them as a father should." Sakharov's letters provided a rare glimpse into the personal struggles of a leading Soviet dissident and human rights activist in the final years of the Soviet Union.
ISCSID ’75 MOSCOW was the 30-year anniversary of the victory in WWII. Three decades of reconstruction and rebuilding were to be presented to the world.

For the Soviets, nothing less was at stake than to present the socialist lifestyle as the most desirable. Under the congress name “Design for Man and Mankind”, designers and influencers came from all over the world to meet and discuss questions of great urgency for the well-being and dignity of people and society.

The participants of course wanted the meeting to be fruitful and constructive, which was made very difficult due to the unnecessary censorship and other obstacles to freedom of speech created upon the event by the Soviet authorities in control of the congress. The lack of faith in the visiting delegates in place for this unique event, in fact even in its already highly educated staff of the host organization, made the Soviet leadership deprive the congress participants of their agency to create a constructive dialogue, and to interact and react without any opportunity of contact, and by humiliating the delegates and the local staff in this way clumsily destroyed the event. The reaction among the congress delegates on both sides of the iron curtain got (get) away with this for most of the time.

Self-censorship – I would call it social decay – had become a severe handicapping disability. Living in fear for decades produced such post-traumatic stress syndromes that many grew silent. The absence of power in the Soviet Union was massive. What I find astonishing is that the VNIITE staff that serve as witnesses in this article had been able to retain even a grain of health, making them able to react the way they did, in spite of the many years of severe abuse they had suffered.

The covers for Tekhnicheskoe estetstvo (Technical esthetics) Toronto show are fair as good any.

Still, good design means a realistic acceptance of differences. The good designer would, I would argue, have to stand up for and empower those in need.6 The bottom line of good design is simply to respect human dignity and to create products that can make a way of culture that is a human one. For the transnational collaborations that took place after 1975, despite all, more research needs to be done.6

THE RECOLLECTIONS presented here show that not even the VNIITE staff who had authored the speeches for the dignitaries was treated with any dignity, or even in accordance with basic human rights – freedom of speech – the foundation for democracy.

The urgent needs for improvement were at last acknowledged by the Party. The five-year plan for 1975-1980 was loudly proclaimed as The Five-Year Plan for Quality. The goals of the plans were to be realized by 1980. They were not. The ways to improve working conditions for the industrial worker at the con-

vex belt, the women with extraordinary heavy workloads in the communal kitchens, and the drivers sitting on the tractor on the enormous wheat fields in the “breadbasket” – the Ukraine. The suggestions VNIITE made were empowerment. They were not to the weak for the strong to become stronger. This was dangerous of course. The suggestions for improvement remained as grandioses of women’s roles as professionals, and also lacked the Fingerspitzengefühl (tact) how to communicate this. Not only was the pink folder with the Ladies’ program a real faux pas, with the Ladies’ program a real misleading: the women in the Swedish delegation were allowed to enter the main congress hall only if accompanied by a male. The real designers were assumed to be men.

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REFERENCES

1. The source for this quote is D.M. Grishin, 1972, “Dizain na dushi slovozobrazovatel’ov. Vospominania D.M. Grishina i ikh konferentsii ISKID” (Design in the service of the soul. The memories of D.M. Grishin and his conference ISKID) (April 23, 2022. Stockholm, Venice, Paris, Montreal. Slovenia, Scotland, Taiwan, Canada, Australia, Kyoto and London are mentioned as hosts for the event, but not Moscow.

Editors’ Note: All translations from Russian and Swedish into English are made by the author of this text.}

Acknowledgement of this text: I want to dedicate this article to the staff members of VNIITE (as well as the facilitator at GHKT) mentioned here, who struggled for the betterment of the human condition despite severe dictatorship in alphabetical order): Dmitry Azrikan, Dzhermen Gvishiani, Aleksei Kozlov, Vladimir Municov, Yuri Reshetnikov, Svetlana Silvestrova, and Yuri Solovey.

I am indebted to the blind peer reviewers of this article for valuable comments.

Margaretta Törnberg, Associate Professor in Art History, Uppsala University. Adjunct Professor, Stockholm University.

Note: For in a system which was infamous for its disrespect and even abuse of the visitors, the Soviet super-effective five-year plans, that reduced human needs — and sixty years later — Azovstal in Mariupol only a few hours after the Russo-Ukrainian War ended.

By way of showing a few concrete events, the very weakest mechanisms whose consequences made the subdued populations want to leave that rule; the Soviet Union dissolved. But the same mechanisms still repercuss as of today, shown by the Russian attack on the Ukraine: the institutionalized state contempt for its citizens, its subjects — the systematic lack of respect for human dignity. VNIITE’s human friendly worldview was an anomaly and a challenge to Soviet industry. With its inclusive view on a society designed for everybody, the work by VNIITE was rather the exception than the rule. The need for a revision of how humans were treated in Soviet society was enormous, but the distance between visions and reality was very far. Too far? No. The failure was due to the lack of willpower.

The very moment I write this — Monday April 25 — there should be complete darkness at noon. That means we should give up? No. I think not.


The September issue of Form nr 1/1976:10.

The June issue of Form was printed in 29 570 copies, and for October, November and December it was issued in 29 000 copies. kommunalnaya Gazeta: " passing", quote from page 4.

34  For example, well-designed land-mines disguised with soft cheerfully making themselves present on the battlefield, finding new ways to drive the enemy, with reinforced concrete, was important for the psychological effect as well. Martin Kelm was accountable directly to Erich Honecker, communist leader in East Germany, KPV. Kelm was also close to the powerful Gospol and GKNV, see Margareta Tillberg, “Martin Kelm: DDR, Moskva and the Design Network in the GDR (1972-1975)”, in Baltic Worlds, vol. 9, no. 142 (1975): 5-38.


37  Black against the sky, with reinforced concrete, Form nr. 1/1976:8.


40  My first contact with Dmitry Arazkin was in February 2018, when I was invited to a lecture in Imperial Russia, with the topic "collaboration design", and thought that arik's projects might be interesting for a wider audience in the Soviet Union. They had already read about some of his projects in Tekhnicheskaya estetika, and many investigations on design in the Soviet Union that Arazkin was labelled “Design No.” in the “Soviet Union. Nevertheless, he emigrated to the US, when the big design center was to be built very centrally in Moscow to stimulate industrial production, signed by the mayor of Moscow, and president of Moscow-Russia Olga Vodolazskaya, commented: "I think that this is a very good design”, as discussed at the conference Design for War and Peace, organized by the Design History Society in Oxford in 2014. In this case, the opposite of "good" was “bad”, but evil.


43  Author interview with Alexei Kozlov, Moscow, April-June 2014 (e-mail).

44  The September issue of Tekhnicheskaya estetika was printed in 29 570 copies, and for October, November and December it was issued in 29 000 copies.

45  The author of this article had a break-in to her home a few years ago, where very important research material was stolen, that I collected and parts that were destroyed, and was forced to work without those. However, the importance of seizing the moment and to maintain momentum for a possible text-piece in this context. The author kindly gave me permission to publish the text.


47  Monica Boman interviewed (all in person), amongst those included in this article: Dmitry Arazkin, Yuri Solovjev, Svetlana Silvestrova.


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