

Borbála Jász

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest University of Technology and Economics

**Dissertation topic: The architecture theory and philosophy of art in the interwar
Hungary – especially the works of Paul Ligeti**

**Modern Technology under Façadism: Aesthetical Foundations of Socialist Realism and
Soviet modern in Eastern Central-European Urban Design**

After WW2 the main goal in city planning was the reconstruction of the urban landscape across Europe. Relying on the results of the classical modern movement this was a common project all over Europe. At the beginning of the 1950s in Eastern Central-Europe a distinct socialist approach emerged with the motto: ‘national by form, socialist by content’. This is called Socialist Realism, which returned to a classical architectural form-language on the surface level of decorations, but at the same time it also retained modernism under the surface in a hidden way. In fact, a modern structure has been decorated with mixed elements from the history of architecture. This approach was terminated and changed by Khrushchev’s famous industrialisation speech in 1954. At that point a new era began: the age of the prefabricated house block systems. Newly built socialist cities emerged, e. g. Stalin city [Dunaújváros] in Hungary, or complete districts were renewed by using the then current form-language, e. g. in Warsaw.

In case of the Socialist Realist gap the philosophical foundations assisted the evolution of the new form-language in connection with the visual appearance of the ideology of the regime. The Socialist Realist pieces of arts and buildings must have been understandable for the workers, had to demonstrate the power of the state and the role of social responsibility. The gap is the niche between two modern periods: from the end of WW2 until 1951 and from 1954 until today. Between them a Socialist Realist gap emerged in Eastern Central-Europe. After the Khrushchevian architectural turn in 1954 the materials used and the planning methods applied became more important and the reasons for this could be found in the philosophical foundations of the architectural theory of the era. At the beginning of the 1950s a new machine age started, which was based on the renewed idea of the machine city of the interwar period, and this theory has dominated until today.

Our first task is to understand these different periods and styles under the Socialist regimes in Eastern-Central Europe. Socialist Realism was a propaganda movement with the motto I

already mentioned above: 'national by form, socialist by content'. The precast house block system became the embodiment of the idea of the interwar modernism: happiness for the greatest number. Secondly, we need to understand the financial situation and the limited possibilities of architecture during this period. We are not able to understand the buildings of the era yet. Masterpiece buildings were torn down due to misunderstanding or non-understanding of the message of the building. Philosophy, the human and social sciences may help us look beyond the machine paradigm without demolition and without simply removing the traces of the past. The keyword will be *imageability*.

People have to live in these machine cities, thus they shape cities in their own image to make them more human, organic, and liveable. One of the first experiments for humanising the machine city was the ISOTYPE project by Otto Neurath during the interwar period. Neurath applied his picture language from its original social-economical context to cities, to help people develop a way finding method. Way finding method means an architecturally appearance of user experience of orientation [Lynch 1960].

In my paper I present the historical facts about Socialist Realism and Soviet/late modern urban design. It is important to show that in the Eastern Central European block there was a Socialist Realist Gap between 1951 and 1954 – during the processing of the modern architecture and urban design in the West. Second, I examine the role of philosophy of art in this process, especially theories of philosophers, who worked on the issue of method, e. g. Descartes and the positivists. Finally, I also analyse the working method and the problems of the machine cities, as well as *imageability* as an attempt for solving those problems.