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Ugly and uglier: defining value and politics in architecture

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to broaden theoretical and methodological approaches to urban aesthetics by introducing the sociology of (e)valuation and Q-sort methodology. In explaining which elements of urban design matter and to whom, existing research deploys concepts such as cultural capital and taste. The article proposes an alternative perspective, which focuses on individuals' critical capacities to judge and qualify the built environment. The analysis shifts focus from studying taste to studying valuation. The findings expand the idea of aesthetic value as something not divorced from social order, but rather reflective of its complexity.

The (non)spectacle of Lenin Avenue

The World Cup arrived in Russia's westernmost city, Kaliningrad, known until 1945 as East Prussia's capital, Königsberg, in June 2018. Anticipating over 100,000 visitors (Chempionat Mira Po Futbolu 2018, 23 October 2017)[1] – nearly a quarter of the city's population and the largest number of international visitors since the city became Russian after WWII – the local organizing committee and the city government took a joint decision to renovate Lenin Avenue. An eyesore for as long as residents can remember, this principal boulevard consisted primarily of proverbial 'khrushchevkas', low-rise, low-cost blocks of flats built in the early to mid-1960s under Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khruschev (Figure 1). The upgrade that began in 2015 involved, first, a Moscow-based and, then, local architectural firms, which developed prototypes for the buildings' revamp. The houses had to be beautified, their Soviet provenance concealed behind a new look. Initially planned to include ninety-three buildings, the upgrade ended up affecting only thirteen. Increasing construction costs over the course of the project and the devaluation of the rouble in 2015 limited work to the facades only, omitting capital improvements.

Which style to choose provoked no debate: Lenin Avenue deserved to look like a northern European Hanseatic trade network city from the Renaissance Period. Following this vision, the original rectangular boxes of modernist Series 1–335 transformed into colourful gabled structures. The look was achieved through using blocks of polystyrene faux brick attached to the fronts and brightly coloured paints: yellow, green, and terracotta. Floral and geometrical patterns adorned the pediments. Imitation wrought-iron railings replaced the socialist steel bars on balconies (Figure 2).

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Figure 1. Lenin Avenue before renovation. Source: Commons.WikiMedia.org.

Figure 2. Lenin Avenue after renovation. Source: Commons.WikiMedia.org.

No less peculiar than the design itself was its definition as proposed by the director of the specially appointed committee: 'Lenin Avenue will be where Bauhaus meets Gothic, with the Hansa look stirred in' (BERLOGOS, *Arkhitekturnoe Tsitirovanie*, 11 April 2018). The idea to imbue modernist buildings with a semblance of northern European architecture came from the governor, concerned with making a good impression on international visitors. The local press lauded this as 'the rightful return of history' (*Livejournal*, 26 November 2017), in which the 'European' origins of the city historically known as 'Königsberg' were acknowledged. Even those who criticized the project for its overt 'Potemkinisation' – by which they meant a focus on appearances and the masking of structural deficiencies such as leaking roofs, derelict electric systems, moribund ventilation, and paint peeling off interior walls – did not contest the aesthetics of the design.

This article does not offer a detailed examination of Lenin Avenue, but rather uses its example to springboard to a broader issue. What defines the transformation of Lenin Avenue is not the *meaning* of style (Barthes 1989), but its *worth* and *desirability*, in other words, its *value* (Heinich 2020). As in many other former socialist cities, residents of Kaliningrad partake in a drive to enhance the historicity of the city's space and to downplay the architectural legacy of socialism (Samutina and Stepanov 2014; Dimova 2013; Colomb 2007; Boyer 1994; Gottdiener 2001). In contradistinction to many other post-socialist cities, however, Kaliningrad possesses a dual history of belonging to Germany until 1945 and to Russia afterwards. This history politicizes architecture and problematizes aesthetic choices in a particular way. In this context, the hodgepodge of styles on 'Lenin Avenue' reveals more than 'bad taste'. The buildings' encasement in faux brick bestows uniqueness upon space otherwise associated with facelessness and anonymity. Shiny new facades are the manifestation of an investment by authorities who care. What counts as 'beautiful' in design is not style but the commitment itself: the commitment to appreciate the city with its complex history and the individuality of its residents. This cannot be adequately articulated as taste.

Following the example Lenin Avenue provides, this article argues that analyses of urban aesthetics need to address valuation, not taste, more forcefully and explicitly than they have been to date. The sociology of (e)valuation provides an appropriate analytical framework as it makes judgment and its justifications its objects:

> The sociology of valuation has nothing to do with helping actors in resolving conflicts, providing clues for good judgments, or fostering democratic ways of making decisions. The purpose of the sociology of valuation … [remains] a purely epistemic one, aiming not at making valuations acceptable but at discovering and analyzing how actors decide whether a valuation is acceptable or not (Heinich 2020, 5).

What are the qualities of buildings and places which urban dwellers recognize and deem significant, and how do these qualities sustain social actors' commitments to buildings and places, even in the face of their obvious deficiencies – faux building materials, inconsistent stylistic elements, and a lack of attention to structural problems? How are different aesthetics variously valued in Kaliningrad? Addressing these questions, this article provides a critique of current uses of the category of 'taste' in assessing urban transformations; expands the idea of aesthetic value; and offers a distinct way to understand the significance of modernism and post-modernism as architectural and urban planning traditions. Establishing a connection between urban design and valuation studies constitutes one of its contributions.

Meeting these theoretical goals requires the introduction of a research methodology, the Q sort. Its value lies in a constructed *test* situation, which forces social actors to articulate and defend their aesthetic choices. Q-sort data collected in Kaliningrad demonstrates the method's potential and the heuristic advantages of a sociology of (e)valuation, while at the same time shedding light upon the region's aesthetic politics, a topic markedly underrepresented in the research literature published in English.

Taste, aesthetics, and politics in urban studies

In the 1980s, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu formulated a theory of cultural capital, which consists of social assets individuals can possess, 'convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and maybe institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications' (Bourdieu 1986, 242). This theory has given rise to growing interest among scholars who study gentrification. Numerous studies demonstrate that what appears to be an innocent search for atypical consumer experiences among gentrifiers – and what in effect changes a neighbourhood's economic situation – possesses a pronounced socioeconomic class dimension and serves as a mechanism for social distinction (Ley 1996; Zukin 1998; Lloyd 2006; Pinkster 2016). Endowed with the perspective afforded by cultural capital, certain scholars note the value of authenticity – and 'the taste for it' – evident in preferences for certain styles of amenities, buildings, and the atmospheres the amenities emanate (Zukin 2011), and demonstrate how this relates to 'a love for diversity' among the upper-middle classes (Tissot 2014). They thus make explicit links between architectural designs and class politics. As high-rise towers lost their association with poverty and social disorder during the past decade, they gained popularity among the transnational superrich. Now they shape 'luxified skylines' (Hewitt and Graham 2015) acting as expressions of the superrich's social status and power.

There are some notable limitations to this influential 'cultural capital' approach, however. Bourdieu famously argues that, in modern Europe, a 'disinterested' aesthetic disposition emerged, and its purported separation from morals or politics cemented the dominance of some aesthetic judgements over others (Kuipers, Franssen, and Holla 2019). More importantly, Bourdieu's own empirical studies tend to reduce actors'

purportedly disinterested judgements to unconscious strategies by which social class members distinguish themselves from others. His work generally downplays the critical competencies of actors and is all but dismissive of moral issues and moral sentiments as significant elements in the reproduction of social order (Sayer 1999; Cloutier and Langley 2013).

Research on formerly socialist cities offers an alternative, demonstrating city residents' direct engagement with urban design. Historically, socialist urban dwellers have vested the colours, materials, technologies, and craftsmanship of urban constructions with the regime's legitimacy or a lack thereof. Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey observes concerning Soviet Russia that 'political ideology may take material forms' and 'artefacts are not material objects divorced from social relations' (2005, 39). In Hungary, a lack of visual diversity and poor construction quality created a particular 'aesthetics of grey', fellow anthropologist Fehérváry (2013) observes. She notes, daily immersion in this 'grey' predisposed the aspiring socialist middle class to imagine the state as an entity that regarded its citizens with disdain and neglect (Fehérváry 2013). Indeed, some urban protests in contemporary Russia explicitly focus on aesthetics. For instance, political demands made during demonstrations in St. Petersburg in 2008–2009 against construction of a corporate tower contained arguments about 'what the city is, how it looks, and who can benefit from living in it' (Yurchak 2011, 3; Dixon 2010). In former socialist countries, there clearly exists a 'volatile convergence of aesthetics and politics' (Enigbokan 2016, 5), which goes well beyond class interests and establishing social boundaries. In this convergence, aesthetics are real and substantive because they concern a profound confrontation over who holds power.[2] But, the question is: how to study them?

Jonathan Metzger and Sofia Wiberg's work offers a useful perspective. A significant number of contentious political situations in urban settings, the authors argue, are not indeed struggles for hegemony, but rather something more fundamental. They are ontological politics, that is, fundamental agreements or disagreements concerning the nature of reality. To study ontological politics in urban transformations is to study 'how [urban] qualities are qualified and values enacted and articulated, whether ostensibly or covertly, directly or indirectly' (Metzger and Wiberg 2018, 2314). It is also to study interests and stakes associated with the styles, quality, craftsmanship, and the care of buildings and places, as well as the orders of value ascribed to them and the values with which they are inscribed. This position is crucial to the argument made in this article.

However, Metzger and Wiberg are mainly concerned with how 'things are made valuable' in the context of public controversy, which they address by bridging literature on framing practices in policy research and valuation studies (2018, 2303). In this article, the focus, by contrast, is on judgment and its justifications as performed by diverse social actors who define the worth of buildings unmarked by controversy. This latter focus generates more research opportunities and richer results than studying framing, when it comes to examining the intersection of politics, aesthetics, and built environments in everyday, ordinary settings. It follows the evaluative standards according to which social actors justify the distribution of resources or access to social goods. Metzger and Wiberg's (2018) study emphasizes controversies – temporally limited events that arise in conjunction with urban renewal projects and involve defined social actors with stakes in the projects. This contribution seeks to divulge what binds social actors together in design. An

emphasis on controversies yields important insights, but sidesteps the constant performative work of holding the social together, something the built environment does and which the present article illuminates.

Worth and justification

If the aesthetic politics expressed through buildings are real and substantive, as Yurchak (2011) and Enigbokan (2016) suggest, this is because *valuation* of buildings mobilizes and stabilizes specific social orders. In the growing field of valuation studies (Lamont 2012), valuation is defined as a latent or explicit dialogue with a specific or generalized 'other' conducted through 'repertoires of practices' (Camic, Gross, and Lamont 2011, 28). The cornerstone of this theory is that social actors 'judge', and in order to 'judge justly' they have to be able 'to recognize the nature of the situation and be able to bring into play the corresponding principle of justice' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 146). This means that they almost always justify and legitimate their choices by relating them to a limited, broad-based set of conceptions concerning the common good. Each set of beliefs has its own content and structure, called 'worlds' or 'orders of worth' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Silber 2003, 429). Individuals accomplish this act by differentiating various objects, actors, and instruments in their environment, and assigning differential worth to them in ways that are consistent with these differentiations (Lamont 2012, 201–221). 'Formatting of a reality' occurs, which 'singles out what is relevant' and not to actors in their evaluations (Thévenot 2002, 54).

Another important aspect of this framework is pluralism: different evaluative principles are always in play – some call these 'repertoires' or 'grammars' (Lamont 2012; Lamont and Thévenot 2000), others 'styles' (Lee and Helgesson 2019), which assemble states and characteristics (features of objects or persons), relations of worth (differentiation into what is more or less worthy), 'investment formulas' (the means to ascending to possessing worth), and select participants (including material ones) under the core organizing principle of 'what matters most' (Cloutier and Langley 2013, 366). Individuals do not interpret and make sense of the world in a predetermined way, but rather draw upon elements from repertoires of valuation – generally coherent principles of value attribution resulting from relations of constructed equivalences among spaces, people, and practices – and use them strategically to suit their needs in particular situations. Consequently, one and the same building, place, or style may acquire different values according to the repertoires available to those doing the valuations. This is very different from merely liking or disliking something, the mechanisms of which, when conceptualized as 'taste', cannot be distinguished from the social structures that create them.

The Q-sort: a methodological approach

This theoretical agenda requires a distinct methodology. While novel to urban studies, the Q-sort method meets the challenge. A variety of factor analysis, Q-sorts seek to measure similarities and differences in individuals' affinities within a pre-defined demographic group with regard to a controversial topic. Yielding both quantitative and qualitative data, Q-sorts allow researchers to access ranking practices and match

them with narratives, and to compare discursive/conscious opinions and non-discursive/subconscious opinions (see, for instance, Schaap and Berkers 2020, 600; also, Eden, Donaldson, and Walker 2005). Forty-five Q-sorts with Kaliningrad architects, planners, city managers, and activists were conducted and their narratives recorded, transcribed, and analysed.[3] Selecting these particular professional groups was a strategic choice. On the one hand, they comprise decision-makers and influencers when it comes to shaping the cityscape. On the other, they share various practical engagements with the city and somewhat differently vested interests: architects might be more concerned with new construction, while administrators would also be occupied with maintaining existing built stock. Finally, the groups have differential relationships with regard to one another: city administrators can be perceived as barriers by planners and architects, who, in turn, may be recruited as allies by activists. These differences were expected to yield different value frameworks (what matters most) and repertoires of valuation. Jumping ahead, the findings did not support this expectation, although some minor differences in repertoires defining the value or deficiency of designs and buildings emerged.

Previous research in the region (Sezneva 2009, 2013) suggests that a fragmented cityscape composed of buildings from the German, Soviet, and contemporary Russian periods regularly generates public controversies over the worth of its different parts and their value in combination. Building upon this, the current study collected systematic empirical data to analyse further the distribution of subjective positions with regard to the built environment characteristic of Kaliningrad. Consequently, the photographs selected for the Q-sorts illustrate five foci – three historic periods and corresponding types of architecture (pre-war, Soviet-period, and contemporary) and two states of maintenance (renovated or neglected). The photographs depict both exemplary (well-known iconic buildings) and ordinary (mass housing estates) urban sites. The method 'accepts viewpoints as complex and multiple, ambiguous or two-headed statements are still usable, whereas they are discouraged in questionnaires' (Eden, Donaldson, and Walker 2005, 417). To ensure maximum variation in the images used, preliminary research, an analysis of media articles, tourist pamphlets, and historical monographs on postwar development in Kaliningrad were employed to determine the choice of sites and the criteria for selecting them. New photographs of sites were printed expressly for the study to avoid variation in image quality.

This approach created 'a situation of test' in Boltanski and Thevenot's (2006) terms. The research subjects were asked to rank pictures on a scale from −4 to +4, from least to most attractive. The Q-sort entailed not mere observation, but also actively stimulated judgment: participants were pressed to explain their ratings. In contrast to quantitative research, this produced two types of data: an actual distribution of sorted objects and narration revealing sorting procedures. Analysis of the urban professionals' narratives was thematic, their interviews coded. Coding emerged from immersion in the data (listening to complete recordings of the interviews, while reading through the transcripts). A twelve-family code tree emerged, with each family reflecting the dominant terms the participants used in evaluating their ratings, such as 'beautiful', 'ugly', 'historical', 'deficient', or 'authentic'.[4] The narratives of thirty-two urban professionals were used to deconstruct the judgements that inform their aesthetic category choices.

Results. 'Soviet' versus 'German': a relation of worth

The results of the Q-sort establish a clear disposition: selected German-period, pre-war buildings receive preferential treatment over postwar, Soviet-period constructions. In particular, the informants favour Gothic architecture and call it 'beautiful'. Two buildings, in particular, consistently occupy the highest +4 position in all forty-eight Q-sorts. These are the thirteenth-century Königsberg Cathedral, which also contains the Pantheon of Immanuel Kant, and the Church of the Holy Family (Kirche zur heiligen Familie). The Teutonic knights who settled the region in the thirteenth century laid the cathedral's foundations. Destroyed in 1944–1945, its full reconstruction did not begin until the late 1990s, concluding in 2005 with its opening as a museum, a place of prayer, and a concert hall (Figure 3).

The history of the Holy Family church is not as dramatic. Built much later, in 1904–1907, in the Gothic revival style, it survived the war and was repurposed as a music hall in the 1980s.

The polar opposite is a Soviet-period housing complex, which ranks, with equal consistency, at −4 and is deemed 'ugly'. New construction in Soviet Kaliningrad began quite late compared to the rest of Russia, in the mid-1960s, following the USSR's characteristic principle of efficiency and low cost (Harris 2013). Four- to five-storey rectangular residential buildings of prefabricated concrete panels constituted the first stage of socialist redevelopment, followed in the 1970s–1980s by taller constructions of up to twelve storeys. Suffering from extreme neglect, these blocks, initially of poor quality, fell in a state of utter decay by the 2010s (Figure 4).[5]

Figure 3. The Königsberg Cathedral, from the Q-sort. Source: Dmitry Vyshemirsky.

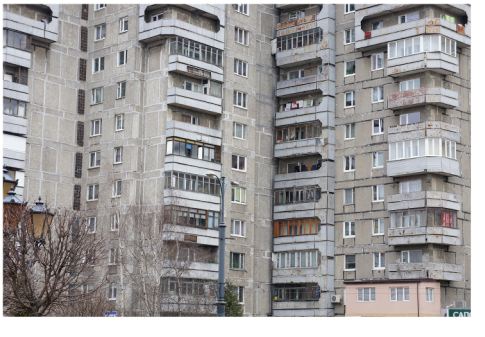

Figure 4. A building on Moskovsky Avenue, from the Q-sort. Source: Olga Sezneva.

Approached as a matter of taste, the choice of Gothic over Soviet-era buildings appears self-evident; the former is simply more 'beautiful'. However, the Q-sort method elicited surprising features in the judgements of the urban professionals. After close examination, what looked like a binary – 'German' versus 'Soviet' – presented itself as a complex set of relationships, characteristics (including words), and values.

Repertoires of valuation

During the interview process, the research participants articulated different sources of value employing a more nuanced typology. They referred to the pre-war constructions as 'German', 'historical' and 'European'. In several cases, informants also used the terms 'cultural heritage' and 'German legacy'. Different from the multiple terms that pre-war architecture elicited, constructions from between 1953 and 1991 were simply termed 'Soviet' or derogatorily, 'sovok'.[6] This unequal distribution of attributes and vocabularies suggests a difference in the interests and stakes with which building styles are vested. Here are some key findings:

A young design studio owner and passionate urban photographer attentively examines the Q-set before he picks up an image of a Soviet housing complex and placed it on the −4 position:

> This is that kind of architecture . . . I do not know the exact years it was built . . . which works as a universal equaliser. It brings everyone to a common denominator. Its entire appearance proclaims that there is no difference among the occupants of this building. Now, I have a well-developed sense of individuality and it bugs me that this architecture sends out this kind of message. I read this message very easily in it, and I don't like it.

Individuality – a reciprocal relation between the uniqueness of the building and that of the person – is a quality principle by which buildings are judged. In the next excerpt, however, individuality stands for something else:

> Why is this unattractive? Because it has no individuality! You would never guess that you are in Kaliningrad and not in some other city—if it weren't for this the red brick here [Respondent points at the adjacent wall of an older house].

A tour guide, the respondent extends the principle of uniqueness to the city. These two statements reflect the deficiency Soviet buildings, urbanism, and politics manifest.

An architect discusses the same socialist building differently:

> Socialist mass housing . . . we can see in it the deployment of materials of poor quality. These sections of concrete . . . we notice how poorly the caulking was done, which resulted in a later need for sealing, and which was again done improperly. This unsystematic glazing of balconies . . . and the colours—grey, gloomy; it provokes nothing but a feeling of sadness.

His emphasis is on techniques and technology, which were substandard during the Soviet period. So is that of a bureaucrat at the municipality's urban planning office, who observes that, 'The buildings need repair, better maintenance, good reconstruction. In this state, they are depressing!'. Both these articulations associate deficiency not with individuality, but with development, in other words, modernization.

When it comes to the German-period architecture, different qualities find articulation. Regarding the Church of the Holy Family, an activist says, 'It belonged to a parish, it was a communal building, and it is a communal building now: a concert hall. Hence, there is a continuity in belonging and who has the opportunity to benefit from it'. To her, the building is significant for its public function, whether that be spiritual or secular. Civic value is manifested even more strongly with regard to the Königsberg Cathedral. The building's restoration in the 1990s is an example of civic unity. 'The building was completely destroyed and practically rebuilt anew, and what's important is that this was done with Kaliningraders' own hands. They volunteered!' a journalist says. A self-employed designer reflects, 'It was almost completely rebuilt, and this was done with German, not Soviet brick. And the labour of common people is contained in it.' A private museum owner states, 'I did not participate myself, but I know it was done by regular citizens, people like you and me. People built it with their own hands. It is handmade, literally. In our times this is something extraordinary!' The building's worth derives from the collective will to rebuild it and the labour of ordinary citizens.

What appears a purely 'aesthetic' binary opposition, 'German'/'beautiful' versus 'Soviet'/'ugly', reveals itself as a range of non-binary positions moored in political subjectivities, ideas about identity and individualism, Soviet technological modernity, and civic virtue. Taste here exhibits affinities that pertain less to social class boundaries than to group formation, citizens' reciprocity, and the worth of the individual in society. Taste also links architecture to (state) power, although in a particular, non-symbolic way – as described below. These findings suggest that aesthetic judgements regarding urban space and architecture are not 'disinterested', but rather saturated with ethics and views on politics and power.

Material manifestations

In an 'economies of worth' framework, various interweavings of people, material objects, technologies, and practices have significance, combining to produce radically varying conceptions of value. In Kaliningrad, facades, building materials, colours, dust, dirt, mould, plants, and even bacteria are brought to bear upon definitions of worthiness. 'In the brick we see good-quality masonry. The aesthetic of decay is beautiful here. It is ageing, not degrading. Even the mildew looks attractive', a journalist says while examining a photograph of an ordinary pre-war brick building. She reacts differently to pictures of socialist panel buildings, with regard to which she also comments on the state of deterioration: 'The impression I have here is infernal. Black mildew oozing out of cracks in the walls, water leaks, rotten balconies … this is the nightmare of the urban ghetto'. Decay and dilapidation in the first case are a sign of life, even authenticity, while in the second, they indicate degradation reflective of the degraded utopia that was socialism.

Cobblestone likewise elicits significant commentary. Widely used in interwar East Prussia, for many decades after the city's annexation, cobblestone pavements distinguished the city's historical areas from newer areas that were covered with asphalt. Sturdy and resilient, cobblestone required little maintenance and created atmospheric cityscapes, which appealed to locals and visitors alike. Its uneven surface presents challenges to wheels. One respondent comments: 'Drivers hate cobblestone. It's

dangerous for cars' underbodies and wears out axles'. Nevertheless, '[o]ne has to make peace with cobblestone': it is 'what we have left of Königsberg'.

To adhere to baked red brick – not to silicon and certainly not to clinker brick, but to the clay base of the nineteenth century or earlier – is to commit to 'truth'. Truth is not an easy subject to interrogate without considering the city's violent history of repopulation, renaming, and physical destruction. In a photograph of a location crowded with buildings from the 1970s stands a fragment of a red-brick wall. A city official inspects the picture closely before putting it down: 'These are such standard neighbourhoods. If it were not for this tiny corner of red brick, we would never guess what city this is'. The actual, veritable – and in this sense, 'true' – city is on the brink of sinking into anonymity. The brick, by its mere material presence, restores the city's singularity in the face of the perceived seriality of Soviet urbanism. Another respondent comments, this time about a contemporary imitation of the brick: 'This resembles the red brick, the one Germans used to make. I like it better. After all, although we live in the city called 'Kaliningrad', its true name is Königsberg'. Here, 'Kaliningrad' is the city's alias, and brick preserves its 'true' identity. Thus, the brick functions as both an identification paper and a mnemonic cue. 'Truth', in this context, is both history's emancipation from political manipulation and its authentication.

Finally, colour emerged as an object that was ranked. Red-to-brown is 'natural' to Kaliningrad, characteristic of 'authenticity' and possessing the same 'truth' discussed above. White, on the other hand, 'is not the colour of Kaliningrad'. Rather, it is the colour of a 'compromised government' and 'corruption'. Consider a recent development, a residential high-rise built at a bend in the Pregel River (Figure 5).

A former project of Kaliningrad city's chief architect, the building rates negatively (−3). It is not particularly unattractive. There are many like it peppering Russian cities. What

Figure 5. New residential architecture, from the Q-sort. Source: Olga Sezneva.

agitates the interviewees is the political process that resulted in its construction. The architect, they say, used his office to secure a prominent location for his design. The building stands just across the river from the venerated Königsberg Cathedral, and 'cancels it out'. Its size is inappropriately large, as is its colour – white. Together, these qualities create a glare. Its colour is associated with alienation, disrespect, and usurping the power of public office for personal gain. The building is 'a slap in the face' of the local public and 'a memorial to corruption'.

The respondents enlist certain objects to represent their worlds, turning buildings and places into actants (Latour 1994) with differentiated capacity to act. Soviet buildings confront the human: 'This is oppressive grey architecture'; 'This irritates me very much . . . I still feel a bit of tension being around it'. German-period architecture, by contrast, generates harmony: 'Here, I experience only positive emotions', or, 'The facades are easy on the eye, they create no stress in me. The colour, the materials feel restful'. Soviet architecture is 'militaristic' and post-Soviet architecture 'brazen', while German architecture is 'vulnerable' and 'fragile'.

Separate elements and entire constructions matter in the qualifications that respondents make. The Soviet and the post-Soviet 'declare': 'Look how abiding we Russians are!' This is the statement that the House of Soviets, built in in the 1970s, 'imparts' to its audience. 'This land is ours!' is what the new Russian Orthodox church on the city's main square 'proclaims'. The church 'takes over' and 'announces': 'not Muslim nor Catholic. We Russians are here!' Remarkably, none of our participants noted the church's religious function. The German-period buildings embody a very different agency. They 'slow down life's pace'; they prompt human body to 'attune to its environment'; they 'remind us of history', 'its sheer presence', and 'eternal, humanistic values'. Cobblestones are a 'time machine' because they 'interfere' with the tempo of the metropolis and, like a time machine, 'transport' one to 'another reality' (although humans must also be sensitive and 'attuned' for this to occur).

These qualifications do not constitute a naive insistence on material agency, but rather established equivalences that create 'interrelated ecological embeddedness' of value (Cloutier and Langley 2013, 363): a bacteria colony, for example, performs either as a sign of worth or deficiency, depending upon whether it populates a 'historical' or 'contemporary' ecological niche. Important to this embeddedness is the interactivity of architecture and materiality, in contrast to the generally recognized contemplative stance regarding aesthetic enjoyment (Benjamin 1968; Hansen 2008). Ethics, not just aesthetics, have bearing upon the matter and its value. Judging architecture is entwined with articulating what it does with respect to human bodies and psyches.

Architecture, however, does not 'act' on its own but needs to be 'backed up' and 'tested'. Such 'backing up' is performed through practices of care.

Care

In an economies-of-worth framework, actions with regards to material entities matter because they signal worthiness and bestow value. In this study, *care* constitutes such an action. Time may impact all matter, but it affects different entities differently. The 'self-evident' 'age-value' Riegl (1903 [1996], 74) that some buildings possess comes to mind. 'Valid for everyone without exception', age-value is an enhancement (of a building,

a place) produced by decay, which is neither distributed evenly nor naturally in Kaliningrad. Socialist architecture, disqualified as 'contingent', (Cairns and Jacobs 2014, 46) because its buildings perform poorly in respect to decay, does not have it. Pre-war German architecture, associated with permanency, possesses it in volumes. Unequal distribution of age-value determines equally uneven distribution of deserved care. Socialist architecture requires constant, costly upkeep. German architecture endures on its own. Many participants noted that socialist housing is not worthy of the investment of care, not because of its aesthetics, but because of its inability to withstand the passage of time 'with dignity'. German-period buildings are, in contrast, 'graceful' even in complete neglect, and thus prove themselves deserving of restoration and maintenance. Both these judgements disregard technical knowledge, restoration expertise, and taste as qualifying criteria.

However, care also ensures a reciprocal relationship between people and buildings: it qualifies human agents. Providing care to a building – doing its upkeep – is a tangible manifestation of commitment by city authorities. Maintenance of pre-war buildings is articulated not merely as a quotidian practice, but also as a function of government, a site where state–citizen relationships are rendered visible and concrete. Care for buildings stands in, at least in part, as care for the population. 'Good renovation is a perfect example of a caring attitude towards the city, towards its people', a businessman and owner of a small museum comments. Repair, renovation, or significant maintenance of any building, any place, manifests city officials' commitment to residents, the higher values of tradition, honesty, and economy ('khozyaistvennost'). Withholding care from a building deemed valuable reflects negatively upon officials, and can undermine their political legitimacy. Paint that peels, a broken fountain, and potholed cobblestones patched with asphalt are evidence not only of poor management, insufficient budgets, and lack of expertise, but also the municipality's lack of 'caring' with regard to residents. Care is an area of collective mobilization, and simultaneously a critical challenge to authority.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, data from Kaliningrad are used to argue in favour of scholarly attention to the valuation of urban design and aesthetics, and for adapting Q-sort methodology to study how individual actors engage in valuation, i.e., how they 'measure' places and buildings. Using key epistemological and ontological assumptions from Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) 'economies of worth', the article traces what urban professionals in Kaliningrad consider important and valuable in architecture and urban design, and demonstrates a multidimensional layering of worth, and consequently, aesthetic value. When evaluating architecture, study participants established hierarchical relationships across styles using a range of judgements that stretch far beyond the purely aesthetic. Rather than subconscious or dispositional, these evaluations were open and strategic and went hand-in-hand with fundamental claims concerning what constitutes right and wrong, collective and individual, or powerful and powerless. Buildings were actively used in collective self-imaging that extolled civic virtues and cast a critical light on authority. They solidified the attachments and commitments social actors made, individually and collectively, to the greater social whole. Focusing on how social actors describe

urban entities as possessing certain qualities, and how the significance of these is justified, the study reveals how urban aesthetics play out politically.

Understood thus, in such environments, aesthetics are irreducible to taste; nor are aesthetic politics simply political struggles played out in architecture (Yurchak 2011). Styles, historical periods, the qualities of materials, colours, infrastructure maintenance, even bacterial colonies support, through established relations of equivalency, ideas about foundational 'truths' regarding the city, its community, and its values. Each brings with it an imperative: to loudly announce national belonging or to deliver 'eternal' – understood as humanistic – values; to act with dignity and respect towards the individual; to value civic unity and responsibility towards one another; and for the state – to serve, rather than exploit, the city and its community. These findings expand the idea of aesthetic value. What is 'beautiful' and 'ugly' can no longer be viewed as binary opposites of each other; 'ugliness' is not a mere lack of 'beauty': something can be 'more' or 'less' 'ugly', more or less 'beautiful'. The categories exist on a gradient. What makes a difference in an object's relative beauty or ugliness is the investment of 'care', 'civility', or 'individuality'. Aesthetic judgment is not divorced from social order, but rather reflects its complexity.

Finally, the all-too-familiar critiques of socialist modernist urbanity as 'ugly, monotonous concrete boxes that looked identical' (Samalavičius 2017), or of post-modernism as a proliferation of 'structural fakes' (Soja 1992, 111) can be re-examined with help from the sociology of valuation and the Q-sort. Such a re-examination will reveal that a much more nuanced and localized logic of worth exists than one might expect, within which buildings' specific properties and the qualities of their design mesh to organize aesthetic judgment.

The results of the current research may appear to confirm the scathing critiques of modernism that dominate many public debates, often initiated by urban professionals. This would be a mistaken conclusion, however. The architecture that oozes disrespect 'fails' differently to that which does not allow for 'street ballet' (Jacobs 1992). That is to say, the apparently universally negative perception of modernist architecture (at least among laypeople) is but an objectified confluence of locally distinct negative stances. In a similar way, the charges of imitation and superfluity associated with post-modernism, so often found in the literature about it, do not resonate with the aesthetic judgements the study elicited, which propose in those imitations a return of historical truth. Dominated by expert opinions and often disconnected from place, the scathing critiques reify all (post) modernist architecture uniformly, divorcing it from the conditions of its social life and valuation.

Notes

1. The estimate of the actual number of visitors is 130,000. http://turstat.com/citytravel2018fifaworldcup.
2. This is not to suggest that Russian and other Eastern European cities are unique and comprise an aesthetic 'other' vis-à-vis Western European and North American cities. Rather, these locales exist upon a continuum. It is simply easy to overlook problems with craftsmanship in western cities, given their levels of technological development.
3. It proved rather difficult to maintain a clear-cut separation among categories of actors: architects sometimes take activist positions; activists are also cultural entrepreneurs; and some bureaucrats are planners. Still, because the Q-sort does not produce correlations

among subjects but establishes relationships across variables (aesthetic types), this does not pose a problem to the analysis.
4. It included 'colour' and 'materials', but also 'change' and 'comparison'.
5. Architecture from the 2000s is treated with scepticism. In this regard the 'Hansa revival style' imitation has its own value as long as it expresses a specific style.
6. Buildings built after 2000 are referred to as 'contemporary' – *sovremennaya* or *nyneshnyaya*. When speakers refer to these structures as 'Russian', which is rare, one hears a sneer in their voices.

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