

Normalizing the Home. A Synchronic Comparison Between the Ikéa Catalogue and *God Bostad*

Rebecca Carrai

FWO-funded PhD researcher, KU Leuven, Belgium; visiting scholar, Architectural Association, London, United Kingdom
carrairebecca@gmail.com

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A concise, handy “how to” book, the *manual* as a format, has a long history in the architecture field, which one might consider having evolved in its structure and circulation from Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* [On the Art of Building]. As Mario Carpo suggests, Alberti’s treatise “did open the way for the 16th-century standardization of the system of the orders.”¹ It encouraged the ongoing trend of sharing predetermined architectural notions, “from top to bottom,” from an authoritative voice to the supposedly instructed reader. Increasingly used by canonical institutions, organizations, and state architects, to lead trends, suggest ideal dimensions, hygienic standards, and house the average family, this tool facilitated the reconstruction of European countries, the creation of welfare state systems, and contributed to the identification of architecture – within which dwelt the housing question – mostly a matter of space-saving solutions, and rational planning.²

As argued by Kristin Skoog after the Second World War, the Swedish model was “widely popularized abroad.”³ This myth grew from the circulation of an ideal image, constructed by transnational media, by disseminating various narratives, many linked to the policies of the *Folkhem* [People’s Home]. From the 1930s through to the 1960s, “Sweden was used as a lens through which a modern welfare state could be visualized and justified,”⁴ with its progressive *Middle Way* and *Folkhem* economic and socio-political programs, reflecting so-called egalitarian, “good” housing planning.⁵ Following the paradigm by Social Democratic Party Chairman Per Albin Hansson envisioning the home interior as the epicenter of the Welfare State system, the architectural manual *God Bostad* [Good Housing], played a significant role, instilling and materializing the politically constructed ideal home model. In 1954, *Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsens Skrifter* [The Royal Housing Board of Sweden] took up the endeavor to issue an instructive booklet preaching “good housing.”⁶ This state-issued manuscript brought

1 Mario Carpo, *Architecture in the Age of Printing: Orality, Writing, Typography, and Printed Images in the History of Architectural Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2001), 129.

2 Apart from the Swedish case, other examples of architectural manuals issued in postmodern era for the provision of a welfare state system, urban reconstruction and housing planning are notable. For instance, in 1949, the Italian government approved the plan “Ina-Casa,” supported by a series of manuals for urban planners and architects, to improve the living conditions of working classes, as illustrated in Paola Di Biagi, *La Grande Ricostruzione. Il Piano Ina-Casa e l’Italia Degli Anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Donzelli, 2010). In France, likewise, manuals allowed the realisation of the post-war social housing project, as argued by Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

3 Kristin Skoog, “Visions of Utopia: Sweden, the BBC and the Welfare State,” *Media History* 25, 3: 307–23.

4 Ibid.

5 Marquis Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936). A detailed account on the histories, voices and actors involved in the Social Democrats’ project of *Folkhem* can be found in Jennifer Mack, *The Construction of Equality. Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), Kindle; Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism. Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* (London: Black dog publishing, 2010).

6 Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, *God Bostad* (Stockholm: Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, 1954).

together lifestyle research and surveys carried out by *Hemmens forskningsinstitut* [The Home Research Institute], and elaborated on studies by *Byggsätdareringen* [BST, The Building Standardization Body] to provide instructions for urban planning and interior design. Transferred into words and visuals, a summary of standards was offered to an expert, targeted reader, in order to be assimilated and replicated.

At the same time, “marginal” texts were disseminating ideas on how to design and use domestic spaces or facilities. Not only in Sweden, but worldwide, a gradual consolidation of another, more illustrative, accessible, popular format could be witnessed. The genre of the architectural *catalogue* had been increasingly consolidated, and proliferated in other commercial spheres, extending knowledge to a broader audience, welcoming non-experts, such as homeowners, simultaneously exporting standards, and “know-how.” From the 19th century’s American Plan Books to Steward Brand’s 20th century *Whole Earth Catalog*, this format evolved alongside manuals and official booklets, at times incorporating their agendas.⁷ In the Swedish context, besides the official view of *God Bostad*, reiterated in two subsequent editions in 1960 and 1964,⁸ other uncanonical media and agents involved in the mediation of home design cast a myth of Swedish modernity and expressed their voice on living.⁹ As argued by Maria Perers, the idealized vision of Swedish domesticity was built not only by means of official actors and their regulations, but also by other unconventional actors, such as commercial entities and popular journals, which together shaped the “spatial dynamics of building norms and (the) outfitting (of) the domestic household.” Ikéa and its catalogue, the affiliated company *Svenska Sencello* and its brochure,¹⁰ alongside the interior design magazine “Allt I Hemmet” [Everything in the Home], “Svenska Hem” [Swedish Home], the *Bra Bohag* catalogues and other popular channels, all interacted with cited discourses on the ideal home while creating and promoting their own. While *God Bostad* disseminated the new housing policies, the family-led company, Ikéa, launched its first proper commercial catalogue in 1951, which nudged domestic micropolitics and design into the public spotlight, and communicated an alternative discourse on the home.

This essay focuses on a comparison between the two tools of “architectural pedagogy” and normalization of Swedish post-war domestic environments: the Ikéa *catalogue* and the *God Bostad manual* and reads the two not as rivals but as complementary, and both participating in the dissemination of an ideal domestic culture. First, it looks at their communication techniques and mediation strategies, in the timeframe from the 1950s through to the 1960s. Then, it focuses on the design and styling of a specific area – the bedroom – where intertwined issues of hygiene, gender and taste emerge, bringing together public responses, dichotomies and overlaps of visions of domesticity.

⁷ Erin Besler, Ian Besler, “The Whole Architecture Catalog,” *e-flux*, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/intelligence/310402/the-whole-architecture-catalog/>.

⁸ Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, *God Bostad 1960* (Stockholm: Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, 1960); Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, *God Bostad i Dag Och i Morgen* (Stockholm: Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsen, 1964).

⁹ The argument is clearly presented in Mattsson and Wallenstein (2010) and is further brought forward in Maria Perers, “Inside the Ideal Home: The Changing Values of Apartment Living and the Promotion of Consumption in Sweden, 1950-1970” (PhD diss., Bard Graduate Center, 2020), which this essay takes inspiration from and elaborates on. Concerning alternative histories of Swedish design see Christina Zetterlund, “Just Decoration? Ideology and Design in Early-Twentieth-Century Sweden,” in *Alternative Histories. Scandinavian Design* (London; New York: Berg, 2012), 103–16; Widar Halén and Kerstin Wickman, *Scandinavian Design Beyond the Myth* (Stockholm: Arvinius Forlag, 2003).

¹⁰ In the fall of 1955, Ingvar Kamprad, IKEA’s founder, bought a shop called *Skumbaren* in Stockholm and within a year changed the name to *Svenska Sencello*. This was a side-company of Ikea specialised in bedroom furniture and mattresses. Shortly after the launching of the brand, Kamprad opened several stores in the city centres of a few cities in Sweden. In March 1956, the second shop was opened in Malmö and in February 1957 in Gothenburg. *Svenska Sencello* hasn’t been marketed as a part of the IKEA Group since 1967. Information from interviews and email exchanges with IKEA’s archivist, Tony Nilsson.

The Ideal Home and Modern Hygiene Obsession

That “ideal home,” in fermentation in Sweden from the 19th century with philosopher Ellen Key’s *Skönhet för Alla* [Beauty for All], and her vision of egalitarian beautiful surroundings and domestic interiors,¹¹ was systematically institutionalized over time, then predicated in *God Bostad*. This manual can be considered the climax of a decades-long process, previous manifold architects’ efforts and government programs aimed at the provision of ideal domestic interiors and public housing projects. It is not without a reason that already the 1921 *Praktiska och hygieniska Bostäder* [Practical and Hygienic Dwellings] manuscript set minimum standards for dwelling size. In reaction to the unsanitary living conditions, the document promoted, in a normative tone, the modern architectural plan as the hegemonic spatial tool for solving the housing crisis. It claimed that “Freedom should not be allowed to degenerate into arbitrariness and carelessness in planning.”¹² In late 19th and early-20th-century Sweden, housing standards ended up being lower than in the rest of Europe, featuring outgrowing working-class families living in a domestic space composed of one room and a kitchen. However, as Kerstin Wickman argues, the Swedish case, in contrast to other countries, was characterized by a constant concern of architects, furniture designers, cooperatives, institutions and private actors altogether working towards an accurately thought design and household rationalization which could meet both the demands of the wealthy classes and of unexceptional people.¹³ This ambition was already visible in Ellen Key’s 19th-century motto wishing for “beautiful homes for everybody,” furnished with beautiful everyday things and decoration.¹⁴ From the inside out, the home had to be progressively embellished, democratized, and aligned with a certain taste, at times called “beauty,” at times “good design.”¹⁵

During the 1930s, housing policy was not so regimented and functioned through loans and allowances offered by the state to selected families depending on their living conditions, whereas, from the 1940s, there was the pressing need to issue additional rules and impose control measures. Hence, increasing norms seemed necessary for tying up the notion of a perfect, modern home with concepts of beauty, “good design,” hygiene, and practicality.¹⁶ Following the formula that standardization equals sanitary conditions and fairness, in the 1940s, the state incentivized nonspeculative housing construction by providing loans at low-interest rates to building companies, now administered by a new authority, the *Byggnadslånebyrån* [Building Loan Office], later renamed *Bostadstyrelsen* [National Board of Housing].¹⁷ Minimum requirements were thus included in the 1942 publication by Sigurd Westholm known as “Westholm’s Bible,”¹⁸ a manual which served as the foundation of *God Bostad 1954*.

¹¹ Ellen Key, *Skönhet För Alla* (Stockholm: Rekolid, 1899).

¹² Osvald Almqvist et al., *Praktiska och Hygieniska Bostäder* (Stockholm, 1921). Quote from Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 55.

¹³ For a more detailed analysis of Swedish housing history, see Kerstin Wickman, “Homes,” in *20th-Century Architecture: Sweden*, edited by Claes Caldenby, Jörn Lindvall, Wilfried Wang. (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1998) 198-225.

¹⁴ On this matter, see also Ellen Key, “Beauty in the Home,” in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, Lucy Creagh, Helena Kaberg, Barbara Miller Lane and Kenneth Frampton, eds. (New York: MoMA, 2008), 32-57.

¹⁵ To learn more on perpetuated design mythologies, see Jonathan M. Woodham, *A Dictionary of Modern Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The historian unpacks how, starting from the 19th century, many museums, influential and governmental institutions have sponsored views of design endorsing specific visions often predicated upon aesthetics and seeking to improve public taste while associating these top-down views with notions of “good design.” This phenomenon evolved into an orthodoxy of “good design,” which was prompt worldwide, as it is visible in the series of exhibitions entitled Good Design which were exhibited at MoMA during the 1950-60s.

¹⁶ Linda Rampell, “En Kritisk Undersökning av det Modernistiska Projektet för Design i Sverige” (PhD diss., Lund University, 2002).

¹⁷ Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, chapter one.

¹⁸ Contributor also to the previous *Praktiska och Hygieniska Bostäder*, Stockholm’s city architect, Sigurd Westholm (1871-1960) was a crucial figure in the implementation of housing reforms and regulation

Beatriz Colomina posits that the symptoms and the principles of modern architecture, taken straight out of science, medical research, reports and innovative representation techniques in medicine and biology, can be seen as responsible for a reconceptualization of the human body, as well as of architecture and the city.¹⁹ Fostered by this widespread call for a healthier lifestyle, the core of the Swedish welfare state program discussions also centered on slum clearance and the elimination of overcrowded living conditions. Recalling the 1933 CIAM Congress definition of *slum*, claiming that this relates to “promiscuity, arising from the interior layout,” and following the conviction inherited from 19th-century medical research linking daylight in dwellings and hygiene to a healthy population, *sanering* (decontamination) became a catchword for redevelopment in Sweden, and an incentive for further norms to monitor people’s private spaces.²⁰

Notwithstanding the socially attentive design manifesto *acceptera* of 1931, which followed the modern Swedish pioneers’ principles, three-dimensionally and glamorously exhibited to the masses during the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, people’s living conditions and wealth were still substandard and unequal.²¹ A 1945 report documented the gap between theory and praxis, between the auspicious design solutions and the disappointing reality of tenants. This led to an additional decree in 1946 when a new housing policy established a standard rental fee for a one-bedroom apartment and decreed this should not exceed 20 per cent of an average worker’s salary. This prohibited more than two people from occupying the same room – apart from the kitchen, which was not considered a sleeping room – given that people lived and slept in overcrowded, often dark, poky interiors.²² In addition, the rampant hygiene obsession resulted in additional oversight. It prompted the formation of novel regulations, controlling governmental bodies, as well as the demolition of thousands of residential buildings, especially in the city centers of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Gävle. Here, the “barracks” – blocks clustered around an over narrow, dark inner courtyard – were swept out and a huge number of households evicted, “cleaned up” to create room for new businesses, modern residential constructions and updated traffic infrastructure.²³

God Bostad, the Manual

By collating the previous contributions and attempts in emergence since the 1930s, which had involved several actors and cooperatives in the construction of an ideal home, featuring “good,” functional, proportionate, beautiful, easy to furnish, clean and maintain rooms, *God Bostad* reacted in a timely manner to the modern “sick building syndrome.”²⁴ In response to the

at the time and was also part of the early committee regarding minimum social housing requirements founded in 1919. The original title of the renamed “Westholm’s Bible” was *Minimifordringar å Storleken av Bostadslägenheter i Hus Avsedda Att Uppföras med Stöd av Statligt Tertiärån* (Stockholm: Statens byggnadslånebyrå, 1942). The manual was extremely influential for *God Bostad* 1954.

19 My thesis aligns with Colomina’s conceptualised connection between modernist architectural elements and trends, pure forms, glass facades, the openness of plan’s layout, and medical discoveries and social interests in achieving a healthier life, where these new architectures and urban projects would have functioned both as an instrument and a background. More examples in Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019).

20 Bengt O. H. Johansson, “The Post-War Destruction of Swedish Cities,” *Building Research & Information* 39, 4 (2011): 412-29.

21 Considered the breakthrough towards functionalism in Sweden, the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition and its proceedings, edited and included in the 1931 manifesto *acceptera*, represent milestones in the 20th-century Swedish modernisation history. The English translation of the original text and a more accurate analysis of the historical period can be consulted in Gregor Paulsson, and Gunnar Asplund et al. “*acceptera*,” in *Modern Swedish Design. Three Founding Texts*, eds. Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg, and Barbara Miller Lane (New York: MoMA, 2008), 70-347.

22 Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 57-58.

23 Johansson, “The Post-War Destruction of Swedish Cities,” 413-6.

24 Although a similar tendency to search for and recreate an ideal domestic vision was also observable elsewhere, as illustrated by the series of stages presented at the British Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, occurring since 1908 in the UK – which, not by chance, followed Sweden as a place of aspiration – the

critically unsatisfactory living conditions and outdated standards by *Meddelanden från Statens byggnadslånebyrå* [The Swedish Housing Mortgage Agency],²⁵ *Kungl. Bostadsstyrelsens Skrifter* [The Royal Housing Board in Stockholm] felt the need to issue a series of manuals, which, throughout the three editions of 1954, 1960 and 1964, addressed the question of “what characterizes good housing?” as its first chapters reiterated.²⁶ The manual presented the housing *status quo* – “how far we are now” – gave concrete proposals on how “to live well” and practical directions to conform to state loans.²⁷ Originating from studies spanning from the early days of the Swedish welfare state system and culminated in the surveys carried out by two state-affiliated bodies, *Hemmens forskningsinstitut* [The Home Research Institute] and *Byggsätdarisen* [BST, The Building Standardization Body], this handy booklet in a vertical format, on slightly glossy paper, approximately 17 x 24 cm, centered on technical planning and provided “how to” design “good” apartment types and layouts. Containing the prerequisite for obtaining favorable government housing loans, the manual targeted an “expert” reader, the *planlösarens* (floor planner), addressed from the preface, namely architects, planners, building contractors, and, more broadly, all technicians operating in the field of housing production. The instructions, technical information, tables, and schematic graphics reported therein, relied on, and were supported by scientific data from monitoring people’s habits, field work and surveys, subsequently turned into standards for specific areas of the home by *Svenska institutet för standarder* [SIS, The Swedish Industry Standard Institute].

Initially composed of fourteen-paragraphs, thirty-three, black and white pages structured in three chapters; later, in the second and third edition, reaching more than fifty pages, featuring manifold sections and paragraphs, *God Bostad* became exponentially more articulate over time. Expanding its focus from basic areas to liminal places such as laundries and outdoor areas, the second edition gave additional directions on, for instance, parking lot planning, and subsequently, the third edition dealt with more varied target sectors such as students and retirees. Increasing in standard requirements, numbers, and tables, *God Bostad 1960* and *1964* continued to envision the home as a complex “machine for living”: an engineering of facts and norms, which, given the overall improving living conditions, now looked more closely at people’s well-being and comfort at home, even giving suggestions on room climate or how to deal with noise nuisance.

Stylistically, the *manual* presented a black and white, rational, visual identity. Probably not exciting to its reader due to the bare, graphic, and creative content, the three editions are composed mostly of text, diagrams, room layout samples and tables, and include few pages of black and white photographs featuring exemplary neighborhoods and projects, such as mass housing blocks, defined as “lamellas,” which, through the assiduous repetition of slabs, permeated the reader’s mind, suggesting a sense of modularity and implicitly discouraged possible variations. Likewise, the language and tone were not overly experimental, but formal, straightforward, and authoritative, a style enhanced by the reiteration of the terms “appropriate,” “good,” “instructions,” and the use of the verb “shall,” alluding to mandatory commands. (Fig. 1)

The 1954 publication cover, featuring stylized furniture and human figures, reminiscent of Otto Neurath’s ISOTYPE abstracted, pictorial diagrams,²⁸ clearly aligned *God Bostad’s* visual and written information with European 20th-century modern ethos and language, which Swedish modernity, with its particularities and local expressions, echoed and tapped into. The manual built on the modern obsession for an “effectively planned floor layout,” which should derive from

latter can be considered a case of its own. More information on the British case and its common ground with the Swedish one can be found in Skoog, “Visions of Utopia: Sweden, the BBC and the Welfare State,” and Deborah Ryan, *The Ideal Home Through the 20th Century* (London: Hazar Publishing, 1997).

Quote from Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture*, 13.

25 Data and actors are all listed in *God Bostad’s* editions.

26 *God Bostad*, 1954, 3; *God Bostad*, 1960, 7; *God Bostad 1964*, 7. All translations, both of *God Bostad 1954*, *1960* and *1964* and the IKEA catalogues, from Sweden to English are produced by the author and were facilitated by the assistance of a Swedish native speaker.

27 Ibid.

28 Nader Vossoughian, “Mapping the Modern City: Otto Neurath, the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), and the Politics of Information Design,” *Design Issues* 22, 3 (2006): 48-65.

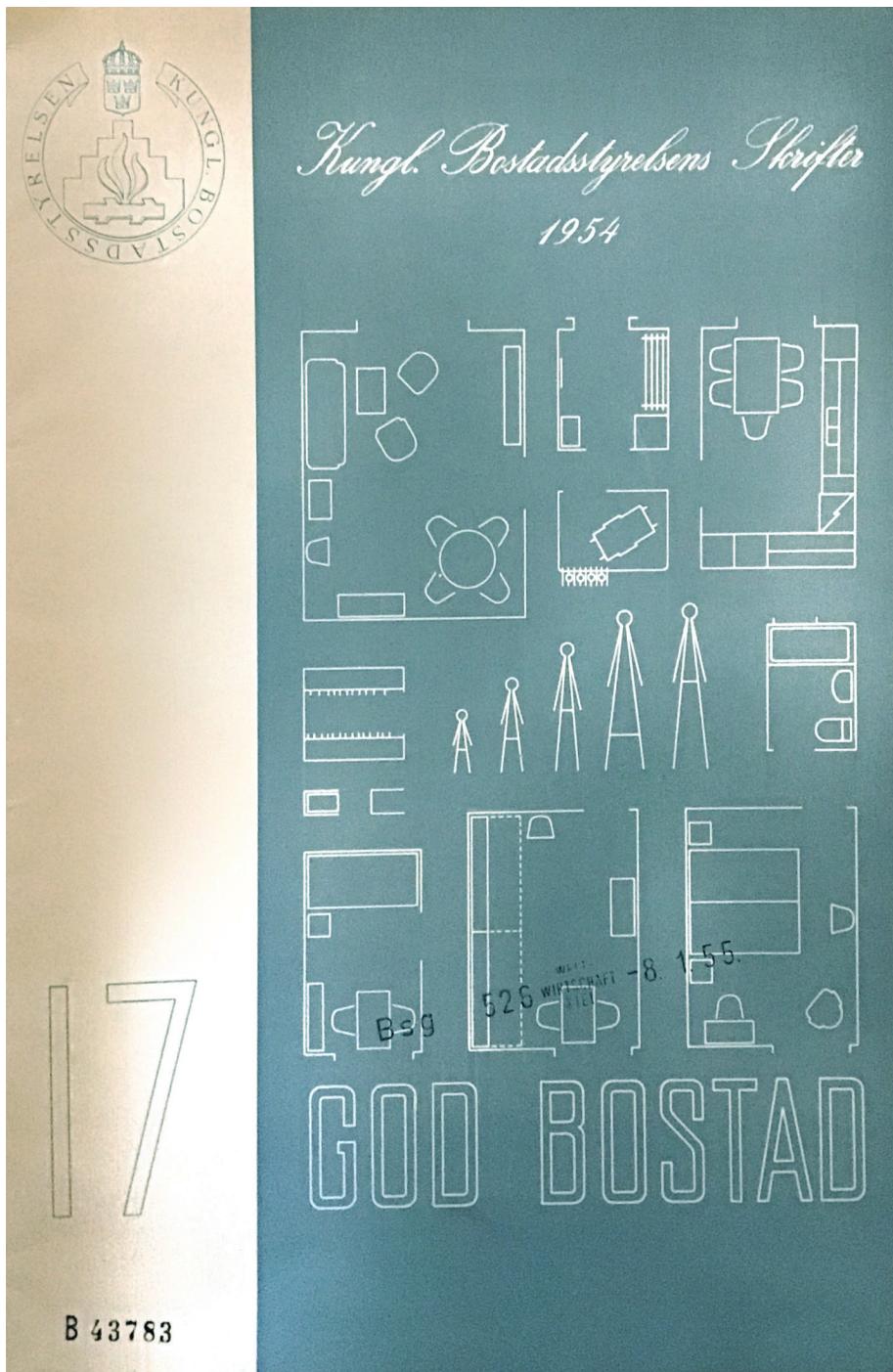


Fig. 1: The 1954 *God Bostad* cover.

functional design, and home space optimization. It followed the rational principles of the 1930s modern Swedish pioneers, the spirit of the Stockholm Exhibition and the 1931 *acceptera*.²⁹ *God Bostad* was a tool and a product of the modernization project of Sweden.

Despite the third and last edition, subtitled *Idag och imorgon* [Today and Tomorrow], expressing a projective dimension in the hope of being included in the annals and to be of use for further generations of planners, its legacy can hardly be compared to today's ubiquitous million copies of the IKEA catalogue, the other format, simultaneously circulating and suggesting a culture of inhabitation. The post-war myth of Swedish modernism was carefully constructed in parallel, using the notion of good living, by various printed tools; not only manuals but also catalogues and commercials significantly contributed to its shaping.

The Ikéa Catalogue Project

After its foundation in 1943 in Elmtaryd (Älmhult), a small village in southern Sweden, by the seventeen-years-old founder Ingvar Kamprad, the company Ikéa printed a brochure in 1948, entitled *Ikéa-nytt*, which circulated as an attachment in a local magazine, *Jordbrukskarnas Föreningsblad*, published by the Federation of Swedish Farmers.³⁰ This event marked the foundation of the long-lasting project of the IKEA catalogue. The early advertising supplement illustrated and presented useful items – suitcases, toilet bags, pens, and watches – initially brought from the factory to the customers' doors through what, at the time, was a family-led, mail-order business. In 1951 – the true birth date of the catalogue – young entrepreneur Kamprad launched the Ikéa catalogue,³¹ which, was initially in a horizontal format of about 20 cm by 13 cm, on grainy paper, of 68 black and white pages and a colored cover with the slogan “the road to good purchases.”³² This was the first booklet showing exclusively home products, classified, and displayed with a sort of storytelling. Issued by a commercial, private enterprise, the *catalogue* targeted common people, aiming to achieve rampant popularity.

The major changes in catalogue production and output occurred after the mid-1950s, when photographer Bo Åkerström and advertising consultant Gillis Lundgren were hired. Whereas early catalogue texts were written primarily by the company's founder, later specialized personnel were hired to not only communicate ideas of an ideal home, but also to juxtapose these with figures, colorful visuals, and life-like scenes of domestic interiors, evoking dreamy dimensions, persuading, almost hypnotizing, the customers to buy IKEA furniture. As Kamprad confessed: “Gillis was incredibly good at making what I envisioned concrete.”³³ Gillis's revolutionary inputs are visible throughout the 1954, 1960 and 1964 editions, and were followed by other insights by new personnel, such as advertising consultant Brita Lang and photographer Karl-Erik Granath, who were hired in 1961.³⁴ By the 1960s, the Ikéa medium not only increased the number of its copies, which were attracting ever more readers, and circulation grew from 50,000 distributed copies in 1954 to about 2,000,000 prints during the 1960s.³⁵ Moreover, it underwent a pyrotechnic evolution in its graphic design and layout, showcasing goods and home furnishing tips.

29 Gunnar Asplund et al., *acceptera* (Stockholm: Tidens Forlag, 1931); Gregor Paulsson, *Vackrare Vardagsvara* (Stockholm: Svenska Slöjdföreningen, 1919).

30 In 1943, during the summer at his parents' farm in Elmtaryd, near the village of Agunnaryd, part of the municipality of Älmhult, Kamprad registered Ikea with the proper authority.

31 As the brand name and logo change over time, throughout the paper I will adopt Ikéa to refer to the editions from 1951 to 1962 and IKEA to refer to the company in general and its subsequent phase leading to today's global success.

32 IKEA catalogue, 1951, cover.

33 Beril Torekull and Ingvar Kamprad, *Leading by Design. The IKEA Story* (New York: Harper Business, 1998), 52.

34 Information from Tony Nilsson, and letters held in (IHA) IKEA Historical Archive in Älmhult.

35 Eva Alte Bjarnestam, *IKEA. Design & Identity* (Italy: TITEL Books AB for IKEA of Sweden, 2013).



Fig. 2: The 1954 IKEA catalogue featuring the letter-like format.

It was implicit that the *catalogue* presented a more persuasive and attractive style, layout, and communication than *God Bostad*. Because of the purpose and nature of the format, it included a lax miscellaneous of home inspiration and items for the clients to deliberately select and design their own home interior. This object of mediation communicated flexibility of arrangement, freedom of choice, ignited the imagination, and provided “goods in hand” to furnish the apartments. An abundance of illustrations – first black and white, later savvy and colored – sales slogans, and friendly rhetoric distinguished the *catalogue* from the *manual*, while guiding the non-expert reader into a novel allegorical space of home decoration and everyday life conveniences. Within the catalogue, the prospective buyer was made to “feel at home.” It embodied a virtual home, editorially constructed by the company for the client to encounter its different merchandise categories, usually labelled with recognizable names alluding, for example, to some historical periods or *milieu*, so as to sound familiar to the reader. While the manual was a body of words to be meticulously read, understood, applied, and reproduced, the catalogue was engineered for the eye: to activate and engage people’s gaze.

Yet, it is important to bear in mind the commercial purposes of this tool. Its scope was originally that of attracting potential clients, first to the early showroom in Älmhult, opened in 1953 and located in the *Lagerblads* factory, then to the store, inaugurated in 1958. However, the catalogue gradually became a “catch-up” appointment between the client and the company, informally updating the reader with news and achievements from the previous year,³⁶ before concentrating on the housing question, which Swedish authorities were obsessing over, and which was stated with a certain urgency in *God Bostad*. Within the *catalogue*, the “ordinary” reader was welcomed yearly through a letter-like, friendly format, greeting them with “Dear Customer” and ending

³⁶ The early 1950s editions to improve their public image, also included company achievements, such as large-size photographs of the IKEA stand at the St Eriks exhibition or positive testimonials from previous customers.

with the salutation “Yours Sincerely.”³⁷ Through a simple, business-oriented, informal language, this medium guided them through an unorthodox body of architecture knowledge made up of carefully-staged home products, ordered in categories, and publicized graphically using basic, informative text; a juxtapositions of visuals and words which from the one hundred pages of the 1954 edition colonized over two hundred pages by the mid-1960s.

References to modern discourses and official propaganda on the ideal home still appeared and were slyly woven into the catalogue. Especially from the mid-1950s the commercial booklet started to sponsor its domestic products through slogans such as “modern” and allude to modernity and a healthy life. In fact, from 1958, the company even aligned with the official testing methods and ergonomics promoted by *Varudeklarationsnämnden* [VDN, The Goods Declaration Board], which was part of *Svenska Slöjdforeningen* [SFF, the Swedish Society of Crafts and Design], another body, unanimously with *God Bostad* working towards the construction of the *Folkhem*.³⁸ Confirming the catalogue’s ambivalent character, the 1958 edition showcased a section demonstrating Ikéa’s alignment with official visions and the “correct” anatomical sitting position.³⁹

Normalizing Sleep and Bed Culture

Recalling Le Corbusier’s five points of architecture for its structure and conciseness, *God Bostad* 1954, turned previous discourses on housing into five, clearly illustrated criteria. First, was the necessity of ensuring the dimensions of each room and to differentiate functions, providing a minimum number of square meters per unit. Second, a correct use and placement of furniture was indicated, depending on the type of room and layout. Third, hygiene, maintenance and durability were addressed and, lastly, attention was paid to communal facilities and the relation between an individual’s home and the urban fabric. Regarding the third criterion, following the widespread insistence on hygiene, tidiness, optimization, and control of furniture disposition, attention was paid, in particular, to sleeping arrangements within all *God Bostad* editions.

Hygiene measures intertwined with matters of “bed culture” were the preoccupation of several official actors, including the SFF, which, in this respect, had been carrying out an investigation into the rationalization of the home and its furniture since 1948, undertaken by furniture designer Erik Berglund. As the deputy director of the SSF Brita Åkerman posited, the functionality of furniture should be researched as systematically as that of housing and urban planning.⁴⁰ Not only ideal bed dimensions and type occupied *God Bostad*, but also *Bäddmöbler* [Bed furniture], the outcome of SFF’s investigation, which even dealt with space for movement and different sleeping positions, presenting proposals for a standard of measurement based on the height and weight of the average Swede.⁴¹

Doctors had long reported the low quality of beds and sleeping conditions in Sweden with children suffering from the overcrowded interiors, sleeping with their parents or in improvised bed spaces, hidden during the day. Swedes slept on various surfaces, from folding beds to ottomans and kitchen benches, which corresponded, in turn, to official or self-initiated ways of arranging sleeping places and bed types purchasable on the market.⁴² In this

37 IKEA catalogue, 1953, 3; IKEA catalogue, 1954, 3.

38 The SFF, today *Svensk Form*, is an association founded in 1845 to safeguard the quality of the Swedish crafts industry and still operates through exhibitions, multiple initiatives, and publications. The association’s members numbered mostly professionals involved in design and crafts but also academics, businessmen, industrialists, and historians. In the early 50s, IKEA became member of the Society.

39 IKEA catalogue, 1958, 7.

40 Brita Åkerman (1906-2006) was another influential figure of the time, interested in consumer guidance, education, and study cycles, activities initiated by official actors such as the SFF, and supported also by other commercial organizations such as the cooperative *Co-op*. Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 167-8.

41 Erik Berglund et al., *Bäddmöbler* (Stockholm: Svenska Slöjdforeningens, 1950).

42 Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 166-84.



Fig. 3: Monitoring people's sleep. Image from *Bäddmöbler*.

Fig. 4: The 1950 counselling section (left) and questionnaire (right) inserted into the 1955 IKEA catalogue.

Var skall skåpet stå?

Råd och förslag för inredandet av Er nya lägenhet lämnas av erfaren inredningsexpert.

Många människor som sätter upp exakt hur deras nya hem skall se ut, vilka detaljer som skall ingå, textilcesserier, färger etc. Hör Ni till dessa människor är denna sida knappast någonting för Er.

Men det finns andra, som inte är lika sikra på sin sak, som insett att hur roligt det

är är det svårt att komponera en inredning — göra den just sådan, att helhetstrycket blir det rätta och så att man verkligen trivs. Naturligtvis är det svårt att råda i sådana fall — smaken är ju så olika. Somliga människor föredrar det extremt moderna, andra den mera konventionella stilten och andra återigen tycker så där lite mitt emellan.

Här skall inte dömas. Den ensamkruktningen är lika god som den andra. I sitt hem skall man trivas och välfärdas i inredning som man trivas med. En humur som tycker mycket om ett sidentöverkast på sängarna vet att det är ömtåligt men har gärna det lilla extra besväret att vika det snyggt och ordentligt och varit rädd om det — men gör gärna något lite extra för det hon tycker är vackert.

Dessutom kan det vara svårt att välja en stil. Det är dock inte svårt att välja om man inte tycker om. Det enda som bör påpekas i sådana fall är att det praktiska och det trivsamma ofta i det långa löpet går hand i hand och att det därför är ett gott råd att ta stor hänsyn till det praktiska. För övrigt vår helhjärtsade uppskattning för det stortarade arbetet som nedlades av olika organisationer på att förståda det allmänna smaken.

Vår erfarna inredningsexpert har tillhuvuduppgift att hjälpa Er tillräckta med inredningsförlag, råd och upplynningsmaterial och sätta till alla sätt bidraga till att göra Er önskemål het som Ni tänkt Er det.

För att kunna göra detta måste han emellertid läsa kända Er — kända Er smak skärmtyper som möjligt och han ber Er därför fylla i schematic briosvid som nogränt som möjligt och sända in detta tillsammans med en skiss av Er nya lägenhet på millimeterpapperet på omständiga sida. Skriv dessutom på särskilt paper ungfruför hur Ni tänkt Er inredningen, vilka möbler, mattor och armaturer Ni är mest intresserad av och i runt tal vad det hela får kost.

Vår expert kommer därför att göra upp ett inredningsförslag med detaljerna inritade, samt några frågeskisser och sända Er detta tillsammans med tygprover och offert.

Varije sätter förslag beräknats kostna IKEA 40 kronor, men kommer vi endast att uttaga halften nämligen 20 — ingeo — kronor av Edes. Dessa 20 kronor avsedges vid order om 1,500 kronor. I praktiken blir detta likvärdigt med att kunder som väljer sin inredning hos oss erhåller förlagret utan kostnad. Vi väntar ett mycket stort intresse för denna nya inredningsservice och hoppas därför att göra förfrikingar i god tid. Vi bör ha 3 veckor på oss för att kunna lämna ett väl genombränt förlag.

Med denna nya inredningsavdelning vill vi i samråd med Er själv lösa Edra inredningsproblem och bidraga till att göra Er hem just så som Ni tänkt Er. I förtroendefullt samarbete med våra kunder arbetar vi vidare på att realisera vår devis: *Önskhem till önskspri*.

METRUMDRÄFTMÅNAD

art, belysning och insändas samtidigt med beställningen. Förfogar du inte över denna information? Skriv så tydligt som möjligt och tex-

ta gärna. Om du har en annan adress, skulle Ni då kunna vän-

ka Er att disponera ett rum enbart som sovrum.

Om inte, skulle Ni de första åren vilja sitta på en ottoman, duvhettel eller båddofsa?

Om Ni har en enrummare, ställer Ni i alla fall som villkor att söka på riktiga resrärsängar?

Uppenbarligen Ni har en annan stil som endast används, när det kommer främmande?

Eller vill Ni ha enbart praktiska möbler som Ni vill använda, jämt?

Om Ni har plats, föredrar Ni då en tyngre ekmöbel i stället för en ljusare vit?

Uppskattar Ni en kristallkrona i era rummet?

Tycker Ni om högglanspolerade ytor?

Eller tycker Ni bättre om alm, teak, valnöt, mahagoni?

Vilken är Er favoritfärg?

Eller vill Ni om skarpa färger istället för lugna slags?

Vilken typer tillstolar Er mest: Blommiga matelasser och mönsterlacker, enfärgade typer i fyllig färg, röda och gröna typer i särskilda mönster?

Tycker Ni om en orientaliskt mönstrad wiltonmatta?

Föredrar Ni en rustik, svart, nockhärnmatte?

Sedan Ni vill ha möbler på hela golvet eller skulle Ni hellre vilja ha ett par mindre gruppmöbler?

Om Ni har flera rum, skulle Ni då vilja ha ett vardagsrummet som en enhet eller skulle Ni i stället dela upp det i mindre grupper?

Näm 5 artiklar i denna katalog som Ni tycker om?

Förfrågar Ni är besvarade av:

Namn: _____

Adress: _____

Postadress: _____

context, architecture (and interior design) became the physical site of the cure.⁴³ As Colomina argues, triggered by the spread of tuberculosis – which had been the major endemic disease in Sweden during the 18th century – novel medical research and technologies, through modern projects, aspired to shelter and cure their inhabitants' multiple illnesses. Architecture became the diagnostic tool and simultaneously the medicine for various human psycho-physical diseases, which elicited specific physical implications and directly influenced home spatiality.

Given the shortage of interior space, *God Bostad* 1954 and 1960 couldn't impose using one room exclusively as a bedroom but allowed parents to sleep on a sofa bed in the living room, and children in another separate room, following the modernist rationale entailing organization of functions and departure from that unhygienic habit of sleeping in the kitchen or other interstitial spaces.⁴⁴ Though the second and third editions paid more attention to people's well-being, as suggested by the paragraph "Sleep and Rest," a persistent pressure in favor of single-bed solutions prevailed, which was justified by better cleanability and flexibility of arrangement, compared to the inconvenient, hard-to-sanitize and difficult to maneuver double-bed size.⁴⁵

Although domestic habits have arguably improved since then – when tenants used to compromise, or even jeopardize, their serene married life, experience a lack of privacy, and improvise sleeping solutions for themselves and their children in order to share the same bedroom – it is striking how ceaselessly official actors worked towards a "good" regulation of bed culture. In particular, they favored the use of single, possible-to-pair beds. Neglecting the emotional, private, sexual aspects, and intimacy of the act of sleeping, in 1952 *Aktiv hushållning* [Active Housekeeping] – precursor of the Swedish Consumer Agency – claimed that since a double bed is around 150-160 cm wide, it is harder to clean and, therefore, it is preferable to use twin beds next to each other.⁴⁶ Since tuberculosis had hit the Swedish population hard before the 1945 mass vaccinations, all the arguments in favor of hygiene measures, such as the airing of bed linen, air recycling, and turning the mattress daily, sounded persuasive, and conflated into a general aversion to double-bed solutions. For the sake of sanitizing the house, the bed was being de-eroticized. Its use was not considered in relation to the individual's needs but turned into a footprint of commandments, a "know-how" reported exemplarily in all *God Bostad*'s editions. But what did this supposedly ideal and rational separation of functions – and beds – in the interior really entail? To what degree did it affect the users' sleeping habits, sex life, and home micropolitics?

While *God Bostad*, Swedish architects and governmental bodies were fighting people's widespread unhealthy sleeping habits, Ikéa's 1955 catalogue included a questionnaire which asked the reader: "if you have a two-roomed apartment, would you consider using one exclusively as a bedroom?"⁴⁷ The question implied freedom of choice. Where to sleep was not imposed by the commercial author nor was the answer obvious.

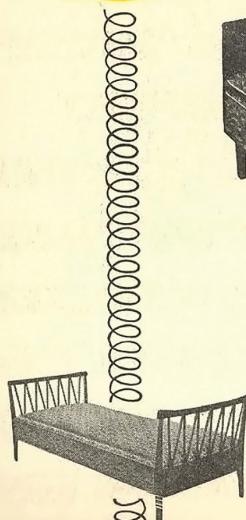
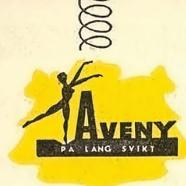
43 Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture*, introduction.

44 "(T)he living room shall also serve as the bedroom of the parents."; "One of the most important rooms of the family residence is that it gives possibilities for a satisfactory and suitably divided sleeping places for parents and children." Excerpts from "Living room" and "Bedroom – alcove bed," *God Bostad*, 1954, 10; 12. The same notions are reiterated in the next editions, see *God Bostad*, 1960, 23; 25.

45 Indeed, both people's sleeping and financial conditions were gradually improving. This was evident from the implementation of the compulsory minimum size for a double bedroom, going from 10, in 1954, to 12 and 15 square meters respectively in the second and third edition. However, *God Bostad* 1954, 1960, 1964, stressed and kept the paragraph "good living shall be hygienic and easy to maintain."

46 In 1952, this state agency published also a brochure entitled *Make the Bed Right and Sleep Tight* which included information about various qualities of beds, mattresses and promoted "real" beds for sleeping, countering people sleeping on multiple and unhygienic furniture pieces. Brita Svenonius and Anna-Lisa Lyberg, *Bädda Rätt Och Sova Gott* (Stockholm: Aktiv hushållning, 1952).

47 The questionnaire was entitled *20 questions* and aimed at getting answers from the reader which were sent to the company's counselling service. IKEA catalogue, 1955, 5.



TACKA AVENY FÖR DE!

Ert humör och allmänna välbefinnande beror i hög grad på sömn och vila. Hemmens Forskningsinstitut konstaterar också att sängen är hemmetas viktigaste möbel. Helförsäkra Er goda sömn genom att välja Aveny — en grundförtun sättning för riktig vila.

Aveny ger så mycket och kostar inte mer än en vanlig resärsäng. Därför inte underligt att Aveny är vår största artikel och redan finns i 1000-tals svenska hem. Läs mera om Aveny på sidorna 44–47.

Strålande humör! Tacka Aveny för dé!

Fig. 5: Single or double bed? The 1955 Ikéa catalogue presents “Aveny.”

How to “Detour” From the Technical Apparatus

Ever since the early 1951 edition, sleeping issues had also occupied an extensive part of Ikéa’s catalogue, which seized the opportunity to unfold multiple furniture ideas which could be reclined on: ottomans, kitchen benches, bunk, and sofa beds, either double size or single, such as the items “Båddsofa,” “Sinetta,” “Rose Mari.” Demonstrating how lack of space and unsanitary living conditions were acknowledged issues even within the marketplace, Ikéa, in fact, started to prompt various creative solutions in response to people’s demands and sleeping needs, for example, the swing bed “Anita” – later relaunched as “Aveny” – which functioned as a double bed but could be cleaned in the same way as a single bed, thanks to the central opening mechanism.⁴⁸

While *God Bostad* predicated a clear normalization of the bedroom, Ikéa, in debating sleeping solutions, took a controversial position. On the one hand, the commercial player contributed to people’s sleeping choices by illustrating varied bed solutions to be placed at one’s will into the home interior, such as the cabinet, unfolding bed “INGA ILL.” On the other hand, it met the official views, which firmly encouraged single beds as the optimal hygienic option, yet in less restrictive terms, without imposing it on the customer as the only viable room layout. This ambivalence can be noted again and again in the following editions, where the “bed mania” still occupied the core of furnishing discussions, with six out of ten interiors dealing with bedroom furnishing within Ikéa’s 1960s catalogues. Debates on the ideal bedroom unfolded in the catalogue, for example, through several mattress sections, cutting the displayed object as if in an architectural cross section and convincing the audience of the quality of Ikéa’s material through slogans such as “Increase the well-being in the bedroom with beautiful furniture,” which followed that modern paradigm linking notions of beauty to functionality and comfort.⁴⁹ And, they were reinforced by launch of a side-business focused on mattresses, and bedroom items, called *Svenska Sencello*, established by IKEA’s director in 1955.⁵⁰

48 This bed solution was also illustrated in the opening page of *Bäddmöbler*, 1950.

49 IKEA catalogue, 1952, 40; IKEA catalogue 1954, 30.

50 In 1957, *Sencello* was also presented in the IKEA catalogue as “the latest achievements in science” and the mattress line was praised for its anatomical qualities, bacteria repellent properties and cleanability,



Fig. 6: The 1961 Ikéa catalogue furnishes the bedroom with multiple items, including the woman's dressing table.

Moreover, IKEA's director started corresponding with designer Erik Berglung – who was involved in publications on bed culture by the SFF – regarding the adoption of various classifications and testing norms in 1962, thanks to liaison Bo Lagerkrantz, who had been trying to convince Kamprad to conform to official furniture standards since 1958.⁵¹ Nevertheless, a certain liberty in use and choice, missing in *God Bostad's* editions, was provided to the user. For instance, the advertisement for the “VEGA” sofa consisted of two separate beds within one double-bed structure, that could be used either as a single bed or paired according to one's sleeping habits, or several diagrams accompanying items showcased a variety of arrangements, such as corner and double-bed solutions.⁵²

Despite its alignment with some predicated principles and the presence in its catalogue of single beds, whose models increased during the 1960s as they were probably intended for wealthier families who could afford a two-bedroom apartment and so a separate room for their children, Ikéa continued to advertise and illustrate many double bed solutions. Although its adherence to official testing methods was stated – evident on the first page of the 1955 catalogue, which reiterates the Home Research Institute's finding that the bed is the most important piece of furniture in the home – the company still provided space for imagination and customization and continued featuring double bed solutions within its catalogue rooms. Rather than imposing that customers conform to one specific layout, the catalogue introduced itself as *En god vägviseare* (a good guide),⁵³ which offered inspiration and alternative solutions, like the option of the portable single bed, “VIKING,” to be placed at one's convenience. While the *manual* imposed constraints regarding where, on what and with whom to sleep, the *catalogue* guided and opened up a world of sleeping possibilities.

echoing the modern hygiene obsession.

51 Moreover, from 1964 onwards, IKEA even decided to establish its own large testing department. IKEA catalogue, 1964, 9-14. The correspondence with Bo Lagercrantz, director of Nordiska Museet, is testified by archival documents held in IHA. Lagercrantz, Bo. 1958. Chosing, modernistisk formgivning men hälsosamt priskrig av Ikéa. *Expressen*. 17. October 28. pdf.

52 “The Vega sofa-bed is certainly practical, comfortable and saves the housewife a lot of work.” IKEA catalogue, 1954, 6; 1960, 49.

53 IKEA catalogue, 1961, opening pages.

Not only were clients given the option to choose their sleeping arrangements, but various bedframes, headboards and bed-related accessories could be selected. In this “phantasmagorical” space of commercial persuasion, the client could collect, and access increasingly commodified home décor suggestions, such as the 1962 color palettes prompted as facilitating the inhabitant’s rest and relaxation. Colomina argues that the post-war bed became a sort of (horizontal) architecture in itself, an epicenter of productivity, which gradually welcomed the outside world, emerging technological devices and was outfitted with all sorts of entertainment and accessories. Affirming its position in post-Fordist, capitalist societies, and riding the wave of the growing consumer culture, Ikéa’s 1960s catalogues prompted savvy, colorful “media spaces” – framed, fictional architectural realities – where bedrooms were fully decorated and accessorized with blankets, carpets, lamps, clocks, technological appliances, workspaces, even including a dressing table, for the “housewife”⁵⁴ – as the *catalogue* addressed her – a shelf with a mirror intended for cosmetics and make up. The IKEA bedroom was filling up rather than being cleared out.

However, it is important to note that, despite the catalogue’s intent to democratize, liberalize and customize the home interior, the doctrine on the preferred cleanable single bed didn’t cease to exist. Not only did it continue to be pictured in official reports and infiltrate the catalogues’ pages, but it also sneaked into other popular media like Bra Bohag, or the magazine *Allt I Hemmet*, which, together formed what Perers defines as “consumption regime.”⁵⁵ The single bed continued to appear ubiquitously, either singularly or paired, conforming with what *God Bostad 1954, 1960* and *1964* suggested. This, even in the latter edition – centered on undisturbed, comfortable sleep – posited that “every person shall preferably have their own bed.”⁵⁶ In the attempt to fight poverty and unhygienic conditions, according to a project of “social engineering,” the state-promoted separation of functions infiltrated society deeply. Through the close collaboration between Swedish state organizations, corporations, politicians, architects, planners, economists, and sociologists, determined visions on sleep and bed culture were instilled in citizens, along with the tweaks and tactics by other commercial actors, simultaneously tackling the ideal home debate.⁵⁷

What About the User?

As Donna J. Haraway posits in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, communication “technologies indicate fundamental transformation in the structure of the world for us” and have long since been adopted by “modern states, multinational corporations, military power, welfare state apparatuses, satellite systems, political processes,” and so forth. In this respect, “multinational material organization of the production and reproduction of daily life and the symbolic organization of the production and reproduction of culture and imagination seem equally implicated.” The objects of knowledge and the addressed bodies mutually result as related, and “the myth and the tool” reciprocally constitute each other.⁵⁸

In evaluating how the myth of *Folkhem* was communicated and translated into coding, and regulations, while other popular agents derived from or aligned with the welfare state *apparatus*, it is necessary to highlight that both parties’ domestic notions not merely affected the home as an architectural object or material assemblage of non-human things but also crafted non-material trajectories, inner dynamics, the inhabitants’ bodies, and home micropolitics. In transmitting a “common language” of design and use of the domestic interior, such instrumental powers, both the *manual*, and the *catalogue*, addressed specific figures in the household and triggered alterations in their domestic practices.

⁵⁴ IKEA catalogue, 1954, 27.

⁵⁵ Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 23.

⁵⁶ *God Bostad, 1964*, “Sleep and Rest.”

⁵⁷ Mattsson and Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism*, introduction.

⁵⁸ Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in *Manifestly Haraway*, 5-90 (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

The reader of both genres was not an abstract, virtual avatar, but a real inhabitant, with their own quirks, self-will, irrational desires, and specific morphological connotations, who could disagree with the superimposed vision of an ideal home. As argued by Jennifer Mack, if one looks beyond the disseminated myth of the Swedish welfare state project, collusions between the proposed universalism of the modernist design and the particularism of minorities and social groups can be appreciated. Why, if the “good” housing model was so ideal, did it leave aside individualism and personal desires? Why did it overlook and not listen to people’s ideas on the homemaking?

I argue that despite being guided by commercial purposes the IKEA catalogue played a crucial role in triggering the user’s creativity and acted as a mediator between the individual’s demands and their materialization in the interior. Through this annually updated, ever expanding and increasingly popular vehicle, the reader could draw from carefully ordered and illustrated home products and ideas and use these as input for envisioning and sketching their desired interiors, an act possible through the blank page which had been inserted since the 1955 edition.⁵⁹ The company’s historical strive for collecting and accommodating clients’ queries is something undeniable, although, indeed, it has meanwhile been conducting market research and shaping the user’s subjectivity with home decoration tips. Following its motto of “democratic design,” this commercial player has fostered over time a horizontal vision of interior design, encouraged an extension of its boundaries, and the involvement of multiple actors and authors. This policy to both suggest home ideas and request the inhabitant’s participation in homemaking is a hallmark of IKEA’s history and catalogue. From the initial counselling section inserted in 1955, which rhetorically asked the reader “where should the cabinet stand?”, to the advice offered by Ikéa’s team and the HEM service targeting the youngest with more affordable options, which were included from the late 1950s catalogues; up to all the illustrative material, such as diagrams, home set images and even plans and sketches, to show ideal furniture disposition.⁶⁰

In response to Ikéa’s “openness” and “benevolence,” a letter sent by a customer in November 1960 to “Möbel-Ikea Älmhult” – the original label of the IKEA company – expressed enormous gratitude to the commercial actor by thanking it, “from the bottom of (their) heart for (the) pleasant interior design suggestions, the choice of well-matched colors, as well as the stylish furniture (they) received.”⁶¹ While *God Bostad 1960* imposed rigid criteria for home decoration, leaving no room for the exchange of knowledge between the addresser and receiver, Ikéa’s 1960 catalogues continued to foster that “chat,” that productive “back and forth” between itself and its customers, useful in constructing an affiliated community of clients, namely the IKEA Family. The clients not only wanted to experiment with the given home suggestions but even asked the furniture retailer for interior design proposals. A prolific exchange – testified by numerous letters and documents held in the corporate archive – had been initiated since the idea of including a questionnaire in the 1955 catalogue, which customers could fill in and return to the company. Concomitantly, *God Bostad* persevered in communicating a univocal domestic doctrine.

Gendering the Home

Following Robin Evans’ reasoning that modern housing appears to transcend culture and was more concerned with the creation of buildings than with their occupants’ real desires or preferences,⁶² a similar doctrine interested Swedish post-war mass housing projects and interiors. In the *parlor*, for example, a strong opposition towards ornamental elements, and a dismissal of the tenant’s attachment to these can clearly be observed. The functionalist ethos of

⁵⁹ Yet even before the catalogue suggested freedom in furniture disposition. For example, in 1954 it rhetorically asked “how should I decorate my apartment?” IKEA catalogue, 1954, 65; 1955, 49; 1956, 5-6.

⁶⁰ IKEA catalogue 1962, 18.

⁶¹ Archival source from IHA. 1960. Letter to Möbel-Ikéa, Älmhult. November 11, 1960. pdf.

⁶² Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building* (London: the Architectural Association Publications, 1997), 56.

sanitizing the domestic space entailed, besides mandatory dimensions and furniture placement, an aversion to wall clocks, cocktail cabinets, and other, so-considered unnecessary items. As argued by Penny Sparke, the staging and stagnation of these objects into interstitial domestic spaces were canonically attributed to feminine style in modern and postmodern eras. A certain “feminine taste” was being banished in favor of a male-defined aesthetic order, a realm devoid of display and ornament, supported by many modern Western pioneers.⁶³

This narrative clearly overlooked the psychological significance and sense of belonging associated with these “knick-knacks.” As the interior was the most problematic place, where the socially approved visions and personal subjectivities, tastes and needs were negotiated, a battle fighting women’s uncontrolled domestic consumption occurred, witnessing, paradoxically, even female objectors like the influential Swedish designer Lena Larsson.⁶⁴ Following Christine Fredrick’s argument, in fact, “(i)t was the consumer, not the producer, nor the state, who was in control” of domestic design.⁶⁵ Since most consumers were female and because of their permanent presence in the house, women were feared, derided, and criticized. First, they were encouraged to become an amateur artist, following Key’s aesthetic instructions; then, they were restrained and condemned for their “wrong” individual taste which did not match the model of “reasonable consumer.”⁶⁶

Consequently, women became protagonists of a long series of activities encompassing the state-led taste education,⁶⁷ while their place in the world was relegated to the domestic sphere, involving childcare and home management, despite the fact they were gradually entering the work environment. Their voices were never heard sincerely. Women were victims of an “hertopia,”⁶⁸ a fake-idyllic male-dominated utopia, orchestrated by governmental and official bodies participant in the construction of the “People’s Home.” They were subject to unrealized promises and lived in first person the discrepancies between the professed “democratic” ideas and their real domestic experiences.

In this scenario, *God Bostad* played a role in reinforcing the woman’s place in the domestic sphere. All its three editions viewed the kitchen as the area designated to the “mother” of the house, encouraged women to take care of the children or do the laundry, and even speculated on women’s daily routines so as to provide predetermined ideal domestic scenarios. The manual never addressed the woman as a bread winning, gender-equal partner, nor as a sexual being, or, simply, as an individual with her own independence, wishes, and impulses. The bedroom, as the most critical site of social, cultural, physiological, and sexual transaction, especially elicited home micropolitics tensions and fictions.⁶⁹ This intimate and personal room rendered manifest the clash between gender roles in the home and between the rigidity of the “top-bottom” layouts and furnishing rules and the spontaneity of the individual choices and rituals of the inhabitant.

63 Penny Sparke, “Designing Taste. Domestic Consumption, Modernism and Modernity,” in *Swedish Modernism*, ed. Mattsson H. and Wallenstein S. (London: Black dog publishing, 2010), 112-21.

64 Curiously, such a patriarchal vision of the ideal home was also supported and shaped by female figures. Not only Lena Larsson but also, for example, sociologist Alva Myrdal. Myrdal Alva, *Nation and Family. The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1968).

65 Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929), 6.

66 Helena Mattsson, “Designing the Reasonable Consumer. Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism,” in *Swedish Modernism*, 2010, 74-99.

67 This doctrine, reflected into a perseverant domestic consumption education, unfolded into study circles and several activities which lasted decades. This was carried out by multiple state-supporting organizations, including *God Bostad*’s partners, the HRI, or the SFF. The latter had since 1944 instituted a Dwelling Committee, *Bo-kommittén*. Its first study circle had Gregor Paulsson and Lena Larsson among the leaders. Maria Göransson, “A home for modern life: Educating taste in 1940s Sweden” (paper presented at the Design Research Society Biennial International Conference, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, July 1-5, 2012).

68 Concept elaborated in Jennifer Mack, Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, “Hertopia: Women’s Swedish Welfare Landscapes during the 1960s and 70s” (paper presented at EAHN2021, online, June 2-5, 2021).

69 Beatriz Colomina, “The Century of the Bed,” in *The Century of the Bed*, (Wien: REMApriint, 2014), 10-18.

**NYHET
FÖR
SVERIGE**

INREG. VARUMÄRKE

Sencello

— överlägset under —

SKUMGUMMI

BLÄTT SENCELLO ger Er detta:

- 1 Runda, helventilerade celler.
- 2 Ni kan tvätta Sencello själv.
- 3 Vävd översida, fastare på mitten.
- 4 Dammfri, bakteriefrämstötande.
- 5 Massiva kanter och hörn ger bättre stadga.
- 6 Antisölpärparerad och skyddad mot koppar och mangan.
- 7 Avtagbart, krympt bolster.
- 8 Kvalitetsdeklarerad med garanti.

SENCELLO HIMMELSKT BLÄ —**HIMMELSKT SKÖN**

Alla fördelar Ni tidigare läst om skumgummi ger Er Sencello och därtill två revolutionerande Sencello-finesser. Runda celler (vanligt skumgummi har ovala) som ger materialiet större bärighet och livslängd. Sencello-materialiet är testat genom sammansättning 4.000.000 gånger, det hårdaste provet som materialen genomsätts.

Alla celler (ca 250 gr per tum²) är helt luftkonditionerade ända upp till ytan varför Sencelloandas bättre än någon annan madrass. Är sval att ligga på, och Ni kan tvätta den själv. Vanligt skumgummi försvinner i vatten, tunnlar och mäste därför sändas bort för tvättning. Sencello är tillverkat av ren naturgummibjörk med väl avvärda stabilitetsegenskaper för ålderstålighet och hållbarhet. I någon form av utdryggingsmedel eller syntetiskt gummi förekommer ej. Det finns ingen ersättning för Sencello. Fyll i kupongen och Ni får helt gratis det sensationella introduktionserbjudandet.



Sencellomadrassen tillverkas i alla storlekar 1,60 x 2,00 cm tjocklek med sanda, rövsmalnande kaviteter.

Kuddar i 50x60 cm m. fl. i svart fublött mjukskum med sanda, rövsmalnande kaviteter.

Priserna är lägre än Ni tänkt Er.

Var med och dela 50.000:-

I årets största introduktionserbjudande hämnar vi rabatter för 50.000 kronor. Var med och dela! Sänd in kupongen i dag. Det kostar Er ingenting.

Ni får dessutom en instruktiv 4-färgsbroschy om skumgummi, förmånskupong m. m.

INGET PORTO — Sencello betalar

Sänd utan kostnad eller förbindelse närmare upplysningar om introduktionserbjudandet, 4-färgsfoldern m. m. till

Namn:

Adress:

Postadress: AR 10-56

TILL
LÖSEN
SVENSKA SENCELLO
ÄLMHULT

Svarsförsändelse
Tillstånd nr 6
Älmhult

Frankeras ej
Adressaten
betalar
portot

Sencello-namnet är lagligen skyddat och alla artiklar garantimärkta. Sencello kan t. v. endast erhållas direkt från Svenska Sencello. Kom ihåg: Det finns ingen ersättning för Sencello.

KVALITETSTESTAD ENLIGT INTERNATIONELLA BESTÄMMELSER. — ASTM STD.

Butiker i Stockholm och Malmö

I Stockholms city ligger vår nyinredda Sencello-butik. Mäster Samuelsgatan 18 är adressen. Tel. 21 38 38.

Alldeles vid Gustav Adolfs torg i Malmö ligger den nya Sencello-butiken, på Engelbrektsgatan 20. Tel. 312 10.

S V E N S K A S E N C E L L O

STOCKHOLM

Mäster Samuelsgatan 18, tel. 21 38 38.

ÄLMHULT

tel. 10 00.

MALMÖ

Engelbrektsgatan 20, tel. 312 10.

Fig. 7: A housewife hugs the company's mattress on Sencello 1956 brochure cover.



Fig. 8: Women as decorative objects in IKEA's 1971 catalogue cover.

Regardless of the official attempts to modernize and rationalize the bedroom, this was probably still largely determined by personal habits and taste. In this respect, the Ikéa catalogue played a role in “feminizing” and “softening” the post-war bedroom.⁷⁰ It empowered the user – and the woman of the house – through its “open-source” catalogue, which, in the 1960s catalogue, included, in spite of the official repulsion, dressing tables, soft carpets, woolly blankets, and many sorts of knick-knacks, which were considered superfluous, dust-catching accessories and didn’t appear in *God Bostad*’s authoritative agendas. Yet, simultaneously, the company’s medium contributed to exacerbating the gendering of the bedroom, and, more broadly, domestic space. Through the repetition of catchy slogans and multiple images displayed in its publications for about thirty years, from 1951 through to the 1970s, IKEA and its imagery foisted the assumption that “home is a woman’s place,”⁷¹ by addressing the housewife as the one responsible for domestic labor, especially in the early editions; assigning her the duty of sanitizing the bed, as explicit in the portrait of an undressed woman on the cover of *Sencello*’s 1956 brochure; and then, in placing female model figures as if they were decorative elements, outfitting IKEA’s merchandise, in the 1970s catalogues.⁷²

Women were instrumentalized in IKEA’s commercial narratives too. As tokens, their bodies, faces, silhouettes were used at IKEA’s will, depending on the most convenient commercial

70 IKEA catalogue, 1964, 70; 133-4; 151.

71 IKEA catalogue 1960, 43; 90; 98.

72 Thesis supported also by Irina Seits, “Architectures of Life-Building in the Twentieth Century Russia, Germany, Sweden” (PhD diss., Södertörn University, 2018).

strategy. Being the favorite target consumer, women were given agency and encouraged to express their femininity by fueling their consumption practices through the catalogue. Yet, although it challenged *God Bostad's* “insensitivity,” and informed feminine domestic taste – as illustrated in the 1961 edition listing a series of home décor tips for “the lady of the home” – IKEA also enhanced and “catalogued” a stereotypical vision of the woman, as Western, white and solely bound to the domestic interior.⁷³ In the end, the catalogue didn't liberate the woman either but created a “cyborg” through its media constructions, “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality” and fiction.⁷⁴

Towards a Commercialization of the Domestic Interior

In 1965, the state led *Miljonprogrammet* [the Million Program] started the construction, ongoing until 1974, of over one million “ideal” dwelling units across the country which originated in many high-rise suburban towns, intended for the increasingly wealthy, middle-class citizen. Later in 1975, continuing the materialization of the utopian “modern project,” *Svensk byggnorm, SBN 75* [the Swedish Building Code] assisted the issuing of regulations and replaced *God Bostad 1964*. As evident, in post-war Sweden, there was the tendency to continue approaching the housing question as an almost exclusive formulation of updated norms and standards.⁷⁵

Despite *God Bostad 1964* attempting to promote a more human everyday world, and even seemingly attentive to various social groups' needs, such as young and old, sick, and disabled people, singles, and couples, this third edition still envisioned users as abstract identities and neglected the continuously evolving character of living spaces. The mid-1970s marked the beginning of the crisis of the Swedish welfare state fixed universal ideology. Architects and theorists started to question the normative assumptions behind idealistic, modern projects, and the directions on “how-to” realize them. The strategy of imposing inflexible standards to be accepted by everyone, and based on a model, preferably a male, white, human body, started to be challenged as going against the numerous diverse lifestyles which increasingly globalized societies and postmodernity had brought about. In 1986, as a metaphor, the assassination of Swedish prime minister Olof Palme suggested that the myth of Swedish modernity was falling apart, and with it, the official stances and univocal ideology, which clashed with increasing liberalism, multiculturalism, internationalism, and emancipatory, feminist movements.⁷⁶

By the time *God Bostad* finished its term, the IKEA catalogue was receiving even greater attention, reaching 6,800,000 distributed copies. More designers and specialized personnel were hired by the company, while new stores popped up, such as the first one outside Scandinavia opened in Switzerland in 1973. Confirming the thesis supported by Perers that Sweden assisted a gradual deregulation and commercialization of housing, even up to the elimination of the Ministry of Housing in 1991,⁷⁷ the Ikeaization of other countries, which took off in the early 1970s, continues till today's phenomenal, global, design, economic and social success. While the housing question was left to the market by the mid-1990s, its furnishing was taken over by a furniture retailer.

⁷³ It is important to note that, although today IKEA wants to appear as a promotor of ethnic diversity and gender equality, images of multi-ethnic families and flipped gender roles at home began to be included in its commercials only from the mid-1990s, as showcased by the popular advertising featuring a gay couple, and even more consistently from the 2000s.

⁷⁴ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” 5.

⁷⁵ Perers, *Inside the Ideal Home*, 431-5.

⁷⁶ Helena Mattsson, “Revisiting Swedish Postmodernism: Gendered Architecture and Other Stories,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 85, 1 (2016): 109-25.

⁷⁷ The welfare state utopia and *modus operandi* started to be also challenged by the building industry, which lamented the increasing standards and bureaucratic challenges, arguing that these entailed more expensive construction.

Still, a few considerations can be made in relation to the legacy of the Ikea *catalogue* comparative to the *God Bostad manual*. If it is arguable that the catalogue “humanized” the domestic interior, showed more sensitivity towards the inhabitants, and even activated them through their participation in the homemaking, simultaneously, implanting new consumption desires, this tool was not innocent either. Playing with the repetition and listing of items, through cleverly illustrated commodified goods and smart image-rhetoric, the IKEA catalogue integrates images into the “psychic economy” and “symbolic order” of the subject.⁷⁸ Structured into sections since 1951 – the bedroom, kitchen, living room, bathroom, up to including workspaces, children’s rooms and so forth – which are updated annually with additional product ranges, it fixes objects and messages into people’s imagination so as to be part of a collective imagery, which becomes accepted and rehearsed by its audience. This medium promotes what Helen Hester defines as “domestic realism.”⁷⁹ It works towards the acceptance that it is nearly impossible to imagine life being organized in any other way than through household labor, privatization, and home ownership, a vision implying a specific framing of the woman, usually Western, performing the housewife and passionate for home shopping; an image reiterated in the catalogue up to becoming a mythological creature. While it might not have normalized the domestic interior as explicitly as *God Bostad*, this other vehicle of communication has historically identified and associated spatial configurations with people’s experiences in the home and recapitulated these so as to link transformation of the domestic environment to household members’ roles and labor. Its forms of domination consist, not in the peremptory tone and rigid standards, but in the persuading friendly tone, in the play with metaphors, allegories, listings, analogies, and yearly appealing additions.

Furthermore, out of this free, annually provided body of knowledge, one should question the price behind IKEA’s generosity. Since the first market research tool, the 1955 questionnaire, IKEA has been fostering a continuously expanding correspondence with its clients – now even happening through counselling video calls – while cleverly collecting people’s home desires along with their data, in exponentially sophisticated ways, such as browser cookies.

To conclude, both these narrators of domesticity, the *catalogue*, and the *manual*, have scrutinized and affected domestic space and the life within it. Both systems of communication have signified ideas on the ideal domestic interior and micropolitics. Both have been responsible for casting myths of Swedish modernity. Both constitute essential contributions to the history of modern Swedish design. They document and their comparison enables the revealing of micro, local histories and everyday life problematics often hidden behind squeaky-clean, mediatic images and universal reports. Despite featuring different language, formats, and tones, both have endured solid and tangible forms which have, by osmosis, become reality. For entrepreneurs like IKEA, the use of the myth – where the *catalogue* plays a major role – is a prerequisite of commercial success.⁸⁰ The narratives constructing IKEA mythology are what allow the company to persuade and deceive the user, to market its manufactured goods as attractive and, in turn, embody a variety of myths. The history of post-war domesticity cannot avoid looking through the commercial actor’s objects of knowledge, but due to their persuasiveness and sense of familiarity, should analyze them critically while reflecting on Umberto Eco’s statement; “(t)oday a country belongs to the person who controls communications.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hal Foster, “Death in America,” *October* 75 (1996): 37-59.

⁷⁹ Helen Hester, “Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism,” *e-flux*, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/artificial-labor/140680/promethean-labors-and-domestic-realism/>.

⁸⁰ Thesis supported also by Sara Kristoffersson, *Design by IKEA. A Cultural History* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁸¹ Umberto Eco, “Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare,” in *Travels in Hyperreality*, (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1986), 135.

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