

1920 Naum Gabo/Antoine Pevsner: Basic principles of Constructivism

The brothers Gabo and Pevsner, both sculptors, wrote in Moscow in 1920 the *Realist Manifesto*, in which they laid down the basic principles of Constructivism, which exercised a powerful influence especially on post-war Russian architecture (Tatlin, the brothers Vesnin, Lissitzky). Gabo and Pevsner are concerned with constructions in space, which, however, are interpreted primarily not as architecture, but as sculpture. An important part is played in their conceptions by haptic and optic charms arising out of the combination of various materials in these spatial constructions. These materials are without exception those produced industrially.

1. We reject the closed spatial circumference as the plastic expression of the moulding of space. We assert that space can only be modelled from within outward in its depth, not from without inward through its volume. For what else is absolute space than a unique, coherent, and unlimited depth?
2. We reject the closed mass as an exclusive element for the building up of three-dimensional and architectonic bodies in space. In opposition to it we set the demand that plastic bodies shall be constructed stereometrically.
3. We reject decorative colour as a painterly element in three-dimensional construction. We demand that the concrete material shall be employed as a painterly element.
4. We reject the decorative line. We demand of every line in the work of art that it shall serve solely to define the inner directions of force in the body to be portrayed.
5. We are no longer content with the static elements of form in plastic art. We demand the inclusion of time as a new element and assert that real movement must be employed in plastic art, in order to make possible the use of kinetic rhythms in a way that is not merely illusionistic.

NAUM GABO *and* ANTOINE PEVSNER:
The Realistic Manifesto (1920)

While it would be impossible to explain, in simple terms, the astonishing development of Russian art in the early twentieth century, it is clear at the same time that any discussion of the subject tends to converge upon one basic problem: To what extent should the Russian contribution to the modern movement be viewed as the outcome of a native tradition and to what extent as a graft from an alien culture? In the case of the Italian futurists, the issue is perhaps more clear. The reaction against the arrested development of Italian art and voracious ingestion of the French avant-garde tradition could go hand in hand in a culture where so much was held in common with its neighbors. Russian modernism was perhaps only superficially touched by the Italian flurry. The decade of the 1910s may have begun with manifestoes of a futurist stamp, but by its close the work of a painter such as Malevich and a poet such as Khlebnikov testified to a profound cleavage between Russia and the West.

The rise of constructivism in Russia represents at the same time the full recognition of this cleavage and a hint that it was to become less absolute. "The Realistic Manifesto" of Gabo and Pevsner is in a sense retrospective, pointing out with unerring accuracy the limitations of cubism and futurism. But it also signifies that the roles of teacher and pupil are about to be reversed. The Russian artist no longer simply has nothing to learn from the West; he now has something to give.

Implicit in this new attitude is the situation created by the Revolu-

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tion of 1917. Gabo refers to "us who have already accomplished the Revolution or who are already constructing and building up anew." The ambiguity between social and political revolution is probably intentional. And the parallel is brought out even more clearly in Tatlin's short statement on "The Work Ahead of Us," which confirms that the conjunction of revolution in art and in the state allows the Russian artist to envisage the task of "creating a new world."

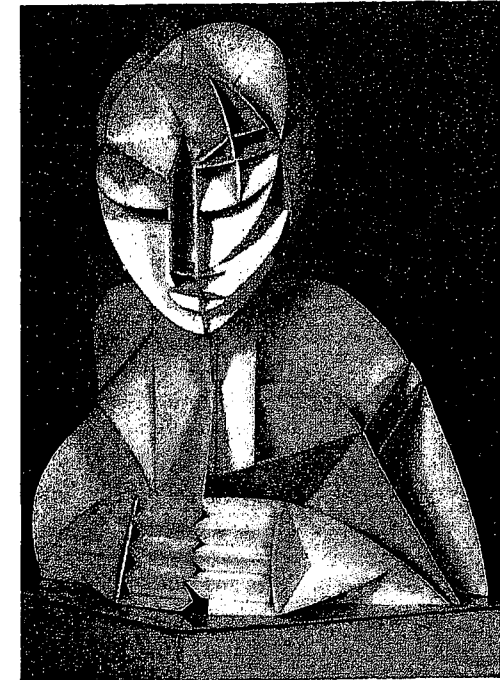
For Gabo and Tatlin, the change in the artist's role is initially seen in quantitative terms. Instead of continuing to work in conventional media and on modest proportions, he is able to confront the heady prospect of creating symbolic embodiments of the new society on a monumental scale. But in the period covered by the passages that follow, the artist's role was also to be transformed qualitatively. Rejecting Gabo's view of the independent social function of art, artists and theorists drew the implications of Tatlin's concern with "the forms encountered in our new everyday life." When the term "constructivism" first came into common use at the end of 1921, it could hardly be said to denote the work of a number of artists bound together by common stylistic properties. It embodied the determination of the artist and the theorist to pursue the implications of a marriage between art and social revolution, even if this investigation meant a revision, or indeed a reversal, of existing conceptions.

Naum Gabo was born in Briansk, Russia, in 1890. He made his first constructions in Norway in 1915. He worked in Russia from 1917 to 1922, when he left Moscow for Berlin. From around 1936 to 1946 he lived in England, moving finally to the United States, where he still lives. His older brother, Antoine Pevsner, was born in Orel, Russia, in 1886; he worked with Gabo in Norway from 1916, and returned to Moscow with him, but established himself in Paris from 1923 on.

A third brother, Alexei Pevsner, has described the genesis of this manifesto, which was written solely by Gabo, although Antoine appended his signature. The occasion of publication was an open-air exhibition on the Tverskoy Boulevard in Moscow at which both brothers were represented in addition to several young artists from the Vkhutemas (Higher Technical Artistic Studios).

Gabo has amusingly recalled that the commissar of the state printing and publication department, who was Trotsky's sister, gave permission for the official publication of the manifesto without reading

Naum Gabo: *Constructed Head*, 1916. (Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, The Philadelphia Museum of Art) Gabo recently reconstructed this work in architectural steel and would like to execute it on a 10-foot scale. Although there are superficial analogies with cubism in this piece and in its companions from the same period, Gabo's central aim was to create a naturalistic image through the use of the stereometric system and to combine monumentality with economy in the use of materials. (Photo Dr. Fred Block)



it. She was under the impression that it favored "realism" in the traditional sense and therefore welcomed an aesthetic position to which, on closer acquaintance, she found herself to be totally opposed.

Above the tempests of our weekdays,

Across the ashes and cindered homes of the past,

Before the gates of the vacant future,

We proclaim today to you artists, painters, sculptors, musicians, actors, poets . . . to you people to whom Art is no mere ground for conversation but the source of real exaltation, our word and deed.

The impasse into which Art has come to in the last twenty years must be broken.

The growth of human knowledge with its powerful penetration into the mysterious laws of the world which started at the dawn of this century.

The blossoming of a new culture and a new civilization with their unprecedented-in-history surge of the masses towards the possession of the riches of Nature, a surge which binds the people into one union, and last, not least, the war and the revolution (those purifying torrents of the coming epoch), have made us face the fact of new forms of life, already born and active.

What does Art carry into this unfolding epoch of human history?

Does it possess the means necessary for the construction of the new Great Style?

Or does it suppose that the new epoch may not have a new style?

Or does it suppose that the new life can accept a new creation which is constructed on the foundations of the old?

In spite of the demand of the renascent spirit of our time, Art is still nourished by impression, external appearance, and wanders helplessly back and forth from Naturalism to Symbolism, from Romanticism to Mysticism.

The attempts of the Cubists and the Futurists to lift the visual arts from the bogs of the past have led only to new delusions.

Cubism, having started with simplification of the representative technique, ended with its analysis and stuck there.

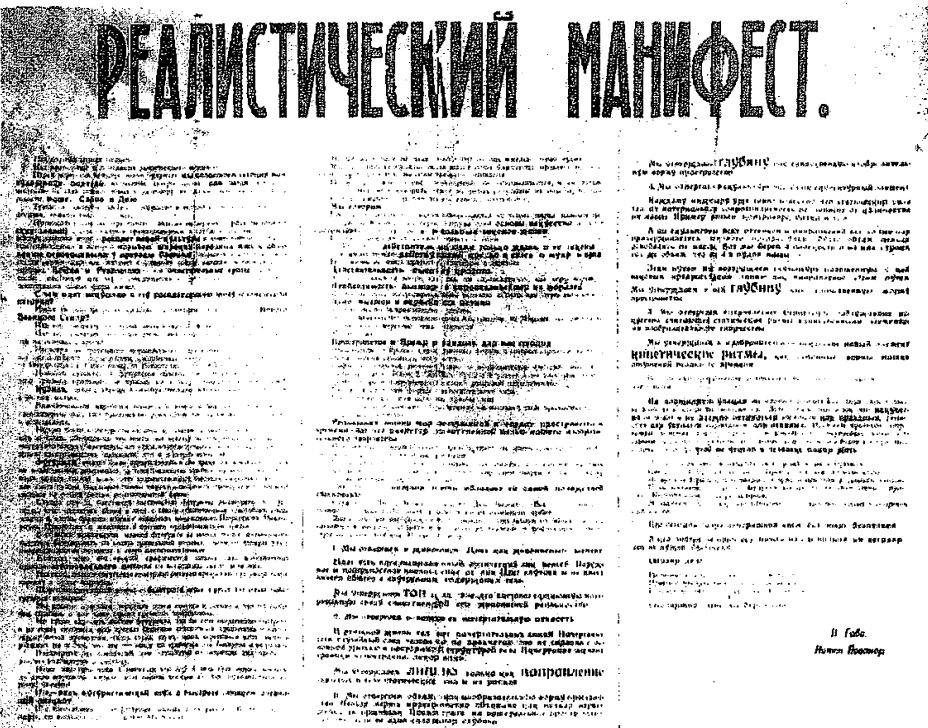
The distracted world of the Cubists, broken in shreds by their logical anarchy, cannot satisfy us who have already accomplished the Revolution or who are already constructing and building up anew.

One could heed with interest the experiments of the Cubists, but one cannot follow them, being convinced that their experiments are being made on the surface of Art and do not touch on the bases of it, seeing plainly that the end result amounts to the same old graphic, to the same old volume, and to the same decorative surface as of old.

One could have hailed Futurism in its time for the refreshing sweep of its announced Revolution in Art, for its devastating criticism of the past, as in no other way could one have assailed those artistic barricades of "good taste" . . . powder was needed for that and a lot of it . . . but one cannot construct a system of art on one revolutionary phrase alone.

One had to examine Futurism beneath its appearance to realize that one faced a very ordinary chatterer, a very agile and prevaricating guy, clad in the tatters of worn-out words like "patriotism," "militarism," "contempt for the female," and all the rest of such provincial tags.

Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner: "The Realistic Manifesto," 1920. This manifesto was written to accompany an open-air show on the Tverskoy Boulevard, Moscow, at which both brothers were exhibiting. Five thousand copies were issued and posted throughout the city.



11 Feb.
Human Ecology

In the domain of purely pictorial problems, Futurism has not gone further than the renovated effort to fix on the canvas a purely optical reflex which has already shown its bankruptcy with the Impressionists. It is obvious now to every one of us that by the simple graphic registration of a row of momentarily arrested movements, one cannot re-create movement itself. It makes one think of the pulse of a dead body.

The pompous slogan of "Speed" was played from the hands of the Futurists as a great trump. We concede the sonority of that slogan and we quite see how it can sweep the strongest of the provincials off their feet. But ask any Futurist how does he imagine "speed" and there will emerge a whole arsenal of frenzied automobiles, rattling railway depots, snarled wires, the clank and the noise and the clang of carouselling streets . . . does one really need to convince them that all that is not necessary for speed and for its rhythms?

Look at a ray of sun . . . the stillest of the still forces, it speeds more than 300 kilometres in a second . . . behold our starry firmament . . . who hears it . . . and yet what are our depots to those depots of the Universe? What are our earthly trains to those hurrying trains of the galaxies?

Indeed, the whole Futurist noise about speed is too obvious an anecdote, and from the moment that Futurism proclaimed that "Space and Time are yesterday's dead," it sunk into the obscurity of abstractions.

Neither Futurism nor Cubism has brought us what our time has expected of them.

Besides those two artistic schools our recent past has had nothing of importance or deserving attention.

But Life does not wait and the growth of generations does not stop and we who go to relieve those who have passed into history, having in our hands the results of their experiments, with their mistakes and their achievements, after years of experience equal to centuries . . . we say . . .

No new artistic system will withstand the pressure of a growing new culture until the very foundation of Art will be erected on the real laws of Life.

Until all artists will say with us . . .

All is a fiction . . . only life and its laws are authentic and in life only the active is beautiful and wise and strong and right, for life

does not know beauty as an aesthetic measure . . . efficacious existence is the highest beauty.

Life knows neither good nor bad nor justice as a measure of morals . . . need is the highest and most just of all morals.

Life does not know rationally abstracted truths as a measure of cognizance, deed is the highest and surest of truths.

Those are the laws of life. Can art withstand these laws if it is built on abstraction, on mirage, and fiction?

We say . . .

Space and time are re-born to us today.

Space and time are the only forms on which life is built and hence art must be constructed.

States, political and economic systems perish, ideas crumble, under the strain of ages . . . but life is strong and grows and time goes on in its real continuity.

Who will show us forms more efficacious than this . . . who is the great one who will give us foundations stronger than this?

Who is the genius who will tell us a legend more ravishing than this prosaic tale which is called life?

The realization of our perceptions of the world in the forms of space and time is the only aim of our pictorial and plastic art.

In them we do not measure our works with the yardstick of beauty, we do not weigh them with pounds of tenderness and sentiments.

The plumb-line in our hand, eyes as precise as a ruler, in a spirit as taut as a compass . . . we construct our work as the universe constructs its own, as the engineer constructs his bridges, as the mathematician his formula of the orbits.

We know that everything has its own essential image; chair, table, lamp, telephone, book, house, man . . . they are all entire worlds with their own rhythms, their own orbits.

That is why we in creating things take away from them the labels of their owners . . . all accidental and local, leaving only the reality of the constant rhythm of the forces in them.

1. Thence in painting we renounce colour as a pictorial element, colour is the idealized optical surface of objects; an exterior and superficial impression of them; colour is accidental and it has nothing in common with the innermost essence of a thing.

We affirm that the tone of a substance, i.e. its light-absorbing material body is its only pictorial reality.

2. We renounce in a line, its descriptive value; in real life there are no descriptive lines, description is an accidental trace of a man on things, it is not bound up with the essential life and constant structure of the body. Descriptiveness is an element of graphic illustration and decoration.

We affirm the line only as a direction of the static forces and their rhythm in objects.

3. We renounce volume as a pictorial and plastic form of space; one cannot measure space in volumes as one cannot measure liquid in yards: look at our space . . . what is it if not one continuous depth?

We affirm depth as the only pictorial and plastic form of space.

4. We renounce in sculpture, the mass as a sculptural element.

It is known to every engineer that the static forces of a solid body and its material strength do not depend on the quantity of the mass . . . example a rail, a T-beam, etc.

But you sculptors of all shades and directions, you still adhere to the age-old prejudice that you cannot free the volume of mass. Here (in this exhibition) we take four planes and we construct with them the same volume as of four tons of mass.

Thus we bring back to sculpture the line as a direction and in it we affirm depth as the one form of space.

5. We renounce the thousand-year-old delusion in art that held the static rhythms as the only elements of the plastic and pictorial arts.

We affirm in these arts a new element the kinetic rhythms as the basic forms of our perception of real time.

These are the five fundamental principles of our work and our constructive technique.

Today we proclaim our words to you people. In the squares and on the streets we are placing our work convinced that art must not remain a sanctuary for the idle, a consolation for the weary, and a justification for the lazy. Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts . . . at the bench, at the table, at work, at rest, at play; on working days and holidays . . . at home and on the road . . . in order that the flame to live should not extinguish in mankind.

We do not look for justification, neither in the past nor in the future.

Nobody can tell us what the future is and what utensils does one eat it with.

Not to lie about the future is impossible and one can lie about it at will.

We assert that the shouts about the future are for us the same as the tears about the past: a renovated day-dream of the romantics.

A monkish delirium of the heavenly kingdom of the old attired in contemporary clothes.

He who is busy today with the morrow is busy doing nothing.

And he who tomorrow will bring us nothing of what he has done today is of no use for the future.

Today is the deed.

We will account for it tomorrow.

The past we are leaving behind as carrion.

The future we leave to the fortune-tellers.

We take the present day.

VLADIMIR TATLIN, T. SHAPIRO, I. MEYERZON, and
PAVEL VINOGRADOV:
The Work Ahead of Us (1920)

Vladimir Evgrafovich Tatlin was born in 1885, either in Kharkov or in Moscow. He exhibited paintings with a number of Russian artistic groups in the years 1911-13 and was closely associated with the painter Mikhail Larionov. But his attitudes were transformed in the course of a visit to Paris in 1913, when he was able to see the cubist reliefs

Dated Moscow, December 31, 1920. This translation by Troels Andersen et al. was first published in *Vladimir Tatlin* (exhibition catalogue, Stockholm: Moderna Museet, July-September 1968) and is reprinted here with permission.

Program of the Productivist Group (1920)

There is some uncertainty over the precise origin of the following manifesto, which has sometimes been associated directly with the name of Tatlin. Gabo has underlined that the constructivist/productivist group, which arose around 1920, was "led by Tatlin." But this program from an exhibition catalogue published "several months after the Realistic Manifesto" and "as a reply to it" carried only the signatures of Alexei Rodchenko and his wife, Varvara Stepanova, who had organized the exhibition. Troels Andersen has informed me that Tatlin's name is specifically omitted from a list of the main supporters of the program given by Jacques Tugenkhol'd in the annual Pechat' i revoliutsiya (The Press and Revolution), vol. VII, 1927.

Rodchenko, who was born in St. Petersburg in 1891, was one of the Russian artists most ready and able to embrace the new task of design for production. Though he was undoubtedly influenced by Tatlin, his search for a synthesis of architecture, sculpture, and painting began as early as 1917, and in 1919 he made a design for a telephone kiosk. From 1920 on he was to take part in a multitude of different projects, designing covers for Mayakovsky's magazine Lef, posters for the new Soviet cinema, and planning numerous architectural interiors, such as that of the Soviet Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of 1925. Varvara Stepanova was also closely concerned with the theory and practice of production art (see p. xxxii).

The task of the Constructivist group is the communistic expression of materialistic constructive work.

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It tackles the solution of this problem on the basis of scientific hypotheses. It emphasizes the necessity of synthesizing the ideological and formal part so as to direct the laboratory work on to the tracks of practical activity.

When the group was first started the ideological part of its programme was as follows:

1. The sole premise is scientific communism, based on the theory of historical materialism.
2. The cognition of the experimental trials of the Soviets has led the group to transplant experimental activities from the abstract (transcendental) to the real.
3. The specific elements of the group's work, namely "tektonika," construction, and "faktura," ideologically, theoretically, and by experience justify the changing of the material elements of industrial-culture into volume, plain [*sic*], colour, space, and light.

These constitute the foundations of the communistic expression of materialistic construction.

These three points form an organic link between the ideological and formal parts.

"Tektonika" is derived from the structure of communism and the effective exploitation of industrial matter.

Construction is organization. It accepts the contents of the matter itself, already formulated. Construction is formulating activity taken to the extreme, allowing, however, for further "tektonical" work.

The matter deliberately chosen and effectively used, without however hindering the progress of construction or limiting the "tektonika," is called "faktura" by the group.

Among material elements are:

1. Matter in general. Recognition of its origin, its industrial and productional changes. Its nature and its meaning.
2. Intellectual materials: light, plane, space, colour, volume.

The Constructivists treat intellectual and solid materials in the same way.

The future tasks of the group are as follows:

1. Ideologically:
 - (a) Proving by word and deed the incompatibility of artistic activity and intellectual production.

- (b) The real participation of intellectual production as an equivalent element, in building up communist culture.
- 2. In practice:
 - (a) Agitation in the press.
 - (b) Conception of plans.
 - (c) Organization of exhibitions.
 - (d) Making contact with all the productive centres and main bodies of unified Soviet mechanism, which realize the communistic forms of life in practice.
- 3. In the field of agitation:
 - (a) The group stands for ruthless war against art in general.
 - (b) The group proves that evolutionary transition of the past's art-culture into the communistic forms of constructive building is impossible.

The Slogans of the Constructivists

- 1. Down with art.
Long live technic.
- 2. Religion is a lie.
Art is a lie.
- 3. Kill human thinking's last remains tying it to art.
- 4. Down with guarding the traditions of art.
Long live the Constructivist technician.
- 5. Down with art, which only camouflages humanity's impotence.
- 6. The collective art of the present is constructive life.

From Art in Production (1921)

The notion of productivism, or "art in production," which is equated with constructivism in the preceding manifesto, can be traced convincingly before 1920 to the Russian futurist movement of the previous decade. The idea that the artist should control the forms of everyday life was, after all, a logical derivative of the futurist concern with removing the barriers between life and art. As early as December 1918, the literary critic Osip Brik had written in the futurist magazine Iskustvo kommuni, of which he was editor: "Go to the factories, this is the only task for artists."

The two articles that follow reflect the convergence between futurist theory and the new constructivist ideology, later to be reaffirmed by the founding of Mayakovsky's magazine Lef. Both were included in a small collection entitled Iskustvo v proizvodstve (Art in Production), which was published by the Art-Productional Council of the Visual Arts Department of Narkompros in 1921. There is a dearth of biographical information on the two authors. But it is known that the first article was the work of the artist and critic Alexei Vasilevich Filippov (1882–1956). The author of the second article, A. Toporkov, reappears subsequently as a contributor to SA (Sovremennaya Arkhitektura [Contemporary Architecture]) in 1928.

sion, fanaticism, and freedom. For the real creators of our technological culture, the material things of this culture are not only objects of utility, but also immediate experiences, events in their spiritual life. Such an attitude toward the machine leads to its aestheticization: there are not only expedient machines, but also beautiful machines. At many exhibitions prizes are awarded for beautiful motorcars, and anyone who likes cars is well aware that a car really can be beautiful.

Of course, nowadays there are already many machines aesthetically designed and beautiful in the full sense of the word. This nonhuman beauty, this new form, is curious, differing as it does profoundly and essentially from the forms established in contemporary art.

It is interesting to note who first implemented these forms. Not being artists by profession, they prejudiced acceptance of these forms through their own influence; but it was these people—engineers, designers, professional workers—who were the first, perhaps unconsciously, to divine a new beauty, a new life, where they had previously been inclined to see only the art of necessity, utility, and constraint. Love of the machine gave birth to the machine's beauty; without this love its finish, its color, its polish, and even its form would have remained a void aesthetically. The artistic implementation of its motive is manifest in the inexorable details. This has been an unconscious impulse, the germination of a new life on the ruins of the old.

By now, it seems to me, the new creative will has sufficiently defined itself, but consciousness of it and understanding of it have still not been clarified by any means. It is essential to work along these lines. The word of liberation must be pronounced.

ALEXEI GAN: From *Constructivism* (1922)

Alexei Gan's Konstruktivizm (Constructivism) was published in the small town of Tver in 1922, though two of its short statements bear

These excerpts from Konstruktivizm [Constructivism] (Tver, 1922) have been translated by John Bowl.

the dates 1920 and 1921. Arising from the foregoing program of the Productivist Group, it is the first attempt to present constructivism as a novel and coherent artistic ideology. And it is worth emphasizing that the typographical design is integral to this aim. Lissitzky was later to single out Gan in this connection, as a producer of books who worked "in the printing-works itself, along with the compositor and the machine." Obviously this close relationship between the typographer and the worker on the shop floor directly exemplified Gan's view of constructivism.

In addition to his graphic and typographic work, Gan was to be associated with the OSA, or Union of Contemporary Architects, founded by M. Ginsburg and the Vesnin brothers in 1925. He designed the title page of their magazine, SA (standing for Sovremennaya Arkhitektura [Contemporary Architecture]), which began publication in 1926, and contributed critical articles on such topics as "Constructivism in the Cinema" (see p. 127).

CONSTRUCTIVISM IS A PHENOMENON OF OUR AGE. IT AROSE IN 1920 AMID THE "MASS ACTION" LEFTIST PAINTERS AND IDEOLOGISTS.

THE PRESENT PUBLICATION IS AN AGITATIONAL BOOK WITH WHICH THE CONSTRUCTIVISTS BEGIN THE STRUGGLE WITH THE SUPPORTERS OF TRADITIONAL ART.

Moscow, 1922

WE DECLARE UNCOMPROMISING

WAR ON ART!

The 1st Working Group of Constructivists
1920,
Moscow

АЛЕКСЕЙ
ГАН

КОНСТРУКТИВИЗМ

Cover of Alexei Gan's *Constructivism*, 1922. The ground is white, with Gan's name in red and the word "Constructivism" in white on a black block.

LONG LIVE

THE COMMUNIST EXPRESSION

OF MATERIAL

CONSTRUCTIONS!

The 1st Working Group of Constructivists
1921,
Moscow

From: Revolutionary-Marxist Thought in Words and Podagrism
in Practice

... But the victory of materialism in the field of artistic labor is also on the eve of its triumph.

The proletarian revolution is not a word of flagellation but a real whip, which expels parasitism from man's practical reality in whatever guise it hides its repulsive being.

The present moment within the framework of objective conditions obliges us to declare that the current position of social development is advancing with the omen that artistic culture of the past is unacceptable.

The fact that all so-called art is permeated with the most reactionary idealism is the product of extreme individualism; this individualism shoves it in the direction of new, unnecessary amusements with experiments in refining subjective beauty.

ART

IS INDISSOLUBLY LINKED:

WITH THEOLOGY,

METAPHYSICS,

AND MYSTICISM.

OUR AGE IS THE AGE OF INDUSTRY.
 AND SCULPTURE MUST GIVE WAY TO
 A SPATIAL SOLUTION OF THE OBJECT.
 PAINTING CANNOT COMPETE WITH PHOTOGRAPHY.
 THE THEATER BECOMES LUDICROUS WHEN
 THE OUTBURSTS OF "MASS ACTION" ARE
 PRESENTED AS THE PRODUCT OF OUR TIMES.
 ARCHITECTURE IS POWERLESS TO HALT
 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTRUCTIVISM.
 CONSTRUCTIVISM AND MASS ACTION ARE
 INDISSOLUBLY LINKED TO THE LABOR SYSTEM
 OF OUR REVOLUTIONARY WAY OF LIFE.

TECTONICS TEXTURE CONSTRUCTION

Having preserved the firm material and formal bases of art—i.e., color, line, plane, volume, and action—artistic work, materialistically intelligible, will rise to the conditions of purposeful activity, and intellectual-material production will open up new means of artistic expression.

We should not reflect, depict, and interpret reality but should build practically and express the planned objectives of the new actively working class, the proletariat, which "is building the foundation of future society and is building it in the capacity of a class subject, an organized force having a plan and the supreme will power to carry out this plan despite all obstacles"!

And it is now, when the proletarian revolution has conquered, and its destructive-creative course is blazing further and further the iron paths to a culture organized on the great plan of social production, that the master of color and line, the combiner of spatiovolumetrical solids, and the organizer of mass action—all must become construc-

tivists in the general business of construction and movement of the human millions.

In order to approach this new work, which has never been met with in the whole of human history, it is necessary first of all to embark on fresh paths of practical searches.

To find the Communist expression of material constructions, i.e., to establish a scientific base for the approach to constructing buildings and services that would fulfill the demands of Communist culture in its transient state, in its fluidity, in a word, in all the formations of its historical movement beginning with the period of destruction—this is the primary objective of intellectual-material production in the field of building, i.e., constructivism.

Its second objective consists in establishing scientific bases for approaches to the organization and consolidation of mass labor processes, mass movements in all of society's production, i.e., to inaugurate the first planned scheme of living human "mass action."

These are the basic and primary objectives of intellectual-material production in the field of artistic labor.

If we study the disturbed concrete reality in which we have been living since the first hour of the days of October 1917, if we analyze step by step the stages of these revolutionary transformations, and if we learn the complicated maneuvers of proletarian strategy, we will be convinced that we have endured and are enduring so many calamities simply because not everywhere and not always have there been and are there any comrades prepared and able consciously to master the functions arising spontaneously during revolutionary development.

This phenomenon affected all fronts of the Revolution.

We do not mean this or that profession, this or that trade. That's not the point.

Revolution is the highest form of social transformation, it requires specific *knowledge* and *initiative* that only it possesses.

It was possible to comprehend this practical truth fully in the Revolution itself after the many victories and intense efforts to consolidate its achievements.

Similarly, in art profound and significant changes occurred.

Proletarian October gave black earth to the seeds of leftist art. Its best and most talented creators came to power. For four years groups of specialists small in quantity but important in quality supervised art

throughout the country, rebuilding schools and mobilizing forces. But even this fortunate atmosphere did not succeed in firmly establishing new forms of artistic expression since the leftist groups did not find in their midst socially conscious revolutionaries. They placed individual and professional achievements in their craft above the tasks of the proletarian revolution. This was the main reason for their downfall.

But the Revolution develops and intensifies, and along with it the innovators of leftist art develop and grow intellectually.

Intellectual-material production is confronted with this problem: by what means, *how* to create and educate a group of workers in the sphere of artistic labor in order really to cope with and come to grips with the everyday problems that rise before us as if out of the ground at every turning in the race of evolution.

From a formal point of view some of the masters of leftist art possess exceptional gifts and sufficient wherewithal to set to work. They lack the principle of organization.

Constructivism is attempting to formulate this.

It indissolubly unites the ideological with the formal.

The masters of intellectual-material production in the field of artistic labor are collectively embarking on the road of Communist enlightenment.

Scientific Communism is the main subject of their studies.

The Soviet system and its practice is the only school of constructivism.

The theory of historical materialism through which the constructivists are assimilating history as a whole and the basic laws and course of the development of capitalist society serve them equally as a method of studying the history of art. The latter, like all social phenomena, is for the constructivists the product of human activity conditioned by the technological and economic conditions in which it arose and developed. While not having an immediate and direct relation to it, they, as production workers, are creating in the process of their general study a science of the history of its formal development.

We must bear in mind that our present society is one of transition from capitalism to Communism and that constructivism cannot divorce itself from the basis, i.e., the economic life, of our present society; the constructivists consider the practical reality of the Soviet system their only school, in which they carry out endless experiments tirelessly and unflinchingly.

Dialectical materialism is for constructivism a compass that indicates the paths and distant objectives of the future. The method of dialectical materialism opens up an unexplored field in the planning and discovery of new forms of material constructions. This abstraction does not divorce it from empirical activity. Constructivism strides confidently over the earth while all its essential ideas are to be found in Communism.

In order to single out qualified (in a Marxist sense) practitioners and theoreticians of constructivism, it is essential to channel work into a definite system, to create disciplines through which all the experimental labor processes of the constructivists would be directed.

Behind the leftist artists lies a productive path of successful and unsuccessful experiments, discoveries, and defeats. By the second decade of the twentieth century their innovative efforts were already known. Among these precise analysis can establish vague but nevertheless persistent tendencies toward the principles of industrial production: texture as a form of supply, as a form of pictorial display for visual perception and the search for constructional laws as a form of surface resolution. Leftist painting revolved around these two principles of industrial production persistently repulsing the old traditions of art. The suprematists, abstractionists, and "nonideaists" came nearer and nearer to the pure mastery of the artistic labor of intellectual-material production, but they did not manage to sever the umbilical cord that still held and joined them to the traditional art of the Old Believers.

Constructivism has played the role of midwife.

Apart from the material-formal principles of industrial production, i.e., of texture and of constructional laws, constructivism has given us a third principle and the first discipline, namely, tectonics.

We have already mentioned that the leftist artists, developing within the conditions of bourgeois culture, refused to serve the tastes and needs of the bourgeoisie. In this respect they were the first revolutionary nucleus in the sphere of cultural establishments and canons and violated its sluggish well-being. Even then they had begun to approach the problems of production in the field of artistic labor. But those new social conditions had not yet arisen within which they would have been able to interpret socially and to express themselves thematically in the products of their craft.

The proletarian revolution did this.

Over the four years of its triumphant advance the ideological and

intellectual representatives of leftist art have been assimilating the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat. Their formal achievements have been joined by a new ally—the materialism of the working class. Laboratory work on texture and constructions within the narrow framework of painting, sculpture, and senseless architecture unconnected with the reconstruction of the whole of the social organism has, for them, the true specialists in artistic production, become insignificant and absurd.

AND WHILE THE PHILISTINES AND AESTHETES TOGETHER WITH A CHOIR OF LIKE-MINDED INTELLECTUALS DREAMED THAT THEY WOULD “HARMONICALLY DEAFEN” THE WHOLE WORLD WITH THEIR MUSICAL ART AND TUNE ITS MERCANTILE SOUL TO THE SOVIET PITCH;

WOULD REVEAL WITH THEIR SYMBOLIC-REALISTIC PICTURES OF IL-LITERATE AND IGNORANT RUSSIA THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION, AND WOULD IMMEDIATELY DRAMATIZE COMMUNISM IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL THEATERS THROUGHOUT THE LAND—

The positive nucleus of the bearers of leftist art began to line up along the front of the revolution itself.

From laboratory work the constructivists have passed to practical activity.

TECTONICS

TEXTURE

AND CONSTRUCTION

—these are the disciplines through whose help we can emerge from the dead end of traditional art’s aestheticizing professionalism onto the path of purposeful realization of the new tasks of artistic activity in the field of the emergent Communist culture.

WITHOUT ART, BY MEANS OF INTELLECTUAL-MATERIAL PRODUCTION, THE CONSTRUCTIVIST JOINS THE PROLETARIAN ORDER FOR THE STRUGGLE WITH THE PAST, FOR THE CONQUEST OF THE FUTURE.

BORIS ARVATOV: From *Art and Class* (1923)

*Boris Arvatov was born in Kiev in 1896 and died in 1940. During the 1920s, he became a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Artistic Department). He also worked at Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture) both in Moscow and Petrograd. In 1923, the year *Iskusstvo i klassy* (Art and Class) was published, he took part in founding Lef and was a cosignatory of the first editorial: “Whom Is Lef Alerting?” His theoretical work represents one of the most rigorous attempts to place art upon a firm and practical basis in the new revolutionary society.*

From Easel Art

. . . modern painting has passed from the imitative to the abstract picture. This process advanced in two directions. The first of them—expressionism— . . . was the path on which forms were treated emotionally, the path of extreme idealistic individualism.

The second direction among the so-called abstract painters is quite contrary to the first. It is constructivism (Cézanne—Picasso—Tatlin).

The radical leading faction of our modern intelligentsia, i.e., the so-called technological intelligentsia, has been brought up in the industrial centers of our contemporary reality, has been permeated with the positivism of the natural sciences—has been “Americanized.” The spirit of action, work, invention, and technological achievement has become its own spirit. Whereas the former intelligentsia soared in the cloudy heights of “pure” ideology, the new, “urbanized” intelligentsia has made the world of objects, material reality, the center of its attention. These people wanted first and foremost to build and construct.

These excerpts from *Iskusstvo i klassy* [Art and Class] (Moscow/Petrograd, 1923), have been translated by John Bowlit.

VLADIMIR TATLIN, with TEVEL SHAPIRO, IOSIF MEERZON, PAVEL VINOGRADOV THE WORK AHEAD OF US

Moscow, 31 December 1920

The foundations on which fine art stood – the foundations of our craft – were all split apart, and all painting's connections with sculpture and architecture had got lost. The consequence of this was individualism, i.e. art had come to express only personal habits and tastes, and when artists addressed themselves specifically to material, they made a kind of eccentricity out of it in relation to one or other branch of fine art. Thus in the best cases artists embellished the walls of private mansions (individual family nests) and bequeathed us a series of 'Iaroslavl stations' and a diversity of now ludicrous forms.

What happened in '17 in social respects had already taken place in our art in 1914, when we adopted 'material, volume and construction (*konstruktivna*)' as the foundation of our work.

Having declared our distrust of the eye, we place the eye under the control of the tactile, of touch.

In Moscow in 1915 there was an exhibition of material laboratory examples (*materialnykh laboratornykh obraztsov*), an exhibition of reliefs and counter-reliefs.

A further exhibition in 1917 showed a series of 'selections of materials' involving more complex investigations and manifestations both of material as such, and of what follows from its use (*ego sledstviia*), that is of movement, tension, and the relationships between them.

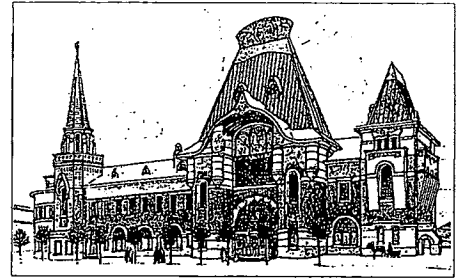
This investigation of material, volume and construction made it possible for us to move on, in 1918, to start creating selections of materials as an artistic form, using steel and glass, as the materials of a modern classicism, equal in their rigour (*strogost*) to the marble of the past.

In this way there now emerges the possibility of combining purely artistic forms with utilitarian intentions. An example of this is the project for a monument to the Third Communist International exhibited here at the Eighth Congress.

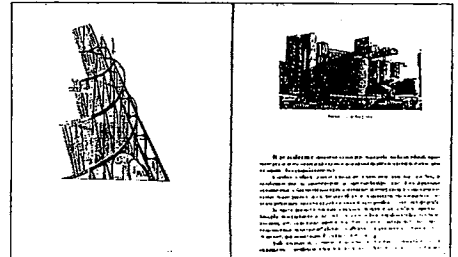
The fruits of this work are samples of something new (*obraztsy*) which stimulate us to inventions in the work of creating a new world, and which call upon us to take control of the [physical] forms of the new way of life (*formy novogo bytia*).

Moscow, 31 December 1920.

This statement was published in the 1 January 1921 issue of the daily bulletin of the Eighth Congress of Soviets where the Tower model was exhibited, see n.2 opposite. The relatively unknown Pavel Vinogradov took no part in building the model, just helped re-erect it in the House of Unions (former House of the Nobility) for the Moscow show. The artists and students of Pegoskhum (Free Studios, see chapter 9) who helped the other three authors make the model were Terletsky, Dormidontov, Stakanov, Khapaeve and two girls, Pchelnikova and Dymshits-Tolstaia.



Fedor Shekhtel, Iaroslavl Station, Moscow, 1902: the Moderne approach to creating 'asynthesis of the arts' which Tatlin and colleagues dismiss here as 'ludicrous'.



Opening spread to Chapter V 'Constructivism', in Moisei Ginzburg's *Style and Epoch*, 1924, juxtaposing Tatlin's Monument, and Buffalo grain silos derived from Corbusier's *L'Esprit Nouveau*, as sources of 'the constructive style'.

NIKOLAI LADOVSKY

ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE WORKING GROUP OF ARCHITECTS IN INKHUK

From protocols of their meetings (26/27 March 1921 et al)

The task of our Working Group is to work in the direction of elucidating the theory of architecture. Our productivity will depend on the very rapid working out of our programme, on clarification of the investigative methods to be used and identification of the materials which we have at our disposal to supplement the work. The work plan can be roughly broken down into three basic points:

1: the assembly of appropriate theoretical studies and the existing theories of architecture of all theoreticians, 2: the extraction and assembly of relevant material from these theoretical treatises and from research achieved within other branches of art, which have a bearing on architecture, and 3: the exposition of our own theoretical attitudes to architecture.

The end-product of this work must be the compiling of an illustrated dictionary that defines precisely the terminology and definitions of architecture as an art, of its individual attributes, properties etc, and the relationships between architecture and the other arts. The three elements of the work plan relate, in the first case, to the past, to 'what has been done'; in the second, to the present, and 'what we are doing', and in the third, to 'what must be done' in the future, in the field of theoretical foundations for architecture. The commission which it will be necessary to set up for working out the detailed programme must develop the foundations for the programme we have proposed. ...

The task we are facing involves the study of the elements, attributes and properties of architecture. This is where we must begin the investigative work, on the one hand, with the absolutely central properties of architecture, and on the other, we must investigate those of its properties which, because they have a general family relationship to it, have been studied already by other Groups within the Institute (i.e. within Inkhuk, CC). Top of their agendas right now is the investigation of construction and composition. For architecture, the most important elements are: space, construction, form, and its other elements follow those.

Here in condensed form is the schema for the programme. But certainly we have no need to confine ourselves dogmatically. For example, results emerging from investigations of questions that are not currently programmed might permit us to deviate from examining the questions in this order. The theory of architecture is an academic (*nauchnyi*, literally 'scientific') field. And it would seem to require first of all a literary exposition in order to establish its concepts and terminologies with the greatest possible precision. But we must not eliminate graphic representation as one of the means of demonstration and proof. ...

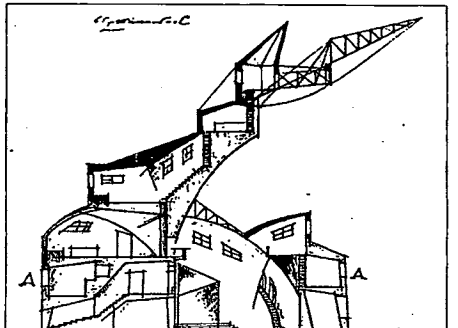
It astonishes me that there can still arise amongst Group members questions such as 'Why is space to be studied as a first priority?'. In such a case would it not be better to turn to our relatives in art, where they will maybe explain to you 'why?'. Spatiality belongs exclusively to architecture, but architecture itself does not concern itself with investigating it, and uses it very badly. The dancer or the actor also work in space. It is from the theorists of these arts that we must work on questions of space and movement ...

Our colleague Petrov has touched upon two categories of question: firstly, the question of perception (of architectural action). But this is a field of psychology and philosophy. We cannot set up a sufficiently broad investigation of the question of perception, since we are not adequately competent in the question of psychology. We shall have to limit ourselves here to axiomatic givens, posited by the specialists on these questions.

Secondly, Petrov, in essence, is carrying out himself a bald classification of the properties of architecture, not according to its real characteristics, but according to purely accidental symptomatic features such as columns, bases, entablatures etc. But what is important in Petrov's words is the aspect of perception he has yet again underlined and his reference to the University as an architectural product. Would not an examination of this from the point of view of its organic and

mechanical characteristics be an examination by analogy? But questions of analogy are questions of aesthetics. There what is being examined is a reincarnation of the individual: where for example a stone lying down calls forth, by analogy, a feeling of rest, and a standing stone, an aspiration upwards, and so on. Restlessness, peace, aspiration and so on are questions belonging to a special science, but not to architectural research. The latter already now gives, albeit temporarily, scientifically founded truths, and not analogous comparisons ...

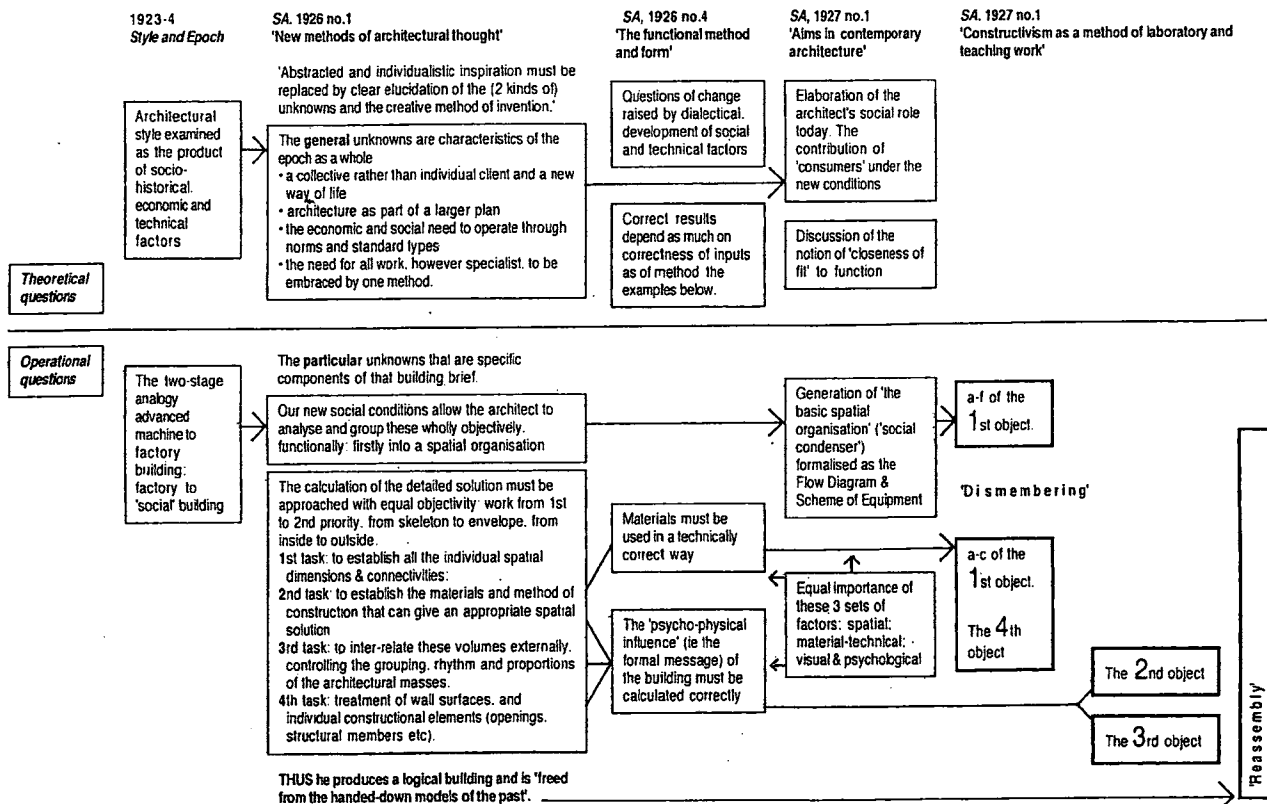
We are not rejecting psychology, but we say that we are not specialists in it. The same is true with mathematics. But there is a field where we are Pythagorases, and that is architecture. And here we need defined premises to build on. These premises, even if only for today, must be immovable, otherwise proof is doomed to rapid ruin. Such premises, and directives of a general type, are what our programme provides.



Ladovsky, project for a communal house, 1920: section

Doc.
6

MOISEI GINZBURG: Development of ideas in the 'functional method' through his writings of 1923-4 to 1927: resumé

Doc.
7

MOISEI GINZBURG HOUSING COMPLEX FOR EMPLOYEES OF NARKOMFIN, MOSCOW SA, 1929, no.5, pp.161-2

This complex is required to accommodate fifty families who would largely retain their old individual character. It is therefore of a 'transitional' rather than fully communal type.

1: The dwelling block. This mainly comprises types F and K worked out with my colleagues in StroiKom RSFSR. Access to the two floors of type F, above, is by a glazed corridor on the fourth floor. Access to type K units below is from an open balcony-corridor at first floor. These are the horizontal arteries of the building, connecting to the staircases at each end and by the first-floor bridge to the communal centre.

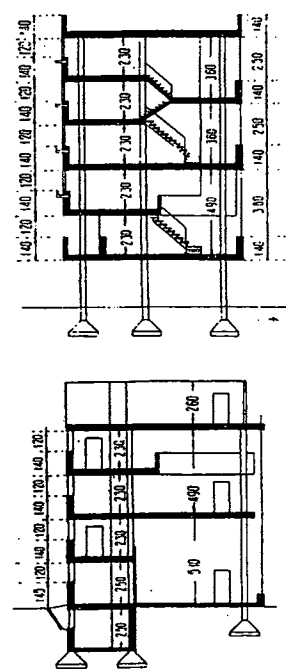
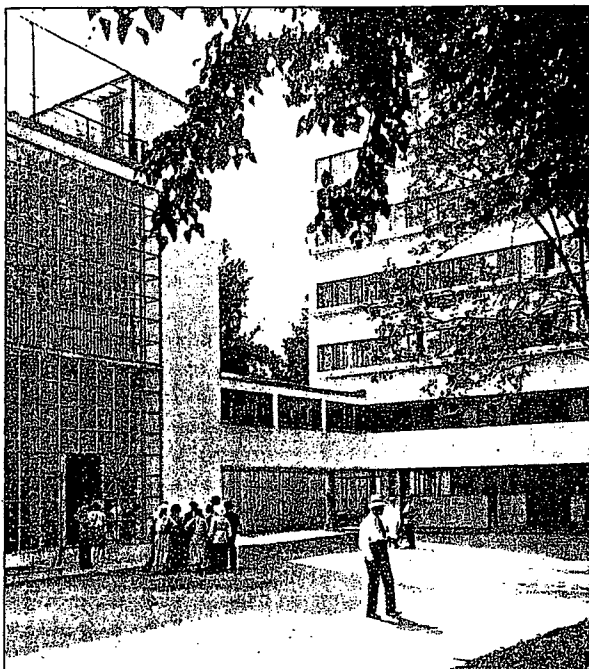
The whole living block is raised on circular columns so that no-one lives at ground level (which is always considered lower value), and the park flows underneath. There is another garden on the roof.

2: The communal centre. This comprises two double height storeys, each with mezzanine. The lower one is a sports hall. The communal dining room, reading and other recreational rooms are above, with summer dining on the roof. Two separate buildings will contain the children's centre, and laundry, garaging etc.

My colleague in design and execution is I.F. Milinis. Structural engineer is S.L. Prokhorov of Tekhbeton.

Right: Inhabitants on the terrace outside the communal centre, photographed soon after completion in 1930.

Far right: Sections: top, the dwelling block with types F above (see p.116) and K below; bottom, the communal centre with dining and recreational rooms above and sports hall below.



path by which thinking about the design process relates to other fields of intellectual endeavour.

By formulating the Modern paradigm so exhaustively the Constructivists perform a service even today. In rejecting such confident and mechanistic determinism, we then perhaps better understand the paradigm shift in the Post-Modern debate as it insists that design should draw at least equally upon the aspirations of the humanities.

1 Corbusier's '5 points of the new architecture' (raising buildings up on pilotis; using the flat roof as a roof-garden; free plan form in a framed structure; horizontal sliding continuous windows; free functionally-generated composition of elevations) were presented to Russians in SA, 1928, no.1, pp.23, 25 2 B. Korshunov, 'Urbanisme', SA, 1926, no.1, pp.37-8 3 Correspondence between Le Corbusier and Ginzburg, SA, 1930, no.1-2, p.61 In English in A. Kopp, *Town and Revolution*, London-New York, 1970, pp.252-4 4 Letter from L. Vesnin, archival material quoted in A.G. Chiniakov, *Brat'ia Vesniny* (The Vesnin Brothers), Moscow, 1970, p.99 5 M. Ginzburg, *Stil' i epokha* (Style and Epoch), Moscow, 1924, p.93 6 See the English edition of *Vers une Architecture*, which is collected articles from *L'Esprit Nouveau*, viz: Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, London, 1946, p.256 7 *Iskusstvo: zhurnal' RAKhN* (Art: the journal of Rakhn), no.1, Moscow, 1923, pp.412-3 8 Iu.P. Denike, 'Marks ob iskusstve' (Marx on art), *Iskusstvo*, no.1, pp.32-42 9 *ibid*, p.32 10 *ibid*, pp.35-6 11 M. Ginzburg, *Ritm v arkhitekture* (Rhythm in Architecture), Moscow, 1923, p.9 12 *ibid*, p.9. On the fate and influence of Nietzsche's ideas in the USSR see, B. Glatzer Rozenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*, Cambridge, 1994. In the architectural article here, M. Bliznakov, 'Nietzschean implications and superhuman aspirations in the architectural avant-garde', pp.174-210, it is erroneously stated (p.175) that 'Nietzsche is never mentioned by name' in any texts of the Russian avant-garde architects. This prominent quotation by Ginzburg seems to have been missed. For the pre-Revolutionary situation over Nietzsche see E.W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in*

Russian Literature 1890-1914, DeKalb, Ill., 1988 13 Ginzburg, *Ritm*, pp.9, 10, 116 14 A. Bogdanov, 'Put'i proletarskogo tvorchestva' (Paths of proletarian creative work), *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, no.15/16, 1920, pp.50-52, translated in J.E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, London-New York, 1976, pp.178-82 15 V. Shklovsky, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem' (Art as a device), 1917, in English translation as 'Art as technique' in L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Nebraska-London, 1965, pp.3-24 16 V.V. Mayakovsky, O. M. Brik, 'Nasha slovesnaia rabota' (Our linguistic work), *LEF*, no.1, 1923, pp.40-41. For an English translation see A. Lawton, ed., *Russian Futurism through its Manifestoes 1912-1928*, Cornell, 1988, pp.202-3 17 These theories and the diagrams appeared in his two lithographed broadsheets, *Vestnik Velimira Khlebnikova* (Velimir Khlebnikov's Herald), Moscow, 1922 & 1923 18 N. Punin, *Tatlin. Protiv Kubizma* (Tatlin. Against Cubism), Petersburg (sic), 1921, pp.17-19 19 Le Corbusier, 'The engineer's aesthetic and architecture', *Towards a New Architecture*, p.23 20 *ibid*, p.20 21 Ginzburg, *Stil' i epokha*, p.28 22 *ibid*, p.140 23 *ibid*, p.142 24 M. Ginzburg, 'Novye metody arkhitekturnogo myshleniia' (New Methods of Architectural Thinking), SA, 1926, no.1, pp.1-4 25 Engr. K. Akashev, 'Forma samoleta i metody ego proektirovaniia' (The form of the aeroplane and the methods of designing it), SA, 1926, no.3, pp.65-66 26 Le Corbusier, 'Airplanes', in *Towards a New Architecture*, p.102 27 Akashev, 'Forma samoleta', p.66 28 Ginzburg, 'Novye metody'. 29 P.K. Engelmeier, *Filosofia tekhniki* (A Philosophy of Technology), Vols.1-3, Moscow, 1912. 30 On this discussion of Engelmeier's work in the Rakhn in 1922, see: Iu.P. Volchok, 'Vliianie nauchno-tekhnicheskikh znaniy na teoreticheskie problemy vzaimosvazi konstruktssii i arkhitekturnoi formy', in Volchok et al, *Konstruktssii i forma v sovetskoi arkhitekture*, (Moscow, 1980), pp.38-39. 31 P. Engelmeier, 'Is a philosophy of technology necessary?' (presumably: 'Nuzhna li filosofia tekhniki?') *Inzhenernyi trud* (Engineering Labour), 1929, no.2, pp.36-40, quoted in K.E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin*, Princeton, 1978, pp.105-7 32 *ibid* 33 A. Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, Tver, 1922, p.55; on the difficulties of understanding, see S O Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, London, 1986, pp.92-93 34 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p.62 35 V. Mayakovsky, 'Poet-rabochii' (The Poet Worker), *Iskusstvo kommuny* (Art of the Commune), no.3 (22 Dec 1918), p.1 36 M. Ginzburg, 'Konstruktivizm v arkhitekture' (Constructivism in architecture), SA, 1928, no.5, pp.143-5 37 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, London, 1960, pp.10, 12. 38 Lionel March, 'The Aesthetic State', *Design*, Sept 1981.

Н О В Ы Е М Е Т О Д Ы АРХИТЕКТУРНОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ

MOISEI GINZBURG NEW METHODS OF ARCHITECTURAL THOUGHT SA, 1926, no.1, pp.1-4

One decade separates us from the architectural 'affluence' of the pre-Revolutionary era, when in Petersburg, Moscow and other great centres the best Russian architects lightheartedly cultivated every possible 'style'.

Is a decade so much?

It is a small fissure in time. But the Revolution, in sweeping away the stagnant prejudices and outlived canons, has turned the fissure into an abyss. On the far side of that abyss remain the last witherings of the already decrepit system of European thinking, of that unprincipled eclecticism which always has a thousand aesthetic recipes at the ready, all of them approved by our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. Such thinking was ready to ladle out truth from wherever suited – provided only it was from a source in the past.

On this side of the abyss is opening up a new path which still has to be paved, and great new expanses of space which still have to be developed and populated. The outlook and worldview of the contemporary architect is being forged in the circumstances of today and new methods of architectural thinking are being created.

Instead of the old system in architectural designing, where the plan, construction and external treatment of the building were in a state of constant antagonism,

and where the architect had to use his powers to the full as peacemaker in irreconcilable conflicts of interest, the new architectural work is characterised above all by its single indivisible aim and aspiration. It is a process in which the task is hammered out logically and which represents a consciously creative [*sozidatel'nyi*] process from beginning to end.

In place of the abstracted and extremely individualistic inspiration of the old-style architect, the contemporary architect is firmly convinced that the architectural task, like any other, can only be solved through a precise elucidation of the factors involved [literally: the unknowns] and by pursuing the correct method of solution.

The architect sees around him the fearless creativity of inventors in various fields of contemporary technology, as with gigantic steps it conquers the earth, the ocean depths and the air, winning new bridgeheads by the hour. It is not difficult to see that these astonishing successes of human genius are explained, in general, by the fact that the right method was pursued in tackling the task. The inventor knows full well that however energetic the upsurge of his creative enthusiasm may be, it will be useless without a sober consideration of all minutiae in the circumstances surrounding his activity. He is fully armed with

contemporary knowledge. He takes account of all the conditions of today. He looks forward. He conquers the future.

Certainly it would be naive to replace the complex art of architecture by an imitation of even the most sparkling forms of contemporary technology. This period of naive 'machine symbolism' is already outdated. In this field it is only the inventor's creative method that the contemporary architect must master. Any mould or model from the past must be categorically repudiated, however beautiful it may be, for the pursuits of the architect are in their essence precisely such invention, just like all other invention. His is a work of invention which has set itself the aim of organising and constructing a concrete practical task not just in response to the dictates of today but as something that will serve the needs of tomorrow.

Thus first and foremost we face the question of clearly exposing all the unknowns of the problem. First among these are the unknowns of a general character, dictated by our epoch as a whole. Here we are identifying those particular features of the problem which derive from the emergence of a new social consumer of architecture – the class of workers, who are organising not only their own contemporary way of life but also the complex forms of new economic life of the State. It is

UNOVIS GROUP, VITEBSK ALMANAC NO.2

Hand lithographed pamphlet, January 1921

'The overthrow of the old world of the arts will indeed be delineated on the palms of your own hands.'

UNOVIS

1. Partinost in art. M. Kunin.
2. Unovis in the studios. L. Khidekel.
3. Architecture faculty. I. Chashnik
4. On still life. L. Iudin.

2nd publication of the Vitebsk
Creative Committee of UNOVIS
Vitebsk, 1921, January
Bukharinskaya Street, No.10

PARTINOST [THE NATURE OF PARTY] IN ART

A party arises when there is a specific class of people following the same aim and the same set of interests. Those aims comprise the party's programme, clearly spelling out what each member must do to achieve the stated aims. All people who seek to better defend their own opinions and to see their aspirations realised must organise themselves into a party.

At present, all the young have recognised the essence of the new art, but adherents of the old art (even when they wear the dress of youth) are erecting all possible obstacles to the realisation of its aims – aims which answer the requirements of today and are necessary to everyone who has creative blood flowing in their veins.

ПАРТИЙНОСТЬ В ИСКУССТВЕ.

ПАРТИЯ ВОЗНИКАЕТ ТОГДА, КОГДА ЕСТЬ ОПРЕДЕЛЕННЫЕ КЛАССЫ ЛЮДЕЙ, ПРЕСЛЕДУЮЩИЕ ОДИН И ТЕ ЖЕ ЦЕЛИ, ОДИН И ТЕ ЖЕ ИНТЕРЕСЫ. ТЕ ЦЕЛИ К КОТОРЫМ СТРЕМЯТСЯ ПАРТИЯ СОСТАВЛЯЮТ ПРОГРАММУ ПАРТИИ, ЯВЛЯЮЩУЮСЯ НА ФАКТЕ ПУТИ ВО КОТОРЫМ ДОЛЖНЫ СЛЕДОВАТЬ ЧАДЫ. ПАРТИЯ ДАЕТ ДОСТОВЕРНЫЕ НАМЕРЕНИЯ ЦЕЛЕЙ, И ВСЕЛЮДИ РЕШАЮЩИЕ НАВЫША ИЛИ ЗАЩИТИТЬ СВОИ ВЗГЛЯДЫ И ПРОВЕСТИ ИХ В ЖИЗНЬ ДОЛЖНЫ ОРГАНИЗОВАТЬСЯ В ПАРТИЮ.

И ТЕПЕРЬ, КОГДА ВСЯ МОЛОДЕЖЬ ОСОЗНАЛА СУЩНОСТЬ НОВОГО ИСКУССТВА, ПРИВЕРЖЕНЦАМИ СТАРОГО (БУДЬ ОНИ ОБИЧНЫ В ОДЕЖДЕ ЮНОСТИ) ЧИНЯТСЯ ВСЕВОЗМОЖНЫЕ ПРЕПЯТСТВИЯ К ОСУЩЕСТВЛЕНИЮ ТЕХ ЦЕЛЕЙ, КОТОРЫЕ ОТВЕЧАЮТ ЗАПРО.

So, it is time to get organised into a party.

There are two entirely different ideas here that are in danger of getting mixed up: the idea of party, and the idea of loyalty to a particular artistic direction. So I will spell out clearly the difference between them.

The crucial difference is that all members of a party work in one direction conforming to the agreed programme, but in art there is no one single direction. The members of any artistic 'party' do not follow identical programmes, though their work produces no results if it lacks a larger system. It is in the nature of a party, by contrast, to propagate its opinions and structures COLLECTIVELY, in an organised way, to dictate its convictions and principles to everyone.

In art there are primitive parties, when small circles of artists form 'groups'. These are the best proof that it is necessary to unite to achieve one's aims, but the short-coming of these groups is their exclusiveness.

Thus knowing what factors a party pursues, I pose the question: do we need a party in art, which must be free, creative and making things? Should it be tied up by party discipline and lose its essential freedom?

Yes! In the present chaotic moment in art, they would like to permit artists only one kind of canvas, namely: monuments; there is a class of artists wanting to resurrect the rotted trash which is no use to anyone; they want to squeeze our new ideas, and our new thinking on the structures of the new world into the framework of the departed world.

In this advanced revolutionary moment, when we

are craving the real emancipation of art, the affirmation of new forms and the realisation of those forms, it is necessary to organise ourselves into a party.

How are we to deal with the individualists, if they are not to be organised into a party? Clearly each will pursue his own tasks. ... In allowing the individualist freedom of action we are announcing that there will be no place for him in the proletarian communist structure and that the future, which only the collective can construct, belongs to us.

All this can only be realised with an organised, cohesive UNOVIS party as the leader.

M. Kunin

UNOVIS IN THE STUDIOS

In their second year our studios have shown a real mastery of the practical and theoretical foundations that we have developed. Since we organised UNOVIS the foginess has gone. Each studio now has solid foundations for its investigation of a particular aspect of our work, and has set itself do-able tasks for achieving its aims.

Amidst the chaos which has continuously reigned here, we have laid down an orderly and correct path for the under-masters' work (*podmastery*: this was UNOVIS's term for students), though much depends on their own energy and attitudes.

Those that have followed the programme correctly are now fully cognisant of the line of development of painting. They pass through all the basic painting modes of the contemporary schools: Cézannism, Cubism, Futurism and Suprematism, and through this acquire knowledge of all types of creative composition, and of the constructing of painterly elements, which serve as the basis of our further progress from here.

More than this, the UNOVIS method leads to a purely creative path of creating new forms, affirming Suprematism as the fundamental systematising new form of the world.

In the equipping of the techno-electrical society there is no place for the artist with his aesthetic rubbish. Every kind of creator will in future be required to participate in this strong and powerful culture, which is imminently coming into being in our communist state.

In this work we must participate on an equal level with the engineer the agronomist and the workers of all specialisms.

From all this it is clear that artistic aestheticisation seems insignificant in this approaching situation. Only by pursuing a pure creative route of construction and invention shall we serve as a force for giving expression to the future of culture.

Laz. Khidekel

ARCHITECTURAL AND TECHNICAL FACULTY

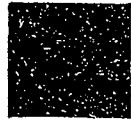
The architectural and technical studio is the culmination of all our knowledge in the painterly field to which the under-master who has passed through painting and material faculties moves on. This is the laboratory for the pure creative work of inventing new constructions, which is leading Suprematism out of its draughtsmanly plan-making to devising the organisms of utilitarian forms for new objects.

The systematic study of all the stages and principles of Suprematism, is the first starting point of the movement towards invention of new utilitarian Suprematist organisms. The processes of geometricisation in Cubism and Futurism are only the preparation for studying Suprematism's systems and principles, for elucidation of its planned movement in space.

The constructions underlying Suprematist structures are the working drawings on which to build and develop the forms of utilitarian organisms.

As the architectural and technical faculty develops it is becoming a vast studio-laboratory, equipped not with the pitiful little mechanical tools and paint-pots of the painting faculties, but with machines that are electric, with foundries and with all the means and wealth of the technology of material forces. In unison

ИСПРОБОВАНИЕ СТАРОГО МИРА ИСКУССТВА
А СЕБЕ ВЫБЕРЕМО НА ВАШИХ
ПЛАТОНАХ



УНОВИС

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with astronomers, engineers and mechanics it shares the unified aspiration of constructing organisms of Suprematism, as the new forms of economy of the utilitarian system of the present day.

The faculty has two sections, the architectural and the technical. The first involves the study of systems of drawn Suprematism and the construction of them in plans and drawings, ruling out earthly space to give each energy cell its particular place in the overall plan. It involves the constructing of all the component elements and the allocation of space on the earth's surface to each of them, delineating those places and lines from which the forms of Suprematism will rise and extend in space. All work in this section leads to drawings and plans, to a diagram of earthly energy cells, to the placing of cells of Suprematist forms of space.

The second section is constructional-technical. It involves the systematic constructing of individual energy-elements in the time of space (*vo vremeni prostranstva*), and the building up of force-forms of an organism into a Suprematist construction of a utilitarian kind (*postroika silovykh form organizma v utilitarnost' suprematisticheskoi konstruktsii*).

Here are the engineer-technologist, the astronomer, the chemist and mathematician. Here the organism's parts are assembled, cast and constructed. From here they go out to display their refinement to the world. The architectural and technical studio is crucible of all the other faculties of the UNOVIS school to which every kind of creative personality must strive in a unified collective of builders of the new forms of the world.

Long live the party of UNOVIS, which is affirming the new forms of utilitarian Suprematism.

I. Chashnik

COMRADES!

Get ready for the All-Russian Spring
Exhibition of UNOVIS in Moscow.

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ТОВАРИЩИ!

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ВЕСЕННЕЙ ВЫСТАВКЕ "УНОВИС"
В МОСКВЕ.

АНОТ. ВИТЕБСКИЕ.