The Avant-Garde
RUSSIAN ARCHITECTURE IN THE TWENTIES

GUEST-EDITED BY CATHERINE COOKE & JUSTIN AGEROS
CONSTRUCTIVISM • RATIONALISM • CLASSICISM
TATLIN • LADOVSKY • MELNIKOV • GOLOSOV • DINZBURG
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The task of our working group is to work in the direction of elucidating the theory of architecture. The productivity of this work will depend on the very rapid working out of our programme, the clarification of the investigative methods to be used, and of the materials which we have at our disposal, as supplements, in the work. The plan of work can be broken down into three basic points:
1. the assembly of theoretical studies and the existing theories of architecture of all theoreticians, 2. the extraction and assembly of relevant material from the 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 to the past, to ‘what has been done’, to the present, and to ‘what we are doing’, and then 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]. Top of their agenda right now is the investigation of construction and composition. For architecture, the most important elements are: space, construction, form, and its other elements follow after that. Here in condensed form is the schema for the programme. But certainly we have no need to confine ourselves dogmatically. For example the presence of results of investigations of questions that are not currently programmed might permit us to deviate from examination of questions in this order. The theory of architecture is a 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 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’. Spaciality belongs exclusively to architecture, but architecture itself does not concern itself with investigating it, and uses it very badly. The dancer or the actor work in space. It is from the theorists of these arts that we must work on questions of space and movement. Petrov touches 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 an adequately 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, and not according to its characteristics, but according to purely accidental symptomatic features such as columns, bases, entablatures etc. But what is important in Petrov’s words is the once again underlined side of perception 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 and aspiration are questions belonging to a special science, but not to architectural research. And the latter already 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.