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THE PROVINCE WITHIN THE METROPOLE: THE HISTORY OF SOVIET ARCHITECTURE AS SEEN FROM MID-CENTURY LENINGRAD

Аннотация. В основу статьи положены архивные материалы обсуждений рукописи «Краткого курса истории советской архитектуры» в Ленинградском филиале Академии архитектуры СССР. Этот курс представлял собой первый сводный труд по истории советской архитектуры, подготовленный на рубеже 1940–1950-х годов сотрудниками Академии и опубликованный массовым тиражом уже в постсталинскую эпоху. Материалы демонстрируют неожиданное для эпохи разнообразие мнений. Наряду с «московской», «центральной», существовали и «местные» точки зрения; в частности, можно говорить о специфической ленинградской школе архитектуры и архитектурной истории с характерными для нее ценностями, приоритетами, иерархиями. Особенности «локального взгляда» на историю архитектуры города трех советских десятилетий нашли отражение и в утверждении профессиональной преемственности ленинградцев по отношению к работам мастеров дореволюционного периода, и в неожиданно лояльной оценке ленинградской архитектуры конструктивистского периода, в постоянном подчеркивании градостроительных, ансамблевых качеств архитектуры Петербурга-Ленинграда, в отборе памятников и персоналий для «Краткого курса».

Ключевые слова: история советской архитектуры, ленинградская архитектурная школа, учебник истории архитектуры, Академия архитектуры СССР, архитектура Ленинграда, архитектура Петербурга, ленинградский конструктивизм

Примечание. Сокращенная русскоязычная версия текста была представлена в виде доклада на конференции «Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства» (Москва, 2022) и опубликована в сборнике конференции. Статья построена на материалах доклада для конференции «States in Between: Architecture and Empire in East Europe and Northeast Eurasia» (European Architectural History Network, Хельсинки, 2023).

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THE PROVINCE WITHIN THE METROPOLE: THE HISTORY OF SOVIET ARCHITECTURE AS SEEN FROM MID-CENTURY LENINGRAD

Abstract. The article is based on archival materials dealing with the discussions of the manuscript of “Concise Course of the History of Soviet Architecture” at the Leningrad branch of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR. The course was the first comprehensive work on the history of Soviet architecture prepared at the turn of the 1940s–1950s by the staff of the Academy and published in mass circulation only in the post-Stalin period. The materials demonstrate a degree of diversity of opinions unexpected in the epoch of political and ideological dictatorship. Along with the “Moscow” (or “Central”) viewpoint, there were also some “local” ones characteristic of local architectural communities, even within the Soviet metropole. In particular, there was the Leningrad school of architecture and architectural history with its characteristic values, priorities, and hierarchies (related to both historic and contemporary construction). The peculiar “local view” on the history from the city’s architecture during the three Soviet decades can be seen in architects’ attempts to establish the professional succession from the pre-Revolutionary architecture and to claim the succession of the classical tradition, in their unexpectedly loyal evaluation of Leningrad Constructivist architecture, in their constant stressing the ensemble qualities of the architecture of Saint Petersburg — Leningrad, in the choice of buildings and personalities for the “Concise Course”.

Keywords: history of Soviet architecture, Leningrad architectural school, the architectural history textbook, the Academy of Architecture of the USSR, architecture of Leningrad, architecture of St. Petersburg, Leningrad Constructivism

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Analyzing the history of Soviet architecture in Imperial/colonial perspective, historians usually focus on relations between the metropole and the province. However, the Soviet metropole was very heterogeneous in terms of architecture and culture, and this diversity was typical of both architectural style and discourse (and the architectural values they represented). The article examines this heterogeneity.

During the 2nd half of the 1930s — early 1950s the Academy of Architecture of the USSR had been developing several histories of Russian and Soviet architecture. By the turn of the 1940s–1950s some of them were finalized as manuscripts and were the subject of reviewing and professional discussion. These discussions demonstrated an impressive variety of opinions. Along with the “All-Union” (or Moscow-centric) views there were also “local” ones.

The mainstream mid-century Soviet architectural discourse had appropriated Modernist formal, spatial, and psychological concepts of the 1920s — early 1930s (see: [Bass 2016]), but was based on values and historic hierarchies established in the pre-Revolutionary period. “Imperial” aesthetic values (ranging from “classical unity” and “noble simplicity” to “classical grandeur”) articulated and popularized at the turn of the centuries and using St Petersburg as an example, turned out to be also “local” Leningrad architectural virtues after the capital had been relocated to Moscow. Despite the centralization and ideological dictate, the Leningrad architectural community possessed some autonomy in terms of both style and shared values.

The present study is based on archival documents, including the minutes of the discussions of the “Concise Course of the History of Soviet Architecture”¹ at the Leningrad Branch of the Academy. The documents (from the Central State Archive of Literature and Art of Saint Petersburg²) reflect the specificity of Moscow and Leningrad schools of architectural history, the historians’ rivalry, etc. For instance, local architects were involved in the writing of the course after they had condemned the “Leningrad” chapters written by Moscow colleagues.

The article offers a sort of microhistorical approach to the history of Soviet architecture: close examination of one local case contributes to a more profound understanding of general processes and trends, complex and heterogeneous phenomena. The text is both traditionalist and “revisionist” in a way: traditionalist since it belongs to the conventional field of architectural historiography and employs conventional sources such as archival documents, and “revisionist” — because it challenges the conventional narrative of mid-20th century Soviet history.

The archival materials make it possible to reconstruct the peculiar “Leningrad view” of the Soviet architectural history. The documents illustrate the changing attitudes towards, for example, interwar Soviet architecture — from the timid attempts to rehabilitate Constructivism in the period of wartime and early postwar

¹ One should mention that “Concise Course” was the conventional form of the authoritative and canonical historic narratives in various fields approved by the state — starting with *History of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (1938).

² Hereafter TsGALI SPb.

mitigation of political control, to the shaping of the official historic canon during “the campaign against Cosmopolitanism”.

Some measure of the autonomy may be seen in architects’ claims that Leningrad hadn’t been affected by Modernist movements, in their establishing the professional succession from pre-Revolutionary architecture, in common discourse stressing the ensemble qualities of new Leningrad buildings, in the choice of edifices to be mentioned as well as personalities to be subjects of particular essays within the “Concise Course”³.

Leningrad had its peculiar history of professional institutions, a specific generational structure of the architectural community, a unique history of the architectural turn of the early 1930s. There were also some “authoritative” historic narratives written by Leningrad architects, such as “A review of the architectural and planning development of Leningrad” [Baranov et al. 1943] published in the besieged city in 1943, or “Architecture and construction of Leningrad” [Baranov 1948]. The Leningrad Branch of the Academy had been working on extensive research, summing up the experience of Leningrad town planning for three decades; the monograph being prepared was to be as large as 400 pages with 500 figures⁴.

“Why did they write the history of Leningrad architecture without involving Leningraders?”

That is why the outrage of Leningrad architects is not surprising. Originally, the local architects were not involved in writing the “Concise Course”, and it caused their predictable resentment. They pointed out that the Leningrad chapters of the manuscript were full of factual errors.

Why should they write the history of Leningrad architecture without involving Leningraders?⁵ (Ia. Glikin, discussion of the “Concise Course” manuscript, May, 1951).

That’s why [the book is] in some places “a tall tale” <...>. There is the Leningrad Branch of Academy, and if it had been consulted a large number of errors could have been avoided⁶ (Ia. Glikin, *Ibid.*).

³ Obviously, the issue of the professional autonomy of the Leningrad architectural community is much broader and cannot be reduced to the case in question. This issue can be explored both at the institutional and personal levels, as well as in regard to the issue of style. One can mention the participation of Leningrad architects in Moscow and All-Union competitions – for example, that for the design of the Eternal Glory Pantheon of Great People of the Soviet Union (1954, see the correspondence: TsGALI SPb. *Fond 341. Opis’ 1. Delo 373*). Another subject is the part the representatives of the Leningrad professional community played in the architectural governing bodies at the USSR and the RSFSR levels (see e. g. G. Simonov, N. Baranov, etc.). The “Creative meeting of architects of Moscow and Leningrad” in April 1940 could be also mentioned (see: [Tvorcheskie voprosy 1940]).

⁴ See: TsGALI SPb. *F. 347. Op. 1. D. 61*. The supervisor N. Baranov, researchers S. Brovtsev and T. Rimskaia-Korsakova.

⁵ TsGALI SPb. *F. 347. Op. 1. D. 147. List 42*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

A lot of things have been muddled, a lot was left out, and non-existent things were added ⁷ (A. Dmitriev, *Ibid.*).

Let us give the historical background of the episode the article focuses on. The story begins in 1949, when the Academy of Architecture of the USSR was tasked with the writing of the “Concise Course of the History of Soviet Architecture” as a university textbook; it was to be up to 40 printer’s sheets (one printer’s sheet corresponds to 20 pages). The first version of the manuscript was finalized by the authors (N. Bylinkin, Ia. Kornfel’d, Iu. Savitskii, N. Stoianov and A. Mikhailov) the same year. “This version of the textbook was widely reviewed and then discussed by a committee led by B. Iofan. The most prominent experts in the history of Soviet architecture along with important creative professionals took part in reviewing” [Mikhailov 1950: 79]. The revised (second) version was prepared by May 1, 1950, and then “they started editing it collectively” [*Ibid.*]. The editorial board of the textbook included A. Mikhailov (chief editor), A. Vlasov, A. Gegello, B. Iofan, V. Dzhakhangirov, V. Zabolotnyi, A. Kurdiani, S. Safarian, M. Useinov.

As Iu. Savitskii noted, “The work started in late 1948 even before the issuance of the governmental decree. It was clear even then that a course like that had to be written”.⁸

It should be mentioned that the work on extensive narratives in the field of architectural history started as early as the 1930s, when the Academy of Architecture was established. For instance, the gargantuan project of a textbook on the history of world architecture (120 “author’s sheets” — about 4800 thousand characters — with 1000 figures), which was being prepared in the Academy under Moisei Ginzburg’s supervision since the 1930s, covered Soviet architecture until 1939 [Ginzburg 1940].

Both the “capital work” on the history of Soviet architecture and the “concise history” were included in research plans of the Academy for 1946–1950 alongside similarly “rolling” research works on architectural theory and on the history of Russian and world architecture and “architecture of the peoples of the USSR” (see: [Chernov 1950; Osnovnye arkhitekturnye problemy 1947; Akademiia arkhitektury 1950]); the “History of Russian architecture. Concise Course” textbook, published in 1951, turned out to be the only finalized work of this kind.

One can consider the studies of the history of Soviet architecture in the first post-war years as a sort of jubilee “summing up” for the 30th anniversary of the Revolution and, at the same time, an element of a broad “Zhdanovite” national-patriotic ideological campaign. Let us provide one example. On November 29, 1946, V. Golovnia, Head of the institutions of artistic education department of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education, sent a letter to the heads of departments of art educational institutions (including that of the Committee for Architectural Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers) and the directors of such establishments. The author states that in those institutions “there are manifesta-

⁷ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 147. L. 59.

⁸ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 148. L. 4.

tions of apoliticality, lack of ideology, escapism from Soviet reality, non-critical acceptance of Western art, veneration of it, formalism.” The Moscow architectural institute (MARKHI), for instance, is accused of “academicism” in diploma works, of a passion for graphic art, of detachment from the real needs of Soviet construction, of obsession with architecture of the past. “In fact, they did not deliver the course of the history of Soviet architecture.” The research topics were also far from Soviet art. The respective bodies were obliged to revise all the academic plans and programs “in the light of the last Central Committee’s decisions on ideological work” and, for example, develop a program on the history of Soviet architecture by January 1, 1947. They had also to “review plans of issuing the textbooks and teaching aids for higher educational institutions by December 15, 1946, and to ensure, first of all, the publication of textbooks and teaching aids on the history of art of the Soviet period.”⁹

History and teleology

The architects of Leningrad discussed the manuscript of the “Concise Course” in May, 1951. Members of the Leningrad branches of the Academy and the Union of the Architects took part in the meetings along with the representatives of the educational institutions and the Moscow co-authors of the “Course”. The leaders of the local professional community joined the discussion, including those belonging to the older generation, such as A. Dmitriev and A. Ol’. N. Baranov, E. Levinson, V. Vitman, N. Baklanov, V. Piliavskii, N. Khomutetskii, I. Bartenev, V. Tvel’kmeier et al. were among the speakers.

The manuscript received a cold response and was considered inappropriate as a textbook. N. Baranov: “The text looks like an array of newspaper clippings collected very quickly.”¹⁰ Both the size and content of the book were the subjects of criticism. The discussants recommended cutting the text by 40–50%.

The issue the majority of reviewers touched upon was as follows: whether the historic textbook should provide only the positive examples, whether the authors should mention the “negative” trends, whether the narrative should represent only the history of the establishment of “Socialist Realism”. The research programs of the branches of the Academy in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev of the period included such topics as “critique of formalism” (as an example of such research one could mention Mikhail Tsapenko’s Cand. Sci. (Art Studies) thesis of 1949 [Tsapenko 1949] and his infamous monograph “On the Realist Foundations of Soviet architecture”, published in 1952 [Tsapenko 1952]). The Academic council of the Leningrad Branch discussed such an “anti-formalist” research program (based on local Leningrad architectural practice) in December, 1949¹¹. This research was being done at the department of architectural theory and history of the Leningrad branch; the research team, led by A. Gegello, included Ia. Glikin and O. Grintsevich. The program comprised two parts,

⁹ TsGALI SPb. F. 266. Op. 1. D. 50. L. 1–6.

¹⁰ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 147. L. 13.

¹¹ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 49.

a theoretical and a historical one, and the latter was “a brief overview of the main stages of the development of Leningrad architecture for 30 years,” mentioning the outstanding structures of the period. Thus, the “critical” research, carried out by local experts, could serve as a history of Leningrad architecture even better than the “Leningrad” chapters of the “concise history” written by Muscovites.

The history of Soviet architecture was written from the perspective of triumphant Socialist Realism. There were, however, two contradictory positions reflected in the texts and the discussions, the “historicist” and the “teleological”. The majority of Soviet historical narratives (including architectural ones) were written from a “teleological” perspective, “from the point of view of the winners”. But in architecture such a perspective was problematic, even if not dangerous, for the authors and discussants: they themselves or their teachers and colleagues who worked during the “wrong”, Constructivist time.

N. Baranov:

[The history] has been presented by the authors from today’s viewpoint. <...> This is methodologically incorrect, since one shouldn’t put in our mouths (as we were 20 years ago) our present ideas — for if it had been thus we would not have made the mistakes we made then, being convinced that we had to work the way we did and not in another way.¹²

V. Shilkov:

The authors who took on this task [the “Concise Course”] are genuine heroes. The Constructivist period is the most problematic, and the authors try to bypass it by confining themselves to a critique of Ginzburg alone (who, by the way, has already died¹³). The narrative turned out to be non-historical. To make their work historical the authors should have shown all the stages, show how Soviet architecture developed. Conversations with the Moscow authors made clear their orientation: not to write the history of Soviet architecture, but to demonstrate through examples the development of Socialist Realism in Soviet architecture. In my opinion, for a historic textbook this highly tendentious attitude is improper.¹⁴

The problematic Socialist Realism and the history of Soviet architecture as that of the struggle against a “superior enemy force”

The architects admitted the lack of clear vision of what Socialist Realism in architecture was (or should be). Socialist Realism was usually defined based on vague and general indications of the political leadership and also in an “apophatic” way — thorough the opposition to Constructivism, eclecticism, etc. N. Bak-

¹² TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 147. L. 13.

¹³ In the meeting’s draft minutes: “and therefore one can blame him with impunity.”

¹⁴ Ibid. L. 47–48.

lanov: “First of all, one should demonstrate what is Socialist Realism. We talk extensively about it, but we have no clear and distinct notion of what is Socialist Realism in architecture.”¹⁵ N. Khomutetskii on the manuscript: “I’ve finished reading having an impression that you hadn’t revealed the method of Socialist Realism.”¹⁶ V. Piliavskii: “I am of the same opinion.”¹⁷

It should be noted that the architects’ repeated attempts to define Socialist Realism theoretically, to endow this concept with some kind of practical, verifiable and intelligible content, to make this “method” instrumental remained unsuccessful [Bass 2016]. Among the works of this kind one can mention the research programs at the Leningrad branch of the Academy carried out under the supervision of A. Gegello¹⁸.

In the discussions, the history of Soviet architecture was represented as the history of a struggle, and Constructivism was claimed to be the stronger side of this confrontation rather than a victim. N. Khomutetskii: the authors

...were too shy, they demonstrated well the importance of leading architects such as Fomin, Rudnev, Shchuko, Shchusev, Gel’freikh, <...> but nowhere is it said that these leading architects, under the influence, the pressure of Constructivism, paid a certain tribute to it. Are we afraid this would diminish their role? One should explain the power and the importance of that pressure <...>. One should demonstrate why it was so strong, why it impacted Rudnev, Shchuko. One should have revealed the roots of Constructivism.¹⁹

Khomutetskii claims that the reasons for the establishment of Constructivism were economic in nature and says that because of a lack of economic knowledge Soviet architects borrowed Western European examples: “Corbusier, Ginzburg [sic!], Mendelsohn etc.”²⁰

Blood, soil, and style

Mentioning Ginzburg among Western European architects is a telling slip of the tongue. The anti-modernist and anti-Constructivist rhetoric of the post-war period was distinctly nationalist. One can find lots of examples of this kind in discussions of the 1940s–1950s. For instance, at a meeting of the Leningrad branch of the Union of Architects in 1948 the architect Lapirov unexpectedly praised Minsk works by I. Langbard and spoke out in defense of the “Russian Soviet Constructivism:”

[Even if the latter] was a mistake, but perhaps this Russian Soviet Constructivism had let slip with its most beautiful mistake here. <...> Not only Langbard, but also a number of other Soviet architects made a

¹⁵ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 49. L. 32.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 148. L. 84.

¹⁸ See e. g.: TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 85.

¹⁹ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 148. L. 90–92.

²⁰ Ibid. L. 92.

breakthrough somewhere, towards some new architectural horizon, to some new architectural shores. This breakthrough was very significant. It was embodied quite decently here and there in the USSR.²¹

This attempted rehabilitation was sharply rebuffed by F. Oleinik:

Comrade Lapirova said that, allegedly, there had been a time when we had Russian Constructivism <...>. There was no Russian Constructivism — it was a Western phenomenon. There was the Russian Empire style, Russian classicism, but there was no Russian Constructivism. It was an architectural movement that had come to us by chance, we have buried it, and we will never not return to it.²²

However, despite all the heated national-patriotic rhetoric, the real processes in Soviet architecture were much more complex. Let us provide one example. In November 1949, the academic council of the Leningrad branch of the Academy discussed A. Udalenkov's work "On the ways of independent development of Russian architecture and on the reasons for the delay in the creation of Soviet architecture." The same F. Oleinik says:

Every day new discoveries are made in the traditions of Russian architecture, and we, Soviet architects, and Leningraders in particular, draw inspiration exclusively from the sources which are in our Russian architecture. All our Soviet architecture is based exclusively on the Russian tradition.²³

However, in the practice of Leningrad construction of the period, at the turn of the 1940s–1950s, the generic neoclassical style (based on references to the Russian imperial Palladianism of the second half of the 18th — early 19th century), is ingeniously combined with numerous quotations, carefully selected and apparent to fellow architects, for example, from Italian architecture of the 16th century, from works by Michelangelo, A. Palladio, A. da Sangallo Jr., B. Peruzzi, etc. Many examples of this kind can be found, for example, on Petrogradskaya Side. Nationalist arguments were also widely employed in Leningrad architectural discussions of the following, post-Stalin period. When criticizing modernist projects one often mentioned their non-national nature, alien to the Russian and Saint Petersburg tradition, their cosmopolitan, Western, and (which was a rhetorical claim, particularly strong in a political sense), American character. See, e. g., the discussion of the competition designs for a Memorial to the defenders of Leningrad (1964, 1966–1967), of the projects for the development of Vasilyevsky Island (1960s)²⁴, or the letter of the head of the USSR Union of Artists E. Belashova to G. Voronov (chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers) proposing to proclaim Leningrad a protected city (1970)²⁵.

²¹ TsGALI SPb. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 188. L. 35–35ob..

²² Ibid. L. 42–42^r.

²³ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 45. L. 8.

²⁴ TsGALI SPb. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 681.

²⁵ Central State Archive of Saint Petersburg. F. 7384. Op. 43. D. 940. L. 52–57.

Leningrad architecture as seen from Leningrad: the continuity of tradition

Reading the minutes of the architects' discussions, one finds a persistent set of features, principles, peculiarities typical, according to the speakers, of Leningrad architecture. The authors of historic narratives should demonstrate this specificity, avoiding at the same time "isolationism".

As an example, discussing the program of "anti-formalist" research in December, 1949, N. Baklanov lamented:

I felt bad for Leningrad since in Moscow there had been many more formalist phenomena, and I was always proud that our traditionalism saved us from formalist infatuations. One can find some in the details, but in general we stood very firm. And it seems to me that Moscow palmed off this topic intentionally on us. We were not mired in Formalism all that much! Perhaps Tatlin? But he is more a Muscovite than a Leningrader.²⁶

On the other hand, the review of the program says:

The architecture of Leningrad <...> is considered entirely separately from the whole of the Soviet Union, as if Leningrad were an insulated island living its own life. <...> The processes in Leningrad architecture are just a particular manifestation of the entire struggle for Socialist Realism in architecture in the land of the Soviets. Such an 'isolationism' is unscientific and harmful.²⁷

In June 1951, after the first review and discussions, a meeting of the members of the Academy took place in Moscow [Obsuzhdenie 1951]. They decided to send the textbook for revision, and the Presidium of the Academy entrusted the Leningrad Branch to take part in working on the Leningrad chapter. As one can see, the discontent of Leningrad architects had not been ignored. Moreover, they turned from authors of auxiliary materials for the Moscow writers into full-fledged co-authors of the course:

Leningrad <...> has overfulfilled the assignment it was given by the Presidium on the Academy: instead of technical clarifications, the group has developed a coherent text on the history of development of Soviet architecture in Leningrad²⁸ (Iu. Savitskii).

In September 1951, the Department of theory and history of Soviet architecture of the Leningrad Branch met to discuss the list of structures to be included in the textbook, as well as architects to be the subjects of monographic essays. The list of the "leaders of Leningrad architecture" includes Gegello, Nikol'skii, Trotskii, Il'in, Ig. Fomin, Levinson (they also mentioned Ol', Vitman, Buryshkin, Katonin, Barutchev, Gintsberg, Asse during the discussion). At the same

²⁶ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 49. L. 31.

²⁷ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 72. L. 28.

²⁸ Ibid. L. 57.

time, Ivan Fomin, Gel'freikh, Rudnev, Shchuko "belonged" to the Moscow chapters of the textbook.

V. Shilkov:

Monographic essays are to be devoted to those architects who have created certain schools. In this regard we can state that there has been the school of Nikol'skii. <...> A kind of school also was established by Levinson and Fomin, since it greatly influenced the development of a number of Leningrad architects. The town-planning school of Il'in [should also be mentioned].²⁹

It is ensemble, town-planning qualities that are considered as a characteristic feature of Leningrad architecture, its main strength.

Our residential areas — Shchemilovka, Moscow Highway, Malaya Okhta and Avtovo — were the first examples in the USSR of the erection of new socialist urban blocks at new sites where before there been nothing but grass . <...> Bateninskii zhilmassiv could be shown as an example of a residential complex. <...> I would demonstrate the Kirovskii District Council building, since it really is very handsome and very characteristic, very well-composed, interestingly and well placed on the square³⁰ (A. Ol').

They included in the list Traktornaia street; the Palevskii residential area was discussed along with Ivan Fomin's design for the Crematorium, which, according to Levinson, "had enormous potential significance for the subsequent development of Soviet architecture."³¹

The list was approved on September 24, and afterwards they started writing the Leningrad chapters of the "Concise Course". On October 26, those chapters were presented to the Academic council of the Leningrad Branch. As V. Shilkov mentioned,

...we managed to carry out this task in such a short time only because we could utilize our previous writings — a study analyzing and synthesizing the experience of housing construction³² and a study on town planning in Leningrad. <...> We don't pretend to be impeccable. Maybe we should or maybe shouldn't have demonstrated what was always a particular Leningrad slant — a kind of specific Leningrad patriotism.³³

With regard to such an ambivalent mention of "Leningrad patriotism" one could recall the "Leningrad Affair", the political purges, aimed at the local leadership, which had been unfolding for more than two years by the time in ques-

²⁹ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 152. L. 32ob.

³⁰ Ibid. L. 21–21ob.

³¹ Ibid. L. 27ob.

³² The research work "The summation of Leningrad housing construction experience over 30 years" (the program see. e. g. in: TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 62). The research covered 628 residential structures built in Leningrad after the Revolution.

³³ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 156. L. 74, 79.

tion, and had, for example, tragic consequences for Nikolai Baranov, former architect-in-chief of the city who was dismissed in 1949³⁴ and later expelled from the party and the Union of Architects, etc.

During that meeting, they also underlined the succession, the continuity of the classical tradition. V. Tvel'kmeier claimed that Ivan Fomin's designs for Leningrad were more classical than the architect's works for the Moscow Metro where he "worked while surrounded by Moscow formalists like Ladovskii, Mel'nikov et al."³⁵

Even the Constructivist era unfolded in Leningrad in a different way than in Moscow, since in Leningrad there were such phenomena as works by Belograd and others. Here, the Constructivist era was not as turbulent as in Moscow because it proceeded while keeping a careful eye on the Classical period.³⁶

According to A. Naumov, Leningrad architects "paid great attention to issues of ensemble."³⁷

The traditionality of Modernism

The authors of the research work carried out at the Leningrad Branch were V. Shil'kov, Ia. Glikin³⁸, O. Grintsevich, V. Ruzhzhhe and the postgraduate student L. Zel'ten. The second version of the manuscript was prepared in 1951³⁹. The text was divided into chapters chronologically — from the first post-Revolutionary years (1917–1921) through "the period of the reconstruction" (1921–1925), "the period of the Socialist industrialization and the first Stalin five-year plan" (1926–1933, 2nd and 3rd Five-Year Plans (1934–1941) and the wartime period to the postwar period (1945–1950). The chapter entitled "Leading architects of

³⁴ The archival documents were electronically published in 2023 by the authors of the project "Leningrad as it might have been" (<https://nleningrad.ru/project/gorod/baranov1949/>).

³⁵ TsGALI SPb. *F. 347. Op. 1. D. 156. L. 41*. Tvel'kmeier also mentions "the harmful cosmopolitan concept of Constructivism," which "had been born in Gipromet [the State Institute for Metallurgical Plants Design] and then spread throughout the Soviet Union" (*L. 45*). He also claims that the authors of the course mentioned the visible Constructivist features in M. Gorkii House of Culture building but ignored in this regard the Lensovet house on Karpovka river (*L. 46*).

³⁶ *Ibid. L. 45, 68*.

³⁷ *Ibid. L. 13*.

³⁸ Glikin's personal collection at TsGALI SPb includes a number of documents related to his research work at the Leningrad Branch of the Academy. See, e. g., "The list of designs and buildings according to the stages of the development of Soviet architecture" (TsGALI SPb. *F. 564. Op. 1. D. 247. L. 1–20*). This list is very illustrative, it covers all the important works by Leningrad architects for both this city and other Soviet places and presents a coherent, complete and detailed picture with full consideration of various periods, including the Constructivist one. The same file includes "The list of research works carried out by the group for research in the theory and history of architecture of the Leningrad Branch of the Academy..." in 1948–1951. The "Concise Course of the history of the Soviet architecture of Leningrad" is mentioned as unplanned research done in 1951.

³⁹ For the manuscript see: TsGALI SPb. *F. 347. Op. 2. D. 255*. The list of illustrations includes 48 items.

Leningrad” included monographic essays on A. Gegello, L. Il’in, E. Levinson and Igor Fomin, A. Nikol’skii, N. Trotskii, V. Vitman, A. Ol’ and L. Tverskoi. As V. Shilkov said,

...we sent the [architects’] profiles from the 1st version of the course to the architects mentioned and asked them to inform us in case they disagreed with something. We also visited these comrades in person and interviewed them.⁴⁰

The authors of the manuscript underlined in the preface the collective and “consensual” nature of the work: they “relied to a great extent on the assistance of the whole Leningrad architectural community taking part in the discussions and critique⁴¹” of the course. The illustrations⁴² were allocated, covering all the periods of Leningrad architectural history (including the Constructivist one) almost equally.

The authors’ focus on the tradition, the continuity, is visible, for example, in the parts of the text discussing architectural education. The “high authority of the old [pre-Revolutionary] school”⁴³ is mentioned.

In Leningrad the Free Studios were organized in the Academy of Fine Arts. <...> The formalist trend that arose in Leningrad painting in 1919 was later transferred into architecture by such ideologists as Tatlin and Malevich; it played a significant part in shaping and ideologically equipping formalist movements in architecture — the future ASNOVA and OSA, — but hadn’t impacted architects’ training in Leningrad.

In the 1921–1922 academic year the Free Studios were reorganized into a normal advanced art school.

They took as a basis the curriculum of the Architectural department of the pre-Revolutionary Academy of Fine Arts and transformed it according to current political and technical requirements.

The conclusion of the first chapter says:

The unsurpassed ensembles of the city, the presence of a high-profile architectural community, the established classical traditions conditioned the search for new ideological and artistic content in architecture, based on ensemble principles and classical heritage.⁴⁴

The succession within the professional community determines the unexpectedly calm and sympathetic tone of the writing on the Constructivist buildings (despite the fact that the previous version of the whole course discussed in Mos-

⁴⁰ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 1. D. 156. L. 73.

⁴¹ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 2556. L. 1b.

⁴² The illustrative supplement to the manuscript see: TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 252. See also the list of the illustrations sent later to Moscow for the “Concise Course” (TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 291. L. 1), which comprises 46 photos of mostly Constructivist Leningrad buildings.

⁴³ Quotations from this point onwards see: TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 255. L. 9–10.

⁴⁴ Ibid. L. 11.

cow in June, 1951, was criticized for the authors' insufficiently critical approach to the evaluation of particular buildings and entire phenomena in the development of Soviet architecture, for the tendency to gloss over and smooth over some shortcomings," and for "a very positive assessment given to some structures in a clearly Constructivist spirit" [Obsuzhdenie 1951]). For instance, Traktornaia street was analyzed profoundly and extensively, and it was called "one of the most interesting residential streets of Leningrad; it represents a united harmonically sounding ensemble."⁴⁵

The architecture of the houses in Traktornaia street features extreme laconicism and simplicity. It is based on happily found proportions of openings and wall surfaces, on rhythmically placed oriels and balconies, on simple and even slightly rough details. The clear, truthful, and perfectly relevant to its time character of the architecture shapes the new appearance of the workers' housing, full of light and air. The sun yellow color of the houses intensifies the cheerful impression of the ensemble. <...> When creating the composition of the street and the architectural solutions of the houses, the architects tried to find new plastic expression in dealing with old elements. The architects provided the houses and the whole ensemble with some features of dynamism and expression *sui generis*, which attaches to them a veneer of Romanticism.⁴⁶

The authors also praise the Palevskii residential complex. They claim that in architecture of the period "a house is a part of a town-planning ensemble, it became three-dimensional and was designed as an architectural volume rather than the ornamented surface of the main façade."⁴⁷

The ensemble qualities, town-planning characteristics of architecture of different periods were in the authors' focus and determined its perception and evaluation. Thus, in the mass housing of the industrialization and 1st Five-Year Plan period "the blocks were usually shaped volumetrically with no consideration of the ensemble."⁴⁸ Disregard for the architectural heritage "gives no possibilities for developing the tradition of Leningrad urban planning; as a result, slightly dissonant elements have been introduced in the uniform appearance of the city."⁴⁹

But the general tone of the text was unexpectedly sympathetic, given the backdrop of the pogrom-like criticism of Constructivism, formalism, etc., typical of architectural writings at the turn of the 1940–1950s. For instance, the first large-block houses by S. Vasil'kovskii are described in this way:

⁴⁵ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 255. L. 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid. L. 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid. L. 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid. L. 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid. L. 36.

Despite the extreme laconicism of the architectural language and the modesty of decoration, the house is perceived as a clear, accomplished and well-balanced structure.⁵⁰

The authors glorify the Leningrad House of Soviets, even though they mention “some features typical of the transition period, related to the overcoming of formalist tendencies and underestimation of the Russian classical heritage.”⁵¹ On the other hand, the “proper”, non-modernist architecture of the 1930th, representing the adoption of the Classical heritage (buildings on Moskovskii avenue, in Shchemilovka, etc.), might be criticized not only for the lack of ensemble unity but also from the point of view of “modernist” common sense: for the “false” monumentality not necessary for residential buildings, for the designers’ excessive passion for “repeating pillars and porticoes” which resulted in shading of interiors⁵².

The evaluation of the House of the Institute of Experimental Medical Science designed by N. Lanceray was more than enthusiastic — even though the tragic fate of the architect who fell a victim of political repression was no secret for his colleagues; even mentioning him in the written text, in the course book, might be dangerous:

Kirovskii avenue, built up with residential buildings designed by first-rate architects of pre-Revolutionary Petersburg (Belograd, Shchuko, Lidval’), demanded of N. Lanceray the high mastery and the ability to find architectural forms that would allow him to fit the new house into the existing ensemble and to link it with surrounding houses by academician Shchuko. Creative use of the classical heritage enabled the designer to attain a fresh and distinct interpretation of the old forms. The new house is closely aligned with the whole ensemble of Kirovskii avenue. The architect Lanceray resolved in the best possible way the task of designing a high-standard residential building, in terms of both layout and architectural form. The clarity of the composition is achieved here along with the high culture of details and quality of all construction and decorative works.⁵³

Conclusion

The revised second version of the “Concise Course” was sent to reviewers in August 1952. The materials prepared by Leningrad architects were employed by the authors of the whole course.

It remained almost as “gigantomaniac” (35 printer’s sheets) as the previous one. The copy of N. Khomutetskii’s review in my possession demonstrates the logic of revisions of the manuscript: “The authors managed to show the history of Soviet architecture more properly, as the history of the struggle of Revolutionary romanticism and Socialist Realist method against all alien ideas and move-

⁵⁰ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 255. L. 55.

⁵¹ Ibid. L. 58.

⁵² Ibid. L. 42.

⁵³ Ibid. L. 53.

ments, resulting in absolute hegemony of the former” [Khomutetskii 1952: 1]. This model — from “Revolutionary romanticism” to Socialist Realism through temporary retreat in the age of Constructivism — was typical of Leningrad texts of the period. For instance, the authors found “Revolutionary romanticism” in the Palace of Labour design by Ivan Fomin:

Classical forms, taken as a basis, were simplified demonstratively and endowed with the severity and the restrained power corresponding to the grandeur and the romanticism of the Revolutionary epoch. It is not surprising that Fomin’s motto of the period was “The Red Doric”.⁵⁴

According to the reviewer, the authors of the revised “Concise Course” still “have not revealed the reasons and prerequisites for the presence of alien and injurious movements, ideas and attitudes (Constructivism, formalism, archaism)” [Khomutetskii 1952: 2]. “There is no need to popularize Ladovskii’s name” [Ibid.: 7]. Khomutetskii suggests shortening the description of Narkomfin commune house twice or three times. “The qualities of the Palevskii housing complex are obviously overestimated, <...> the formalist nature of Lensovet house on Karpovka river should be noted” [Ibid.: 9], etc.

Preparation of the “Concise Course” was not finished in the early 1950s. For instance, in 1957 V. Shil’kov and V. Ruzhzhë still were working on the illustrations for the Leningrad chapters.⁵⁵ The textbook on the history of Soviet architecture was published as late as 1962 [Bylinkin et al. 1962], when the political climate was by far milder than in Stalin period. The majority of authors had been working on the book since the turn of the 1940–1950s.

As a postscript, here are some quotations from N. Khomutetskii’s 1952 review, characterizing the political atmosphere of the period:

I find it unacceptable to popularize N. Baranov’s name as the author of the master plan of Leningrad of 1939–40. I do recommend not mentioning Baranov anywhere within the course book. I recommend the same in regard to S. Vasil’kovskii <...>. Should we praise so much the House of the Institute of Experimental Medical Science and popularize the name of N. Lanceray who was arrested by NKVD and died in prison? I believe that the history of Soviet architecture would not lose much if one didn’t mention him, as has been done in the case of A. Iunger et al. (the architect and artist A. Iunger was arrested in Leningrad in 1942, during the siege, and died in 1948. — V. B.) [Khomutetskii 1952: 12–13].

A professional discussion had transformed into a political accusation, and today the historian of Soviet architecture has to be aware of the political climate and the circumstances of the period.

⁵⁴ TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 255. L. 7.

⁵⁵ See: TsGALI SPb. F. 347. Op. 2. D. 397.

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