through the use of the worked material.

The Material. The material as substance or matter. Its investigation and industrial application, properties and significance. Furthermore, time, space, volume, plane, colour, line and light are also material for the Constructivists, without which they cannot construct material structures.

The Immediate Tasks Of The Group

1 In the ideological sphere:
   To prove theoretically and practically the incompatibility of aesthetic activity with the functions of intellectual and material production.
   The real participation of intellectual and material production as an equal element in the creation of communist culture.

2 In the practical sphere:
   To publish a statement.
   To publish a weekly paper, VIP [Vestnik Intellektual’nogo Proizvodstva; The Herald of Intellectual Production].
   To print brochures and leaflets on questions relating to the activities of the group.
   To construct designs.
   To organize exhibitions.
   To establish links with all the Production Boards and Centres of that unified Soviet machine which in fact practically shapes and produces the emergent forms of the communist way of life.

3 In the agitational sphere:
   i The Group declares uncompromising war on art.
   ii It asserts that the artistic culture of the past is unacceptable for the communist forms of Constructivist structures.

7 Alexei Gan (1889–1942) from Constructivism

The author was a designer as well as an artist and theorist active in Inkhuk and the First Working Group of Constructivists. Gan’s book is the most extensive exposition of the principles of Constructivism, but is marked by an extremity of formulation which caused disagreement even within the group. The book itself embodied Constructivist typographical and design principles. The brief extract reproduced here discusses the key triad of Constructivist concepts: ‘tectonics’, ‘faktnaya’ and ‘construction’. ‘Faktnaya’ essentially concerns the properties of materials and the processes of their working; ‘construction’ ways of combining and reorganizing them; and ‘tectonics’ the vague, but from a constructivist perspective none the less essential, area of these principles’ relation to the theory of Communism. Originally published as Konstruktivizm, Tver, 1922. The present translation is taken from Camilla Gray, The Great Experiment, London, 1962.

Tectonic emerges and forms itself based on the one hand on the characteristics of Communism, and on the other on the expedient use of industrial materials.

The word tectonic is taken from geology where it is used to define eruption from the earth’s centre.

Tectonic is a synonym for the organic, for the explosion from an inner being.

The tectonic as a discipline should lead the Constructivist in practice to a synthesis of the new content and the new form. He must be a Marxist educated man who has once and for all outlived art and really advanced on industrial material. The tectonic is his guiding star, the brain of experimental and practical activity.

Factura is the whole process of the working of material. The working of material as a whole and not the working of one side.

Here the material is understood in its raw state. The expedient use of material means its selection and working over, but the character of this working over [of the material] in its integrity is factura: the organic condition of the worked over material or the new condition of its organism.

The material is the body, the matter. The transformation of this raw material into one form or another continues to remind us of its primary form and conveys to us the next possibility in its transformation.

In so far as we transform and work over [materials], we are engaged in factura. Proceeding from this, the second discipline one can formulate thus: Factura is to consciously select material and use it expeditiously without halting the movement of the construction or limiting its tectonic.

Construction. Construction must be understood as the co-ordinating function of Constructivism.

If the tectonic unites the ideological and formal, and as a result gives a unity of conception, and the factura is the condition of the material, then the construction discovers the actual process of putting together.

Thus we have the third discipline, the discipline of the formation of conception through the use of worked material.

All hail to the Communist expression of material building! [. . .]

The end has come to pure and applied [art]. A time of social expediency has begun. An object of only utilitarian significance will be introduced in a form acceptable to all.

Nothing by chance, uncalculated, nothing from blind taste and aesthetic arbitrariness. Everything must be technically and functionally directed.

Once and for all the idea of a final solution and eternal truths must be invalidated.

The roots of art were always in material-formal substances, in production . . .

From the speculative activity of art to socially directed artistic work . . .

The technical system of society, the ordering of its wealth, creates the ordering of human relationships . . .

In the field of cultural organization, the only valid criterion is that which is indissolubly connected with the general tasks of the revolution . . . Art is dead! There is no room for it in the human work apparatus. Work, technique and organization!

Let us tear ourselves away from our speculative activity [art] and find the way to real work, applying our knowledge and skills to real, live and expedient
work. Intellectual-material production sets up working mutual relations and a
production basis with science and technique, replacing art which by its very
nature cannot be disentangled from religion and philosophy and is not capable
of pulling itself out of the closed circle of abstract, speculative activity . . .

Tectonic, factura, construction. Retaining the lasting material and formal basis
of art such as colour, line, surface, volume and movement, artistic work
materialistically directed will become, in conditions of expedient activity and
intellectual-material production, capable of opening new means of artistic ex-
pression.

Not to reflect, not to represent and not to interpret reality, but to really build
and express the systematic tasks of the new class, the proletariat. The master
of colour and line, the builder of space-volume forms and the organizer of mass
productions must all become constructors in the general work of the arming
and moving of the many-millioned human masses. . . .

Our Constructivism has declared unconditional war on art, for the means and
qualities of art are not able to systematize the feelings of a revolutionary
environment. [. . .]

8 El Lissitsky (1890–1947) and Ilya Ehrenberg
(1891–1967) Statement by the Editors of Veshch

Lissitzky and the writer Ehrenberg collaborated in 1922 to produce a short-lived trilin-
gual journal under the name Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet, intended to relate developments
in post-revolutionary Soviet art and design to similar movements in the West. Typically
the cover of the third issue drew together Malevich’s Black Square and a locomotive
in a dramatic montage. The journal occupied a mid-point between Suprematism and utilita-
rian Constructivism. The statement reproduced here was delivered by Lissitzky to a con-
gress of ‘progressive artists’ in Dusseldorf in 1929 and was instrumental in the organisa-
tion of an ‘International Fraction of Constructivists’ at that Congress. The Veshch state-
ment was published in De Stijl, V, no. 4, Amsterdam, 1929. The present translation, by
Nicholas Bullock, is taken from Bann, op. cit.

1 I come here as representative of the magazine Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet,
which stands for a new way of thinking and unites the leaders of the new
art in nearly all countries.

2 Our thinking is characterized by the attempt to turn away from the old
subjective, mystical conception of the world and to create an attitude of
universality – clarity – reality.

3 That this way of thinking is truly international may be seen from the fact
that during a seven-year-period of complete isolation from the outside world,
we were attacking the same problems in Russia as our friends here in the
West, but without any knowledge of the others. In Russia we have fought
a hard but fruitful struggle to realize the new art on a broad social and
political front.

4 In doing so we have learned that progress in art is possible only in a society
that has already completely changed its social structure.

5 By progress we mean here the freeing of art from its role as ornament and
decoration, from the need to satisfy the emotions of the few. Progress means
proving and explaining that everybody has the right to create. We have
nothing to do with those who minister to art like priests in a cloister.

6 The new art is founded not on a subjective, but on an objective basis. This,
like science, can be described with precision and is by nature constructive.
It unites not only pure art, but all those who stand at the frontier of the
new culture. The artist is companion to the scholar, the engineer, and the
worker.

7 As yet the new art is not always understood; it is not only society that
misunderstands it, but more dangerously, it is misunderstood by those who
call themselves progressive artists.

8 To combat this situation we must join ranks so that we really can fight back.
It is essentially this fight that unites us. If our aim were only to defend the
material interests of a group of people called artists, we would not need
another union, because there are already international unions for painters,
decorators, and varnishers, and professionally we belong to these.

9 We regard the founding of an International of Progressive Artists as the banding together of fighters for the new culture.
Once again art will return to its former role. Once again we shall find a
collective way of relating the work of the artist to the universal.

9 LEF: ‘Whom is LEF Alerting?’

Vladimir Mayakovsky, the leading revolutionary poet, organized the group ‘Left Front of
the Arts’ around the journal LEF in 1923. During the years of the civil war, ‘leftist’ art
had been hegemonic. In the changed conditions of the New Economic Policy more
technically conservative trends in art and literature re-emerged, claiming to serve the
Revolution under the banners of ‘realism’ and ‘popularity.’ Mayakovsky’s aim was to
regroup the Left and re-establish its claims to be the true art of the Revolution. This
manifesto–editorial appeared in the first issue of LEF, pp. 10–11, Moscow, 1923. The
present translation, by Richard Sherwood, is taken from Form, no. 10, Brighton,

This is addressed to us. Comrades in LEF!

We know that we, the ‘left’ master-craftsmen, are the best workers in today’s
art. Up to the Revolution we piled up highly correct draft-plans, clever theorems
and cunning formulae, for the forms of the new art.

One thing is clear: the slippery, globular belly of the bourgeoisie was a bad
site for building.

During the Revolution we amassed a great many truths, we studied life, we
received the task of building a very real structure for the centuries ahead.
A world shaken by the booming of war and revolution is difficult soil for
grandiose constructions.

We temporarily filed away our formulae, while helping to consolidate the days of
revolution.
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