

# 1 Sources of a radical mission in the early Soviet profession

## Alexei Gan and the Moscow Anarchists

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Ten years after the 1917 revolution, there were several clearly identifiable theories of a consciously 'revolutionary' and 'socialist' architecture being practised, taught and debated in the Soviet Union. Some were purely modernist; others sought some synthesis of modernity with classicism. As soon as these various approaches start to be formulated with any rigour and launched into the public domain, we can evaluate them as more or less subtle professional responses to certain dimensions of Bolshevik ideology.<sup>1</sup> However, preceding that stage and underpinning it was a process of personal adjustment and collective refocussing whereby a relatively conservative capitalist profession faced up to a new context and started mentally defining its tasks or writing a new narrative for its practice.

This earlier part of the process, during the Civil War, is infinitely less accessible than what happened once building activity revived in 1923–4. The earliest stages of the process were also being conducted in a political environment which was very different from that of the mid-1920s, an environment that was more fluid and more plural than mainstream accounts from either East or West have suggested. In the phrase of Paul Avrich, who is one of the few (besides survivors) to insist on documenting the minority radical groups of the revolution, both Eastern and Western orthodoxies have to differing degrees been written 'from the viewpoint of the victors', that is privileging the Bolsheviks.<sup>2</sup> In reality, important voices were also coming from other directions. Such was the Bolshevik terrorisation of dissent that for decades the safety of individuals and their historical reputations demanded that these censoring filters be applied. In the new situation, however, it becomes possible to start opening up the early biographies of some key individuals to show a much richer picture.

In the context of architecture, the first person whom we find rethinking the city as an active political agent in Marxist terms is Alexei Gan in his typographically dramatic little book *Constructivism*, published in 1922.<sup>3</sup> Gan is well known for playing various roles as theorist, publicist and typographical designer at the heart of Moscow avant-garde art and architecture from 1920 onwards. His *Constructivism* opens with a lengthy quotation from the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and his reference point throughout is 'the proletariat with its sound Marxist materialism'. However, he is merciless in his critique of the Bolshevik Party's cultural leadership.



*Figure 1.1* Alexei Gan at work on a magazine cover, 1924, photographed by Alexander Rodchenko

Commentary on Gan's book has conventionally focussed on his venom against 'old art'. This is traditionally and reasonably attributed to the productivist artists' natural vehemence in 1922 in face of a revival of easel painting after the Party's economic retreat into a quasi-capitalist New Economic Policy (NEP) in the previous year. By encouraging private enterprise and free markets, this was reviving the concept that creative work in its conventional media legitimately existed to provide accoutrements or entertainments as objects of consumption. Certainly the aesthetic consequence of this economic retreat is one of Gan's most direct targets, but he extends that critique into merciless attacks on the Party's new cultural hierarchy in the Commissariat of Popular Education, Narkompros:

The Communists of Narkompros who are in charge of art affairs are hardly distinguishable from non-Communists outside Narkompros. They are as much captivated by the idea of beauty as the latter are by notions of the divine.... Their words promise the future whilst they reverently transmit and popularise the past. Whether in painting, sculpture or architecture, this is impelling them in the direction of the most reactionary *déclassé* maniacs.... As if guided by a prayer book they venerate the art of those very cultures about which they are so scathing when they discuss the theory of historical materialism.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of the voice we hear here have always been obscure. Its political explicitness, and even more its political edge, are very different in their confidence and sharpness from anything we hear in the statements of other creative people in Russia at that time. What we can now see is that this voice which mocks ‘our responsible and so very authoritative *leaders* [his emphasis]... who paint themselves up to look like Marx’,<sup>5</sup> and which challenges them to face the implications of their own ideology, has its origins not in Bolshevism but in anarchism.

In the materialist view which Gan brought to Soviet architecture, he conceptualised the built environment as one dimension of ‘the intellectual-material culture of Communism.’ He explicitly propounded this view of its socially formative role in an effort to overcome ‘the lack of even minimal Marxist understanding’ amongst all practitioners ‘whether in painting, sculpture or architecture’.<sup>6</sup> The aggressiveness of his voice, in both discussions and writing, made it effective propaganda. If his Marxism seems at times suspiciously *plus royalist que le roi*, however, this is perhaps because his own political allegiance had once been very publicly displayed as lying with a rival ideological group: a group by which the Bolsheviks had felt sufficiently threatened since the Revolution to make it an early target of their increasingly dreaded new secret police, the Cheka.

### **The vacuum of ideology in the post-revolutionary profession**

Those who emerged as leaders of the radical architectural avant-garde of the 1920s had not been conspicuous as social or aesthetic dissidents before the revolution in the way that the bohemian, iconoclastic artists had been. There was very little in Russian architecture before the war that was socially innovative by the standards that would be applied thereafter. As progressive structural and servicing technologies arrived from Europe at the turn of the century, a form of art nouveau developed that was declared by sympathetic commentators to be inherently ‘democratic’, but such a term was very relative.<sup>7</sup> A building boom among the new middle classes gave a dramatically new shape and scale to city centres, but it was the architectural expression of a reformist political option that was increasingly doomed after 1905.<sup>8</sup> It left a material matrix that can be physically and ideologically reinhabited with Russia’s return to a capitalist culture today.

But in 1917, it bequeathed the new regime a building stock whose very robustness made it ill-adapted to change.

When building ceased in 1913–14 the modernising, westernising decade of the 1900s had created a Russian architectural profession which, though relatively small, was not significantly different in its profile from those of the West. Above all, it was similar in the extent of its political engagement, which was generally minimal. Very few architects fled when their world collapsed in October 1917. One senses that they stayed with their buildings as doctors stay with their patients, more engaged by the professional act of ministrations than by high politics. Where, then, and amongst whom do we first see signs of personal engagement with the new ideology?

Conspicuously, it was not in the old capital. Between signing and ratifying a peace treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk but with German advances still underway, Lenin transferred his new government to Russia's historic centre of Moscow on 10–11 March 1918. From that date, the city resounded with political voices as the new leaders moved conspicuously around it and the new 'people's commissariats' embarked on their social and economic reorganisation of the country, mainly from requisitioned hotels. Petrograd, formerly St Petersburg, was now a relative backwater.

A conceptual context for rethinking the built environment had been created by some of the new government's earliest legislation, which nationalised all real estate and redistributed housing space.<sup>9</sup> For the middle and upper classes, the ensuing process of 'quartering, eviction and concentration' were the most exquisite torture and violation. For the former have-nots, this effected a vast improvement but also gave them shelter of a manifestly ill-adapted kind. Architects suffered with the rest, but for them the new legislation was also the first draft of a new scenario.

The first task through which professionals in both cities engaged with the new Soviet government was that of effecting emergency repairs and protection to architectural monuments damaged by fighting or vandalism. This was taken very seriously by Commissar of Popular Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, as part of his Marxist ideological obligation to preserve the cultural heritage and artefacts made by the working populace.<sup>10</sup> This obsession with preventing pillage and vandalism created caretaking jobs for a large number of young architects in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, and the new legal reality became daily more tangible as they moved freely around buildings that were hitherto 'private'. Having passed from multiple to single ownership, this space was manifestly accessible to reshaping as one whole.

Once the Bolshevik party had asserted its authority with such brutality during the Civil War, useful debate in any field had to accept the Party's values as their premise. Even interpretation of their constantly evolving policy was a complex task that imposed rapid learning curves on all concerned. In a profession such as architecture, those who led the way were inevitably those who combined a suitable predisposition with useful prior experience; the vast majority of its members were essentially ignorant of the minority ideology which now ruled them. At all

three levels of the built-environmental task, at the levels of urbanism, architecture and theory, the early work of professionals reveals a complete ideological vacuum.

An Architectural Studio for the Replanning of Moscow was set up by the city council, Mossoviet, in August 1918, just five months after the Party leaders moved into the Kremlin. The announcement in *Izvestiia* made clear that it was motivated by the historic urge of all post-revolutionary regimes to make their new citadel 'beautiful'.<sup>11</sup> As if the logic was obvious, it declared that 'the overall political perspectives of the urban economy cannot be developed without such a plan.'<sup>12</sup> The notion that the plan should depend upon the politics (not vice versa) would be precisely Gan's message in 1922.

The Studio was headed by the fifty-year old academician Ivan Zholtovsky, famed for his adulation of Palladio, who had wide pre-revolutionary experience in and around Moscow. Zholtovsky was known to the cultured Lunacharsky and made himself personable to the new government.<sup>13</sup> Zholtovsky later recalled his personal briefing meeting with Lenin. The leader was plainly still living out the parallel with the French Revolution that had sustained him, as colleagues remarked, through the first days of their own takeover. This was the element of heritage to which their own plans must refer. In Zholtovsky's words, 'Vladimir Ilich talked about how Moscow must be rebuilt in such a way that it became something with an overall aesthetic conception to it, whilst also being convenient for the individual citizen.'<sup>14</sup> Lenin stressed to him three times, 'Remember, just don't make it in bourgeois taste!', which in Russia at that time meant either the overdecorated eclecticism of late nineteenth-century commercial architecture or the art nouveau which followed it. Zholtovsky loathed them both as much as his new client did, but their shared preference for classicism derived from personal tastes rather than Marxist theory.

The plan which resulted at the end of 1918 proposed a traditionally imposing administrative centre of classical building around the Kremlin, a ring of fully-serviced suburbs of the kind obligatory in model city plans worldwide during the 1910s.<sup>15</sup> The most apposite criticism of it came from less glamorous planning people in the new economic administration, VSNKh. These men from highway engineering and the pre-war Garden Cities movement could see that this was 'an architectural plan without any basis in traffic flows *et cetera*', a failed to 'take into account the new socio-economic structure of our life'.<sup>16</sup> But Zholtovsky's office continued and was joined by another academician with strong Moscow experience, Alexei Shchusev.

Dividing the city into eleven design studies, they provided almost the only employment available for architects and allied professionals of all ages during the next three years. They surveyed, planned and designed while the city decayed around them. Its spaces were gaily decorated for every revolutionary festival, but building interiors were systematically stripped by the freezing and starving population. As Berthold Lubetkin described it: 'Since the floorboards had been used for firewood we slept, wrapped in old newspapers, across the bare joists.'<sup>17</sup>

Shchusev took Zholtovsky's strategy into greater detail as a Plan for the New Moscow, which was presented on 2 January 1923 and 'approved' by Mossoviet.

A mass of documentation and project work remains, and what is evident today became increasingly clear to those who could muster another perspective on the task at the time: namely, that all this was meaningless.<sup>18</sup>

At the scale of architecture, the context of the revival after the end of the Civil War in 1921 was defined by the nature of the New Economic Policy as the chosen engine of the recovery. When it was launched in March 1921, the NEP completely reversed the approach hitherto applied under the name of War Communism. Instead of attempting to eliminate private ownership, wage differentials and even money itself, these now became the officially approved motors of economic revival. Lenin himself admitted that it was 'a retreat'.<sup>19</sup> The extent of private enrichment by the devious and energetic 'NEP-men' was equivalent to that of the 'New Russians' under Yeltsin's regime today. In August 1922 a decree 'On the Right to Build' launched one of the government's main vehicles for absorbing these private monies. A raft of privileges enabled individuals and cooperatives to build and operate housing which they could pass on as an inheritance.<sup>20</sup>

Hungry and unemployed architects saw in this the hope of some work. An experimental Trade Union of Architects, formed after the February revolution of 1917, had collapsed and the old established Moscow Architectural Society, MAO, had re-established itself earlier in the year and retrieved its old headquarters. In June Fedor Shekhtel, doyen of art nouveau, resigned after fifteen years as its President and was replaced by Shchusev.<sup>21</sup> In the vacuum of architectural publishing MAO achieved two issues of a new journal, *Arkhitektura* (Architecture) which give us a unique close-up on the core of the profession at this date.<sup>22</sup>

On 1 July 1917 the Society's new Board declared to its members: 'Before us stands a ruined Moscow, a new social environment and entirely new legal norms, under which the work of architects must proceed in quite new directions.' They were gratified that 'in virtually all organisational activity related to the revival of construction...the Society has links into their practical work.' On principle, however, the message they took into that work was devoid of political content. As MAO's Board proudly reported:

our representatives...are, by the very essence of it, expressing views which are free of any one-sided bias and provide the possibility for problems to be solved in the interests of the generality, which is so necessary at the present time amongst the endless arguments between different interest-groups.<sup>23</sup>

This was professionalism in its old mould, entirely benign but on principle non-partisan. It was appropriate to the humanitarian urgency of the moment, and MAO's busy lecture programmes had the same tone. But there was no attempt here to discover what Marxism said or should mean for the field.

The only attempt at such theoretical investigation was being made by their nearest equivalent in the fine arts, the new Russian Academy for Artistic Sciences, RAKhN.<sup>24</sup> RAKhN's diligent researcher in the Marx-Engels Institute did not find much, but as part of Lunacharsky's sprawling Narkompros empire, art

historians were forced to address such issues, however lamely. So too was RAKhN's rowdier subsection, the Institute of Artistic Culture (InKhuK), where small groups of young abstractionists hung out.<sup>25</sup> MAO, by contrast, was an independent professional society of the old kind. In February 1922 RAKhN had created its own research section on 'the science of architecture', but the boundaries of 'theor here were predetermined by the appointment of Zholtovsky as chairman. The researchers established a studio 'to work on the problems of current architecture', but it was 'closed for lack of resources' by the end of the year.<sup>26</sup> In this torpid environment it is no wonder that somewhere outside the old professional establishment a voice protested that the Revolution seemed to have been 'forgotten' and that 'theory' should perhaps be addressing the new ideology.

### Alexei Gan: the city as political agent

Gan's constantly repeated challenge to one creative field after another was precisely this: 'where is the new ideology?' We see him raising the question first among the painters, then the film-makers and finally the architects.

Gan was at that time a close colleague of Alexander Rodchenko, of whom the abstract, so-called 'leftist', art community were increasingly in awe, but Rodchenko's wife Varvara Stepanova noted in her diary for 7 January 1920: 'Gan says our art is not proletarian, that it carries no ideology but only develops on the level of professional achievements.'<sup>27</sup> A month later Gan made a similar critique of Narkompros's Theatre Section, TEO, who were planning the political festivals. They must, he said, stop 'borrowing every alien myth from classical Greece to the French Revolution' and 'protect the class essence of real history'. The revolutionary festival must be reconceptualised as 'a Mass Action'. It was 'not something to be borrowed, but a form to be created'. For the forthcoming May Day he proposed that 'entire proletarian masses of Moscow' should enact their own vision of 'the Communist city of the future' in real space, filling 'not only the entire city of Moscow but even its outskirts'.<sup>28</sup>

A year later, in the spring of 1921 when Rodchenko, Stepanova and the other InKhuK artists with whom Gan was forming the First Working Group of Constructivists had moved on from painting to making three-dimensional assemblages, Gan's message to them was unchanged: they were 'operating upon material haphazardly'. Their work was still 'conceptualised in a narrowly-professional way and artificially cut off from life'. They should be 'tackling the tasks posed by the Communist culture which is arising in front of us' and which was above all 'dynamic'.<sup>29</sup>

When he became editor of a new film journal *Kino-Fot* in summer 1922, Gan addressed his message to the film-makers. Film was one of the 'material-technical "organs" of society'.<sup>30</sup> Here too, he warned, 'unless the soldiers of the "left front" [stop their] endless series of formal experiments [and] carry it into real life, the cause will be lost.' He quoted the founding theorist of Marxist aesthetics at them:

Plekhanov wrote that 'In order to understand the way in which art reflects life one must understand the mechanism of life.' But our self-styled 'left front' has no such understanding of the mechanism of life...which is why voices of protest are so often raised against their work among Communists who are literate in Marxism.<sup>31</sup>

In his book *Constructivism*, put together that summer and published in December, he reiterated these various dimensions of his message and addressed them to architecture.

With its most aggressively political assertions highlighted by its boldest typography, the book's aim was to force people to recognise:

what Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, that 'theoreticians of the proletariat must set themselves the cognitive task of giving themselves an account of what is really going on in front of their eyes, and of becoming the interpreters and explainers of that reality.'<sup>32</sup>

The problem, he said, was 'a lack of Marxist literacy': 'The lack of even minimal numbers of Marxist-educated people has a notable effect even in the circles of politically reliable party comrades.' But the situation was worsened because:

even our supposedly qualified Communists are sometimes intellectually extremely lightweight and take a slighting attitude to subjects they know little about. All this reflects itself disastrously on our practice, on our thinking, on the approach to multi-faceted and diverse phenomena of life, on the solution of a whole series of questions that are currently arising in connection with the building of communism and its way of life.<sup>33</sup>

With construction work about to restart Gan could see that no one had begun to analyse the political significance of buildings:

As material-technical 'organs' of society, the capitalist towns that we inherited are staunch allies of counter-revolution. Soviet communism has already discovered that the capitalist town not only does not accommodate even the most timid measures of Revolutionary reorganisation, but more than that! *It stubbornly obstructs the path of that reorganisation.* Its small and awkward buildings have been totally unable to accommodate the operational requirements of the various new Soviet organisations. They are too cramped, just as the streets and squares which we inherited have not afforded the spatial conditions that we need for mass parades and vast assemblies.<sup>34</sup>

The varied heights of capitalism's buildings and 'the eclecticism of their architectural forms' were 'obscuring the logical structure bequeathed to us by this fragmentation of economic activity', which NEP was about to revive. In the spirit of Marx's injunction, therefore:



We must get human consciousness organised. We must force the revolutionary activists and the working masses to see this disformity, this misfit, to see it just as clearly as they see a misfit when some reorganisation [of their lives] brings disorder into their space at home.<sup>35</sup>

If 'misfitting' buildings could obstruct social change, then buildings that 'fitted' would clearly assist it. But the design problem this posed was not so simple, because 'Communism by its essence is dynamic.' It requires dialectically-thinking and theoretically-literate masters who can give material shape to fluidity and its specific content', but 'our actuality and reality do not contain such people.' This is not 'an aestheticising task' but a 'constructive' one, says Gan. It is not a matter 'of building something which abstractly gives a visual illusion of the dynamic.' It is a matter that:

if communism today requires a building *for today*, that building must be provided in a way which takes into account that tomorrow society will be needing forms for its next stage and that this next form must be provided in a way that does not reject yesterday's, but is supplemented and supplements it with the next successive requirement in its turn.

Thus [the architect] cannot build today if he does not know the essence of what communism is and what it may require tomorrow.

How then ought this work to be approached?...

Only through an absolute knowledge of the principles of the communist economy and mastery of the economics of the transition period from capitalism to communism, through intense attention to the political and economic strategies of revolutionary action.

In this context, 'usefulness has to be judged from the point of view of the current moment in the proletarian revolution.' Society's forms of external expression under communism will emerge, says Gan, from a synthesis of the sociopolitical and the technical, not a conflictual battle between them. Henceforth 'usefulness must be understood as achieved through the organic properties and requirements of communism on one hand and the conscious approach to industrial material on the other.'<sup>36</sup>

It sounded theoretical, but Gan was also typically practical. No amount of 'communicating one's fantasies about the communist city' would serve 'to create a clear understanding in the citizen's own mind about the meaning of public ownership' in this sphere. 'Planning activities must be brought out studio and onto the streets to attract all citizens of the proletarian republic into this great and collective work.' But:

the first stage towards solving the city as 'the communist expression of material structures' is to get orientated.

First of all we must study the experience of the last five years, in the course of which the proletarian revolution, as the first stage towards the

communist transformation, has visibly altered the bourgeois capitalist city. Then we must observe how NEP is restoring it all again.

So the first stage must be:

A plan of fact-finding: (1) what needs to be done at the present moment. (2) Who can take part in the work. (3) What professional resources and groups exist right now? (4) What has the revolution given us? (5) What attempts have been made so far? (6) Information on towns past and present. (7) Building materials, and (8) the approach to restructuring the city in a manner sympathetic to Communist ideals.<sup>37</sup>

Whatever form this urban restructuring might take, it would not involve ‘monumentality.’ “Monumentality”...cannot be the defining concept of new communist buildings’, Gan declared, because it ‘is saturated by judgements of taste and sanctified by aesthetics.’<sup>38</sup>

So much for Zholtovsky and Shchusev as architects of communism. Indeed, their planning approach was headed for sharp criticism by even the Party’s own newspaper *Izvestiia* as ‘creating a museum of a city’ and ‘representing a purely aesthetic approach to planning’;<sup>39</sup> but their careers were established. It was the much younger architects who took up Gan’s challenge, most importantly those around the three brothers Vesnin and around Moisei Ginzburg, who later formed the Constructivist architecture group with which Gan was intimately involved. Unfortunately, the informal debates through which that group coalesced and argued out its position are not documented in verbatim records like those kept by the artists around Gan in InKhuK. From 1924, it was principally Ginzburg who carried the baton of theory forward, as scribe if not the sole thinker, and the period of fuller professional documentation began.<sup>40</sup>

The political illiteracy of which Gan accused his creative colleagues was characteristic of the entire Soviet population, and the Bolshevik Party used every opportunity and medium to rectify it. On 1 November 1922, just as Gan’s book would have been coming off the presses, a government decree obliged every higher education institution to augment their professional curricula with compulsory courses in subjects such as ‘historical materialism.’<sup>41</sup> Such moves helped to spread a superficial awareness of the new catechisms, but the process by which each profession would analyse its tasks and reconceptualise its practice was infinitely slower. Even before Gan’s architect colleagues started to develop the implications of his theories (indeed, so far as we know, before he actually had any architect colleagues except perhaps Alexander Vesnin), statements from the Party leaders in 1920–1 were becoming ominously indicative that myth would be preferred to systems analysis.<sup>42</sup> However, that outcome could not be prejudged, and Gan’s theory promised potent tools.

The primary theoretical concept which he articulated was that of seeing the built form (like other ‘material-technical “organs” of society’) as an active agent influencing social change in ‘revolutionary’ or ‘counter-revolutionary’ directions

at any given moment or stage of political development, and doing this through the structure into which it organised space and material. (This concept was later developed into the Constructivist architects' notion of the building's spatio-material organisation as a 'social condenser'.)

Gan's second key contribution was his insistence that the mechanisms by which these 'material-technical "organs"' operated in any real context, and the processes by which they could be 'constructed' to have those effects, were permeated throughout by politics and required serious research. He echoes here the classic *ABC of Communism* in which the Bolsheviks gave a popular explanation of their 1919 Party Programme. 'Marx's chief instruction to all his followers', it said, 'was that they should study life as it actually is...precisely after the manner in which we might study a machine, or, let us say, a clock.'<sup>43</sup> Thus Gan's geologically inspired science of Tectonika would be the 'new discipline' which described how materials and ideology had interacted in different historical cultures. Equipped with this, designers could move on predictively, 'to create a system of forming objects...whose service to society was not just utilitarian but conformed to social aims.'<sup>44</sup> (The Constructivist architects later devised their 'functional method' to be such a system.)

The special drive of Gan's theory came from his constant insistence that the forming of these active 'material-technical "organs"' depended, in every field, upon the synthesis of profound ideological understanding with an equally profound mastery of domain-specific knowledge, what the *ABC* called knowledge 'taken from life'. Repeatedly he stressed this to his colleagues in film-making: 'You must know the mechanisms of film.' 'Revolutionary ideology' in cinematography, he said, demands a mastery of what its 'real material' is and of how this impacts on 'real, concrete, consumers', not just as 'agitation' but at the profound level of their self-understanding.<sup>45</sup> In the *ABC*'s words, they know 'how the wheels of our clock are actually fitted.' In *Constructivism*, Gan praised Rodchenko for similarly 'concrete' work on in developing 'the system which must be studied in the field of producing [three-dimensional] form.' In every field, 'creating such systems means proceeding by lengthy practical sequences of live experiments built on the foundations of social relevance.'<sup>46</sup>

### **Gan's political allegiances**

If we stand back from the specific messages about the arts and architecture in Gan's writing at this time, three general themes are conspicuous. The first is a familiarity with Marxist texts that is beyond anything we find amongst the artists around him. The second, built on that foundation, is an extraordinary boldness in his criticism of the Bolshevik Party and its cultural leaders. The third is his constant concern with the need not just to teach people ideological facts but to engage them in the subtler business of understanding what ideology means for the 'mechanisms' of their lives. With new biographical information on his activities in the years preceding *InKhuK* and the ideas of his book, we can begin to identify the origins of Gan's particular slant and concerns.

His own trade skill seems to have been typesetting, I suspect without the artistic pretensions now implied by the word ‘typographer’. Unlike Rodchenko, who came to the use of letter forms from art and is better described in today’s terms as a graphic designer, Gan’s work and his discussion of it indicate an intimate familiarity with the craft disciplines of metal type. Certainly he was not an architect, as Stites has described him,<sup>47</sup> nor is there any hint of the art school background which Lodder has rather assumed.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, in the remarkable diary which Stepanova kept from January 1919 and through the debates of 1921 in InKhuK, we see Gan constantly trying to get inside the artist’s mind to get a feel for what drives it.

There were many conversations in which Gan plainly irritated people, as a non-painter and relative outsider, by trying to label and classify their work. On 14 January 1919 Stepanova reported her husband Rodchenko declaring ‘I am sick to death of Gan. He understands nothing about art.’<sup>49</sup> A year earlier the balance had been the other way, with the artists indebted to Gan. In March 1920, Gan’s different motivations are clear. She registers the gulf between them with the disdainful remark that ‘Gan considers agitation is just as important as making works [of art].’ As a result, ‘he sees Malevich’ who was still then, with Tatlin, the towering artistic figure of avant-garde circles in Moscow, ‘as a propagandist for something new, not as an artist.’<sup>50</sup> Back in January she had been pleased to sell Gan Igor Grabar’s classic five-volume pre-Revolutionary *History of Russian Art* for five thousand rubles to teach him some art history.<sup>51</sup> In her most cutting judgment on 11 March 1920:

Certainly Gan still has a lot to learn and see, but he is impeded in this by his desire to be some kind of ‘new person’—and how! But I think there is a bit of decadence nested in there somewhere, and not enough rigorousness and seriousness in order to be a new person.<sup>52</sup>

By this time it is clear that Gan needs the artists as some kind of *raison d’être* and is becoming ever more closely integrated in their professional activity. A year earlier, the balance was still the other way. At a meeting on 14 January 1919, Gan became exasperated at their factiousness over who to include in a forthcoming exhibition:

I just don’t understand. This is your family business, but now you have got a split. Here am I, for example, working with the anarchists, the maximalists and the bolsheviks. They are all calling each other names the whole time, but they don’t tear themselves apart over it.<sup>53</sup>

At a moment when the Bolsheviks were doing their best finally to eliminate the anarchists, this remark of Gan’s is a telling indicator of his personal situation and the problem of allegiances he was later forced to navigate.

From Gan’s role in the Moscow anarchists’ newspaper a year previously and from his other activities at that time, we can now see more clearly where his

origins lay, the cause of his dilemma and the sources of these features in his polemical writing. Of the various strands of Russian anarchism which originated with Kropotkin, Bakunin and others in the late nineteenth century, the anarchosyndicalist movement which grew amongst industrial workers after 1905 was particularly strong in Moscow by the autumn of 1917. On principle, the anarcho-syndicalists were less organised than the Marxist-inspired Bolsheviks and were therefore less effective (as well as lacking membership records), but common estimates suggest they were about three times as numerous as the Bolsheviks in their own capital. Throughout Russia the two movements had made common cause in the revolutions of February and October 1917. After Kerensky's Provisional Government was driven out, however, no common hatred of the Tsarist Whites could persuade the anarchists to accept the centralising, bureaucratic policies being imposed by the Bolsheviks. Through the first shaky months after Lenin and his colleagues seized power, the balance of forces in many of Free Russia's town and city soviets and among the general population was relatively even.<sup>54</sup>

In the spring of 1917, when many vulnerable state figures fled after the February revolution and the Tsar's abdication, both anarchists and Bolsheviks expropriated their homes as headquarters, as indeed the Provisional Government expropriated several palaces of the Imperial family. With freeing of the press, a flood of new newspapers emerged from proliferating groups which combined their own views with general news. Anarchist groups in Petrograd produced several newspapers, and September 1917 saw the launch in Moscow of 'a week public-affairs and literary newspaper of the anarchist persuasion' called *Anarkhiia* (Anarchy).<sup>55</sup>

Amid the general disruption of the October takeover, *Anarkhiia* ceased publication. In early March 1918, however, it reappeared as a daily, not least as a mouthpiece for anarchists' increasing fury at the concessions with which the Bolsheviks were buying peace from a still belligerent Germany at Brest.<sup>56</sup> The second issue in March, its twelfth in total, contained its first piece signed by Alexei Gan on 'The revolution and popular theatre.'<sup>57</sup> The next, on 5 March, had one of anarchism's main ideologists Lev Chernyi, personal acquaintance of Kamenev and other leading Bolsheviks, declaring that for anarchists the socialist state was as much their enemy as its bourgeois predecessor and promising 'by all means to paralyse the governmental mechanism.' On the 7th, *Anarkhiia* greeted the signing at Brest-Litovsk with the proclamation 'Peace concluded. Long the war!' (their own war with Bolshevism).<sup>58</sup>

Amidst ever more detailed proposals from Chernyi and others for entirely decentralised production and 'complete absence of internal power structures',<sup>59</sup> the fifteenth issue launched a regular back-page section on 'Culture' (*Tvorchestvo*, literally 'creative work') covering literature, theatre and art, whose editor was Alexei Gan. With a daily print run of twenty thousand, this was a worthwhile platform to which he was soon bringing not just the usual fare of events and reviews but polemic pieces from rival groups of avant-gardist painters in Moscow

and Petrograd. These included Tatlin, Rodchenko, Altman, Punin and the regular voice of Malevich, who was always the most fluent of them in print.<sup>60</sup>

The issue of 6 April carried Malevich's article 'Architecture as a slap in the face to reinforced concrete', which is well known through its republication in December that year in Narkompros's Petrograd paper *Iskusstvo kommuny* (Art of the Commune).<sup>61</sup> Malevich's plea for a 'reincarnation' of Moscow architecture that would 'allow the young body to flex its muscles' was effectively *Anarkhiia's* architectural manifesto. In typically colourful language, it denounced current architecture as 'the only art with the warts of the past still growing endlessly on its face.' It was a brutal attack on the 'sick, naive imaginations... absolute lack of talent and poverty of creative powers' of 'Messieurs the individualist architects.' His example of how 'iron, concrete and cement are insulted' was Moscow's historicist Kazan Railway Station and its architect Shchusev (though his name is not mentioned), who won the job in 1911 and was still completing it.

By the time Lenin and his new government arrived in Moscow on the 10–11 March, the anarchists had expropriated twenty-five mansions as their local headquarters across the city.<sup>62</sup> *Anarkhiia*, ran articles describing the buildings and their contents. The central headquarters of the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups and editorial address of *Anarkhiia* was the former haunt of Moscow businessmen, the Merchants' Club, a superb piece of Jugendstil by Ivanov-Shits of 1908. With the spacious rooms of a gentlemen's club, its library and theatre, this 'House of Anarchy' ran a rich cultural programme which, as one participant recalled, included '[hobby] circles of proletarian art-printing, poetry and theatre', as well as their propaganda.<sup>63</sup> Its basement was the depot whence guns and bombs were issued to a somewhat uncontrolled range of dissidents which included (said the Bolsheviks) White Guard officers and criminal vandals as well as their own Black Guards.

Gan was superintendent of one of their grandest expropriations or 'exes'.<sup>64</sup> The former owner of the house, Alexei Vikulovich Morozov, was a member of Moscow's biggest multi-millionaire dynasty. Gothic interiors had been done by Shekhtel with vast Faustian murals commissioned from Moscow's leading symbolist painter, Vrubel. Special wings contained Morozov's nationally famed collections of Russian china, silver, icons and twelve thousand portrait engravings.<sup>65</sup> On 19 March, Gan described the collection in his *Anarkhiia* piece on 'The Morozov mansion.'<sup>66</sup> Ten days later the culture page announced plans for a museum in the house; Gan was to be its chief curator and had invited Grabar to address the project's 'initiative group'.<sup>67</sup>

To what extent it was this shared concern of Bolsheviks and anarchists for protecting the heritage that brought artists like Tatlin and Malevich into contact with anarchism and Gan, and to what extent they were already involved in the movement, is not so far clear. (Was Malevich's canonical 'Black Square' of 1915 perhaps also an anarchist black flag?<sup>68</sup>) Rodchenko's memoirs illuminate the situation at the mansion, but they do not clarify this issue. Indeed, whether through his own caution or later family editing, they are carefully silent on

Gan's central role there and suggest little engagement by Rodchenko with the anarchists' cause:

Tatlin and Morgunov, having got mandates from Mossoviet, went to Gan in order to make arrangements about protecting private mansions from plundering and to watch over them. They took me along to the meeting. There I made the acquaintance of Alexei Gan.

They assigned me to protecting the mansion of Morozov where there were engravings and china. A group of 'anarchist-communists' was lodged there. I walked over every day and my work consisted in moving everything of artistic value into one room, of which I kept the keys.

The anarchists were quite a few, of whom several were women. What they did in the evenings I never knew, as I went home at five or six. Not that they did a stroke during the day, in my opinion. They would go out somewhere, come back and sleep. I don't know where they ate. They seemed quite ordinary people if somewhat sentimental. They played the mandolin and had arguments.

Their attitude to me was rather hostile and watchful, as if I was some kind of observer from Mossoviet, from the communists.<sup>69</sup>

Much of these artists' writing in *Anarkhiia* and elsewhere at this time rings with a natural artistic anarchism that does not of itself indicate ideological conversion, though coincidences of vocabulary and common themes need analysing further. The only example that I have found so far of a direct identification between their work and anarchism is by Malevich, in one of his last *Anarkhiia* pieces published on 20 June 1918. A suprematist painting, he says, starts by establishing that 'single plane...from which each author can build entirely in his own way' which is the basis of 'true abstraction'. This, and the presence in the work of 'one inviolable axis on which everything is built...constitute the assertion "this is how I want it" from which follows the final affirmation "I am an anarchist in my very essence."<sup>70</sup> The very date of this piece is interesting in relation to the larger events..

Through March and early April 1918 the paper's political pages increasingly reflected hostility not just to the Bolsheviks' actions, but to an onslaught of propaganda which blamed anarchists for every act of vandalism or civil disorder in the city. This climaxed in Trotsky giving a week of anti-anarchist pep talks to Red Guard troops in the Kremlin to stir their fury before being dispatched by the Cheka, in the early hours of 12 April, to flush the anarchists out of their twenty-five houses. The process was confused and vicious, leaving forty dead or wounded and over five hundred people under arrest in the Kremlin. As described by an editor of the other Moscow anarchist paper, *Golos truda* (Voice of Labour), who was one of them, they were 'kept in abominable conditions and treated in the most insulting manner.'<sup>71</sup> Whether Gan also went through this experience, we do not know.

The next day's *Anarkhiia* had not yet gone to press when the raid started, and it was a fortnight before it managed to resume.<sup>72</sup> When it did, both

production and secretariat were at ‘temporary addresses’, the latter at 1 Nastasinsky Lane, just across the street from their routed headquarters in the Merchants’ Club. ‘Nastasinsky 1’ was a building the anarchists had long frequented. Since the previous November its basement had housed the famous Poets’ Café, where the futurist artists and writers who founded it, Kamensky, Mayakovsky and Burlinuk, would paint their faces and declaim outrageous poems to earn themselves a nightly crust. Moscow had a dozen such places which regularly saw full-scale battles between gangs and the militia, but as the writer Lev Nikulin recalled, ‘it is hard to say what particularly attracted the Anarchists to the Poets’ Café.’ The main attraction was probably its proximity to their base. In Nikulin’s words,

There were no alcoholic drinks here, no ladies of easy virtue, that is to say none of the ingredients which abounded in the Anarchists’ den under the black flag. But they still came to the café as if it was their home, sat comfortably on the benches and played ostentatiously with their revolvers.<sup>73</sup>

Rodchenko and other artists also came here, and indeed had helped decorate it. This café may have been one of their initial points of contact with the anarchist movement. By the time *Anarkhiia* set up its office and resumed publishing from here, the basement café had closed. According to a neutral Moscow newspaper report of 15 April, ‘the “official” reason was departure of the moguls of futurism for the provinces.’<sup>74</sup> The larger picture, however, suggests it may have been a response to the purges three nights previously. As Mayakovsky opened the ‘gala programme’ of the closing evening he spotted Lunacharsky, not for the first time, sitting at one of the tables. Challenged to speak, the Commissar ‘captivated the audience’ by talking ‘with great gusto’ but ‘by no means felt obliged to flatter his hosts and relentlessly criticised the noisy and anti-aesthetic publicity tricks of the futurists, their contempt for the classics’, and perhaps aptly identifying the source of this liaison, ‘their tendency to pretend they were Anarchists at any price.’<sup>75</sup>

The Cheka’s effectiveness in disrupting the movement’s affairs was now reflected in a daily note on *Anarkhiia*’s front page: ‘In view of the routing of the Moscow Federation and the disappearance of all materials and books from our dispatch section, the *Anarkhiia* office requests all subscribers to send us their addresses again as soon as possible.’<sup>76</sup> Similar raids on anarchists followed in Petrograd and provincial cities through the next six weeks, producing such a pressure of political news that Gan’s culture section was driven out for a week in late May.<sup>77</sup> But none of this resulted in his diminished participation; on the contrary, other front-page notices announced his very public identification with leading ideologists of the Moscow Federation. Thus we read that:

On Tuesday 14 May, at 5 pm, the initiative group in the Moscow Post Office is organising a PUBLIC MEETING in the newspaper dispatch



department of the Main Post Office on Miasnitskaia Street, which will be addressed by comrades Vl. Barmash [*Anarkhiia*'s editor], the Gordin brothers, Al. Gan, Kaz. Kovalevich, Yakovlev and others.<sup>78</sup>

Both Kovalevich and Barmash were known for terrorist activity. They had histories of imprisonment stretching back to the 1905 revolution, and records with the Tsarist Okhrana which preceded the Bolshevik Cheka.<sup>79</sup> Clearly Gan identified himself with these people on public platforms, not just in journalism.

On 30 May his culture section was back with the announcement that a volume would be published called *Anarchy: Creative Work* with articles by Gan, Malevich, Rodchenko and two regular pseudonymous authors, Sviatigor and Plamen. Its three sections would be titled 'Agitation', 'Dynamite and Form', and 'Information'. Its programme had that same anarchist ring:

We shall fly up through the heads of bosses, retailers, critics, and the vegetarian and narrowly Party organisations now dominating the cultural section of the cooperatives and the Proletkult, and drop down into the very midst of the masses with the dynamite of destruction and the forms of our creative inventiveness.<sup>80</sup>

The book was never published, and the newspaper's regular section continued till its 99th and last issue on 2 July, which had statements on artgroup politics from Tatlin and Rodchenko.<sup>81</sup> By now Bolshevik power was increasingly dominant and anarchism was in severe retreat. In December, delegates who came to Moscow for their All-Russia Conference were arrested, and by then no anarchist journals remained. Over the next two years, 1919 and 1920, the mass movement was wiped out by the Cheka, and small factions with increasingly unworldly programmes grouped and regrouped amongst intellectual membership.<sup>82</sup>

### **Cultural education for the Bolsheviks**

These episodes fully explain Gan's political awareness and his later critiques of Bolshevik cultural policy. Meanwhile, it was perhaps that 'unseriousness' which Stepanova had perceptively noted that now enabled him to work with them as well. As to what that work was, I recently discovered some indications in an unexpected source: in the *Prikazy* (Orders) of the Moscow District Commissariat for Military Affairs for the spring of 1919.<sup>83</sup>

The civil war was at its height, and these flimsy little bulletins were gazetting the movements of Red Army regiments and personnel from one activity and garrison to another on a daily basis. The whole military effort to save the new regime was threatened by the soldiers' ignorance of the Bolshevik programme and ideology for which they were fighting. In the Red Army as throughout the population, this problem began to be tackled urgently during early 1919, at three levels: directly, with political information and agitation; less directly, through 'cultural-educational' activity, and at the fundamental level, in teaching people to

read and write. At the global level of its leaders and general policies, this vast programme is extensively documented.<sup>84</sup> Through references to the Administration for Political Education in these Orders, however, we get a closeup view onto personnel and activities in the Moscow District command.

Most of the Orders from this Administration were published over the names of two people, 'Military Commissar Yaroslavsky' and 'Head of the Political Education Administration Vukolov.' An Order of 2 May 1919, however, also bears the third name of a Departmental head under the latter: 'Head of the Cultural Education Department Alexei Gan.' Significantly, he is the only signatory I have found in two years of these Orders who is given a first name, clearly identifying him as a person with some individual, non-military identity. The Order in question announces 'that all water-sport societies, that is yacht-clubs, sailing and rowing societies, are hereby taken over by the [Moscow District] Commissariat [for Military Affairs]' and whether 'requisitioned or confiscated... their property must be registered with the Administration [for Political Education] within two weeks.'<sup>85</sup> There is clearly some continuity here with Gan's earlier work on expropriated buildings. Some indication of his job's content appears a year later in Orders which now formally define the tasks of such a Cultural Education department within its Military District:

It conducts cultural education [*vospitaniye*] and all-sided enlightenment [*prosveshcheniye*] of troops in the spirit of the idea of communism. It organises and executes instruction in clubs, theatres, libraries, reading rooms, schools, lectures, excursions, orchestras, choirs and all kinds of cultural enlightenment establishments and within the military units themselves, in accordance with the programme of the Political Education Administration of the military district, helping with distribution of instructors in the area. It works in contact with the local organisations of the Russian Communist Party [RKP] and Narkompros.<sup>86</sup>

From this work we can see how Gan might have come to realise that capitalism's buildings did not fit communism's needs and so constrained them as to be themselves 'counter-revolutionary.' It is less indicative of the real depth of his Party commitment. This order states that the person at Vukolov's level will be chosen 'from amongst local members of the RKP' and must then select his own staff. Whether this means that Gan was a Party member in the spring of 1919 we do not know, but when the artists came round to his lodgings at 5 pm, as Stepanova describes,<sup>87</sup> he would be just back from a day organising 'cultural education of troops in the spirit of the idea of communism.' In this context, it is not surprising that he was impatient with their introspectiveness and indecision as well as their political naivety. From the artists' point of view, as their diaries and transcripts show, his questioning served as grit in the oyster. Their world was dramatically radical in its internal, professional aspirations and was psychologically desperate for change, but it was still, like the troops, politically illiterate.

The next two years were no time to advertise any anarchist sympathies in Moscow.<sup>88</sup> Every increased threat from the Entente powers who were blockading the country and every movement towards Moscow by White forces increased the propaganda pressure to support the government for national survival, and every sign of counter-revolution was deemed to be inspired by 'the anarchist underground.' For Kropotkin's funeral on 13 February 1921, a few leading members of the movement were let out of prison by Kamenev, Chairman of Mossoviet, in deference to the old man's special status. That was famously the last time that anarchism's black flag was paraded through Moscow's streets.<sup>89</sup> Those who had contributed to *Anarkhiia* knew that colleagues not imprisoned were in hiding, had emigrated or, like Chernyi in September 1921, simply been shot.

By December 1921, little was left beyond a brave group of AnarchoBiocosmicists who sought a social revolution in interplanetary space, but not on Soviet territory.<sup>90</sup> According to one scholarly Soviet source, they had formed a year before around a declaration made on 16 December 1920 by A.Sviatigor, whom we know as a pseudonymous colleague (or alter ego?) of Gan's in the proposed collection of *Anarkhiia* papers over two years earlier. According to this source, the Biocosmicists 'comprised two groups of anarchists: the group of poets and the group of artists.' On 17 April 1921 'twenty-six Sviatigor supporters in Moscow formed a Club of Creator-Biocosmicists' (*Kreatory-biokozmisty*).<sup>91</sup> Was Ganin this? One Western authority has said that Lunacharsky dismissed him from heading the mass festivals section of Narkompros's TEO at the end of 1920 'because of his extreme ideological position.'<sup>92</sup> During 1921–2 he seems to have been earning his living in the printing trade again, and in summer 1922 began *Kino-Fot*. With so many contacts among Moscow printers, it has always seemed curious that he produced *Constructivism* in the town of Tver a hundred miles away. However, even the NEP did not make such direct Party criticism as his acceptable. Tver had had a strong anarchist group; perhaps it also had a friendly printer.<sup>93</sup>

The potency of Gan's ideas for architecture was proven in their subsequent development by colleagues in that profession. His particular contribution lay in the tendency astutely observed in 1920 by two of Rodchenko's painting students, the Chichagova sisters. They visited Gan about a project and noted how 'in his characteristically energetic manner he started to theorise about our task.'<sup>94</sup> In as far as he was engaged with the anarchists he exemplifies Emma Goldman's observation, writing as a participant: 'The anarchists, the future unbiased historian will admit, have played a very important role in the Russian Revolution—a role far more significant and fruitful than their comparatively small number would have led one to expect.'<sup>95</sup>

## Notes

- 1 For general accounts see Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution*, London, 1970; S.O. Khan-Magomedov, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture*, London, 1987; C.Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City*, London, 1995.
- 2 P.Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Princeton, NJ, 1967, pp. 4–5.
- 3 A.Gan, *Konstruktivizm* (Constructivism), Tver, 1922.
- 4 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 14.
- 5 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 15.
- 6 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, for example pp. 11, 14, 16, 49, 57.
- 7 For example, V.Apyshkov, *Ratsional'noe v noveishchei arkhitekture* (The Rational in the Latest Architecture), St Petersburg, 1905, pp. 55, 63.
- 8 W.C.Brumfield, *The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture*, Berkeley, CA, 1991; C.Cooke, 'Fedor Shekhtel: an architect and his clients in turn-of-the-century Moscow', *AA Files* 5, January 1984, pp. 3–31.
- 9 'O zemle' (On the Land), 26 October 1917; this draft by Lenin was affirmed on 19 February 1918. For the texts of these in English, see M.McCauley, ed., *The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State 1917–1921: Documents*, London, 1975, pp. 241–7 (though first date is Western style and second misprinted). The further decree of 20 August 1918 confirming 'Abolition of private ownership of urban real estate' appears in T.Sosnovy, *The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union*, New York, 1954, Appendix I, pp. 228–9. Lenin's own draft of 8 November 1917, 'On requisitioning the houses of the rich for alleviating the needs of the poor', was finally passed on 20 February 1918 as 'Fundamentals of the law on confiscation of apartment houses'. On these, see Sosnovy, *Housing Problem*, p. 12. On the specific measures taken to redistribute housing in Moscow, see N.M. Aleshchenko, *Moskovskii soviet v 1917–1945 gg* (Moscow City Soviet during 1917–1945), Moscow, 1976, pp. 193–4.
- 10 For well documented accounts, see later sections of V.P.Lapshin, *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Moskvy i Petrograda v 1917 godu* (Artistic Life in Moscow and Petrograd in 1917), Moscow, 1983. Trotsky also describes his colleague's earnest concerns in L.Trotsky, *My Life*, London, 1930, pp. 300–1.
- 11 *Izvestia* report, 15 August 1918, reproduced as Document 18 in V.E.Khazanova, comp., *Iz istorii sovetskoi arkhitekтуры 1917–1925 gg: dokumenty i materialy* (From the History of Soviet Architecture 1917–25: Documents and Materials), Moscow, 1963, p. 32.
- 12 Programme for the organisation of Mossociety's Planning Department, 5 September 1918, Document 19, in Khazanova, *Iz istorii 1917–25*, pp. 32–3.
- 13 For Lunacharsky's high estimation of Zholtovsky, see A.V.Lunacharsky, 'Ob otdele izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv' (On the Department of Fine Arts), ms, 1920, in and A.F.Ermakova, *A.V.Lunacharsky: ob iskusstve* (A.V.Lunacharsky on Art), vol. 2, Moscow 1982, pp. 79–83.
- 14 G.D.Oshchepkova, *I.V.Zholtovsky: proekty i postroiki* (I.V.Zholtovsky: Projects and Buildings), Moscow, 1955, pp. 9–10.
- 15 The Plan is illustrated as Document 25 in Khazanova, *Iz istorii 1917–25*, p. 40, also in V.Quilici, *Città russa e città sovietica*, Milan, 1976, fig. 132, p. 142.
- 16 Account of meeting, 20 December 1918, from archives, is Document 22 in Khazanova, *Iz istorii 1917–25*, pp. 37–8.
- 17 On the festivals, see V.Tolstoy, I.Bibkova and C.Cooke, eds, *Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918–33*, London, 1990. On the condition of buildings, see H.Carter, 'Rebuilding Soviet Russia: 2–The condition of urban Russia', *The Architects' Journal*, 20 September 1922, pp. 373–7; B.Lubetkin, 'The Revolution, 1917', in M.Reading and P.Coe, *Lubetkin and Tecton*, London, 1992, pp. 128–3
- 18 *Pravda* announcement, 21 December 1922, is Document 28 in Khazanova, *Iz istorii 1917–25*, p. 42. Examples of the urban design schemes are illustrated as Documents 23, 24, 26 and 31–33 in Khazanova, *Iz istorii 1917–25*; in G.Muratore, ed., *Architettura*

- nel paese dei Soviet 1917–1933*, Milan, 1982, figs. 77–8, 84; and in Khan-Magomedov *Pioneers*, figs 712–15, 731.
- 19 For example, Lenin's speech to Moscow Party workers October 1921, in Aleshchenko, *Moskovskii sovet*, p. 225.
  - 20 Provisions of the act are discussed in: Sosnovy, *Housing Problem*, pp. 44–5.
  - 21 I.Mashkov, 'Moskovskoe Arkhitekturnoe Obshchestvo, 1867–1927 gg' (Moscow Architectural Society 1867–1927), *Ezhгодnik MAO* (MAO Annual) 5, Moscow, 1928, pp. 9–1
  - 22 *Arkhitektura* (Architecture), 1923, nos 1–2; 3–4. Though described on its cover as *Ezhemesiachnik MAO* (MAO's Monthly), these were both double issues.
  - 23 P.Antipov, 'Khronika' (Chronicle), *Arkhitektura*, 1923, 1–2, p. 47.
  - 24 I.P.Denike, 'Marks ob iskusstve' (Marx on art), *Iskusstvo: zhurnal' RAKhN* (Art: the Journal of RAKhN) 1, Moscow, 1923, pp. 32–42; for a discussion, see Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, pp. 122–3.
  - 25 For general accounts of InKhuK, see Khan-Magomedov, *Pioneers*, and S.O.KhanMagomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*, London, 1986.
  - 26 'Arkhitekturnaia sektsiia' (The Architecture Section), *Iskusstvo: zhurnal' RAKhN* 1, pp. 431–3.
  - 27 Varvara Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhет zhit 'bez chuda* (A Person Cannot Live Without a Miracle), Moscow, 1994, p. 92.
  - 28 A.Gan, 'Chto takoe konstruktivizm?' (What is constructivism?), *Sovremennaiia arkhitektura* (Contemporary Architecture) 3, 1928, pp. 79–81; Proposals for the organisation of May Day festivities, from TEO Narkompros, February 1920, published as Document 38 in Tolstoy, Bibikova and Cooke, eds, *Street Art*, pp. 124–5.
  - 29 A.Gan, 28 March 1921, paper 'O programme i plane rabot Gruppy konstruktivistov' (On the programme and work plan of the group of constructivists), in S.O. Khan-Magomedov, *InKhuK i rannyi konstruktivizm* (InKhuK and early constructivism), Moscow, 1993, pp. 98–9. Part of this is translated in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 92.
  - 30 A.Gan, 'Kinematograf i kinematografiia' (The cinematograph and cinema), *Kino-Fot* (Cinema-Photo) 1, 25–31 August 1922, p. 1, translated in R.Taylor and I.Christie, eds, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939*, 1994, pp. 67–8.
  - 31 A. Gan, '“Levyi front” i kinematografiia' (The 'Left Front' and cinema), *Kino-Fot* 5, 10 December 1922, pp. 1–3, translated in Taylor and Christie, eds, *The Film Factory* pp. 75–7.
  - 32 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 21.
  - 33 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, pp. 11–12.
  - 34 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 63.
  - 35 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 63.
  - 36 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 60.
  - 37 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, pp. 63–4.
  - 38 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 61.
  - 39 Khazanova, *iz istorii, 1917–25*, p. 9.
  - 40 On this later development of theory, see Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, ch. 5.
  - 41 C.Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, London, 1983, p. 286, n. 75.
  - 42 For example, Lenin, 'Speech to the 3rd All-Russia Congress of the Komsomol' 2 October 1920, in V.I.Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, Moscow, 1965, pp. 283–99; Lunacharsky, 'Ob otdele izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv' (On the Department of Arts), 1920, in A.V.Lunacharsky, *Ob iskusstve* (On Art), Moscow, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 79–83; and Lunacharsky, 'Iskusstva v Moskve' (Art in Moscow), speech to 3rd Congress of the Comintern, July 1921, in *ibid.*, pp. 94–100.
  - 43 N.Bukharin and E.Preobrazhensky, *Azbukha kommunizma*, Moscow, 1919, translated

- as *The ABC of Communism*, London, 1969, pp. 63–4.
- 44 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, pp. 63–4.
- 45 A.Gan, 'Kino v shestom oktiabre' (Cinema at the sixth anniversary of the Revolution), *Zrelishcha* (Spectacles) 61, 1923, pp. 20–2.
- 46 Gan, *Konstruktivizm*, p. 65.
- 47 R.Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, Oxford, 1989, p. 198, describes him as 'a major Constructivist architect'.
- 48 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 243.
- 49 Stepanova, *Chelovek*, p. 66.
- 50 Stepanova, *Chelovek*, pp. 108–9.
- 51 Stepanova, *Chelovek*, p. 93.
- 52 Stepanova, *Chelovek*, p. 109.
- 53 Stepanova, *Chelovek*, p. 66. The Maximalists were the Soiuz S-R Maksimalistov (Union of Socialist-Revolutionary Maximalists), an ultra-radical offshoot of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) lying roughly between the anarchists and the Bolsheviks. For sources on them, see Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, p. 203.
- 54 There are inevitably several historical views on the anarchist movement in Russia. For Western scholarship, see Avrigh, *The Russian Anarchists* and P.Avrigh, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, documents with introductory texts, London, 1973. For the accounts of leading members forced into emigration, see most notably G.P. Maximoff (Maksimov), *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents)*, Chicago, 1940; also A. Skirda, *Les anarchistes dans la revolution russe, Textes de: A Skirda, A.Gorélik, A.Berkman, V.Serge, E.Goldman*, Paris, 1973. For the Bolshevik account, see S.N.Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia i krakh anarkhizma; Borba partii bol'shevikov protiv anarkhizma 1917–1922 gg* (The October Revolution and the Break-up of Anarchism: The Battle of the Bolshevik Party against Anarchism, 1917–22), Moscow, 1974, and G.Kostomarov, ed., *Moskovskie bolsheviki na zashchite sovetskoi stolitsy v 1919 godu: sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow Bolsheviks Defend the Soviet Capital in 1919: Collection of Documents), Moscow, 1947.
- 55 *Anarkhiia*, was the organ of the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups, itself formed in Moscow in March 1917. The first issue appeared on 13 September 1917; the editorial office was at 12 Moronovsky Lane, and the editor was Vladimir Barmash. The main Petrograd papers were *Burevestnik* (Stormy Petrel), *Kommuna* (The Commune), *Golos truda* (Voice of Labour) and by autumn 1917 also *Svobodnaia kommuna* (The Free Commune). Anarchist papers from other towns are listed in Avrigh, *The Anarchists*, p. 68; Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp. 344–5; Gorélik in Skirda, *Les anarchists*, p. 67. Until lately these have been unavailable in Soviet libraries ('never existed') and western library searches have so far failed to locate *Anarkhiia*. The chance to open up this topic was created by first republication of all Malevich's contributions to it in: D.V.Sarab'ianov et al., eds, *Kazimir Malevich: Sbranie sochinenii v piati tomakh: tom 1* (Kazimir Malevich: Complete Collected Works in Five Volumes, vol. 1), Moscow, 1995, where footnotes on pp. 331–7 give new detail on Gan's anarchist connections.
- 56 The manifesto of the Moscow Federation published in *Anarkhiia*, 6 November 1917, i.e. four days after the end of violent fighting in which the Bolsheviks took Moscow, included a strong cry for peace to be negotiated without any accommodation to 'German imperialism'. (Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia*, pp. 122–3, 287.) By February 1918 anarchists papers were pouring 'a stream of obloquy' at the terms being negotiated (Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, pp. 182–3). Different secondary sources variously give references to the paper by date, number of issue, or both. It reappeared as a daily, but with some irregularity for correlation is often difficult. Offices were initially in their headquarters but in late March moved to 1 Nastasinsky Lane, where the famous futurist artists' haunt 'The Poets' Café' was located. Herman Askaraov was editor at one stage. When the government moved to Moscow central figures of

- Petrograd anarchism followed and brought *Golos truda* with them, among whose editors was Grigorii Maksimov, author, as Maximoff, of *Guillotine*.
- 57 A.Gan, 'Revoliutsiia i narodnyi teatr', *Anarkhiia*, no. 12 (March) 1918, cited in Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 331.
- 58 L.Chernyi, 'Gosudarstvo i anarkhizm' (The state and anarchism), *Anarkhiia*, 5 March 1918; 'Mir zakliuchen. Da zdravstvuet voinal!', headline in *Anarkhiia*, 7 March 1918. Quoted in Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia*, respectively on pp. 102, 307.
- 59 Chernyi's article in *Anarkhiia*, for 12 March 1918 outlined a proposal for a federative system of national organisation with a 'great federation' or national assembly and city federations below it, and to individual persons free to produce their own food, goods and so on or enter into exchanges with any other unit, 'without dealing through middlemen'. Article quoted but not named in Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia*, pp. 130, 262
- 60 Launching, Gan's role and general contents of the 'Tvorchestvo' section, from Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 331. Print run, from Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia*, p. 56. Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 345, indicates this is typical for such papers in Moscow and Petrograd, where *Golo struda*, and *Burevestnik* each sold about 25,000.
- 61 K.Malevich, 'Arkhitektura kak poshchechina betono-zhelezu' (Architecture as a slap in the face to reinforced concrete), *Anarkhiia*, 6 April 1918, p. 4; Russian text in Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, pp. 69–72. Later republished, with additional ending, in *Iskusstvo kommuny*, no. 1, 7 December 1918, pp. 2–3. For English translation of the latter see T.Andersen, ed., *K.S.Malevich: Essays on Art 1915–1933*, vol. 1, Copenhagen and London, 1968, pp. 60–4.
- 62 Sources vary between 25 and 26: maybe 25 plus their headquarters? Some sources describe them all as 'mansions' (*osobniaki*), others refer to 'buildings' (*doma*). Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p. 180, reports their principled preference before the Revolution for taking only private homes. After the Revolution their strength on Mossoviet enabled them to operate a 'special desk' in its requisitioning office handling their own expropriations (Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 407). Most were too large for their needs and contained ordinary residents too. Maximoff describes their management of property as exemplary and adding to their popularity among local populations.
- 63 Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp. 405–6. For plans of the building at 6 Malaia Dmitrovka (later Chekhov) Street, see T.V.Moiseeva, ed., *Pamiatniki arkhitektury Moskvy: Zemlianoi gorod* (Architectural Monuments of Moscow: Zemlianoi Gorod Area), Moscow, 1989, pp. 197–9. For period photos and drawings of the interiors, see M.Raeburn, ed., *The Twilight of the Tsars*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1991, pp. 214–7.
- 64 This is clearly stated by Sarab'ianov in his *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 337, presumably from sources in *Anarkhiia* including Gan's own piece of 19 March (see note 66 below). His role is notably not mentioned by Rodchenko, see my following text and note 69. Maximoff's statement, *Guillotine*, p. 408, that 'registration of art treasures in the Morozov house' was under supervision of Piro refers to the house and post-impressionist art collection of another Morozov, Ivan. On the anarchist takeover of this, see B.Whiney Kean, *All the Empty Palaces*, London, 1983, p. 255.
- 65 For plans of the house and associated buildings at 21 Vvedensky (later Podsosensky) Lane, see Moiseeva, ed., *Pamiatniki: Zemlianoi gorod*, pp. 288–9. For period photos of the Shekhtel/Vrubel interiors, see E.I.Kirichenko, *Fedor Shekhtel'* Moscow, 1973, pp. 34–5, and Raeburn, ed., *The Twilight*, pp. 50, 198–9. On owner, collections and their fate after 12 April 1918, see E.B.Sametskaia, 'A.V.Morozov i sozdanie gosudarstvennogo myzeia keramiki' (A.V.Morozov and the creation of the State Museum of Ceramics), *Muzei*–6, Moscow, 1986, pp. 159–64
- 66 A.Gan, 'Osobniak Morozova' (The Morozov Mansion), *Anarkhiia*, 19 March 1918, cited in Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 337, note 3.
- 67 *Anarkhiia*, 29 March 1918, cited in Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 337, note 3.
- 68 His 'blasphemous' presentation of this picture in the exhibition 0.10 (Zero-Ten) in

- Petrograd, December 1915-January 1916, high in 'the icon corner', as well as its fundamental role in suprematism, has made it much discussed. See C.Douglas, '0.10 Exhibition', in S.Barron and M.Tuchman, eds, *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930: New Perspectives*, Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA, 1980, pp. 34-40; J.A.Sharp, 'The critical reception of the 0.10 exhibition: Malevich and Benua', in A.Calnek, ed., *The Great Utopia*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1992, pp. 38-52; and L.S.Boersma, *0.10: The Last Futurist Painting Exhibition*, Rotterdam, 1993. All these and criticism at the time discuss the works in relation to each artist's personal development and the politics of the art world. Where they broach broader political implications, for example by Sharp, the assumption is that the 'left radicalism' in these works of Malevich's and Tatlin's coincides with the political aspirations of the Bolsheviks.
- 69 V.A.Rodchenko, comp., *A.M.Rodchenko: Stat'i, vospominaniia, avtobiograficheski zapiski, pis'ma*, (A.M.Rodchenko: Articles, Reminiscences, Autobiographical Notes, Letters), Moscow, 1982, pp. 86-7. These reminiscences were written during 1941-2.
- 70 K.Malevich, 'Vystavka professional'nogo soiuzu khudozhnikov-zhivopistsev. Levaia federatsiia-molodaia fractsiia' (The exhibition of the Trade Union of Artist-Painters. Left Federation-Young Fraction), *Anarkhiia*, 20 June 1918, p. 4; republished in Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, pp. 117-23, where annotations make no comment on these passages.
- 71 Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp. 355-7 gives the most authoritative account as he was arrested near his workplace at *Golos truda*. He reproduces related government and newspaper documents in *ibid.* pp. 383-9. See also Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp. 184-5. The Bolshevik side is told in Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia, revoliutsiia*, pp. 318-24. Official documents quoted in Sametskaia, 'A.V.Morozov i sozdanie', record supposed damage to contents found at the Morozov house, this being another virtuous pretext for the Cheka's purge.
- 72 Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 356. In *ibid.*, p. 410 he says *Anarkhiia* was closed for 'more than a month' but issue numbers/dates indicate it was about two weeks.
- 73 From Nikulin's unpublished reminiscences in W.Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky* London, 1972, pp. 209-11.
- 74 Report in the Moscow literary and cultural newspaper *Figaro* of 15 April 1918, quoted in Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, pp. 212-14. Woroszylski describes *Figaro* as a daily, but standard Russian press listings of that date describe it as weekly.
- 75 *Figaro*, 15 April 1918.
- 76 *Anarkhiia*, nos 56 and 57, 11 and 12 May 1918, p. 1.
- 77 Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 331. It was absent from nos. 63-69, in mid-late May.
- 78 *Anarkhiia*, nos. 56 and 57, 11 and 12 May 1918, p. 1.
- 79 Peter Goodman, 'The anarchist movement in Russia 1905-1917', Ph.D. thesis, University of Bristol, 1981, p. 230.
- 80 *Anarkhiia*, no. 72, 30 May 1918, quoted in: Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, p. 331.
- 81 Sarab'ianov, *Kazimir Malevich*, pp. 330, 347. The 'two further issues' he describes as appearing in September and October 1919 were a paper of the same name but no connection: Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p. 188.
- 82 The documents in Kostomarov, ed., *Moskovskie bolsheviki*, give a grim picture of the developing campaign in late 1919. For a general account, see Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*. On the fate of the last journals, see Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 357.
- 83 *Priказы Moskovskogo Okruzhnogo Komissariata, po voennym delam* (Orders of the Moscow District Commissariat for Military Affairs), Moscow. Issues surveyed are 2 May 1919-27 Dec 1920.
- 84 V.G.Kolychev, *Partiino-politicheskaia, rabota v krasnom armii v gody grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1920* (Party-Political Work in the Red Army During the Civil War 1918-1920), Moscow, 1979, has extensive bibliography.
- 85 *Priказы*, 2 May 1919, no. 871, pp. 6-7.



- 86 *Prikazy*, 23 Feb 1920, no.168, 'Polozhenie o Politichesko-Prosvetitel' nom otdele Gubernskogo Komissariata po voennym delam utv. 22 ianv. 1920' (Regulations on the Political Education Departments of Gubernia Commissariats for Military Affairs, affirmed 22 January 1920), p. 7.
- 87 At this stage, and later as InKhuK, they generally met in each other's lodgings around central Moscow. Gan at this stage seem to have been in 'apartment 62, 29 Dolgorukovskaia Street' (Stepanova, *Chelovek*, p. 66). Domestic photographs convey the atmosphere, e.g. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko*, p. 69, showing a group over teacups including Stepanova, Popova and Alexander Vesnin; and A.Lavrentiev, *Varvara Stepanova: A Constructivist Life*, London, 1988, p. 55, which includes Gan.
- 88 Maximoff, *Guillotine*, includes a photograph of the eighteen-member Kropotkin Funeral Committee, of which he was a member with Chernyi, Barmash, Askarov others who wrote in *Anarkhiia*. The caption includes notes on dates of murder or deportation of each person in and after 1921. Other leading figures expelled are listed by Anatole Gorélik, in Skirda, *Les anarchistes*, pp. 81–3. When Maximoff himself emerged from Moscow's infamous Butyrka Prison in January 1921, those still prominent in the Moscow movement told him 'Abandonnez l'idé e d'oeuvrer à Moscou, capitale des bolchéviks—Moscou la rouge où il n'y a pas de place pour les anarchistes', *ibid.*, p. 77.
- 89 Avrich, *The Anarchists*, pp. 26–7, 153.
- 90 Avrich, *The Anarchists*, p. 27; Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 362; Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia, revoliutsiia*, pp. 38–9.
- 91 Kanev, *Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia*, p. 49. His source on the Club of Creator-Biocosmicists is the journal *Biokosmist*, 1922, no. 1, p. 3. On the *Anarchy* papers, see note 74 above.
- 92 J.Bowl, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–34*, London, 1988, pp. 214–5.
- 93 Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p. 406, mentions Tver as one of several towns of central Russia where there was 'anarchist educational and propaganda activity of the same extensive character as in Moscow' during 1918.
- 94 Reminiscences of Galina Chichagova in Rodchenko, *A.M.Rodchenko*, p. 142.
- 95 E.Goldman, *My Disillusionment with Russia*, London, 1925, p. 251, quoted as Document 54 in Avrich, *The Anarchists*, p. 165.

# Architecture and Revolution

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