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## 2000–2006: Monitoring Moscow's Avant-garde Architecture

The Russian avant-garde of the 1920s to early 1930s made one of the most important contributions to the international Modern Movement as well as to the 20<sup>th</sup> century historical and architectural heritage. Moscow as the new capital of the young Soviet Union became one centre of the architectural avant-garde, developing its ideas and erecting quite a number of public buildings and housing for the anticipated communist society after the revolution of 1918. About 250–300 buildings were built in Moscow between 1925 and 1932. Some of them became outstanding icons for the rational ideas of Russia's constructivist architecture.

However, most of them are not in good shape today due to either no, low or incorrect maintenance, or so-called "euroremont" – a cheap cover-up refurbishment. Incorrect maintenance occurs for example when preserved historic wooden or metal-framed windows of architectural monuments are replaced with plastic windows. Furthermore parts of monuments are sometimes demolished or changed without the permission of the local authorities. Even setting protected buildings on fire seems to be a solution for getting rid of preservation problems. A monument can also be damaged by "over"-maintenance under the local definition of "reconstruction", which seeks to make the monument even more authentic than it ever was, causing it to lose its real authenticity. In the last years Moscow has been turning into Las Vegas, consisting more and more of copies of historic buildings which had been lost, in some cases by fire. This happens to much older historic monuments too, but I will concentrate on Moscow's avant-garde monuments of the 1920s.

Today one can state that Russia's avant-garde buildings meanwhile traditionally belong to "Heritage at Risk," as a result of decades of extreme neglect. What are the reasons for Russia's difficult attitude towards its built cultural heritage from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?

<sup>1</sup> "Cauchuk" workers club of the rubber factory, Pluschikha Street 64, Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1927–29, Monument No. 613, local importance.

<sup>2</sup> For example, if plastic windows are installed, humidity can easily pass through the wall, but no longer through little gaps in the window frames. This causes fungus if ventilation is not sufficient.

<sup>3</sup> Decree (b) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 23 April 1932 "about the reorganisation of literary-artistic organisations" – *Postanovlenie CK VKP (b) 23.04.1932 g. "O perestroike literaturno-chudožestvennykh organizacii"* – which forced different groups of artists into line.



Rusakov workers club, Stromynka Street 6, Moscow, arch. K. Melnikov, 1927–29, monument of local importance. Main entrance with plastic doors, 2005

### Economic reasons

Especially within the last 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in some cases before this dramatic incident, avant-garde monuments started to deteriorate, losing their function and suffering from a lack of maintenance which can be called "destruction without demolition." The administrations of the famous workers clubs could no longer afford those social facilities for their employees. This was the case with the "Cauchuk" rubber factory's club on Pljuschikha Street.<sup>1</sup>

The houses fell empty and then depended on the fantasy of their administration. Sometimes space was sublet with the result that the new users treat their rented space with no regard to the building's monument status, carrying out "euroremont," which means a cheap refurbishment with contemporary materials and design. "Euro" refers to Europe, i.e. trying to achieve European quality and appearance of construction work. Sometimes it is only a new coat of paint. Lack of maintenance and damaging preservation work cause loss of authentic fabric and provoke problems from a building physics point of view.<sup>2</sup> Both end in loss of the monument's authentic and cultural value.

### Defamation

One more reason for neglect is surely still a late consequence of the first repression that started after the state decree about "the reorganisation of the artist associations" was published in April 1932.<sup>3</sup> It stopped any lib-

eral discussions and initially allowed public defamation of constructivist architecture for the first time. It became popular to criticise architects like Konstantin Melnikov and Ivan Leonidov for producing purely "formalistic architecture".<sup>4</sup> The rationalist architecture for the envisaged Soviet society with its new tasks like workers clubs, communal housing and kitchen-canteens, which had started to appear in the new capital since the mid-twenties, was then considered to be ideologically imposed foreign architecture.<sup>5</sup> And in fact for many people it is still considered so up to the present day. Because of its simple facades Constructivism still remains stigmatized as "non-Russian" in the taste of most citizens. Apart from its simplicity and minimalism the new materials and construction methods that were used at that time were criticized. People in Russia assume that the houses built in the 1920–30s are of much lower quality than the buildings of the European Modern Movement which were and partly still are stigmatized for the same reason. Of course there were extremes within the materials and construction methods using those materials. Numerous workers settlements that were built at that time suffered from lack of construction materials in Russia with its low-level industry after years of civil war. The builders had to be creative in order to finish their task.<sup>6</sup> But the materials invented and used were the same as in Europe.

As we know today the economic and social conditions, which stimulated invention of new and cheap materials for the construction market, were quite similar in those days in the young Soviet Union and for instance in Germany. In general the icon buildings of both movements – Constructivism and Europe's Modern Movement – were built quite analogously mostly as concrete skeletons with cinder concrete blocks, fibrolit (heraclith in Europe) and wood-cement flooring as typical materials.<sup>7</sup> The revolution in the construction market that took place in the 1920s became the foundation of today's building



*Narkomfin commune house of the Ministry of Finance on Novinsky Boulevard 25, Moscow, arch. M. J. Ginzburg, I. Milinis, 1928–30, monument of local importance. The new street was constructed in 2004 at a distance of about 5 m from the house*

technology with lots of different construction materials and methods. The "Narkomfin" commune house<sup>8</sup> and the former textile institute with its huge dormitory known as the "Nikolaev House"<sup>9</sup> were built like this. Their extreme concepts for communal living illustrate why most people and decision-makers still deny constructivist architecture. As built manifestations of the 1930 "utopia for the

<sup>4</sup> cf. A. Mordvinov, *B'em po čuždoi ideologii – Leonidovščina i ee vred – yearning for foreign ideology – Leonidovschina and her danger*, in: *Isskustvo i massy 1930*, No. 12, pp. 12–15

<sup>5</sup> cf. A. Zalivako: *Zur Erhaltung der Bauten der 1920-er Jahre im Vergleich Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Russische Föderation (Moscow) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der baukonstruktiven Voraussetzungen: Probleme, Erfahrungen, Perspektiven*. Diss. TU Berlin 2003.

<sup>6</sup> cf. W. Hegemann, *Das Wohnungswesen in den Städten und neuen Industrie-Zentren Russlands*. In: *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst 1932*, No. 16, p. 197: "In Moskau wurde die Lage besonders schwierig durch das Wachstum der Bevölkerung und das wachsende Bürobedürfnis der Regierung. Auch hier konnte das Wohnungsbauprogramm 1931 nicht erfüllt werden. Von den 90 in Angriff genommenen Bauten konnten nur 16 fertig gestellt werden. – In Moscow the situation became extremely difficult because of the increasing population and the increasing demand of the government for office space. Even here the building program could not be fulfilled in 1931. Only 16 out of 90 started projects were carried out."

And cf. W. Stein, *Versuch "sozialistischer Städte". Verwirklichung der Kollektivgebäude zu teuer- daher zurückgestellt*, in: *Bauwelt 1931*, No. 21, pp. 703–705. Regarding workers' settlements in the Don area Stein writes on p.703: "(...) und aus dem Vorjahre sei in Folge Mangels an Bauholz in das Jahr 1931 übergegangen "eine große Zahl unvollendeter Häuser: ohne Dächer, Fußböden, Decken, Türen. (...) Ein Teil der gebauten Häuser blieb ohne Heizanlagen und sanitäre Einrichtungen." – Because of the lack of wood as construction material quite a number of houses remained unfinished in 1931: without roofs, flooring, ceilings, doors (...) A couple of houses were left without heating and sanitary blocks."

<sup>7</sup> cf. A. Zalivako: *Zur Erhaltung der Bauten der 1920-er Jahre im Vergleich Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Russische Föderation (Moscow) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der baukonstruktiven Voraussetzungen Probleme, Erfahrungen, Perspektiven*. Diss. TU Berlin 2003

<sup>8</sup> Commune house of the Ministry of Finance "Narkomfin" on Novinsky Boulevard 25, Moscow, arch. M. J. Ginzburg and I. Milinis, 1928–30, Monument No. 604, local importance.

<sup>9</sup> Commune house for textile institute students on Ordzhonikidze Street 8–9, Moscow, arch. I. S. Nikolaev, 1929–30, Monument No. 617, local importance.

new socialist man of tomorrow“ they proved to be too far away from the real life conditions of their inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> With their sanitary blocks for collective use, mostly located at an extreme distance within the building, with their minimal kitchens or kitchen-canteens they were often rejected by their users. In fact it was evident that the Russian population would understand those concepts as an affront to their tradition. Obviously the first inhabitants of the “Narkomfin“ house were recruited from the countryside as employees for the new Finance Ministry. Even in the city the kitchen remained a “rudimentary Russian oven”, traditionally as the gathering place for the family. The minimized kitchens within the constructivist floor layouts contradicted the requirements of their users. This is only one reason why for many people the constructivist buildings of the 1920s still represent the state imposed “Novyj byt“ dissolving the family and creating a new “socialist“ family.<sup>11</sup> Today avant-garde architecture is still associated in people’s minds with a cut-off in history and traditions that became illegal in those days.

The result of broad criticising over decades of both the architectural design and construction quality of that period is a general defamation of the early Soviet Modern Movement which also affects the attitude towards these buildings in terms of preservation, in particular the willingness to accept them as cultural monuments and to treat and



*Narkomfin Commune House, Moscow, 1928–30, arch. M. Ginzburg, I. Milinis. One of two corridors giving access to the five upper floors of the apartment block, 2004*

preserve them in the same way that palaces and churches from the Middle Ages are kept for future generations.

Historically only after Nikita Chruschev initiated a period of cultural and political relaxation it became less dangerous to recall the first steps of Soviet architecture. Initial books were published about Russia’s avant-garde by Kirill N. Afanas’ev, Varvara E. Chasanova und Selim O. Chan-Magomedov – signalling the start of theoretical analysis of this period. In the early 1980s first attempts were made to rehabilitate the avant-garde. Thanks to a small number of activists in this field in 1987 it was possible to include about 30 houses on the Soviet list of state-protected architectural monuments. In 1989, on the occasion of Konstantin S. Melnikov’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, seven more of his buildings were included. All 37 buildings considered to be worth protecting received the same monument status “of local importance”.<sup>12</sup> This means that in first instance the City of Moscow is responsible for their integrity. Before their registration as monuments their destiny was determined exclusively by the town’s local house management “Zavedchoz“,<sup>13</sup> or in case of apartment blocks the “ZhEK.”<sup>14</sup> Those administrations took care of maintenance according to Soviet accommodation norms. This maintenance was limited to an absolute minimum, which preserved most houses most authentically. However from today’s point of view this caused a conservation problem demanding complex solutions.

The guidelines for dealing with registered monuments are determined by the Russian legislation for the protection of monuments and sites. In June 2002 Russia adjusted to the new post-Soviet situation with the federal law “about objects of the cultural heritage (cultural and historic monuments) of the nations of the Russian Federation”.<sup>15</sup> Before this the City of Moscow had created its own law about “protection and use of historic and cultural monuments” from 14 July 2000.<sup>16</sup> In general Russian

<sup>10</sup> *Commune houses were developed within the state research program for housing beginning in 1928. They were a new type of experimental form of living following the sociological research results of the department for standardisation at the Ministry for Building of the RSFSR. The research in 1928–29 related to a “scientific organisation of everyday life.”*

<sup>11</sup> *“Novyj byt” means “new life” and refers to implementing the change of education of each person towards communist ideals within all personal spheres of life.*

<sup>12</sup> *Moskovskij gorodskoi sov’et narodnykh deputatov, Ispolnitel’nyj komitet, Rešenie No. 647 ot 23. marta 1987 “O prinjatii pod gosudarstvennuju ochranu zdaniy pamjatnikov archiztektury soveckogo vremeni”. – Decision No. 647 by the deputies of the Moscow city council from 23 March 1987 “about putting buildings from the Soviet time under state protection.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Zavedchoz – Zavedujuščee chozjaistvo” City Housing Administration.*

<sup>14</sup> *“ZhEK – Žiliščnyj Eksploitacionnyj Kontor”, means “Housing Office.”*

<sup>15</sup> *Federal’nyj zakon RF ot ijun’ja 2002 g. N 73-F3 “Ob ob’ekтах kul’turnogo nasledija (pamjatnikach istorii i kul’turny) narodov rossijskoi federacii.”*

<sup>16</sup> *Zakon goroda Moskvy “ob ochrane i izpolzovanii nedvižimych pamjatnikov istorii i kul’turny” – Moscow law for the “protection and use of immoveable historic and cultural monuments” from July 14, 2000, published in “Delovoi zentr”, Tverskaja 13, No. 41, 11–17. 10. 2000.*



*Gostorg Ministry of Trade, Mjasnitskaya street 47, Moscow, arch. B. M. Velikovskiy, A. J. Langman, M. Barsch, 1925–27, monument of local importance. Narkomsem Ministry of agriculture, arch. A. W. Schusev with Bulgakov, Franzus, Jakovlev, 1929–33, monument of local importance, in 2005*

preservation legislation is sufficient and does not differ too much for instance from German legislation, despite the already mentioned categories of “local, regional or federal importance” of a monument. For instance the necessary instructions and definitions for establishing a “preservation zone” around a monument can be found here.<sup>17</sup> But in most cases such protection zones do not exist, so that the insufficiency of the law seems to be more a problem of its strict application. In recent years in fact a lot of under- and aboveground construction work was done around the Melnikov House, damaging its foundations. Obviously there is no preservation zone around this icon of modernism.

When such a zone does exist, it might be just the footprint of the monument itself, ending outside the external wall and therefore making no sense at all. That was the case with the “Narkomfin” house in Moscow, so that a street was built just three metres from the house in 2003, increasing damages for the monument from constant heavy traffic.

### Priority of other monuments

Since the middle of the 1990s the Russian capital has been facing an enormous building boom which is still go-

ing on. As usual construction activity affects the existing environment with demolition or re-building of houses. The city’s administration is stimulating construction activities. In 1999 the vision for Moscow’s future development was fixed in the “Moscow City Plan”.<sup>18</sup> As a general plan it is setting the guidelines for adjusting the capital to the new post-Soviet conditions. Despite decentralization of industrial enterprises, the creation of sub-centres in order to ease the historic centre, and the optimization of the traffic flow, the plan defines zones in the city centre subject to historical reconstruction and zones subject to conservation. The official announced motto of “re-

<sup>17</sup> See the Moscow law for the “protection and use of immovable historic and cultural monuments” from July 14, 2000, Article 25 (Preservation Zones): In order to guarantee the integrity of an architectural monument and its aesthetical appearance a special preservation zone is defined for territories adjacent to the monument’s site. Within this zone certain regulations for usage of the ground are defined.

<sup>18</sup> See Catherine Cooke, *Moscow as a global city*, in: *Academia Rossica, Rossica. International Review of Russian Culture. Moscow. The Third Rome. Stalin’s Capital – Global City*, issue 4, London 2001, p. 50.

creating Moscow as a historic city" is dominating the city's development. Reconstruction of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century church of the Kazan Mother of God at the north end of Red Square started already in 1993 and was finished in 1994. For the city's 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997 a full re-creation of the vast 19<sup>th</sup>-century Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which had been razed in 1931 for the Palace of Soviets, was reopened. Today it is the one and only building from the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Russia included into its tentative list for the World Heritage. The "Iver'skije Voroty", the former gate to Red Square which was eliminated to give access to the square for tank parades, has been rebuilt, too. Many smaller churches are refurbished or were partly reconstructed within the last years. All these re-creations prove the priority of "historic" Moscow, trying to provide people with their lost history and to make them feel like historic beings. The anticipated re-creation of Moscow as a historic city as set down in the 1999 City Plan may place avant-garde buildings under real pressure insofar as they are located somewhere in the centre of the city. In fact it is tragic that the longing for history makes the avant-garde monuments a fringe group again.

Yearning for the pre-revolutionary past is felt in Moscow's contemporary architecture as well. Modern buildings in Moscow illustrate clearly what the motto "re-creating Moscow as a historic city" means. Historic quotations and façade decorations with towers and bay windows should recall Moscow as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a city of towers and monasteries. They form the so-called "Moscow style", required also for official approval of new projects, anticipating a new – now specifically Russian – postmodernism. Evidently this is an attempt to connect to the time before the revolution, ignoring the Soviet period.

The fact that only two buildings from the early Soviet time are registered as monuments "of regional importance" is characteristic for the denial of the avant-garde. After major input from Moscow's public in 2005 it was possible to upgrade the status of the Melnikov House at least to a "monument of regional importance". In fact this building together with Melnikov's "Rusakov" workers club and Mosei Ginzburg's "Narkomfin" building would have deserved to be included on the World Heritage List from the very first moment the list was invented. The second monument of regional importance is Alexy Schusev's club for the railway workers, built in 1925.<sup>19</sup> The main facade consists of stylized round arches, symbolizing hi-storic forms and matching today's architectural taste in Russia.

<sup>19</sup> House of the railway workers, Komsomol'skaya Square 4, Moscow; arch. A. V. Schusev, 1925–26, Monument No. 550, regional importance.



*Planetary, Sadovaja-Kudrinskaya Street 5, Moscow, arch. M. O. Barsch, M. I. Sinjavsky, 1927–29, monument of local importance. In 2004 the cupola was hydraulically raised six metres to create more space. The original annexes were removed and re-constructed*



*Mostorg department store, Krasnaya Presnya 48/2, Moscow, arch. A. A. Vesnin, I. A. Vesnin, V. A. Vesnin, 1929, monument of local importance. View from the square in 2005. The transparent façade is now an advertisement board*

### Lack of will and knowledge

The fact that cost-intensive restorations and reconstructions of quite a number of churches were realized whereas important monuments of Russia's famous avant-garde such as the "Narkomfin" house are still left unattended makes me assume that lack of will is the real reason for



*Bakhmet'jevsky-Park bus garage, Obraszova Street 19a, Moscow; arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1926–27, monument of local importance. The roof trusses were illegally removed in 2002*

deterioration here. The will or in this case unwillingness to keep and preserve a building is crucial for its protection and further existence. With regard to the "Narkomfin" house, which is recognized all over the world as the finest, most elegant and important example for the epoch-making architecture of Russian Constructivism, one can only assume that the lack of will or at least lack of knowledge and information about the monument on the part of those who are responsible for it is the main reason for its tragic condition. Lots of interviews I made since 2000 with Moscovites, ordinary people, inhabitants or users of 1920s buildings and various architects showed that most people do not realize the real age and value of the buildings I gave as examples. When I asked about age, most people dated those buildings – for example the "Tsentsrosojuz" by Le Corbusier and Nikolai Kolli (built in 1929–36)<sup>20</sup> – at around 1960, probably because the windows had been changed to glazing with aluminium frames so typical for late modernism in Eastern Europe. On the one hand this illustrates their avant-garde value being so much ahead of their time. But on the other hand it is kind of tragic that most people still associate buildings of the early 1920s avant-garde with late Functionalism with its mass-production, buildings with no composition in design – the pure technocratic approach of the "Brežnev"–era. This is probably another reason for today's longing for decoration in Russia.

In 2000 and in 2005 I systematically visited Moscow's avant-garde buildings, trying to understand their current condition as far as possible. Such a monitoring is obligatory every five years for the authority for the preservation of monuments by law.<sup>21</sup> The overall impression after 132 site visits in 2005 was that the majority of Moscow's constructivist heritage is in much worse condition than in 2000, when I did this for the first time. Indeed most of the houses are hardly recognizable if you compare their appearance with historic photos. After extensive analysis I would dare to divide at least the monuments into four different groups determined by their current condition:

### 1. Monuments that still keep their original function

This group includes first of all a number of constructivist ministries that were built in the 1920s when the capital moved back to Moscow. There is the Ministry of Trade "Gostorg",<sup>22</sup> the "Tsentsrosojuz" building, now the State Agency for Statistics, and the Ministry for Agriculture "Narkomsem"<sup>23</sup>. These buildings are in relatively good condition because maintenance was always minimal but sufficient. The only real loss here from what could be seen from outside are the historic windows. They were changed in the 1960s into aluminium framed ones. Also included is the "Zuev" workers club<sup>24</sup> that somehow manages to survive difficult times and is still a meeting place for cultural events. Of course changes occurred over the years, but this is probably the only building from Moscow's Modern Movement where one can still feel a little bit the authentic atmosphere of the 1920s.

### 2. Investment projects/objects

The impact of work being done on avant-garde monuments in Moscow today depends on their adaptation to current conditions. This includes any activity under the definition of "prisposoblenie – adaptation", which means changing floor layouts and materials to prepare the building for the new function. Finding a new function is the first priority, as anywhere in the world. In fact in Moscow this is the only chance for a building to survive instead of being demolished. However, any potential investor seems to be welcome in order to save the unloved heritage of the early 1920s. In reality this means that the building physically stays in place, but in many cases it will be re-formed and will lose its authenticity and monument value. This is a very sensitive subject. Changing the surfaces and fit-

<sup>20</sup> "Tsentsrosojuz – later Narkomlegprom" house, Central Association of the Consume Cooperatives, now State Agency for Statistics (GosKomStat) Mjasnitskaya Street 39, Moscow, arch. Le Corbusier, Nikolai D. Kolli, 1929–36, Monument No. 623, local importance.

<sup>21</sup> See the Moscow law for the "protection and use of immovable historic and cultural monuments" from July 14, 2000, Article 40 (Monitoring), which regulates the duty of the monument preservation authority to carry out technical monitoring of all monuments located on Moscow territory every 5 years in order to establish the current situation and necessary preservation measures.

<sup>22</sup> "Gostorg" Ministry of Trade, Mjasnitskaya Street 47, Moscow, arch. B. M. Velikovskiy, A. J. Langman, M. Barsch, 1925–27, Monument No. 624, local importance.

<sup>23</sup> "Narkomsem" Ministry of Agriculture, arch. A. W. Schusev with Bulgakov, Franzus, Jakovlev, 1929–33, Monument No. 628, local importance

<sup>24</sup> "Zuev" workers' club, Lesnaya Street 18, Moscow, arch. I. A. Golosov, 1927–29, Monument No. 633, local importance.

tings like railings, door handles and so on, means that the atmosphere so typical for the Modern Movement will disappear on the spot.

What is happening in Moscow is far from the European level of sometimes sophisticated restorations, as for example at the Bauhaus in Dessau. Such a differentiated approach, which takes the short history of the house into account and carefully judges which stage of usage to keep and which to abolish, is a utopia within preservation efforts in Moscow so far. If an investor agrees to restore a monument, it is subjected to his investment plan with all its consequences. Examples of such "investment"-restorations include Moscow's planetary<sup>25</sup>, the "Mostorg" department store on Krasnaya Presnya Street<sup>26</sup> and the "Bakhmet'jevsky" bus garage.<sup>27</sup> In case of the garage "Bakhmet'jevsky-Park", at a certain point the building was more or less demolished after eight original roof trusses by V. G. Shukhov were illegally removed.<sup>28</sup> Only public protest stopped this vandalism.

Sometimes a fire occurs before reconstruction of the unloved monuments will be carried out. The "Frunse" workers club and the "Pravda" publishing house became such victims in 2005 and 2006.<sup>29</sup> And sometimes construction work is stopped soon after it has started and a ruin is left behind. A more positive example of such a "euroremont" restoration is the "Burevestnik" workers club.<sup>30</sup> The wooden winter glazing was changed to a modern face. The building was fitted out as a fitness centre named "Tatami". Lots of gypsum board partitions were erected (reversible?). Nobody would ever assume that this building was built in 1929. Such refurbishment proves how flexibly the avant-garde buildings can be used for a new function if



*Frunse workers club of the "Dorchimzavod" chemical factory, Berezhkovskaya Naberezhnaya 28; Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1927–29, monument of local importance. View in 2005, after a fire it was reconstructed*



*Laundry of the Narkomfin-House on Novinsky boulevard, Moscow; arch. M. J. Ginzburg, I. Milinis, 1928–30. Facade facing the Gardenring wrapped with fabric, 2006*



*Pravda – printshop and publishing house, Pravda street 25/4, Moscow, arch. P. A. Golosov and A. V. Kurovsky, 1930–35, monument of local importance. View from Pravda street after the fire in february 2006*

<sup>25</sup> *Planetary, Sadovaya – Kudrinskaya Street 5, arch. M. J. Sinjavsky, M. O. Barshtch u. a., 1927–29, Monument No. 647, local importance.*

<sup>26</sup> *"Mostorg" department store, Krasnaya Presnya Street 48/2, Arch. A. A. Vesnin, I. A. Vesnin, V. A. Vesnin, 1929; Monument No. 601, local importance.*

<sup>27</sup> *"Bakhmet'jevsky-Park" bus garage, Obraszova Street 19a, Moscow; arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1926–27, Monument No. 664, local importance*

<sup>28</sup> *cf. V. Mazepa, V zaščitu rossiskogo konstruktivizma – Defending Russian Constructivism, in: Stroitel'stvo. Arkhitektura. Nedvizhimost', 2002, 2 (7).*

<sup>29</sup> *"Frunse" workers' club of the "Dorchimzavod" chemical factory, Berezhkovskaya Naberezhnaya 28, Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1927–29, Monument No. 659, local importance. "Pravda" – print shop and publishing house, Pravda Street 25/4, Moscow, arch. P. A. Golosov and A. V. Kurovsky, 1930–35, Monument No. 627, local importance.*

<sup>30</sup> *Workers' club of the leather factory "Burevestnik", 3rd Rybinskaya Street 17, Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1929–30, Monument No. 627, local importance.*



*Commune house for textile institute students on Ordzhonikidze street 8–9, Moscow, arch. I. S. Nikolaev, 1929–30, monument of local importance. View from the roof of the institute in 2005*



*"Gosplan" – garage of the State commission for planning, Aviamotornaya street 63, Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, 1933–36, monument of local importance. Condition in 2005*

they are not registered monuments. However, the result has nothing in common with preservation of architectural monuments based on scientific documentation.

The third group consists of monuments that can be labelled in this sense as

### 3. *Partly sensitively restored monuments*

such as the Melnikov House. Great efforts were made to do the best, though heavy losses have to be declared. With the restoration that was carried out between 1983 and 1997 the original surfaces and floors of the Melnikov House are gone forever. It is now more or less a reconstruction made for museum use, but the authentic fabric and texture is preserved at a very low rate. At least part of the original floor is kept in Moscow's Architectural Museum.<sup>31</sup> Anyway the house is entirely preserved with all its interiors. Under the current conditions this is already a big success for the heritage.

A generally positive example is the facade restoration of the Traffic Ministry "MPS".<sup>32</sup> The result of this difficult restoration is that the facade now gives an impression

of entirety, which had been lost for some years through replacement of historic windows with plastic ones.

### 4. *Ruins of the Avant-garde*

This is the most tragic group of monuments because they might have already crossed the border to death. On the other hand they are still very authentic. It is a chance that these buildings are still more or less untouched and therefore authentically preserved as witnesses of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history. They are of real cultural value.

The most well-known candidates are in the first instance the "Narkomfin" house and also Melnikov's "Gosplan" garage.<sup>33</sup> I have no evidence about the situation of the "Gosplan" garage more than what I saw. The third house became famous in the world as "Dom Nikolaeva". Suffering from decades of minimal maintenance, it is now undergoing a complicated restoration process carried out by the user and investor, the Moscow State Institute of Steel and Alloys (MISIS). The concept for utilization was developed by the Moscow Architecture Institute (MarchI). In March 2006 the original steel balconies of the dormitory were cut off. The future will show whether it moves to group no. 3 or 2. In 2006 these buildings gave the impression that the responsible organizations surrender rather than take the necessary restoration as a challenge.

Up till now there is not a single example of a restoration based on scientific documentation carried out with a differentiated view into the short history of these amazing monuments of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was no attempt yet to cope with the international level of preservation of this fragile architecture. Indeed it is very fragile because its appearance and design suffers much more from minimal changes in its dimensions than any highly decorated historic facade.

Unfortunately, to this very day only an extremely small number of such authentic avant-garde buildings still exists in Moscow. As a building of high significance the "Narkomfin" house would offer a chance to become such a precedent for all of Russia. If such a restoration could be carried out and Moscow could succeed in creating a precedent this would be a huge achievement in order to raise the level of civilized restorations in the country and to include at least this most important building of the epoch-making Russian avant-garde into World Heritage List.

<sup>31</sup> *Schusev State Museum of Architecture Moscow, MUAR former GNIMA – Gosudarstvennyj nauchno-issledovatel'skij musei imeni A. A. Schuseva, 119019 Moscow, Vozdvizhenka Street 5.*

<sup>32</sup> *"MPS" Ministry of Traffic (former NKPS), Sadovaya-Chernogriasskaya Street 1, Moscow, arch. I. A. Fomin, 1930–34, Monument No. 625, local importance.*

<sup>33</sup> *"Gosplan" – garage of the State commission for planning, 1933–36, Aviamotornaya street 63, Moscow, arch. K. S. Melnikov, Monument No. 658, local importance.*