

SOCIALISM AND REPRESENTATIONAL UTOPIA:  
CLUB OF THE NEW SOCIAL TYPE

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### Abstract

This paper studies the “Club of the New Social Type” by Ivan Leonidov in 1928, a research study project for a prototype of workers’ club. As a project in the early stage of Leonidov’s career, it embodies various sources of influences upon the architect from Suprematism to Constructivism. The extremity in the abstraction of forms, specific consideration of programs and the social ambition of Soviet avant-garde present themselves in three different dimensions. Therefore, the paper aims to analyze the relationships of the three aspects to investigate the motivation and thinking in the process of translating a brief into a project. Through the close reading of the drawings against the historical context, the paper characterizes the project as socialism and representational utopia. The first part of the paper would discuss the socialist aspect of the “Club of the New Social Type”. I will argue that the project demonstrates Leonidov’s interest in collective rather than individual not only spatially, but also in term of mass behavior and program concern. In the second part, the arguments will be organized on the representation technique in the drawings which renders the project in a utopian aesthetic. It reveals the ambition that the club would function as a prototype for the society and be adopted universally. Throughout the paper, the project would be constantly situated in the genealogy of architectural history for a comparison of ideas.

Ivan Leonidov was born in a peasant family. He spent his childhood in the village of Babino and in the forest of Vlasikha. Andrej Leonidov, son of Ivan Leonidov, recalled his father's frequent reminiscence about the time living in the woods. Ivan Leonidov was fascinated by the law of nature. He valued the sense of orientation and ability to decipher the natural signs. Those years spent with nature would later become the basis of the architect's understanding of formal logic, his "original vision of the world" and his "independent thinking"<sup>1</sup>. Leonidov started his artistic pursuit in painting and studied painting in his first several years in VKHUTEMA. Later, he joined the studio Alexander Vesnin to study architecture. At that time, the faculty has heated discussion between constructivists and rationalists. Nikolai Ladovsky, the leader of rationalist movement, who reproached constructivists' reduction of architecture to engineering, delivered courses focusing on three dimensional space. He argued that the architectural rationality lies in

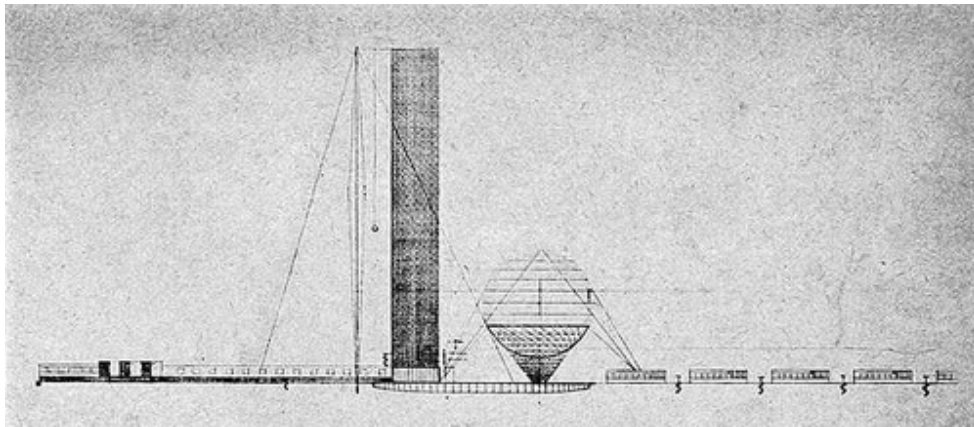


Fig.1. The Lenin Institute, Diploma project, 1927, Elevation

the perception of spatial and the functional properties. Vesnin, though a leader of Constructivist,

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan I. Leonidov, Alessandra Latour, American Institute of Architects. *Ivan Leonidov*. New York, NY: New York Chapter/American Institute of Architects, 1988.

is also leaning towards the functional trend.<sup>2</sup> Leonidov embodied his individual thinking against all the influences in his Diploma project of 1927 for a “Lenin Institute of Librarianship”. The founder of the OSA Group, Moisei Ginzburg identified the spatial feature in the project is not “properly Constructivist” and more “space oriented”. He put it as a “categorical break” with the constructivists’ method in architecture.<sup>3</sup> I will discuss in detail on Leonidov’s effort in accommodating the numerous influence into his own architectural method in the “Club of the New Social Type”. In the rest of his career, Leonidov would continue the rejection to constrain himself in one single language and further the exploration of architectural vocabulary.

In 1928, Leonidov developed the “Club of the New Social Type” as a research study project. He designed two variants of the club complex to illustrate the idea of creating a prototype for an entire program of new social clubs. It would perform as a public, social and scientific center on the scale of a whole city district. He described the operating resources in the club project as: a library, meetings and study spaces for political education, social and public affairs, touristic travel, sport facilities, physical and chemical laboratories, cinema and radio transmission and a botanical garden.<sup>4</sup>

The socialist aspect is reflected mainly in the programs, including the expectation of activities, the choice of programs distribution and the relationship between programs generated by the formal operations. (The formal choice would be discussed in the second part.) In the Leonidov’s

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<sup>2</sup> Cooke Catherine. *Russian Avant-garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City*. London: Academy Editions, 1995. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> A. Gozak, Andrei Leonidov, Catherine Cooke, and Igor Palmin. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. London: Academy Editions, 1988. 60.

description of activities in the club, it accommodates scientific study, civic education, military training, media propaganda and sports facility. The broad range shows the constructivists' idea of architect as the "organizer of life" and the architecture as a "social condenser".<sup>5</sup> Leonidov anticipated that the club would concentrate workers for cultural education and be "closely linked with the whole mass political and propagandist work of the Party"<sup>6</sup>. This purpose aligns with Marx's vision of the revolutionary community, which is described by Marshall Berman as:

The immense productive units inherent in modern industry will throw large numbers of workers together, will force them to depend on each other . . . and so will teach them to think and act collectively. The workers' communal bonds, generated inadvertently by capitalist production, will generate militant political institutions, unions that will oppose and finally overthrow the private, atomistic framework of capitalist social relations.<sup>7</sup>

When presenting the project in the congress of OSA, Leonidov also pointed out that the club is not designed for "absolute rest" as there only exists "relative rest" which is achieved by changing the type of work that one is engaged in. He emphasized on the organization of a worker's day around work, cultural development and leisure.<sup>8</sup> The club is designed for the cultural development. Thus, he opposed singing and theater, and encouraged more "culturally beneficial activities" like radio and cinema. When questioned what the workers would listen to over the radio if it is not for recreation, Leonidov responded: "life".<sup>9</sup> This choice of media corresponds to the constructivists' rejection of "experimental activity divorced from life"<sup>10</sup>. From the view of

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<sup>5</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall Berman. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Maria Gough. *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 8.

constructivists, art should be concerned more about reality, practical work and production. Apart from this reason, Leonidov also demonstrated selected panels of photos (shown in Figure 2 and 3) on what not to show and build against what should be presented in the “new type of club”. He showed his preference of collective bodies rather than a shot of an individual. The collective behavior is associated with a clear pattern. In other words, it is a unified mass movement with a single purpose or single law. People will share a common identity as a participant of the socialist collective. Leonidov saw the potential of engaging collective recipients in the mass media. He shared the opinion on mass communication with El Lissitzky, who argued that “the center of collective effort is the radio transmitting mast which sends out bursts of creative energy into the the world”<sup>11</sup>. The media will be used as a more efficient tools to deliver equal education in the workers’ club and to broadcast the new social values of Soviet Union to the mass.



Fig.2. “What NOT to show and build”



Fig.3. Individual and Collective Activities

<sup>11</sup> John E. Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988. 151.

In 1920s, there is a shifted concern in art from “the individual, private client” to “the public and the universal” called “social commission” which is brought out by El Lissitzky.<sup>12</sup> Architects used spatial operation as a tool in response to this social transformation from individual to society and as a means to generate new collective lifestyles. In “Club of the New Social Type”, Leonidov also showed the thinking of producing collective behavior and participation through programmatic organization.

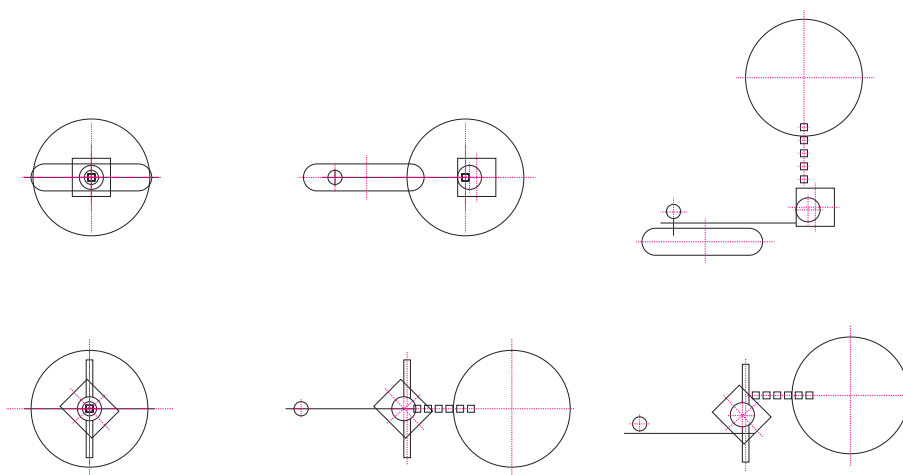


Fig.4. Analysis Diagram. Formal operations of first floor plan in Variant A & B

Studied has been made upon the compositional logic in Leonidov’s work by François Blanciak. He characterized the model of the process into basically four steps. First, each programmatic element is rendered in pure form to accentuate the contrast. He identifies the operation as “programmatic fragmentation” and “morphological diversification”. Then, the symmetry axes of these various forms are “dislocated”. As the result, the composition exhibits in a manner of

<sup>12</sup> El Lissitzky. “Basic Premises,” and “Interrelationship Between the Arts,” 1930. In *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, Eric Dluhosch, trans. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1984. 27-31.

“planar dispersion”.<sup>13</sup> These operations could also be seen in “Club of the New Social Type”, illustrated by the diagram in Figure 4.

Clear as the logic is, the motivation behind this series of operation still needs to be further discussed. Similarity in formal composition could be drawn between the “Club of the New Social Type” and Malevich’s painting. In one essay on Suprematism, Malevich wrote that the “new basis for artistic construction” is not on “the interrelation of form and color, and not on the

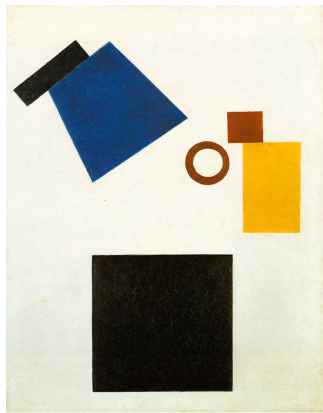


Fig.5. *The Daily Norm*, Malevich

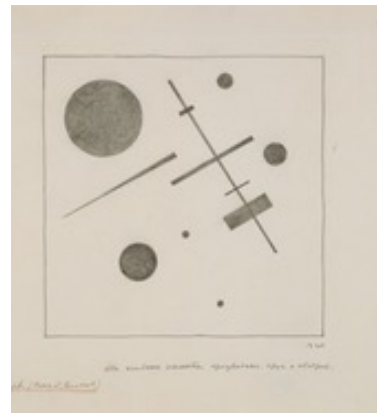


Fig.6. *The World as Objectlessness*, Malevich

esthetic basis of beauty in composition, but on the basis of weight, speed and the direction of movement”. He argued that form should be operated at the level of “dynamics of movement” in order to “transmit the movement of modern life”.<sup>14</sup> Constructivists also value the dynamic attribute in construction as “the organization of the kinetic life of objects”.<sup>15</sup> This sense of

<sup>13</sup> Francois Blanciak. “Revolutionary Objects: Pure Forms and Disorder in Ivan Leonidov’s Work.” *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture* 8.2 (2014): 135-142.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Margolin. *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy : 1917-1946*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography”. *October*, Vol. 30 (Autumn, 1984): Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 82-119.



movement is obtained by the asymmetrical composition in the “Club of the New Social Type”.

However, rather than representing all the forms in an objectless field, for example, as Malevich’s

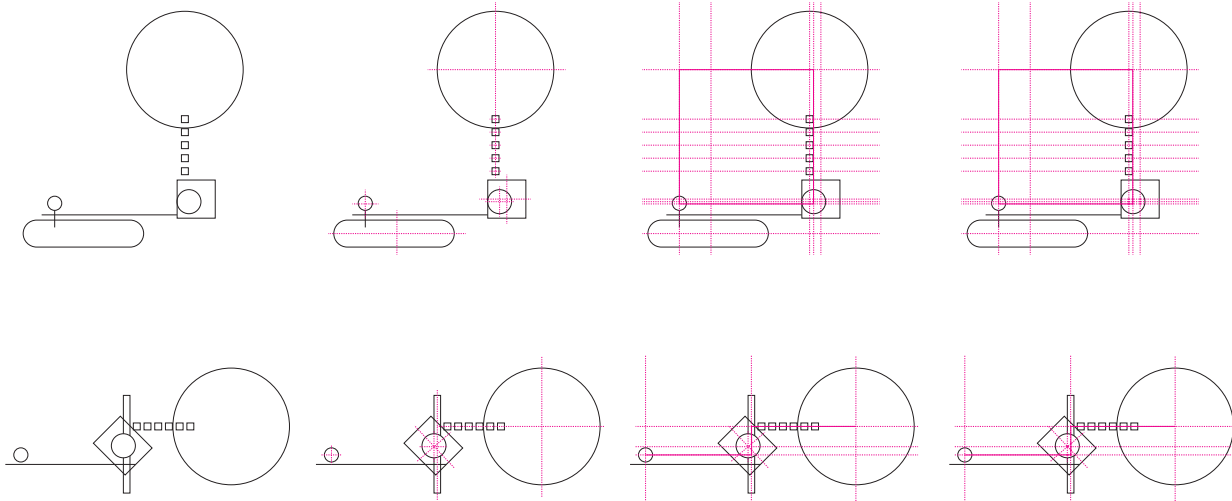


Fig.7. Analysis diagram of first floor plan in Variant A & B, from left to right showing: formal components, shift of axes, balance of centrifugal force, multiple force centers.

The World as Objectlessness, the composition in “Club of the New Social Type” turns towards a centrifugal force that gravitizes the separated forms. As is shown in the diagram in Figure 7, the most important operation is the shifting of axes of each form, which creates this dynamic equilibrium. Leonidov deliberately biased this composition of forces to emphasize the interrelationship of the forms. He described it “as a product of the organization and functional interdependence of workers’ activities and structural factors”<sup>16</sup>.

In his point of view, the objective of formal expression to construct a “cultural organization”, so the forms could be simple and abstract. While the Constructivists intended to reduced architecture to pure material and construction, this inclination towards extreme abstraction also

<sup>16</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 64.

parallels the trend in the field of art. We mentioned that Malevich intended to liberate art from formal representation into pure depiction of movement. Another De Stijl artist, Mondrian was trying to reduce painting into its fundamental element and nothing besides the truth. In “Club of the New Social Type”, Leonidov shared a similar effort with those artists to abstract architecture into what he regarded as its essence, the program. We could recall later in 1950s, John Summerson argued that program is “the source of unity”, as “program is a description of the spatial dimensions, spatial relationships and other physical conditions required for the convenient performance of specific functions”.<sup>17</sup> Programs are the direct agency that generates intersection and interaction of social activities and primarily illustrate the concept of “social condenser”. Under such consideration, the club turns into “a field with programs” rather than “a definition on architecture”. The programs “function as condenser for activities” and are also governed by the centrifugal force of “a new sphere of human activities”.<sup>18</sup> Almost half centuries later, this idea would be taken up by Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi in their efforts to diagram architecture in mere programs and events.

Both the formation of the centrifugal force and the understatement of form serve the intention to foreground the interrelationships of the form or rather, the programs. This interrelationship facilitates the reading of the project as one collective rather fragmented multiplicity, as it is important in proletarian idea that the individual exists in the context of collective. Each part

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<sup>17</sup> John Summerson. “The Case for a Theory of ‘Modern’ Architecture,” in *The Unromantic Castle and Other Essays*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990: 257-266.

<sup>18</sup> Francesco Marullo. “Pure Programme and Almost No Form: Notes On the Typical Plan and Ivan Leonidov.” *San Rocco Magazine*, 7 (2013): 58-71.

acquire meaning only through the interaction of all the other parts.<sup>19</sup> This relationship of the programs is meant to define a new social relationship.

Broadly speaking, the decentralization and the centrifugal force breaks down the centralized authority of singularity. The planar field is a more democratic method to embrace “the widest possible body of the working class” in participating activities.<sup>20</sup> Leonidov himself contrasted his design with the existing type of club, a standard club by engineer G Vol’fenzon. G Vol’fenzon’s design is a two-storey masonry building filled with rooms for the standard activities including a theater, a gymnasium, four library rooms, drawing rooms and meeting rooms. Leonidov criticized it as “not even posed any of the problems of cultural organization, far less attempted to solve them”.<sup>21</sup> As a comparison, we will examine what exactly are the programs in the “Club of

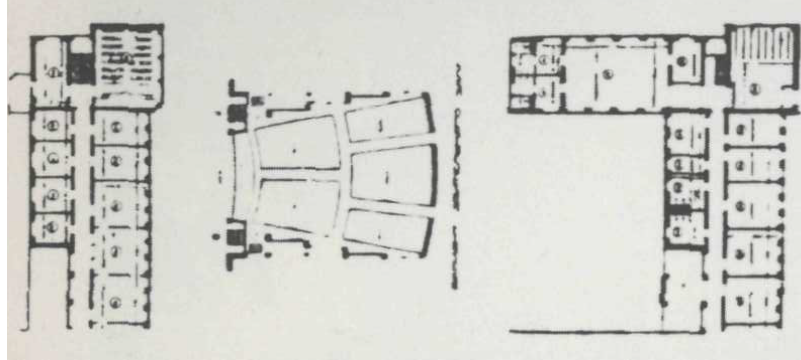


Fig.8. G Vol’fenzon’s Design of Standard Workers’ Club

the New Social Type” and how they are distributed in the plan. By comparing the description of programs and plan, I make an assumption of the program distribution illustrated in Figure 9.

<sup>19</sup> Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. 161.

<sup>20</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 64.

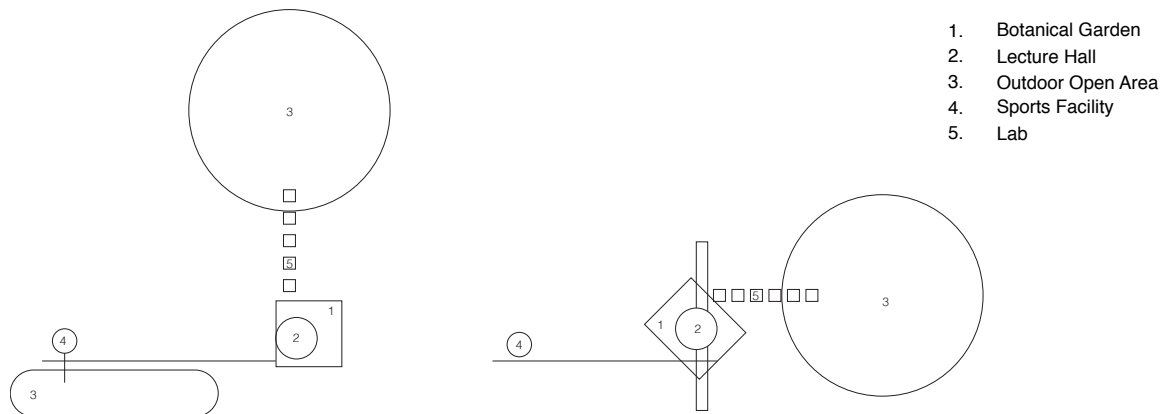


Fig.9. Program Diagram. Assumed program distribution.

From Figure 7, we can see the most important program in “Club of the New Social Type” is the botanical garden under glass. It occupies a central position and almost act as the source of the centrifugal force. The lecture hall locates inside the garden for films, meeting and planetarium demonstration. Here we could recognize Leonidov’s obsession with nature as we discussed before. The introduction of a garden into a workers’ club extends the definition of collective beyond the social boundary to the relation between human society and nature. Berman identified Marx’s emphasis on the “expression of human life and energy: men working, moving, cultivating, communicating, organizing and reorganizing nature and themselves”<sup>22</sup>. This harmonized relation between society and nature is also a justification of the relation between men and labor or production. In addition, Leonidov imagined this garden contained under glass which is more like a greenhouse rather than an open land. This artificial and industrial envelope, the building, embraces nature. A similar idea goes back to the Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph

<sup>22</sup> Berman. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. 93.

Paxton in 1851. The Palace, built in six months and dissembled in three months, trumpeted the achievement of Industrial Revolution and the advanced system of prefabrication. In other words, it symbolized the mass power of industrial production and human labor. Human labor has always been collective as it relies on “collective experience” and “use of tools”.<sup>23</sup>

Another large portion of area in plan is assigned for outdoor activities, including military service, open-air screen to disseminate news inside and outside the club, tourist walks and mass activities such as gliding and flying. An additional sport pavilion is anchored at the corner with ancillary accommodation and accompanied with sports areas for tennis, basketball, swimming and so on. The military exercise serves the requirement of the revolution and war preparation in Soviet Union. Besides that, we can also argue that the military training could be perceived as a political collective behavior. It creates a rhythmical pattern among masses which is also favored by Leonidov. And it is “not just a crowd, but a strictly regulated, collective, peaceful army sincerely possessed by one definite idea”<sup>24</sup>. During the 1920s and 1930s, there is a also particular stress on mass gymnastics and health exercises in Soviet Union. It is said that through sports and gymnastics, one could liberate bodily feeling in the movement.<sup>25</sup>

For the intellectual training, the scientific laboratories are distributed linearly and floating above the path which connects the garden to the large outdoor space. Although Leonidov explicitly denoted that the laboratories are for chemical and physical analysis, it would be worthwhile to

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<sup>23</sup> Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. 179.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>25</sup> Hilde Heynen. *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.

mention briefly the concept *fakura* developed in the period of Laboratory constructivism. The core feature of *fakura* is its “quasi-scientific, systematic manner” in which the constructivists aimed to achieve in their investigation of architectural language and effort to negotiate with engineer method.<sup>26</sup>

We are unable to relate and identify all the programs to the forms in the plan. As we have discussed previously, in this particular project, Leonidov was not interest in the relation of form and function, but how the relation generated from the forms benefited the relation of programs. We have examined closely on the choice and interpretation of the programs. Even though Leonidov said that the form was not the prior consideration, the form he used in plans that registered in pure geometry generates a strong impression. Architecture is inevitably about form and geometry. In the second part, we will discuss his use of form and the intention of using a

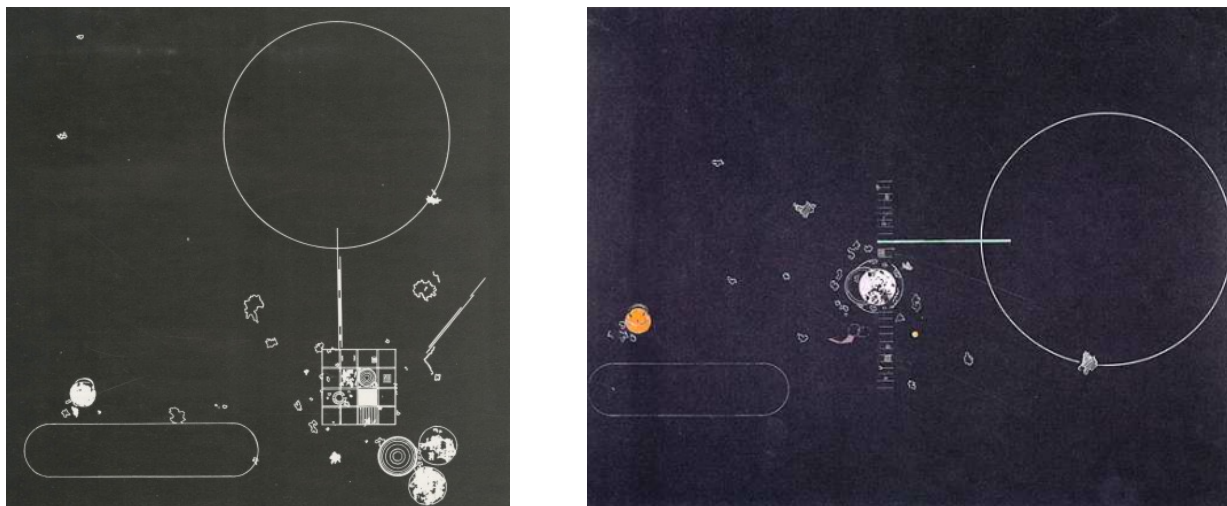


Fig.10. Ground floor plan of Variant A & B.

drawing technique that is significantly different from traditional plans. Despite of Leonidov’s

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<sup>26</sup> Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography”. 82-119.

writing on materiality in his brief, he deliberately rendered the project in an abstracted manner to emphasize the universality and visionary quality, which I characterized utopia. Thus, this utopian aspect is not about the feasibility of construction, but about the representation and ambition. For Leonidov, the “Club of the New Social Type” is indeed buildable with “the scientific and technical facts available” at the time. He also denied the criticism of the project as “a piece of fiction” and argued that unless for them “soviet power is not power, but a piece of fiction”.<sup>27</sup> We will discuss about those criticisms further that it was unfair to characterize Leonidov as utopia by his colleagues, but rather the ambitions of the avant-garde movements in Soviet Union are utopian in historical retrospect.

The formal components in the plan are basically rectangles, circles and lines, the ideal platonic geometry which is often associated with mathematical beauty. In the beginning, we mentioned briefly the rationalism influence upon Leonidov’s architectural vocabulary from his teachers in

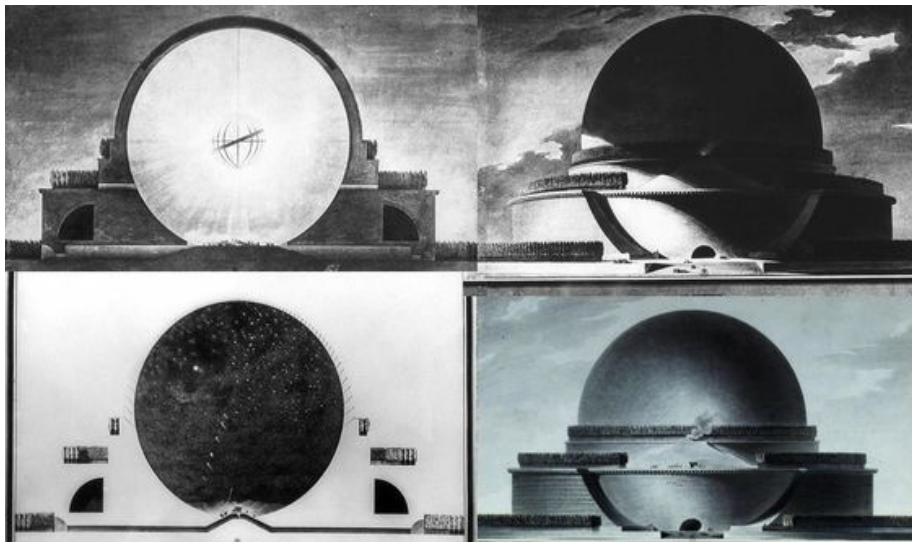


Fig.11. “Newton Cenotaph”. Étienne-Louis Boullée.

<sup>27</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 66.

VKHUTEMA. We will compare this use of pure geometric forms in “Club of the New Social Type” to Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who typify Enlightenment rationalism in 18th century.

Both formal and representational similarities could be seen between the “Club of the New Social Type” and Boullée’s design for “Newton Cenotaph”. Boullée was also deeply influenced by the beauty of nature. He described the strong impression created by moonlight and shadow in a country walk as his motivation and sources of ideas. He regarded the use of abstracted form as “the result of pushing the imitation of nature to an extreme in an effort to heighten the emotional effects of architectural representation”.<sup>28</sup> In designing the “Newton Cenotaph”, Boullée intended to reproduce the image of nature through both spatial design itself and representation. In his renderings, which he described as “architectural painting”, he used a strong contrast of black and white between architecture and surroundings to strengthen the “symbolic expression of universality”.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, though Leonidov appreciated the beauty of nature as Boullée did, he was not interested in the emotional power of the pure forms but the potential to represent the law of nature. His opinion on natural law is basically the harmonious relationship between creatures.<sup>30</sup> This law is not only a logical one but also an aesthetic one. The platonic geometry has an architectural tradition since Renaissance to express the harmony of the universe.

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<sup>28</sup> Neil Levine. *Modern Architecture: Representation & Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 75-79.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Leonidov. *Ivan Leonidov*.



In this sense, the motivation of using pure form in Leonidov's work is closer to Ledoux, though in compositional appearance, they are far from alike. Ledoux continued the trend characteristic of Boullée toward "grandeur and the introduction of elementary geometry". He was interested in the harmonious composition that the simplicity of elementary geometry could help to achieve.<sup>31</sup> He exhibited his mastery of invention with the simple geometry in Propylaea of Paris. In the scheme, he shaped each tollhouse in a unique way in the same time the designs all shared a universal architectural vocabulary of geometry. He showed an inclination to stresses the autonomy and the relation of different components by the juxtaposition of equally important, independent, and clear form. From the diagram of François Blanciak, Leonidov's work also displays a similar exploration of architecture with a simple language of form. He shared the interest in dramatizing the contrasting forms to accentuate the relationships.

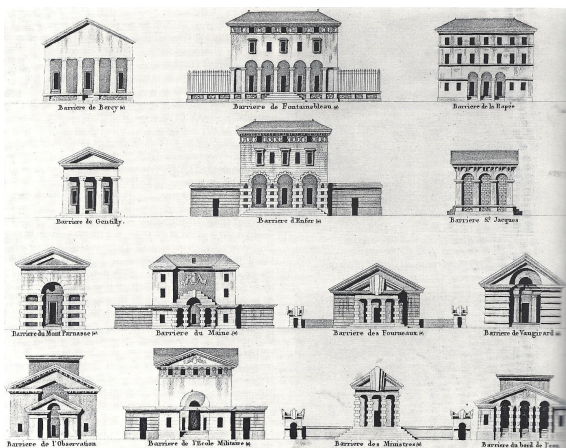


Fig.12. "Propylaea of Paris" (part).  
Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.

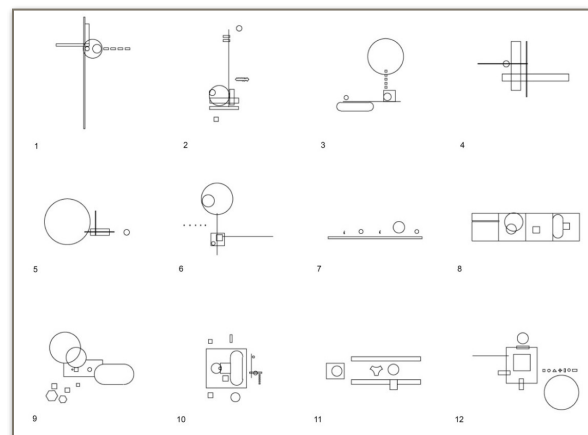


Fig.13. Basic formal vocabulary in Leonidov's  
Work, diagrammed by François Blanciak.

<sup>31</sup> Emil Kaufmann. *Three Revolutionary Architects: Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952. 486.

Therefore, the forms in “Club of the New Social Type” bear less meaning about themselves than their interrelations on the programs. They function merely as symbols of their content. This idea echoes Vasilii Kandinsky’s statement in *Content and Form* that a work of art is inevitably a combination of “inner and outer elements, i.e., content and form”. While for Kandinsky “form is the material expression of abstract content”, Leonidov’s designation of form to content is more representational.<sup>32</sup> The form does not necessarily correspond to or vary itself according its content which is the program. If we apply the linguistic terms from de Saussure, there is a clear separation of the signifier and the signified in this project. As the signifier functions as a mere visual sign, it should denote something beyond the signified. The Polish scholar Andrzej Turowski proposed two fundamentally different linguistic models of utopian thought between Rodchenko and Malevich as “utopie reiste” and “utopie phenomenologique”, which the later term also suits in the case of Leonidov. The forms transcend the materiality of object by pointing to something beyond itself and then embody a new consciousness of human thought.<sup>33</sup> It would be reasonable to say the signifier which is the form in “Club of the New Social Type” denotes to a new state or condition of lived experience. Then, what kind of experience?

Leonidov was not interested in concealing his ambition. He revealed the prospect in his representational drawings. The elements in plan are all rendered in white fine lines against a dark background. The materiality is eliminated together with the heaviness of massing. Respectively, the form achieves a lightness in its delicate and void shape. It embodied the desire of freedom

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<sup>32</sup> Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Margolin. *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy : 1917-1946*. 12.

from land and ground and eventually earth. Another VKHUTEMS student's diploma project, "the City of the Future", also explicitly expresses this common pursuit of liberty at that time. It is a flying city proposed by Georgii Krutikov, in which the inhabitants would be able to fly in the sky. Krutikov maintained a similar idea that the buildings liberated from the land reflects "humanity's aspiration to rise above the Earth"<sup>34</sup>. This fascination with aeronautics could also be seen in the drawing of "Club of the New Social Type". Aeroplane is a repetitive theme that would appear in Leonidov's drawings, both in perspective, elevations and in plans. It not only

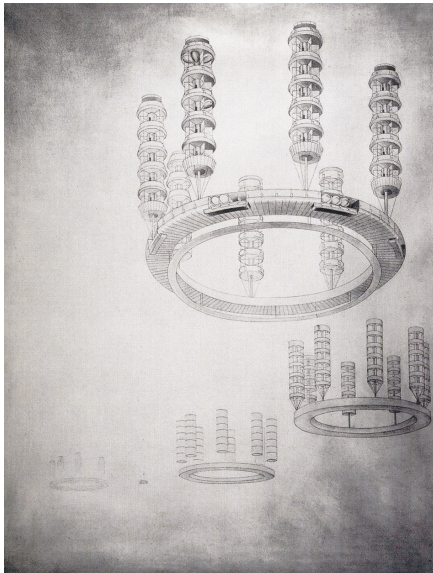


Fig.14. "The City of the Future".  
Georgii Krutikov.

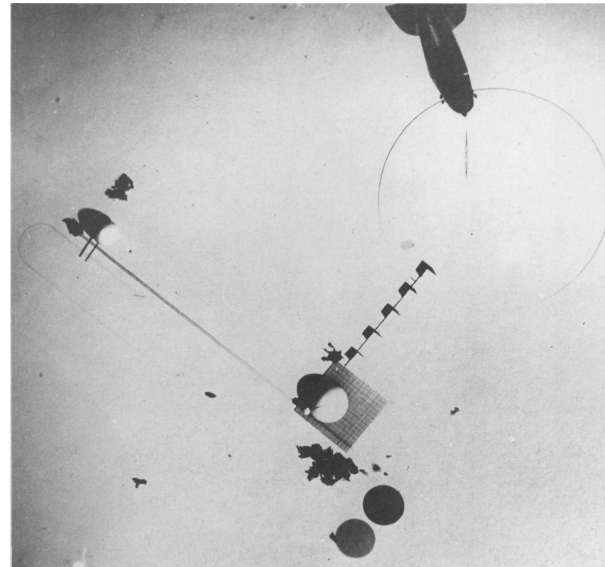


Fig.15. Above model view with aeroplane of  
"Club of the New Social Type".

stands for lightness and freedom, but also provides a unique view upon the architecture. This is also an avant-garde idea in Soviet that the artist intended to break people out of their habit in

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<sup>34</sup> S. O. Khan-Magomedov. *Georgii Krutikov: The Flying City and Beyond*. Barcelona: Editorial Tenov, 2015. 47.

terms of the perception of daily objects. Architects like Leonidov were trying to offer new perspective to defamiliarize the interpretation of architecture.<sup>35</sup>

In “Club of the New Social Type”, Leonidov took up this unfamiliarity of reading an architecture one step further. The plan no longer look like a drawing of architecture but rather of orbiting planets. In the drawings titled as *Scheme of Spatial Organization of Cultural Services*, it is hard to tell if it is an extreme abstraction of the organization or it is the club viewed from far from the

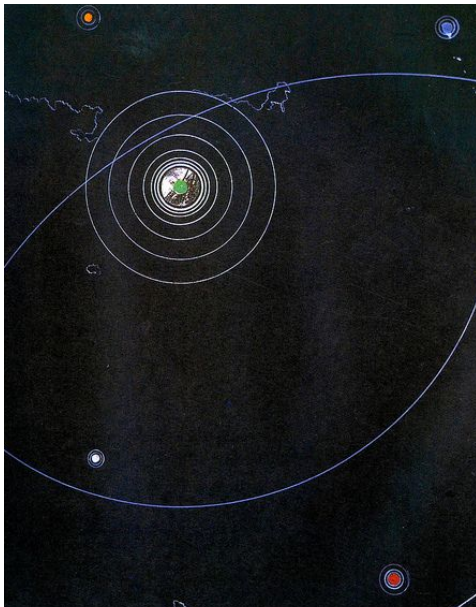


Fig. 16. Scheme of Spatial Organization of Cultural Services.

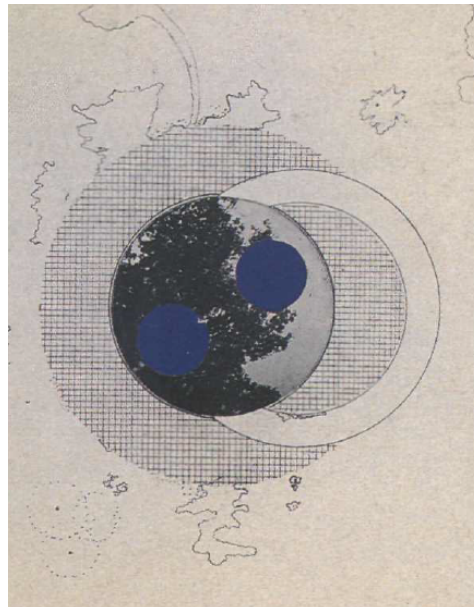


Fig. 17. Sports pavilion for variant A & B: ground level plan,

universe. This cosmology representation functions in two major ways. The first is reinforce the importance of organizational relationship. Though we discussed this before, now this relation is extended to a much broader time-space frame of a moving body, from an observer that may not exist on this planet. In fact, this observer could only exist in a spaceship traveling above the

<sup>35</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917), in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, David A. Richter, ed., 3rd. ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007: 774-784.

earth. In this sense, this organization becomes a pure intelligent interpretation rather than a diagram representing reality. The second is the quality of universality that Leonidov planned to achieve in the project. The idea makes a reference to Mies's universal space and also Marx's advocate of world literature. In either context, they were willing to propose an objective perspective of the world as a flat globe. The individual component could extend its influence beyond its own physical boundary and be connected into a network for a more complicated information transmission. Mies was particular interested in defining a new prototype of architecture that can be adapted in almost any environment. This notion aligns with Leonidov's anticipation of the club as a prototype that could be employed throughout the country maybe even the earth. While each of club is a micro mechanism, being in a network, they could function as a part of this large infrastructure that eventually would connect the universe as an integrity. This is his motivation in depicting a self similar pattern on the scale of both the plan of architecture and the myth of universe. It is not the project itself is utopia, it is the social ambition that embodied in the way of drawing that is utopia.

In 1931, Arkady Mordvinov referred Leonidov's projects as "leonidovism" in *The petit-bourgeois direction in architecture*. He pointed out that leonidovism took on an abstract form which ignored utilitarian content, economy and technological reality. The projects were associated with personal fetishization in the field of specialist training which was self-serving rather than providing a solution for the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> As we have discussed, there is indeed a differentiation of emphasis on form and content in the "Club of the New Social Type", yet it is

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<sup>36</sup> Gozak. *Ivan Leonidov: The Complete Works*. 95.

obviously unfair to characterize it as formalism which Leonidov himself would totally disagree with. In historical retrospect, I would argue that almost all the avant-garde movements in Soviet Union more or less share this characteristic of utopia.

If we look back at the constructivist's manifesto, the intention to adopt fully the aesthetic and logic of engineering in architecture is in nature contradict to the definition of "architecture" itself. There lies the fundamental question that if architecture is an art. Reyner Banham in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* criticized the failure of modern architecture in trying to bring out the potential of technology and engineering as they claimed.<sup>37</sup> The only credit might go to Buckminster Fuller, who was denied as architect in Philip Johnson's view. While the constructivists like Aleksei Gan called for the death of art<sup>38</sup>, they avoided the discussion about if the extremity of imitation of engineering will also lead to the death of architecture. Because of this unsettled question, the avant-garde movements were avoiding the discussion on the reality of the profession and "threw themselves into ideological anticipations" of a utopia future. Yet the Soviet avant-garde were not really bringing out a utopia of ideology, but rather "the technological utopia". In this way, the utopia in Leonidov's project is different, though they shared the negation of relation between signifiers and signified. The avant-garde groups wanted to "destroy all the symbolic attributes" and "purify the signs to the point of annihilation".<sup>39</sup> The form should be nothing except construction, material, and the law of industrialization. For

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<sup>37</sup> Reyner Banham. *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. New York: Praeger, 1960.

<sup>38</sup> Bowlt. *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*. 221.

<sup>39</sup> Manfredo Tafuri. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976. 60-77.

Leonidov, the form still need to facilitate the reading of universality beyond the form itself and to serve the ideology of socialism.

Tafuri wrote in *Architecture and Utopia Design* that, “there cannot be founded a class aesthetic, art, or architecture, but only a class criticism of the aesthetic, of art, of architecture, of the city itself”<sup>40</sup>. I think this is why we examine the form and program against the historical context. The form and program themselves are apolitical, yet the architects argue through their manipulation of form, program and drawings for claiming ambitions. In the paper, we have discussed the programmatic concern as a new organization for the working class in the “Club of the New Social Type” through the lens of the social propaganda. Leonidov envisaged the specific programs that he intended to include and the mode of mass activities that worker would be involved in. The interest in collective is also manifested in foregrounding the relationships of form rather than form itself. And it is this concern of equilibrium of relationships between human, society and nature that makes the project socialism in addition to its inherited Soviet context. Though Leonidov mentioned he was only interested in programs, the undermining of form does not mean the form is drawn in an arbitrary way. Instead, Leonidov seems deliberate in rendering the project in a cosmological impression with forms taken in platonic geometry. It represents a utopia of creating a prototype that could be universally adopted and expend influence beyond itself across the country.

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<sup>40</sup> Tafuri. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. 190.

The “Club of the New Social Type” is indeed visionary. It reflects an urban thought unconstrained by the scale of architecture. The tension between the singularity of architecture, the multiplicity of its components and the scale of urban scheme becomes a consistent interest in Leonidov’s work. However, it was until 1960s that the interest in depicting an alternative life experience in a conceptual urban style become acceptable and popular, for example, Archigram and Superstudio. In Leonidov’s entire career, he was only able to have one project built. Yet, this never undermines his status or identity as an architect. His exploration of the potential of architectural vocabulary as well as the possibility of architectural influence upon society make his ideas valuable to this day. And it is also this kind of effort in experimentation that makes the discipline still attractive as it has always been.



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