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Review of The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture by William C. Brumfield

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is called ethnography, will then take first place in the curriculum and, commensurate
to their importance for a rational life, zoology, mathematics, physics, chemistry and
other disciplines shall follow in their appropriate places.” Tolstoy the educator went
to the peasantry a missionary and left converted, an ethnographer; he established
himself as instructor and ended his life a Teacher.

The state of research on Tolstoy and education has been deplorable, but now
Daniel Murphy of Trinity College, Dublin has done much to rectify the situation. He
comes to the topic as a prominent historian of education and places Tolstoy’s efforts
in the mosaic of European and American reform with precision and clarity. While he
cannot devote ample space to locating Tolstoy in the context of Russian history, Rus-
sian peasant schooling studies are sufficiently advanced that Murphy’s accurate, com-
prehensive account of Tolstoy’s pedagogical thought and activities can easily be read
against that detailed scholarly background. He captures the cross currents of Tolstoy’s
struggle with the Enlightenment, fulfilling the promise of Boris Eikhenbaum’s and Sir
Isaiah Berlin’s insights on that subject. Murphy understands that the central charac-
teristic of Tolstoy’s philosophical procedure is “a Beckett-like process of ‘aporetic’
questioning” that withers reason under the lamp of constant, critical self-scrutiny. In
perspective Tolstoy’s relentless attack on progress throughout his writings is precursor
to Horkheimer and Adorno’s assault in Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), the corner-
stone of contemporary critical hermeneutics.

If there is a drawback to this volume it lies in the enormous promise of the title
relative to the numerous and more modest achievements of the book. “Tolstoy and
Education” connotes a contribution to our general understanding of Tolstoy with an
original view of how teaching shaped the man, based upon definitive reading of se-
lected texts couched in the context of Tolstoy’s opus. But Murphy does not, for ex-
ample, linger over the above mentioned essay on art and peasant learning long enough
to discover and analyze the stories that Tolstoy and the children wrote together or the
volume of narratives collected by Tolstoy’s student-teacher Alfonse Erlenevin; are they
the basis for the popular lesson tales Tolstoy wrote twenty years later, such as “What
Do People Live By?” One would also wish for an appreciation of the predicament
Tolstoy’s confrontation of education brought about, the modernity it forced on Tol-
sto, the nostalgia he felt for lost learning, all of these the true condition of Tolstoy’s
contemporary rather than the eccentricity biographers attribute to Tolstoy. Finally,
one misses reflection on the relationship between learning and writing, a step toward
reconstructing the cognitive continuum we are familiar with in other nineteenth cen-
tury thinkers but have industriously destroyed in Tolstoy. Murphy addresses this issue
at the level of Tolstoy’s thoughts on aesthetic education and aesthetics, but does not
explore the matrices of Tolstoy’s philosophical and his artistic production.

These desiderata would not be exhausted by the study of Tolstoy and education
but Murphy’s monograph is one of the first steps toward them in all the vast literature
on Tolstoy, and suggests that other efforts, of the nature of “... and the Poor” (Richard
Wortman’s analysis of Tolstoy’s What Then Shall We Do? provides the parameters for
such an inquiry), “... Agriculture,” “... Politics,” “... the Church,” “... the State,” “... Religion” (Richard Gustafson’s synthesis sets a standard), “... and Society” (Peter
Ulf Moller’s study of reader reception is exemplary in its unearthing of detail) will
eventually overcome the inertia in Tolstoy studies.

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The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture. By William Craft Brumfield. Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1991. xxv, 343 pp. Plates. Maps. Figures. $75.00,
hard bound.

In The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture, William Brumfield has produced a
worthy successor to his earlier Gold in Azure: One Thousand Years of Russian Architecture
(1983). Moving from the vast scale of centuries to the concentrated focus of a few crucial decades, the author sets out to chronicle “the transformation of Russian architecture from the 1880s to the 1917 revolution,” a period that witnessed the advent, in rapid succession, of the Russian Style, the style moderne (art nouveau) and neoclassicism.

This is not the first attempt to examine the development of modernism in Russian architecture. Evgeniia Kirichenko’s pioneering Russkaia arkhitektura 1830–1910-kh godov (1978) dealt with the same chronological period and more recently a number of deluxe albums by Soviet scholars have appeared in English, devoted to aspects of Russian art nouveau and the search for a national style (Stermin and Borisova, Russian Art Nouveau, 1990; Kirichenko, Russian Design and the Fine Arts, 1991). This book, however, is the first by a western scholar to examine thoroughly a period hitherto dominated by Soviet historians.

On the face of it, it is the visual aspects of this book that will perhaps attract the widest audience, for it is generously illustrated with both the author’s own excellent photographs (40 of them in color) and with photographs from contemporary architectural periodicals (primarily Ezhegodnik obschestva khudozhnikov-arkhitekturnoi). While many of the monuments illustrated have been reproduced before, in the work of Kirichenko, Borisova and Kazhdan, there are also fresh discoveries, notably in the sections on neo-classicism. No other book in English offers such a well balanced and thorough visual survey of the search for an architectural style both modern and national in late Imperial Russia.

The accompanying text will appeal, first and foremost, to architectural historians. The author examines, not only the questions of style and technology and the interaction between them, but also grapples with the problem of “the meaning of style” as a question that was debated on the pages of Russian architectural journals. Such journals form the principal source material for the author’s discussions and conclusions, so that the overall impression is of an objective, reportorial stance rather than the more ideological approaches of Soviet scholars. But the text’s real strength lies in forging an essential link between the specific problems and developments of late Imperial Russian architecture and the broader context of European modernism—a context that has been conspicuously absent from the Soviet literature to date.

The result is an extremely useful source of reliable factual data on specific monuments discussed within the context of ideas that lie at the heart of European modernism. It would appeal most directly to the architectural historian and the specialist in European modernism, but also to all those interested in Russian cultural history.

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Considering its origin in various Kennan Institute presentations over the course of two years, this collection of six articles by four well known Russian architectural historians gives a surprisingly coherent narrative. William Brumfield has done a skillful editing job in pulling together the varied interests of his colleagues.

Blair Ruble begins by describing the century-long retreat from public space in St. Petersburg which culminated in the alienating space of Leningrad’s Moscow Square. Then Brumfield demonstrates the consequence of the professionalization of Russia’s architects through an examination of the journal Zodchii and its fascination with American skyscraper technology. In another chapter, Brumfield concisely summarizes the work of the present generation of Soviet architectural historians who, over the last twenty years, have been patiently rehabilitating and re-absorbing (for themselves and young contemporary architects) the phenomenon of Moscow’s “modern” architectural aesthetic during the Silver Age. Ruble then shows us the later product of that mod-

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