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Contextualising Appraisal and the Destruction of the Soviet Design Institute's Archives

A field note [1]

Abstract

Recently, historians and theorists of architecture have started questioning the neutrality of traditional archival research methods by uncovering the operations of power and authority inherent to the creation, appraisal, accessioning, or erasure of historical documents and the institutionalisation of official and unofficial archives. Most of this research is based on analyses of archiving in Euro-American and (post-) colonial contexts; consequently, there is limited understanding of the politics and practices of archiving architecture in both former and current state-socialist countries. The paper addresses this lacuna by exploring different ways of archiving a single design practice, the Giproteatr Institute, one of the central organisations behind the construction of buildings for culture and the performing arts in the Soviet Union and beyond. By reconstructing the changing material and economic conditions of architectural labour in the late Soviet and immediate post-Soviet periods, precedents of authorised and unauthorised destruction of architectural documents, archival regulations, and appraisal procedures, the paper demonstrates that Giproteatr Institute's archives are in themselves historical and carry different definitions of archival value and of the architectural profession. Therefore, the paper further problematises the notion of 'evidence' in architectural history and advocates for strengthening the focus on analysis of material processes of archiving.

Introduction

Architectural history has lately exhibited a sustained interest in de-centralising and globalising the Eurocentric canon in research and teaching. This work was achieved primarily by expanding the geographical scope of the discipline and incorporating case studies from the so-called 'Global South' and the former 'Second World.' However, while alternative geographies have often been recognised and included in recent anthologies of global architectural history (Ching, Jarzombek, and Prakash 2017; Fazio, Moffett, and Wodehouse 2008; Fraser 2019 [Fletcher 1896]; James-Chakraborty 2014), reflection on methodological approaches and alternative archives or epistemologies that emerge within such a de-centring remains understudied. As Huda Tayob has pointed out, the "imperative" of this new wave of reconsidering the foundations of the architectural discipline is "to question not only where we find knowledge, but how we produce it" (Tayob 2020). This article aims to respond to this prompt with a methodological reflection on archiving and its role in the architectural history of Soviet socialism.

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There has been a surge of interest in the practices of design institutes from the Soviet Union, state-socialist Eastern and Southeastern European countries, and in their involvement in global architectural mobilities and processes of urbanisation (Beyer 2019; Butter 2018; Erofeev 2019; Motylinska 2020; Schwenkel 2020; Seculic 2017; Stanek 2020). These studies have challenged the notion of 'globalisation' as seen exclusively as a result of the expansion of the capitalist market economy and its 'technoscience' by outlining a more complex map of networks and actors, including from the former Second World. Even though these new findings have allowed scholars to start reimagining twentieth-century architectural history, the literature rarely reflects on the methodological techniques that have assisted in the production of these new histories. Particularly, attention to the specificities of archiving practices in state-socialist and immediate post-socialist contexts would allow better management of future researchers' archival expectations and a more nuanced understanding of the limits and possibilities of archival research methodology precisely at the stages of source criticism and interpretation.

To address this research gap, the article first reviews the relevant literature on methodological considerations in archive studies and specifically in relation to architectural archives. Secondly, the article analyses the dispersed archives of the State Institute for the Design of Theatre and Entertainment Enterprises (Giproteatr) within the Ministry of Culture for the USSR, one of the central organisations behind the construction of buildings for culture and performing arts in the Soviet Union and beyond. In exploring the ways in which Giproteatr's activities were archived, the article analyses the state archives that hold documents concerning Giproteatr's operations and reflects upon their historicity via reconstructing different logics behind the appraisal, accession and destruction of blueprints and paperwork produced by the institute. Ultimately, the article argues that the ongoing re-centring of attention on the histories of state-socialist design institutes and on engagement with large corpora of newly discovered sources requires reflection on the conditions in which these sources were archived, preserved, and deemed accessible. Does the study of socialist architectural archives prompt an analytical retooling and a methodological adjustment of traditional methods within architectural history? This article aims to start answering this question in the form of a field note.

Archives and Evolving Architectural Historiography

The changing definitions of an 'architectural archive' and, more broadly, how a research methodology could adequately accommodate studies of actors who were previously missing from classical accounts, are at the centre of this ongoing discussion among architectural historians. The Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative associate the origins of such a discussion with the anglophone revisionist historiography that grew strong in the

second half of the twentieth century (Mumford 1938; Giedion 2013 [1948]; Banham 1969; Kostoff 1977; Colomina 1994; Frampton 2002; Davis 2006) and questioned the centrality of architectural drawings, form and the oeuvre of individual architects as a main source and subject of architectural histories, branching off towards the exploration of broader social, economic and cultural implications of the architectural profession (Abramson, Çelik Alexander, Osman 2021). Methodologically, all of these works, Aggregate argued, performed this shift by either focusing on alternative types of documents 'within' the vast archives of canonical architects, such as Colomina's examination of Le Corbusier's engagement with media and photography, or going 'beyond' architectural archives altogether and exploring broader technical devices such as patents and standards to offer new insights into the construction and engineering histories of canonical buildings such as Larkin Building Wall by Frank Lloyd Wright (Abramson, Çelik Alexander, Osman 2021). These documents and objects of eminent architect-donors, as anthropologist Albena Yaneva (2020) has observed, are often further reassembled and "crafted" at archiving institutions. The labour of selecting, processing and restoring architectural documents, she contends, to some extent offers an epistemological framing of architectural practice that precedes historical writing.

Another field of research that experiments with using alternative sources for architectural history research is the history of architectural labour. These scholars aim to look at the processes of architectural production: from questions of the extractive nature of architecture and procurement chains of building materials and labour (Hutton 2019; Amhoff, Beech, and Lloyd-Thomas, 2016; Lloyd-Thomas 2022) to histories of the architectural profession that view the architect primarily as a worker within a broader economy of paid and unpaid labour practices (Deamer 2020), working within large organisations and offices (Martin 2003), and that view these practices as mundane routines and techniques that do not necessarily include only design, or 'creative,' tasks (Deamer 2020, Osman 2018, Celik Alexander and May 2020). Telling these stories, as Aggregate (Abramson, Çelik Alexander, Osman 2021) has shown, is possible by shifting the 'historical' focus towards other types of documents and archives. However, such de-centring still happens mainly within a narrow set of reference points: through writing and rewriting the histories of largely Euro-American architects and buildings.

By contrast, scholars working within a postcolonial framework and problematising the relationship between architecture and race put the centrality of the institutionalised archives of architectural history into question (Cheng, Davis II, and Wilson 2020). For instance, Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi and Huda Tayob are interested in how to write histories in the absence of institutionalised records or official archives in order to give voice to or reconstruct histories of historically marginalised actors. Oral history, ego-documents such as memoirs and diaries, artifacts from private archives (Siddiqi 2017), as well as poetry and fiction (Tayob 2020), in this case, become the toolkit for recovering histories that were

previously ignored by state archives and heritage specialists for ideological, racist, political (Rotbard 2014) or other reasons, such as considering the work of non-white actors as something improper and 'outside of history' (Cheng, Davis II, and Wilson 2020, 10). As a result, scholars working with these marginalised histories are faced with the methodological challenge of working with and around 'absences', without the conventional 'historical sources' or forms of 'evidence'. As Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II and Mabel O. Wilson argued, historians should be "suspicious" of archives and borrow methods of "literary deconstruction and critical race studies to uncover the racial logics behind Hegelian universal history and postmodern aesthetics" (Cheng, Davis II, and Wilson 2020, 11-12). Therefore, postcolonial histories raise concerns about the centrality of archival research methods to architectural knowledge production.

Similarly, it has been demonstrated that oral history can help reflect upon some of the archival 'absences'. For instance, the gendered aspects of architectural production, and the processes of construction, inhabitation and maintenance that are often excluded from the 'solo' and 'masculine' architects-centred narratives (Gosseye and van der Plaat 2019). The inclusion and discussion of the role of construction workers (Wall 2013), volunteers and urban residents in sustaining and repairing a public building (Graziano and Troga 2019), housing complexes (Schwenkel 2020; Akcan 2018) or larger infrastructural systems (Barnes 2017) in these oral histories foreground the everyday work of maintenance and care raising broader questions of the disciplinary and methodological boundaries of architectural history.

Indeed, we can see that architectural history methodologies now constitute a spectrum of different tools, and a historian can juggle and combine them to produce more complex and situated stories – both from within and on the outside of official and unofficial archives. Architectural history methodology no longer seems to be a universal standard applied to case studies within and outside of Europe. Instead, depending on a research context, various research methods could potentially acquire different social and political meanings.

The History of Late Soviet Architecture: An Institutional Lens

What does this polyvocality and the decentralisation of conventional archival research methods mean for the history of architecture in state-socialism? And, more specifically: how can researchers attune methodologically to continue reviewing the canon through the critical inclusion of Soviet architecture in these ongoing discussions?

While in capitalist conditions the state most often plays a role as a secondary actor in architectural practices — briefly appearing in the discussion of zoning laws, the legible form of contracts, or in

2 While design institutes also existed in other state socialist countries, their organisational structure and work principles were far from a simple copy of the Soviet model. See, for example, the analysis of the institutionalisation of Stavoprojekt in Czechoslovakia by Kimberly Elman Zarecor, who highlights that the state-run practice inherited some of the organisational principles of the interwar industrial capitalist Bata corporation, and that the Soviet influence started to be visible only since the 1950s (Zarecor 2011).

building regulations — in state socialism the situation was different. In the post-WWII Soviet Union, for example, most architectural projects were designed not by private ateliers, but in large planning teams, some of which had the status of design or research institutes.[2] Such a form for the organisation of labour required design professionals to be strongly integrated within different industry branches of the government that, in turn, worked within the centrally produced economic plans that allocated funding for future goals in each sphere of the economy. The state financed the wages of design professionals, as well as the building projects themselves. In the Soviet Union, the State Planning Committee (*Gosplan*) allocated annual funding for all organisations working on design, research, building and construction, as well as financing building projects following centrally devised plans for each branch of the construction sector, whether housing, public services, transport, energy infrastructures, military-industrial complex or culture. This strategy was called "central planning" (Rindzeviciute 2008, 89). In practice, such planning meant that design practices were administratively incorporated into various governing bodies across 15 Soviet national republics — they, for instance, could collaborate with a ministry,[3] or a regional- or city-level municipal government.[4] Within this system, different branches of the government could serve simultaneously as a commissioning body, a funder and a client.

Between 1953 and 1992, the Giproteatr Institute operated within these conditions. The Institute was subordinated to the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union and therefore was the recipient of the Soviet government's architectural commissions for the construction of public buildings for culture, education and the performing arts, for example, theatres, libraries, houses of culture, circuses and museums (including both projects for mass production and individual designs) (*Normativy udel'nikh kapitalovlojenii v stritelstvo objektov kelturi na 1976-1980 gody* [Standards for specific investments in the construction of cultural facilities for 1976-1980]. 1976. Approved by the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union and Gosplan of the USSR). The Institute specialised in the design, refurbishment and research of buildings for culture and the performing arts and had three offices – Moscow, Leningrad (Soviet Russia) and Baku (Soviet Azerbaijan). Giproteatr's interdisciplinary team of architects, structural engineers, stage design and technology specialists, stage mechanics, film and lighting engineers, researchers and invited acoustics experts were, moreover, working both domestically and internationally. Apart from producing building and stage designs, Giproteatr also conducted research and cultural industry forecasts for the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union, participated in the development of building norms and technical equipment standards at national and international levels, collaborating with partner organisations at the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), and published its own 'digest' on theatre design and technology that circulated across theatre specialists in the Soviet Union and in Eastern European countries. Despite the Institute's historical significance and global impact, Giproteatr's archives (similarly to

3 In this case, institutes often specialised in a single type of building programme (housing, sports facilities, public buildings, industry-related structures, etc.) that was supervised by a relevant branch of government.

4 For more on the institutional networks of Soviet institutional structure, see the example of the State Committee for Construction of the Soviet Union (*Gosstroy*) (Meuser and Zadorin 2016).

the archives of many other Soviet design institutes and republic- and city-level architectural practices) are surprisingly sparsely preserved, making reconstructing the organisation's history challenging due to a number of absences. For example, at times, researchers struggle to identify the location of documents or entire archives relating to prominent actors in socialist building industries. Existing archival collections often report entire chronological or thematic ranges of lost documents, and some collections preserve only drawings from late in the design process, focussing instead on their records of correspondence, making the reconstruction of some basic details about the building process and procurement challenging. While recent studies on 'socialist globalisation' in architecture have shown that Soviet design institutes have had a broad reach and significant impact on the international stage (Stanek 2020; Erofeev 2019; Beyer 2019), what made their archives so precarious?

Archiving Giproteatr

Impact of poor working conditions on archiving

In November 1958, the State Fire Supervision Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Leningradsky District of Moscow carried out a fire–prevention inspection at the head office of the Giproteatr Institute. Department representatives were deeply dissatisfied with what they saw. In the report filed following this visit, the fire supervisor had ordered for the mitigation of multiple fire risks. The fire inspector was concerned that Institute employees were casually smoking in workrooms filled with electric heaters. But most importantly, it was happening in the presence of "a large amount of all kinds of paper spread" around the office (RGA Samara, 'Fire-fighting inspection of the premises, Order 11 of November 4, 1958,' Fund P-578, op. 1-6, d. 24, 11). *All kinds of paper*, the report stated, were stacked on top of cables, and overflowing into the office's corridors, filling up almost every square metre of the space intended for evacuation. While it is unknown whether Giproteatr employees had addressed the warnings of the firefighting commission, what this report evokes well are two impressions about the everyday life of a Soviet state design institute. First, it was required to process large amounts of paper, and paper of various kinds – in fact, even more than the office allocated by the Ministry of Culture could handle. Secondly, workers were navigating such conditions by stockpiling the excessive paper across the office, repurposing corridors and corners into temporary storage spaces for the continuously accumulating paperwork that was necessary for running the practice. Even though each design institute should have had its own archive, there was so much paper that it was obstructing the workers' labour and, according to the firefighting standards of 1958, even putting them at risk; yet architectural workers evidently needed all this paper to conduct their duties.

Paperwork was indeed at the heart of the Institute's operations. Paper-based research and industry review reports were filed to

the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union and were returned with various operational and project orders. Paper was used for drafting, sketching, listing, noting, tracing, and copying, and was at the heart of design, research, communication, management, and the dissemination of information. Paper was used to type articles, and reviews for Giproteatr's own institutional digest published quarterly between 1958 and 1985. Paper was used to publish and circulate building norms and technical standards for cultural buildings. Seemingly, following various genres of paperwork handled by the multiple professionals at the Institute, one could reconstruct the contours of the material world of the organisation and get a glimpse of what architectural labour in state-socialist design institutes constituted. Yet, when one leafs through archived paperwork of Giproteatr at different state archives and libraries, it becomes clear that it is not a direct encounter with a fragment of Giproteatr's life informed by paperwork. It is also the encounter with the consequences of archiving and selecting these materials as not all paperwork stacked around the corners of the office made it to the archive.

Oral history interviews with Giproteatr employees and archival workers who later processed Giproteatr's documents confirmed that the destruction of records dating from the 1950s-60s primarily happened due to overall poor working conditions in the design organisation and the lack of storage space for large amounts of files. As the Institute did not have a permanent office, the organisation often changed their address. According to Vladilen Krasil'nikov, a former chief architect of one of the Giproteatr's architectural ateliers, in one of the locations, the Institute's archive was stored in the cellar (which was against regulations) due to the lack of space. As a result, much of the documentation was severely damaged by water leaks (Krasil'nikov 2019). Moreover, with each move to a new location, the preservation of the archives was further impacted (Antipova 2019). The composition of Giproteatr's documents that later arrived in the hands of representatives of the state archive for appraisal and accessioning reflected the material conditions at the organisation.

Bureaucratic and 'technical-scientific' logics of archiving

It is also important to follow this paperwork from archive to archive, each with their own definitions of what constitutes an archive of a Soviet design institute. The largest part of Giproteatr's archival trace is currently split across four state archives collections: the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow, the Russian State Archive of Scientific-Technical Documentation (RGANTD) in Moscow, the Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg (TsGANTD SPb), and the Russian State Archive in Samara (RGA Samara).[5] The three latter archives previously comprised different branches of one state archive for Scientific-Technical Documentation, so their collections

5 Archival documents from the Baku branch of Giproteatr were not found during the research.

and archiving principles are similar and focus around Giproteatr's building projects. By contrast, in RGALI, Giproteatr is archived as a part of the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union, and the archive holds files related to the Institute's bureaucratic exchange with the government administrators: documents that circulated between the design Institute and the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union. The main archived paperwork genres resulting from this exchange were scientific-technical reports, foreign trips and forecasting reports, routine correspondence, meeting protocols, and orders that "in-formed" the flow of information and expertise between the two parties. Reporting was a core condition of Giproteatr's negotiations with governmental actors. Through these media, the theatre design community was involved in producing policies for the administration of the cultural life of the population across the Soviet Union and beyond. If one looks exclusively at the RGALI archives to evaluate Giproteatr's activity, they would probably tell a story of architectural workers as bureaucrats and their collaboration with the Soviet government. However, the archives that formed part of the scientific-technical documentation system follow a different logic, hold other documents, and frame a different portrait of Giproteatr's design practice.

The RGA Samara and NTD-network archives, for instance, mainly hold visual materials and blueprints that mediated the construction of theatres and different types of buildings for culture and performing arts in the Soviet Union and abroad. However, the collection of these blueprints and supporting documentation is in itself historical, involving various agents and forces that facilitated the selection and destruction of documents. RGA Samara (previously The Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of the USSR) was founded in Kuibyshev (as Samara was called between 1935-1991) in 1964 with the aim of preserving "the history of domestic science and the development of design thought and technology" (*Volzhskaya Kommuna* 24 February 1977). Upon the opening of the new building of the archive in 1977, its new director, Anatoly Prokopenko, gave an interview to the local newspaper, *Volzhskaya Kommuna*. The interview reported that leading design, construction and research institutes from Soviet Russia were ordered to send original paper-based documents to create a national "chronicle" of the development of science and technology. Prokopenko also highlighted that, in accordance with the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR from the 1st of June 1918 on the Reorganisation and Centralization of Archival Affairs in the USSR, all paperwork produced by state-sponsored institutes was considered state property and, therefore, should have been "concentrated in the system of state archival fonds" (*Volzhskaya Kommuna* 24 February 1977, 4).

The main goal of the mass accumulation of documents at a new State Archive in Kuibyshev was to create a retrievable base of information about different industry branches, facilitate inventions and innovation, and create educational materials for professionals who were just starting out in the industry. Among other activities, it was planned to produce copies of documents for professional

organisations upon request, create a "classificator of all types of buildings and industrial products", launch a convenient electronic search engine, publish and disseminate thematic sections and organise exclusions to the archival holdings (*Volzhskaya Kommuna* 24 February 1977). Giproteatr's documents were part of more than seven million files that were intended to be "received, processed and stored" at the archive. Therefore, the archive itself had its own political agenda: simultaneously to become a repository of Soviet technological, architectural and industrial 'innovation' (*izobretatel'stvo*) and to foster such innovation in the future.

In accordance with Soviet archival law, every five years, the Main Archive Directorate of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (*Glavarkhiv SSSR*) should have nominated organisations and persons whose "documents [...] are advisable for acceptance for state storage" (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 108). The selection of institutions and (less often) individuals was carried out according to the following criteria: "the importance of institutions within the system of governance, the completeness of the reflection of the activities of the institution in the documents of higher and other institutions, the correspondence of the activities of the institution with the profile of the archive" (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 108). Within this procedure, design institutes should submit so-called "scientific-technical documentation" (largely, the blueprints) no less than once every twenty-five years, and all management documentation every ten years.[6] To ensure this process was carried out accurately, various Soviet ministries would also have oversight of it and would direct institutes and organisations working under their patronage to comply with the new archival policy. However, the 1985 note that reported on the ongoing results of assembling the Kuibyshev archival collection pointed out that not all ministries "fulfilled the duties assigned to them to work with scientific and technical documentation" (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 109), leading to the full or partial loss of archival documents. To mitigate the loss of valuable documents, the Main Archives of the USSR (*Glavarkhiv USSR*) offered consultancy meetings with ministry administrators as well as with the institutes themselves for "improving work with scientific and technical documentation" in preparation for archiving (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 3).

Such meetings were introduced to stress the importance of archiving "historically valuable" (RGA Samara, f. R-846, op. 2-6, d. 316, 'Note of the head of the main archival department under the Council of Ministers of the USSR No. 16/7-B dated 5 January 1985 'On the progress of the implementation of the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR dated 21 May 1964 'On the centralization of storage of scientific and technical documentation and on organising its widespread use', 2) "scientific-technical documentation" related to a building, a technology or an industrial product. As a result, the archive had less interest in the broader work routines of organisations that did not necessarily lead to an innovation. The institutionalisation of a new "scientific-

6 Requests for submission of scientific-technical documentation could also arrive in case the design institute was liquidated or changed institutional belonging within the system of governance (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 109).

technical" archive suggested its own starting points for a history of Soviet technological development centring around particular organisations and mostly storing such paperwork genres as final-stage blueprints for building projects and technical equipment, minutes of meetings (if preserved) and documents related to significant changes in organisations' administration.

Archival research at RGALI and scientific-technical documentation-type archives is, therefore, an encounter not only with the documents of an organisation in focus but also with the results of retrospective framing of the organisation's practice. Different modes of archiving Giproteatr's documents produced varying definitions of architectural labour and technological progress. Within RGALI's bureaucratic or ministerial logic, Giproteatr's paper trail mainly consists of different types of reports preserving 'official' genres of collaboration with government administrators in the Ministry of Culture of the USSR. The Institute's involvement in the production and forecasting of state cultural policy and the voices of the Institute's director and research team are, as a result, at the forefront of the Giproteatr fond at RGALI. The RGA Samara (former Kuibyshev), on the other hand, accessioned documents that focus on the results of the professional creativity of the Giproteatr's design team and foreground the agency of the Institute, following the archive's agenda of defining and fostering future technological innovation.

Double appraisal process

To make matters even more complicated, in addition to the impact of precarious labour conditions and different logics of accessioning, multiple actors also participated in document appraisals. In 1958, Giproteatr's director V. Dubinin ordered the establishment of a commission within the institute that would annually evaluate all the documents archived at the institute – both the visual documents such as blueprints that recorded the different stages of project preparation and the so-called 'managerial documents', the reports and correspondence – and would decide on which documents were to be placed for further preservation in state archives. Therefore, the design institute was asked not only to produce and handle different types of paperwork, and archive it, but also to pass an initial judgement of the 'historical value' of these documents (RGA Samara f. P-578, op. 1-6, d. 23, 1958, 'Order number 176' from 16 August 1958). Thus, already at this stage, some documents were destroyed as they were considered unworthy of preservation.

In addition, before formally transferring the documents to a state archive, Giproteatr had to evaluate the documents' "physical and sanitary-hygienic condition", and, where necessary, to perform their "fumigation or restoration" (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 111). If the document did not present any "scientific and practical importance" (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 115), had repeated information available in other documents or was damaged to

a degree that made it illegible, it could be destroyed (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 114). The inventory of documents (*opis'*) also had to be prepared by the organisation and handed over to the state archive together with the original files. Further systematisation of documents was carried out by professional archivists at a state archive (Glavnoe Arhivnoe Upravlenie Pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1984, 113). Therefore, all documents comprising Giproteatr's archival funds in state archives resulted from a double appraisal – one routinely performed by the institute's employees and another afterwards by the professional archivists. Files encountered in the Giproteatr archive are not just single documents or interfaces establishing an unbroken continuum with the institute's 'real' work routines. The institute's archival fonds also result from several erasures, value-making transactions between different actors and classification systems participating in the appraisal process.

Reflections on politics and appraisal theories, or the so-called archival 'weeding', are central to long-ongoing debates in archival sciences (Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg 2007; Cox 2004; Duranti 1994; Hughes 2014; Kolsrud 1992; Lutzker 1982; Schwartz and Cook 2002). The problem of appraisal, as Terry Cook pointed out, is especially pertinent to the archiving of modern institutions as the volume of records they produce with the mass introduction of bureaucratic governance in Europe and internationally since the interwar period put archivists in a situation of 'information overload' (Cook 1996, 140). There are now simply too many documents to handle and too few resources for processing and storage. Naturally, the question of theoretical foundations of 'weeding' and destroying parts of the large corpora of documents yet still making archival fonds useful for future research took centre stage in archival sciences. On the other hand, questions of counter-archiving and inclusion of previously marginalised groups and voices further problematised state- or institutional archives and archive-keeping principles (Johnson 2007). In this context, appraisal decisions become ever more visible and politicised as they foreground the archivists' involvement in defining historical value and curating initial interpretation of and relationships between documents. The way 'evidence' is made accessible for historians via archives already assumes that it has a particular 'informational value' that is not 'objective' but 'purposeful.' (Menne-Haritz 1994, 541).

Similarly, in the case of appraising Giproteatr's documents, the Deputy Chairwoman of the Management Board of Kuibyshev archive, Olga Soldatova, who had worked at the archive since the late Soviet period, noted that the archiving process favoured the preservation of projects that held higher "historical value", and therefore often only final blueprints were preserved, foregrounding the final stages and versions of the project (Soldatova 2019). The project documentation that belonged to the earlier stages of projects "had to stay in the organisations for internal use" and after "the need to use it disappeared, it was usually destroyed" (Soldatova 2019). Only certain types of earlier stages of project documentation were marked valuable: "an assignment for a design,

a feasibility study, explanatory notes." "And working drawings... this stage is not subject to state storage" (Soldatova 2019), concludes Soldatova. Therefore, the selection of documents was also conducted according to the ideal of the linearity of the project, punctuated by specific types of documents that charted the project from commission to realisation. To achieve structural coherency in design institute's archival fonds, each project was archived along a standardised temporal axis, and it is therefore often hard to get a sense of the contingencies, delays, informal practices, and agreements, and to map all stakeholders that were part of the process of design and execution. The style of archiving scientific-technical documentation often does not give enough sense of the project-as-a-process and therefore can significantly impact the possibilities for telling a story of a Soviet design practice. This, of course, must be considered during the archival research.

In addition, not all aspects of the life of a Soviet design institute could be reflected by what was processed via 'official' paperwork genres and final-stage blueprints. Therefore, archival research might be profitably complemented using other research methods to address gaps in the record generated by precarious labour conditions and different appraisal logics. These gaps can be partially reconstructed through the analysis of 'nonarchival sources' (Cook 1996, 142): local newspapers, professional design magazines, 'grey' literature, oral history interviews with design or construction workers and eyewitnesses. As Kit Hughes has pointed out, oral history is especially valuable as it allows us to reconstruct how workers made sense of their labour and routines at an organisation (Hughes 2014, 293). Apart from interviewing members of the organisation, Hughes also suggests conducting participant observations (if possible) and preserving elements of the institutional material culture in a museum setting (Hughes 2014, 287-288). Some of Giproteatr's workers salvaged fragments of the Institute's archive, so working with *impromptu* private archives combined with oral history could be another alternative. Valerie Johnson, on the other hand, suggests working *with* archival silences instead of against them by allowing previously suppressed voices to speak or analysing records 'against the grain' (Johnson 2017, 107). Acknowledging and historicising these partiality and archival gaps is also essential to source criticism and interpretation of the remaining documents.

Towards Contours of Absence

Giproteatr's files dating back to the 1970s-80s were due to be archived at the beginning of the 1990s. The transfer of documents overlapped with the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by a breakdown of the state property system and privatisation of formerly state-sponsored design and construction organisations and institutes. These events prompted the most extensive loss of archival documents of Giproteatr and many other Soviet design practices. Giproteatr went through privatisation in 1992. That same

year, the Leningrad branch of the Institute was sold at an auction (TsGANTD SPb, f. F-398, op. 1-1, d. 229, 'Order on preparation for privatisation of 14.01.1992', 5; 'Order of September 11, 1992. 'In connection with the upcoming sale of Giproteatr at an auction, director Apraksin B. A. is ordered to transfer the documents to the archive', 51). The Moscow branch remained functioning, but the scale of work, number of employees and a variety of disciplinary competences offered by the Institute were no longer comparable with those offered during the 1970s-80s. Most of the Institute's architects left the practice to pursue individual work or founded private ateliers. Overnight, the archived documents turned from state property to a financial burden for the newly privatised design practices facing high bankruptcy risks. Funding for the costly preparation of the documents for archiving was no longer covered by the state. Soviet archiving rules were still in place in the immediate post-Soviet period; however, they were not effective in new economic conditions: "They [institutes] had no money, they were bankrupt [...] Documents may not have been saved […]. We had to collect [the documents ourselves]. Many documents went missing. And not only managerial [documents], but there were also personal [files] [...]. Former employees were left without a pension, without payments" (Soldatova 2019). Following eyewitness accounts, many institutes that did not go bankrupt immediately chose to rent parts of their offices to third parties to make ends meet. Large volumes of paperwork, project documentation and architectural models were often thrown away to free up space for commercial use (Krasil'nikov 2019).

Paradoxically, in the historiography of Soviet architecture, and more generally, in the historiography of Soviet history, the 1990s are considered the years of 'opening of archives'. Many archives were declassified, making new research directions possible. By contrast, from the point of view of Soviet architectural history, these years also marked a minor archival catastrophe: the destruction of the large corpus of documents of the Soviet design institutes and other organisations involved in research, construction and planning practices. Now, more than thirty years later, it might be time to comprehend these gaps and commence a discussion on a research methodology that pays attention to archival collections of state-socialist design institutes as a historical context and meaning-making culture.

Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, the corpus of documents that constitutes an architectural archive of a Soviet design institute is a result of different appraisal systems and varying understandings of what constitutes architecture and the architectural profession: bureaucratic work or technological innovation through design. Several factors have had a particularly notable impact on the social life of Giproteatr's archival fonds: archiving in poor material and working conditions; the effects of bureaucratic and technical-

scientific logics of document selection that led to the preservation or destruction of diverse paperwork genres; double appraisal, whereby both design workers and professional archivists evaluated documents based on descriptions of 'historical value' that were not openly declared or reflected; Soviet archival regulations; and finally, the impact of privatisation and changing economic conditions in the immediate post-Soviet period. Complementing archival research methods with the critical study of material processes and histories of archiving in a specific research context – what Sonja Luehrmann calls 'archival ecologies' (Luehrmann 2015) – allows for a more nuanced understanding of the limits and possibilities of archival research methodology. Attuning to files not only as sources of information but also as elements of these 'ecologies' would improve the process of source criticism and management of both researcher's archival expectations and archivists' awareness of the sorts of questions architecture humanities scholars are pursuing in their research.

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