The Great Utopia

The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
State Tret'iakov Gallery
State Russian Museum
Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

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The Great Utopia
The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932

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Even on purely stylistic and formal grounds, the Russian and Soviet avant-garde's contribution to Modern art merits the scale and depth of the present exhibition. Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin, the avant-garde's leaders, brought Modernism to its logical conclusions even as they first fully internalized and reinvented it in a Russian context. Yet those ideas became starting points. The laboratory of Constructivist and Suprematist experiments yielded visual inventions that still influence art, architecture, and design.

In his *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square,* 1915), Malevich resolved the Modernist struggle to reduce form to its essence; and when, for the *0.10* exhibition (Petrograd, 1915–16), the artist hung the work in the place traditionally reserved for a religious icon, he aspired to replace the existing order with a new artistic ideal. Reinterpreting European Cubism, Malevich applied the abstracting process to reduce the substance of the world to primary forms, revealing an entirely other dimension—an absolute, non-objective world. With his *Kontr-rel'ef* (*Counter-Relief,* 1914–15), Tatlin took the fractured planes of Cubism in a different but still logical direction—into real tangible space.

Somewhere between the absolute spiritual idealism of Malevich's Suprematism and the dramatic reality of Tatlin's reliefs is that utopian sensibility, within a historical context of political and social upheaval, which released Russian art from the studio and onto the street, and which endowed it with a desire to pervade every aspect of life—even to become an agent of social change.

The term "utopia" carries with it the spirit of the avant-garde's project to place art at the service of greater social objectives and to create harmony and order in the chaotic world around them. Given the course history has taken in Russia in the twentieth century, "utopia" also has connotations of impracticality; idealism is good in theory, but not in practice. Few images in the Russian avant-garde are more compelling than Tatlin's construction of an Everyman's flying machine, *Letatlin* (1929–32), intended to be the utilitarian marriage of art, science, and technology—now, as a historical relic, it recalls the legend of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun.

One thing that can be gleaned from the scant but growing critical analysis of the Russian avant-garde—the "Great Experiment," as pioneering art historian Camilla Gray called it—is that single interpretations are impossible to maintain. Essential questions persist, relevant to our own predicament: What is the potential for art—an essential ambition of the avant-garde—to infiltrate and transform everyday life? Have traditional painting and sculpture, as Rodchenko proposed, reached the end of their cultural development in favor of more utilitarian communications media and practical arts? What is the relationship between art and politics? Can an aesthetic pluralism be established and institutionalized?

In planning the exhibition, we identified three primary phases of the avant-garde in Russia:

- First, the hegemony established by avant-garde artists committed to Suprematism and to Tatlin's culture of materials before the 1917 October Revolution, and the impact of their theories in defining cultural policies after the Revolution.

- Second, the development in the 1920s of work by artists who sought to project principles of construction and design into rationalized aesthetic systems through pedagogical programs at Moscow's Vkhutemas/Vkhutein (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops/Higher Artistic-Technical Institute) and group shows such as the Obmokhu (Society of Young Artists) exhibitions and the *Pervaia diskussionnaia vystavka ob"edinenii aktivnogo revoliutsionnogo iskusstva* (*First Discussional Exhibition of Associations of Active Revolutionary Art,* Moscow, 1924).

- And third, the pluralism of the 1920s—the emergence of new debates over figuration in the media of photography, photomontage, and painting, and the impact of Constructivist theory upon architectural practice.

Our exhibition, *The Great Utopia,* attempts to map out the vast territory of vanguard artistic production in Russia, beginning in 1915 with the *0.10* exhibition, where Malevich's square and Tatlin's relief were first shown, and ending in 1932 with the competition for the Palace of Soviets in Moscow and the First Five-Year Plan, at which time the "left wing" in art lost credibility in the face of Stalin's stern program to build an industrialized Soviet Union.

At its core, the exhibition emphasizes the utopianism of the vanguard project, the tensions between radical affirmations of the autonomy of art and the projection of aesthetic concerns into daily life through design; the exhibition attempts to contextualize issues of style by emphasizing the institutional and ideological foundations for much of the production of vanguard work.

By representing the plurality of approaches to utopian abstraction, the curators demonstrate the essential continuity of the vanguard project before and after the Revolution, in terms of individual artists' contributions and in their collective (and competitive) struggle to play leading roles in the formation of a new consciousness.

This exhibition presents a nearly complete sample of the artistic documents of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde—laid out in all of their diversity, beauty, and contradictions. The exhibition encompasses almost all media, with the notable exception of film, which it was not possible to exhibit because the renovation of the Guggenheim Museum theater has been postponed. No exhibition on the topic has included such a comprehensive representation of artists and of works drawn from so many collections. Seventy percent of the objects were

borrowed from Russian museums and private collections, as well as from museums in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Latvia. Many of the works on view are being seen for the first time by American and European audiences.

The scale of the exhibition is a function of an urgent need we felt for the full scope of the period to be presented at once, for the benefit both of the devoted scholars and students of the avant-garde who continue to define its complex history and circumstances and of a larger public that will be able to comprehend the breadth and the uniqueness of this movement in the history of art.

The task of assembling such a broad range of material from such a wide range of sources demanded a unique organizational structure. Obviously, no single curator commands a detailed expertise encompassing all of the works and their myriad locations, many of them obscure. A number of sources had to be combined simply to create a working checklist from which to draw a final selection.

In addition, since the history of the avant-garde in Russia, in comparison to the history of European Modernism, is still in part uncharted, no single interpretation is dominant. From its inception, the exhibition necessarily demanded a variety of perspectives in order to select and shape its content.

The team of curators and experts appointed in June 1989 defined the conceptual guidelines for the exhibition and culled working lists of literally thousands of objects from Western and Russian public and private collections. The team of museum and independent curators from Russia, Germany, and the United States—Vivian Endicott Barnett, Christiane Bauermeister, Charlotte Douglas, Svetlana Dzhafarova, Hubertus Gassner, Evgenii Kovtun, Irina Lebedeva, Evgeniia Petrova, Alla Povelikhina, Elena and Vasilii Rakitin, Jane A. Sharp, Anatolii Strigalev, and Margarita Tupitsyn—was chosen to encompass a variety of specializations and backgrounds. Over a period of almost three years and in meetings in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Frankfurt, and New York, the lists were narrowed down to a group of over 900 works that the curatorial team felt would provide the most comprehensive and coherent overview of the period.

It was also a post-Cold War spirit of collaboration that inspired our effort to structure a project that would be a joint venture of American, European, and Soviet/Russian expertise and organizational foundations. The idea originated in the spring of 1988, when Eduard Shevardnadze, then Soviet Foreign Minister, toured the Guggenheim. That summer in Moscow, a first official protocol was created to initiate the project.

As the exhibition was being organized, the Soviet Union underwent the most dramatic and overwhelming changes since the Bolshevik Revolution. With the emergence of perestroika, a great sense of optimism fueled the establishment of the exhibition as a joint East-West venture. Further changes in Russia meant the reorganization of cultural as well as governmental bureaucracies, which could have halted the project, were it not for the patience, dedication, and communication of all of the institutions involved, including the continued participation of the Russian (formerly Soviet) Foreign Ministry represented especially by Anatolii Adamishin, now Ambassador to Italy, and by Vladimir Petrovsky, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, whose deep involvement with international cultural issues dates at least to his attendance at the inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum's Frank Lloyd Wright building in 1959.

The two major Russian museums—the State Tret'iakov Gallery in Moscow, led by Iurii Korolev, and the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, led by Vladimir Gusev and Deputy Director Evgeniia Petrova—committed their staffs and their important collections to this exhibition. The Vuchetich All-Union Artistic Production Association (VUART)—under former Director Pavel Khoroshilov, Director Aleksandr Ursin, and Deputy Director Valentin Rivkind—took on the very difficult task of coordinating loans from over fifty provincial and other museums throughout the former Soviet Union. The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation—led by Minister Evgenii Sidorov and Head of Museum Department Vera Lebedeva—lent their critical official support and logistical assistance, as had the former Ministry of Culture of the USSR, led by Nikolai Gubenko with assistance from Genrikh Popov and Lidiia Zaletova.

Christoph Vitali, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt—one of the most prominent cultural institutions in Germany and also the first host of this exhibition—was the critical link in Europe in all aspects of negotiation and organization.

At the Guggenheim, all of the selection lists, research, loans, and catalogue contents were coordinated over the course of three years by a competent and specialized staff led by Jane A. Sharp, Project Associate Curator. With her curatorial expertise, impressive facility with the Russian language, and thorough approach to the exhibition's organization on every level, Jane Sharp was the hub holding together the project's many spokes. Natasha Kurchanova, Curatorial Assistant, managed the English/Russian database of thousands of objects and provided important research and loan coordination with the further assistance of Sabine Lange, Emily Locker, Katherine Glaser, and Nataliya Bregel. Linda Thacher, Associate Registrar, professionally handled the endless details and logistics of the international transport of objects. Erik Quam, Information Systems Analyst, designed and supported the database related to the works of art.

In Moscow, a parallel organization was coordinated at VUART by Svetlana Dzhafarova, Zel'fira Tregulova, and Faina Balakhovskaia, without whose professional work and tireless effort the exhibition simply would not have been possible. They, in concert with Deputy Director Evgeniia Petrova at the State Russian Museum and Curators Irina Lebedeva and Ekaterina Seleznova at the State Tret'iakov Gallery and representatives of other museums, coordinated the loans of all objects in the former Soviet Union.

The catalogue itself was a monumental and unique project begun over three years ago. The content, determined by the curatorial team, was intended to make the book a comprehensive reference that would be of value for years to come. Authors include not only members of the working group but such well-known scholars as Natal'ia Adaskina, Susan Compton, Nina Lobanov-Rostovksy, Christina Lodder, Aleksandra Shatskikh, and Paul Wood. Managing Editor Anthony Calnek oversaw the production of what is the most ambitious catalogue in the Guggenheim's history. The editing of the book was handled with extraordinary skill and dedication by Jane Bobko. The talented American catalogue team also included Victoria Ellison, Associate Editor for the glossary, Robert Hemenway, copy editor, and Charles Davey, production and design consultant, as well as Research Assistant Kathleen Friello. Massimo Vignelli created the simple and elegant catalogue design in keeping with his new graphic system for the Guggenheim.

A complementary catalogue team worked in Russia, coordinated by Svetlana Dzhafarova, Zel'fira Tregulova, and Faina Balakhovskaia and including editors Andrei Sarab'ianov and Irina Sorvina.

The extraordinary design of the exhibition is due to architect Zaha Hadid, who, with Pamela Myers at the Guggenheim, made the exhibition accessible and provocative in the Frank Lloyd Wright space and new Gwathmey Siegel and Associates tower. The exhibition marks the first occasion on which the two spaces have been used as a single entity.

All in all, the exhibition touched almost every person in each of the organizing institutions in New York, in Russia, and in Frankfurt.

Perhaps most important, the exhibition is the product of the cooperation of lenders—museums and private collections. The State Tret'iakov Gallery and State Russian Museum treasures form the core of the exhibition, surrounded by works from Russia, Europe, and the United States. The central contribution from the collection of the late George Costakis, both from his estate and from the group of works he generously donated to the State Tret'iakov Gallery, deserves special note. Costakis, whose long association with the Guggenheim included the 1981 exhibition of his holdings, acquired and protected the richest collection of its kind at a time when almost no institutional attention was being paid to this revolutionary chapter in the history of art.

The exhibition represents the most complex logistical effort ever undertaken by the Guggenheim, involving more people and institutions around the world than any other of the museum's projects and requiring sponsorship from the start. It can often be simply a formality to acknowledge a sponsor. In this case, Lufthansa German Airlines cannot be identified merely as an exhibition sponsor with a natural regard for culture, although it is one of the most active corporate supporters of cultural events throughout the United States, Europe, and Russia. Rather, Lufthansa served as a collaborator—bringing people together, carrying precious information as well as people and art, and providing assistance (including translation and communications) in negotiations. Jürgen Weber, President and CEO, is dedicated, as was his predecessor, Heinz Ruhnau, to a world linked by the high technology of air travel as well as by the essential fabric of cultural communication. That Lufthansa's dedication to culture is deeply rooted in its mission to connect people is no more evident than in the work of Nicolas Iljine, Director of Public Affairs, who was present with Dr. Heinrich Klotz, Director of the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, at the inception of the project. Through his equal dedication to people, culture, and business, Nic Iljine was a source of expertise and inspiration throughout a long and complex process.

In sum, it might be stated that the urgency and importance of this unique project is evidenced by the extraordinary hard work, commitment, and faith it inspired in its participants. Utopia is not at hand, but the art of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde in this exhibition may plainly demonstrate some of its essential components—that a blueprint for the future may be more likely found on the margins of our consciousness than at its center; that it may require the invention of a new starting point (the zero form of Malevich's *Black Square*), the progressive involvement of every stratum of society, and the engagement with a diversity of changing aesthetics that becomes the foundation of a practical system of human communication in the midst of a changing world.

—Thomas Krens, Director
Michael Govan, Deputy Director

The Russian avant-garde is a chapter of art history which demands a higher level of knowledge. While many collections around the world house Russian masterpieces from this period and many worthy publications and important exhibitions have presented the originality of Russian culture in the years before and after the October Revolution, these collections and surveys have only highlighted the many nuances and riches of this culture that remain to be explored. Moreover, most of the exhibitions focusing on the Russian avant-garde have discussed the works of art within the narrow framework of the Revolution. As a result, artistic processes have often been neglected in favor of the political and social implications of the works.

The history and role of Russian avant-garde art are far more complex. These artists, despite being intimately bound by the social and political situation of their country, were absorbed as never before by questions of pure aesthetics. The world of the European Modernists—a world which had opened to Russian artists for the first time and whose development they followed with lively interest—combined with their own artistic, literary, and philosophical heritage to create a unique context for innovative creative experiments.

At the turn of the century, an artistic vocabulary capable of describing all possible experiences seemed unquestionably in place. In Russia, the newly defined world order and life-style required new forms of expression. While the artists central to the vanguard movement—Mikhail Larionov, Natal'ia Goncharova, Vasilii Kandinskii, Kazimir Malevich, Pavel Filonov, and others—did not come fully into their own with the Revolution, the events of 1917 focused their maturation. In the diversity of artistic movements in Russia from 1910 to 1920, two principal trends can be clearly discerned and differentiated. One trend describes the emotional-intuitive penetration of the material world, and the other tries to understand matters through a rational-Constructivist analysis. As a result, the initial working title for the present exhibition was *Construction and Intuition.* Although this title was eventually changed, the two themes helped to define the concept at the heart of the exhibition: the tension within the Russian avant-garde between rational and irrational experiences and representations of the world.

In a political sense, this exhibition comes perhaps too late. Since the early 1980s, the idea of romantic underpinnings to the Revolution has lost popularity. Yet the artistic might of this era, with its gathering of creative energies and investigations, has continued to hold its ground against more short-lived political ideologies and economies. It is therefore that much more important for the public to be able to see for the first time the breadth of Russian avant-garde art without a background of political fervor—to see it in peace and to be able to measure fully its place in the development of art in our world.

Our heartfelt thanks to our partners in this project, Thomas Krens, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice; Michael Govan, Deputy Director of the Guggenheim Museum; and Christoph Vitali, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

American, German, and Russian experts have contributed to extensive research and to developing the complex thematic structure of the exhibition. This was not only a fruitful collaboration for the exhibition but also a personal accomplishment for each individual involved.

Equal thanks are due to the sponsor of the exhibition, Lufthansa German Airlines; to Nicolas Iljine, Director of Public Affairs at Lufthansa, who followed the nearly four years of preparations with great sympathy, involvement, and patience; to the former Soviet Ministry of Culture and its staff; and to the Vuchetich All-Union Artistic Production Association (VUART), with Valentin Rivkind at the helm.

Finally, we are tremendously grateful to all museums and private lenders for the very generous gift of their works as loans to the exhibition.

—Vladimir Gusev, Director
Evgeniia Petrova, Deputy Director
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Iurii Korolev, Director
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow

Like few other artistic movements of this century, the Russian avant-garde—with its group of young, overwhelmingly enthusiastic, and energetic artists—continues to excite, fascinate, and captivate.

A comprehensive look at this creative period between 1915 and 1932 is dramatically presented for the first time in *The Great Utopia.* The exhibition opened to great acclaim at Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle, and subsequently at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. We are delighted that the show can now be seen at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the final venue on its international tour. Lufthansa welcomes another opportunity to foster cultural exchange by bringing this monumental work to the handsomely restored and newly expanded Guggenheim.

The Great Utopia brings together both individuals and works of art in an international exchange of culture. Through its support of the exhibition in New York, Lufthansa hopes to demonstrate its commitment to worldwide cultural communications. We feel that it is especially important to establish ties with nations that have recently opened their doors to the rest of the world. That is why our airline has expanded its services to Eastern Europe. And through exhibitions such as *The Great Utopia,* we hope cultural ties with these nations will also flourish, strengthening human relations and furthering mutual understanding.

—Jürgen Weber
Chairman of the Executive Board
Lufthansa German Airlines

Lufthansa

Editorial Note

Transliteration of Russian and Ukrainian in this book follows the Library of Congress system, modified by the omission of diacritical marks. With the exception of artists who had substantial careers in the West and whose names would be rendered unrecognizable by transliteration (such as Marc Chagall), the transliterated form of Russian names is used throughout (Vasilii Kandinskii, for example, in place of Vasily Kandinsky). Russian surnames of foreign origin have not been restored to their Western form but transliterated (thus Lancere rather than Lanceray). The names of non-Russian artists whose activity was concentrated in Russia likewise appear in their Russian rather than native form (Gustav Klutsis rather than Gustavs Klucis).

With some exceptions, geographical names and the names of institutions follow the Russian and have not been anglicized. Many of these names, moreover, changed during the period covered herein; since August 1991, in the wake of developments in the former Soviet Union, many have changed yet again. The city founded by Peter the Great, for example, was called St. Petersburg until August 1914, Petrograd until January 1924, and Leningrad until September 1991—when the name St. Petersburg was restored. Such fluctuations are observed in these pages, where the choice among variant geographical and institutional names has been determined by context.

Renderings of the names of individuals, institutions, and places, as well as renderings of Russian words, that appear in citations from published English sources have not been altered to fit the prevailing system of transliteration. Nor have any "corrections" been made, in citations from artists' statements and manifestos, of the nonstandard capitalization often used for rhetorical purposes in such documents.

Dates up to February 14, 1918, are given according to the Julian (or Old Style) calendar, and after that according to the Gregorian (or New Style) calendar. Before 1900, the Julian calendar in use in Russia was twelve days behind the Gregorian; from 1900 to 1918, it was thirteen days behind.

The avant-garde in Russia has a complex history. The two essays in this volume that tackle the chronology of Obmokhu (the Society of Young Artists) are evidence of the scholarly dialogue in progress.

Permission was granted for the essays by Vivian Endicott Barnett, Susan Compton, Charlotte Douglas, Christina Lodder, Jane A. Sharp, Margarita Tupitsyn, and Paul Wood to appear first in English in *De Grote Utopie,* published by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; they are published here in slightly different form. Vasilii Rakitin's essay appears here in an English translation different from that published in *De Grote Utopie.*

The Politics of the Avant-Garde

Paul Wood

I don't know how radical you are or how radical I am. I am certainly not radical enough; that is, one must always try to be as radical as reality itself.

—Lenin

After many decades of occlusion, the art of the Russian avant-garde is now widely available, presented with a clarity and scope which must once have seemed impossible. There are monographs on each of the major figures, and for some artists more than one. Extensive international exhibitions of their works have been mounted. These have been accompanied by surveys revealing interconnections in the work of major and minor producers alike. Linked to such exhibitions, where once a scrap of misinformation about Constructivism sufficed, weighty catalogues have become indispensable. Certain key documents are available in a variety of collections, frequently standing as monuments in their own right to the ferment of intellectual activity that accompanied the avant-garde practice. Furthermore, the main contours of the institutions both formal and informal which exerted such a decisive influence upon individual production have been filled in to an extent which even a decade ago must have seemed unlikely: reorganizations at Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops), debates at Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture); we even know how many carriages the agit trains had, not to mention where they ran and what function they fulfilled. Scholarly articles regularly appear in a range of journals, often linked to detailed doctoral investigations. Metaphors of trickles, floods, even avalanches are inadequate to describe a collective enterprise of almost military dimensions to lay bare the trammeled soul of Soviet avant-gardism. If present trends continue, by the end of the century Moscow will be as academically well trodden as Montmartre. Yet this is a century for most of which Russia has been a kind of intellectual dark continent, probed, if at all, by hostile Kremlinologists rather than sympathetic students of a vivid cultural constellation. Are we not lucky, then, that the tenebrous coils of prejudice are finally being parted? And, of course, all this work, from encyclopedic summation to diligently unearthed fragment, *is* valuable, the very stuff of intellectual advance. Why, then, the rustle, the murmur, the thickening, the steady coagulation of the sense of a Problem?

It is, after all, simply put. With notable exceptions, studies of the Russian avant-garde have become, in a Kuhnian sense, "normal science." And yet the work to which it adverts is anything but. This is not an insignificant matter, though it is not a very widely acknowledged one. It is a problem that has always existed and that has never gone away but just seems to have become invisible. Like some otherwise defenseless creature in a hostile environment, the question of the politics of the avant-garde has blended into the tangled undergrowth of facts and names, research grants, footnotes, and scholarly paraphernalia. Yet there are sharp teeth lurking here, and narrow eyes peering through crevices in the piles of documents. And it is precisely these eyes, both menacing and beautiful, which constitute the attraction in the first place. The revolutionary avant-garde is not of interest for its normativity. Aleksandr Blok wasn't joking when he summoned Europe to the "bright feast of peace and brotherhood and labor" with the "strings of a Scythian lyre": "Are we to blame if your rib cages burst / beneath our paws' impulsive ardor?" Blok's warning could doubtless be written off as a romantic evocation of the Revolution's most backward aspects—all slave girls, wild horses, and Asiatic jubilation—when the Revolution was really about tractors and planning. But a revolution is a revolution, and the academic researcher padding noiselessly through carpeted libraries or, indeed, faxing documents from one international center of learning to another would do well to remember that Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Dziga Vertov, Gustav Klutsis, and the rest, working in conditions of privation to begin with and harsh censorship later, were all, without

fig. 1
Simplified model of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International *in a street demonstration, Moscow, ca. 1927.*

exception, explicitly committed to working-class revolution—out of which a new order of international socialism would arise. One should not overlook the paradox that the very research which progressively reveals the contours of the Soviet avant-garde is predicated on the historic defeat of the avant-garde's social vision. By whom, by just which forces, is not quite so easy to say. To echo the sentiments of a thinker little acknowledged in these late days of cultural studies: "What is to be done?"

It is an irony upon a paradox that in setting out to answer the question, in attempting to clarify the politics of the avant-garde, there is no other starting point than this unglamorous one, this place where we are. Our starting point consists of these apparent conclusions, this pile of books, this trail of articles: not, after all, the soul of revolutionary Petrograd but the "soul" of the bourgeois academy. The Russian avant-garde, Constructivism, Socialist Realism even, are what they have been made to mean in these pages, in the play of their silences and their affirmations. To ponder the paradox is, in effect, a question of resistance: resisting various normalizations enforced by the history our own culture is writing.

I

It is quite clear that one of the central factors that has fueled historians' widespread desire to confront the Soviet avant-garde—either positively or negatively—is its proximity to the Russian Revolution. This is so obvious that it sounds almost strange to insist upon it. In the days before such claims lost their vogue, E. H. Carr said that the Revolution had been the source of more profound repercussions than any other historical event of modern times. Be that as it may, the Revolution has been the source of greatest controversy in modern times at the level of interpretation: interpreters range from the inhabitants of the most ethereal superstructures to the state planners and military strategists at the other end of the spectrum. This controversy's sheer scale has increasingly drawn art historians into its orbit, though motives have, of course, varied. On one side there has been what amounts, more or less, to a myth of buried treasure: avant-garde artworks from the heroic period that have lain in attics and basements for decades being led blinking into the light of modern scholarship. For historians of this persuasion, ideology has probably counted for little next to the glamour of the quest, which can range from a tomb-robbing lust for gold in its darker reaches to an honorable desire to shed light on a lost but incontrovertibly significant chapter of twentieth-century art. For other historians, the ideological factor has surely played an important role. Confronted in their own productive lives, within and without the academy, by institutional orthodoxies requiring resistance, they find that the art of the most thoroughgoing of all moments of resistance holds a powerful attraction. Thus for both left-wing and liberal historians, the relation of the avant-garde to the Revolution has, in different ways, been a prime motivator: either to recover the work from burial by the Revolution understood as closure or to restore that work as evidence of the Revolution's heroic challenge to orthodoxy and stasis across the board of human endeavor, before its rapid eclipse.

For all that, the precise nature of the avant-garde's relationship to the Revolution has tended to remain underinvestigated. This is the case despite the increasing detail of particular studies, as well as the enormously deepened understanding of the avant-garde's technical innovations—even when these latter have been read in terms of their significant connection to the revolutionary project of social emancipation. That is to say, as the historical account has developed both extensively and intensively, the question of the politics of the avant-garde has been left relatively underresearched.

This is due, in part, to the simple fact of gaps in the historical record. Until the 1970s, little enough was available empirically. As recently as 1983, what gave Christina Lodder's *Russian Constructivism* its benchmark status was preeminently the fact that nobody had previously brought such information to light. To know who said what at Inkhuk in 1922, let alone be able to fit it into a context of debate on key technical and theoretical issues, marked of itself a qualitative advance. The silence cannot be laid wholly at the door of ignorance, however. It is, to a greater degree, reflexive: it has to do with the ideological commitments and blindnesses, interests and silences (sometimes explicit, more often implicit, if not deeply buried) of the collective academic psyche in the liberal-bourgeois educational institutions of the late-capitalist West. For all its epochal status, outside the ranks of a few specialists the historical shape of the Russian Revolution is little enough known; and for each lacuna in the record there is a pathology of mistrust, uninterest, and fear to account for it.

The manner in which the avant-garde's political alignments have been represented in the literature may be generalized under three headings, though these have changed over time and, obviously, been subject to inflection. The hegemonic response, until recently at least, has paradoxically been to dissociate the avant-garde from involvement with revolutionary politics. This "disengagement" thesis can adopt various forms. Traditionally, Constructivism, in the sense of an avant-garde art practice that was transmuted into a more direct cluster of interventions into daily life under the rubric of "art into production," was simply ignored. What "Constructivism" tended to mean was an international subvariant of abstract sculpture within a broadly Modernist tradition, associated with artists, such as Naum Gabo, who had left Russia shortly after the Revolution. Limited and misrepresentative as this now seems, it is sobering to recall that it was probably the dominant view from the 1930s to the 1970s—let us say, from Alfred Barr's brief and ambiguous homage to Lef (the Left Front of the Arts) in 1928 to Camilla Gray in 1962. Even major figures like Rodchenko were little known, others like Klutsis not at all; and the relations of such work to an intellectual and political program simply fell outside the scope of what passed for the history of modern art. Dark days, then, whose end is not to be regretted. It would, however, be unwise to celebrate a passage into light.

A small selection of quite recent examples will suffice. John Bowlt has established a reputation at the head of his field largely through his efforts to establish the density of this period of Russian artistic culture, the coexistence of a variety of different strands of art practice. The lasting benefit of his enterprise has undoubtedly been to relativize Western art history's tendency to become fixated upon the Soviet avant-garde in a narrow sense, (mis)construing it as a precursor of postwar, principally American, vanguard art; and, by contrast, to place the work of that wing of the avant-garde in a perspective of other trends ranging from the realistic to the fantastic. The price of this pluralism, fueled, one may speculate, by the détente politics of the 1970s, has, it seems, been to bend the stick too far in the other direction and depoliticize the avant-garde *tout court*. "Perhaps the most dangerous rumor concerning the Russian avant-garde has to do with its alleged support of radical politics, and radical political philosophy in general."[1] This was written by Bowlt in 1984. Chapter and verse surely no longer need to be given. Yet for an author deeply familiar with the writings of that avant-garde to advance such a claim at that late date is remarkable and must, one assumes, be motivated by considerations concerning the

social relations of art quite discrete from the substance of the historical record itself.

For their part, surely, Rodchenko, Klutsis, Lissitzky, Maiakovskii, and others could not have been clearer about their commitment to the Revolution and to the task of building a new society. Take only the simplest example: the program of Lef itself. Maiakovskii in a letter of 1923 charges his correspondent to remember "the purpose for which we have united our efforts," which he then defines as "*communist art* (as part of com-culture and communism in general!)."[2] There is a threefold articulation here: a Communist art—quite a specialized thing, which by Maiakovskii's own admission has not yet been fully developed and which it is the business of Lef to promulgate; the relation of this to a wider Communist culture—which is to say, something akin to Marx's "superstructure," the range of institutions both formal and informal wherein social consciousness organizes itself and in which "art" per se is only a part; and then a relation of this to Communist society, by which Maiakovskii obviously means a social mode of production, the "base," which will underwrite the achievement of the other two. This is highly schematic. But it is also programmatic and not at all incidental to the project of Lef—which is, in its turn, central to what we mean when we speak of the "Soviet avant-garde" at all. Examples could, of course, be multiplied.

All this makes it difficult to entertain claims about the avant-garde's political virginity. Yet the thesis is not confined to American authors, who have, after all, suffered a uniquely depoliticized intellectual tradition. Andrei Nakov offers an example of one European variant in a study of Rodchenko which simply omits mention of factors ranging beyond the formal and technical—an omission which is the more surprising given the artist's own frequent invocation of a sociopolitical dimension to his work.[3] Such exclusions—sins of omission, as it were, rather than commission—might be defensible on grounds of relevance, space, and so forth. Not so the stance of the Russian historian Vasilii Rakitin: "In practice the artists who were practitioners of the 1920s left agit-art, a Rodchenko or Lissitzky, have much less in common with leftist sociological hypotheses than has been supposed."[4] This is not a claim that there is *no* relationship, just that it is not central to the avant-garde project; it is not, however, the simple omission of a set of determinations, as in the previous instance, but an explicit thesis about the relation of the avant-garde to revolutionary politics—and the relation it claims is one of relative disinvolvement. Yet throughout the twenties, Lissitzky's writings are replete with references to the value of art residing in its relationship to the community, and to the requirement that artists abandon a conventional sense of artistic work and participate in the development of new forms of community to achieve the goal of a classless society. This endeavor is held to have serious repercussions, moreover, in that it results in the opposition of other, more conservative, artists to the left project: "New space neither needs nor demands pictures—it is not a picture transposed on a surface. This explains the painters' hostility towards us: we are destroying the wall as the resting place for their pictures."[5] This "new space" is linked to a conception of a modern world, a world whose modernity, furthermore, resides not merely in new technology but in new social relations. "It is to the social revolution rather than to the technological revolution" that the basic elements of Lissitzky's work are tied.[6] In 1930, he published a whole book to this effect with the unambiguous title of *Architektur für eine Weltrevolution* (*An Architecture for World Revolution*). After several years' residence in the West during the midtwenties, and in marked contrast to those like Gabo who could not leave the Soviet Union fast enough after the Civil War ended and Bolshevik power was consolidated, Lissitzky went back to Russia because, as his wife put it: "There were tasks of a special kind awaiting him. He was needed in his homeland; the Soviet Union needed all his knowledge, his experience, his art."[7]

There is a case, let us put it no more strongly than that, for the partial determination of the avant-garde by the example of the successful Bolshevik Revolution. The argument against this relies almost completely on the Soviet avant-garde's roots in a prerevolutionary avant-garde art movement, on the one hand, and its relationship to postwar West European developments in architecture and design during the 1920s, on the other. The existence of these relations does not, however, refute the specificity of the conjuncture of the avant-garde and the Revolution within the Soviet Union. It is a peculiar kind of history which wants to claim almost as a point of principle that the one set of connections debars the other, yet such has been the disposition of hegemonic art history: to emphasize connections compatible with the overall aegis of notions of art's autonomy—even on this most unpromising terrain—and systematically to disregard theoretical, ideological, political orders of relation. As such, this is more a problem of Western art histoty and *its* institutional-political conjuncture than anything to do with the historical terrain it claims to conjugate.

That there are powerful motivating factors behind the "severance" thesis does not make it any more robust. What those factors are can be gleaned from Rakitin's argument. He needs to play down the avant-garde's relation to revolutionary politics precisely because of the overarching virtue he attaches to the avant-garde; and, concomitantly, because of the vice associated with Sovietization. Thus, the avant-garde is "an energetic free force"; it requires for its practice "the participation of free active persons." As such, it is "thoroughly alien to the Soviet model of life."[8] Rakitin does, at least, have the excuse of being Russian and, therefore, having been constrained for at least part of his career by the closures of the Stalinist system. The same cannot be said of "liberal" West European and American intellectuals whose work remains within the purview of their own culture's official ideology.

The clear line linking Rakitin and other East European "severance" theorists to their Western liberal counterparts is the identification of the Bolshevik Revolution with the monolithic Soviet system of the Cold War. A simultaneous attraction to an adventurous abstract art and repulsion from a totalitarian political system lead to the strategy of divesting the former of its political commitments. The two most common variations on this strategy are, first, the displacement of the sociopolitical impulse to the margins of a practice seen as primarily determined by formal and technical considerations that it shares with similar practices elsewhere. And, second, when that argument becomes too weak to sustain, the notion of "utopianism." The members of the avant-garde are interpreted as innocents caught up in the revolutionary turmoil, mistaking its motivations for their own, and then being badly burned by the consequences of their mistake once the "real" politicians managed to divert some of their will-to-power to the sphere of culture. Neither of these arguments is completely without foundation: that is precisely what lends them their specious plausibility and accounts for their longevity in a political-intellectual conjuncture which wants them to be true. Thus, to invoke Maiakovskii once again: the reason Maiakovskii offers for forming Lef is indeed that the political leadership's attentions are no longer going to be completely absorbed by the exigencies of War Communism; and the artistic left, as a consequence, has to organize itself and get its version of the cultural task inserted properly into the debate which is about

to ensue. This is not in itself "utopian," however; quite the contrary.

Utopianism is a resort of historians who want to ensure there is absolutely no passage between Kazimir Malevich, for example, and—let us say—Leonid Brezhnev, as the symbol of the Soviet order at the moment of production of most cultural-artistic histories of it. For American historians in particular, the potency of this system of passages and disjunctions must have been enhanced by the cultural prestige of the exiled Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his emphatic assimilation of the Stalinist dystopia to Bolshevism per se—an endemic trait of liberal thought throughout the period, but given significant reinforcement by the horse's-mouth effect of the wave of post-1960s literary dissidents in general and Solzhenitsyn's American exile in particular. Utopianism itself, it may finally be noted, has been inflected in two different directions according to the demands of the account. Thus, either we have the blissful innocence and otherworldliness of artists whose very openness and suggestibility lead to their being raped by the Marxist politicians as soon as they can find the time (subtext: art should avoid politics, then and now) or, in the case of those who appear to have persisted in their association of art with the Revolution, we encounter a construction of willful naïveté, a tempting of fate, a dangerous kind of utopianism purblind to the true nature of the realpolitik it entertained; these people are paraded as a lesson on the dangers of playing with such fire in the first place, for inviting it, as it were, into the house of art (subtext, of course, the same).

There is probably even today a sense in which this image of a "protean avant-garde," either innocent of or childishly infatuated with revolutionary politics and subsequently crushed by the totalitarian Marxist power which has continued to disfigure the twentieth century almost to its end, remains the most widespread view of the Soviet constellation of the early twenties—with Lenin the ruthless leader whose iron shadow fell across a generation of free spirits, a generation whose eccentric vitality has, however, continued to grace liberal culture even as it was anathematized by Marxism's pathology of control.

Accounts of that stripe have been hegemonic. A second broad category emerged, however, to challenge hegemonic certainties as part of that general contestation trading variously under the titles of critiques of Modernism, the social history of art, and the new art history in the later 1970s and the 1980s. Here for the first time serious investigations not only of the individual arts but of interconnections among them begin to appear, tellingly stimulated more by developments in film and literary theory than in art history per se. The result has been a range of reconceptualizations away from crudely conventional assertions of the autonomy of art—though not, it should be said, thereby away from a necessary focus on the formal. Needless to say, the orthodox account of the avant-garde's distinction from politics and this series of radical re-readings have not evolved neatly, one from the other. Rather, the contestation between them has effectively constituted the field during recent times, setting the register within whose compass our qualitative leap in the understanding of the avant-garde has taken place. The upshot has been a field transformed out of all recognition, dedicated most often to re-reading the extraordinary series of technical radicalizations which fundamentally constituted the revolutionary avant-garde of the 1920s, revealing that avant-garde as an unparalleled site of the committed scrutiny and transformation of all the norms of bourgeois cultural practice. The excavation of the full scope of the work of Rodchenko, Vertov, Klutsis, Vladimir Tatlin, Maiakovskii, and Lissitzky, not to mention the related theoretical perspectives of Osip Brik, Viktor Shklovskii, Valentin Voloshinov, and others, has achieved that rare thing: the eruption of the historical work into the practical conjuncture of the present. It would not be going too far to say that a culture has been recovered—a culture, moreover, that is still revolutionary with respect to our own. Nothing has more vividly thrown into relief the tragic conjunction of the technically extraordinary and the socially and politically regressive within our own culture than this revealed constellation of practices in the fifteen years or so after the October Revolution.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this concentration, the relation of this spectrum of work *to* the October Revolution has not been the focus of such close scrutiny as the contours of the work itself. Needless to say, the aforementioned ideologically motivated sanitizing of the avant-garde has been eclipsed. But the nature of the avant-garde's revolutionary affiliations has, for the most part, continued to be read at the level of a general platform enabling the plethora of technical innovations. That said, Yve-Alain Bois, for example, has mapped his reading of Lissitzky's geometrical investigations back onto a sociopolitical context.[9] At their best, such readings have aspired to conjoin the semantic and social revolutions of the Soviet avant-garde, at least as a point of principle. In so doing, they are an effective counterweight both to depoliticized accounts of avant-garde art and to orthodox political histories which neglect the dimension of the social production of meaning.

Lodder's account overturned many assumptions about the nature of Constructivism, indeed it started from the premise that "no satisfactory overall account"[10] existed. She was, nonetheless, able to devote little space to siting that avant-garde within the revolutionary process. As might have been expected, the consequence, therefore, was a certain asymmetry in her account: innovatory analyses of the aims of the avant-garde and the organization of its institutions, yet reliance upon conventional assumptions about its context. One of Lodder's premises was the ultimate failure of Constructivism; a tragic, even a grand failure, but a failure, nonetheless. This failure is signaled by a retreat from aspirations to intervene in—even to "organize"—building the new world, to small-scale contributions to the spheres of graphic design and theater. Even the turn to photography in the later twenties is read as an attempt to claw back some ground from the increasingly dominant "Realist" painting groups like AKhRR (the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia).

The implicit premises here are three, and they are of course not Lodder's alone but the conventional wisdom. First, "the Party" and its preference for a Realist art. Second, the grounds of this preference in Realist art's supposed popularity and accessibility to the uneducated masses, an accessibility which cuts both ways—as an expression of the people's unschooled interests and as a conduit for the Party's preferred messages. Third, economic scarcity, which underpins this symbiosis between an authoritarian Party and a conservative people. Thus the Vkhutemas experiment was "aborted" because of "the material circumstances in which it operated."[11] More than that, the "principal reason" advanced by Lodder for the failure of Constructivism as a whole is "the material poverty that dominated all Soviet activity in the 1920s."[12] No adequate account of Soviet developments in the 1920s could, of course, avoid the economic aspect. But what tends to be overlooked is the extent to which economic questions did not arise as "brute" facts. This may seem alarmingly to underestimate what it is to lack the equipment to produce goods, or what it is to experience famine. The point remains, nonetheless, that the economic dimension is continually implicated in a process of political direction and decision making. If the economic and social wreckage of the War Communism period could sustain

the high levels of activity of the revolutionary avant-garde, there is no specifically economic reason why such activity could not be sustained later in the decade. The reasons for the increasing effectiveness of criticism of the erstwhile avant-garde, ultimately amounting to its marginalization and suppression, are more complex; and the "failure" is not Constructivism's alone.

What is at issue is a far wider "failure": the failure of the October Revolution itself. The failure of Constructivism or, indeed, of the "left front" of art in general is best regarded as a symptom of this larger defeat. It is as well to be clear on this point. In both the foregoing accounts of the avant-garde—explicitly in the depoliticized version and at least implicitly in the qualitatively more sophisticated account wherein the avant-garde is powerfully determined by the Revolution—the tendency is, at bottom, to view the avant-garde as victim of the Revolution's success. The implication is that the avant-garde found a space to operate in the heady days immediately following the Revolution, when a mixture of euphoria, chaos, and the leadership's preoccupation with other matters offered a loophole. Seizing its opportunity, the avant-garde became briefly dominant. Once the revolutionary ship was stabilized, however, the authoritarian Party showed its true colors and, as part of the drive to extend its control, suppressed the avant-garde. The realpolitik of building up an industrial base in a backward country meant that the avant-garde became, at best, a sort of luxury when there was no provision for luxuries and, at worst, a vestige of prerevolutionary bourgeois culture which had to be extirpated from the nascent workers' state. It must be said that, once again, there are elements of truth in this explanation: there *was* suspicion of the avant-garde's bourgeois antecedents, and so forth. But the cumulative effect of such accounts, despite their moments of truth, is misleading—skewed by an interpretation of the Revolution which, it is increasingly evident, is itself an ideological construct. What gives this construct its force is, of course, that it has constituted the ideology of *both* competing world-power blocs. For equal and opposite reasons, the bureaucratic monolith in the USSR and the liberal-capitalist democracies in the West have sought to underwrite a continuity between the October Revolution and the state system that succeeded it. To develop this point here would be to get ahead of the story; suffice to say at present that the three constituents of the avant-garde's failure, as offered even in "revisionist" accounts—the monolithic Party, the backward people, and economic dearth—are themselves in need of considerable investigation and revision.

Even Benjamin Buchloh's compelling account of the avant-garde's evolution "from *faktura* to factography" betrays elements of this questionable perspective—though his argument is somewhat the reverse of Lodder's.[9] While for Lodder economic scarcity set the agenda, Buchloh, if anything, overestimates the extent to which it had been conquered, yet in so doing demonstrates fundamentally the same perception of the Revolution's aims. One of the virtues of Buchloh's account is that it acknowledges the self-consciousness of the Constructivists' transformation out of a bourgeois avant-garde art group in the changed conditions post-October; furthermore, this transformation is treated in terms of a focus upon the audience for their work. That is to say, the revolutionary self-transformation of the avant-garde is not treated as merely the result of some internal dynamic but conclusively presented as determined by a sense of its task: whom it is addressing, and what has to be done to consolidate and encourage that new constituency. It is here, however, that Buchloh seems to go astray. The basic problem is a repeated overemphasis on industrialization as if this were an achieved condition from the moment of the Revolution. Thus, in a passage clearly referring to the immediate postrevolutionary situation of War Communism (when Lissitzky displayed his Suprematist hoarding *Stanki depo fabrik zavodov zhdut vas* [*The Factory Benches Await You*, 1919–20] outside a factory in Vitebsk), Buchloh speaks of "the new audiences of industrialized urban society in the Soviet Union." Ironically, postrevolutionary society was in the process of becoming considerably less industrialized than it had been even under czarism as production was wrecked and the working class itself bled dry by the Civil War. Elsewhere, this time in a discussion of the NEP (New Economic Policy) period, and specifically of avant-garde responses to the reassertion of tradition under NEP, Buchloh refers to an art production addressing "the needs of a newly industrialized collective society"—this at a time when Russian society, as a matter of policy, was neither industrialized nor collective. Factography as it developed in the late 1920s certainly took place in an atmosphere when industrialization, ultimately in the shape of the First Five-Year Plan, came on the agenda. Yet it did not become enshrined as an absolute until 1928 or even 1929. Thus, in a discussion of *faktura* (density) during the so-called "laboratory period," circa 1918–21, Buchloh's reference to "the introduction of industrialization and social engineering that was imminent in the Soviet Union after the revolution of 1917" certainly seems premature. That industrialization of a certain type—not of the sort which actually came about at the end of the decade—may have been required by Constructivism merely underlines the significance of such a gap between requirement and reality.

There are two possibilities here. One is that Buchloh's wider history is insufficiently differentiated, but of no consequence because it doesn't affect his account of developments within the avant-garde. The other is that a tendency to misread the productive context does indeed have some bearing on an explanation of artistic developments which, after all, sets out with the intention of situating them in a dialectic with society and production rather than treating the latter as a passive backdrop to the art. It is this second possibility which I shall go on to explore below. But first, this schematic survey of characterizations of the sociopolitical alignments of the avant-garde requires completion.

Just as the "severance" thesis of liberal dominance came to be challenged by revisionist accounts which for the first time revealed the extent of the avant-garde's project of participation in the revolutionary process of building the new society, so recently there is evidence that a third kind of account is emerging. This is not so surprising as it might seem. Both of the foregoing accounts have themselves emanated from an academic-institutional conjuncture overdetermined by the conditions of the postwar settlement: the division of the world into two superpower blocs. In terms of a structural logic, if not always of strict chronology, it may be possible to ascribe the "severance" and "revisionist" accounts to distinct moments in that period: in brief, to pre- and post-1968. The reemergence of a second Cold War during the Reagan/Thatcher/Brezhnev period tended to give renewed emphasis to perspectives more at home in the earlier phase, just as it threatened to marginalize the revisionisms which for a period after the radicalizations of the late sixties, and during the period of détente, threatened to become hegemonic at least in the social sciences and the newly sophisticated cultural studies departments of Western higher-educational institutions. Since the mid-1980s, and reaching at least a temporary climax in 1989 (whether this proves to be a plateau before even greater upheavals remains to be seen), this map has been redrawn. A condition which appeared to be—or perhaps more accurately, felt as if it were—permanent, has dissolved into history; and

official talk, at least, is of a "new world order." One of the main accompaniments to the sound of the Berlin Wall coming down has been the clatter of intellectuals of a variety of persuasions typing out the obituaries of socialism/Communism/Marxism. One of the darkest stars in this dubious intellectual constellation has been Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the end of history, a kind of right-wing Postmodernism in its evocation of a boring future in which the grand narratives of emancipation have expired, but a thesis which nonetheless offered a rerun of Daniel Bell's "end of ideology" claim from the 1950s.[14] The affirmative side of Fukuyama's elision of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and the socialist tradition *tout court* was an assertion of the permanent realization of liberalism. In fact, the "end of history" consisted specifically in wall-to-wall liberalism, albeit of a conservative, State Department hue. The foundations of Fukuyama's thesis have, since its publication, been subject to criticism, and in the wake of the Persian Gulf War skepticism has accrued mightily about the credentials of George Bush's "new world order." Notwithstanding this, however, the Fukuyama argument is an indication of the new lease on life which the rhetorical death of Marxism et cetera has given to voices which want nothing to do with revolution—neither English nor French nor, of course, Russian; nor, one might add, cultural.

A side effect of the collapse of the Soviet empire in the field of cultural history has been the opening up of a hitherto largely dormant field: the culture of the Stalin period. Much of this work promises, of course, to be of exceptional value, as it brings to light the complexities of that which has heretofore been written off, for the most part, as the ossified Other of Modernism, unworthy of scholarly investigation, the creature of a totalitarian bureaucracy with no compact or articulated identity—no history—of its own. One contested area which this development places on the agenda, however, is the relationship of the avant-garde of the 1920s to the official art of the Stalin era. The traditional option of a pristine, apolitical avant-garde subordinated to a totalitarian political agenda having been somewhat abrogated by those revisionist histories which revealed the extent of the avant-garde's politicization, the question now poses itself the more starkly: what is the relationship of those politics to the politics of Socialist Realism and Stalinism?

One of the key issues here, which falls beyond the scope of the present essay, concerns the political perspective of revisionist-left histories themselves. Suffice to say that for the majority of the left, Stalinism has presented a major ideological, as well as a moral and political, problem. The glaring discrepancy between conceptions of a "presently existing socialism"—positively or negatively inflected according to the author's devotion to the Communist Party tradition—and the realities of the bureaucratic nightmare that Stalinism actually was, coupled with the fact that the bureaucracy systematically denied access to all kinds of information about its own constitution and history, ensured that the question of Stalinist culture did not get addressed. The demise of that system, combined with the renewed boldness of the ideological wing of the apparently victorious, economically liberal/politically conservative capitalist formation in what E. P. Thompson once called the "Natopolitan" countries, has given a new lease on life to denunciations of Stalinism, while reducing any need to be scrupulous in depicting its antecedents. When even the Western Communist parties are competing to distance themselves from the October Revolution (and the legacy they themselves have systematically misconstrued), what historian of art is going to be in a position to be able—let alone to want—to delve into the occluded byways of Russian politics in the 1920s? That sense of a loosening of restraint, albeit often for negative reasons, on the scrutiny of Stalinism, plus the fact that a great quantity of historical data on the Stalin era is only now becoming available, means that the question passed over in silence by those histories which gave back to the avant-garde its political dimension is now close to the center of concern. Moreover, the contours of an answer are being provided, too. To borrow a term from media studies, our situation on the threshold of a "new world order" offers a preferred reading of that order's defeated opponents. If "severance" was one motif for the avant-garde's relation to politics, a motif redrawn as *cohabitation* by left-revisionist histories, the new neoconservative perspective can be given in one word: complicity.

Not all such accounts are, of course, of a piece; this "map" is only schematic, and the epithet "neoconservative" may not always be wholly justified. Thus, to take only two authors: Boris Groys in a stimulating and suggestive argument treats Socialist Realism as a sui generis cultural formation, whereas Igor Golomstock in a palpably rebarbative text is concerned to reduce it to the status of merely one manifestation of a "totalitarian art" that also includes the products of Italian Fascism and German Nazism.[15] Both, however, in a diametric reversal of arguments for the political innocence of the avant-garde, are concerned to draw connections between it and the ostensibly very different art of Socialist Realism.

Golomstock's case involves more than a hint of guilt by association. In an ironically symmetrical replay—of all things—of Georg Lukács's denunciation of the Expressionist avant-garde for weakening the resistance of the bourgeois humanist tradition to Fascism, Golomstock despairs of the avant-garde for smoothing the path of totalitarianism. It should be said that this is not Golomstock's main focus—which consists in the claimed isomorphism of Stalinist and Nazi art. But a central plank of such a claim is the assertion of continuity between the Bolshevik Revolution and the Stalinist bureaucracy. As his teleological argument has it: "a totalitarian regime disguises itself in revolutionary garb during its first stage of development." In line with this political claim, a "continuity" thesis is asserted in art. The committed wing of the left avant-garde—Tatlin, Rodchenko, Klutsis, Lissitzky—become totalitarians *in nuce.* "Many features" of the avant-garde's artistic ideology "were later incorporated into the foundations of totalitarian art." Citations from 1920s avant-gardists are deployed to prove that "the first calls for the strict administration and central administration of the arts" came from "the revolutionary avant-garde themselves," and thence that the avant-garde "first elaborated a totalitarian ideology of culture." The slippage in the argument is notable. In fact, Golomstock inserts a disclaimer in his argument to the effect that it would be wrong to overstate the avant-garde's responsibility for totalitarian art, since that is just what Socialist Realist theoreticians themselves claimed about the avant-garde vis-à-vis Nazism, as part of establishing their own distance from it. The disclaimer does, however, ring somewhat tokenistically in the face of the multiplicity of claims to the effect that it would be "illegitimate, however, entirely to deny the role of the avant-garde in the formation of the totalitarian artistic ideology." A supposedly conventional antithesis (our first, "hegemonic" interpretation above) is invoked wherein "these two decades [i.e., the 1920s and 1930s] appear to be antagonistic epochs" according to a list of binary oppositions: "freedom and slavery, dynamism and stasis, development and stagnation, etc." By thus absolutizing the supposed "oppositions," it becomes easier to take a "realistic" step back and claim a "hereditary link" between the revolutionary avant-garde and the Stalinist apologetics of Socialist Realism.

The thrust of this argument in Golomstock's case is clearly grounded in a valorization of Western liberal democracy—not surprising, since he is in voluntary exile after a blighted career within the Stalinist system. The point is not so much to question the allegiances imposed by a trammeled biography as to note that in the present conjuncture of its publication, Golomstock's thesis dovetails with the wider triumphalism of Western official readings of the revolutions of 1989. In this connection, there is, in fact, an explicit sense in which the historical continuity thesis is offered as a dire warning to contemporary artists who evince a renewed openness to art's sociopolitical dimension. Artists inclined to a critique of Modernism may be tempted by a "nostalgia" for "art's lost social role" to "flirt, albeit unconsciously, with totalitarian aesthetics."

Groys's argument differs from Golomstock's in its view of Socialist Realism as a specific formation, as well as in its acknowledgment of the paradoxical defeat of the avant-garde's intentions to transcend bourgeois art practice, which the contemporary interest of art museums and historians represents. Nonetheless, apropos the present argument concerning the politics of the avant-garde, he repeatedly asserts Socialist Realism's "identity with the avant-garde era," the "unity of their fundamental artistic aim." Despite appearances, Socialist Realism "put into effect practically all the fundamental watchwords of the avant-garde." Although it moved away from the avant-garde stylistically, "at the same time it continued, developed and in a certain sense, even implemented its programme." Clearly, these arguments require careful consideration. Outrageous as they might seem at first glance to sensibilities nurtured on the alleged otherworldliness of a Malevich, let alone the straightforwardly anti-Soviet credentials of a Gabo, there is once more a grain, though not a kernel, of truth to them. The issue revolves, of course, precisely around the Soviet avant-garde's self-transformation out of a Modernist-type embrace of the autonomy of art rooted in the narrowing of art to the realm of the aesthetic (where the aesthetic is understood in terms of a conception of the expression of emotion and concomitant distance from the cognitive or critical). It is this basic fact of an art being conceived in terms of a social rather than a purely aesthetic task which engenders the desire to curtail its emancipatory aura by reining it in as a precursor of Socialist Realism. Thus, Bois wants, rightly, to claim of Lissitzky's prouns that they are "abstract models of radical freedom."[16] Any such identification is clearly disrupted by an argument which postulates a one-way street from the avant-garde to the subservient, sometimes brutal, always formulaic art of the bureaucratic system.

Groys's key phrase is that Socialist Realism constitutes the "continuation of the Russian avant-garde's strategy by other means." The whole issue, by which I mean the thesis of continuity between the avant-garde and Socialist Realism *and* between the Bolshevik Revolution and Stalinism, centers on the constitution of "means" and "ends." For Groys, the "means" are, on the one hand, a highly idealized form of figurative painting and, on the other, a rhetoric of materialism. His claim is that the end which the avant-garde and Socialist Realism shared was the aspiration to change people's nature: either through a kind of narrative persuasion or by directly intervening in and changing their environments. Such a comparison is, it must be said, smoothed somewhat by the invocation of hyper-Productivists like Boris Arvatov. The wilder reaches of Soviet Taylorism, as represented by such as Arvatov, Boris Kushner, and Aleksei Gastev, are, it must be conceded, terrifying. They are not, however, truly representative of the left front of the arts as a whole. It is more than a little disingenuous to use them as a stick with which to beat the avant-garde in general. But the question of shared "ends" runs deeper than this, and care is required.

The basic disposition to change people's habits, even the revolutionary desire to bring about a new kind of person living a new kind of life free from oppression and exploitation is, as it stands, too vague to legitimate the assimilation of the revolutionary avant-garde of the 1920s to the official state art of the 1930s. The question is, rather, whether their conceptions of a "new way of life," of "socialist man," and so forth, are the same. Equally important is whether the philosophical positions stood in the same relation to actual policies, insofar as the question of "ends" has two aspects: what they said *and* what they did. The main issue, nonetheless, is whether the ends of the October Revolution can be said to be the same as the ends of the Stalinist system of the thirties and after. Before debating the historical point, it is worth underlining that, for Groys, they are. In one particularly outspoken instance they are de facto identified: ". . . the October Revolution and its slogan of the total reconstruction of the country according to a single plan." There is obviously an overlap here with the arguments of Buchloh noted earlier. And once again the assumption is mistaken. The Bolshevik intention was not, initially, to build up an industrial planned economy in the national Russian state. It was to stimulate, to act as a bridgehead for, revolution in the already industrialized Western nations. Lenin repeatedly argued that "without such a revolution we are lost," and even that "the final victory of socialism in a single country is of course impossible."[17] Moreover, he also judged that when the international revolution did occur, its Russian component would retreat to the the second rank, only then slowly building itself up on the basis of aid from the developed countries. It was in complete opposition to this view—which is to say, the view of Lenin, Lev Trotskii, and the Bolshevik Party as a whole—that Stalin, as Carr has pointed out, as early as 1918 voiced skepticism about the international dimension of the Revolution and viewed it in a primarily Russian national context.[18] Thus, the effect of that one sentence in Groys's history is to collapse the international-socialist Bolshevik October into the Stalinist doctrine of "socialism in one country" and its achievement through the Five-Year Plans. It is worth noting that even this latter is an elision of no small order: the doctrine of "socialism in one country" in fact preceded the adoption of the First Five-Year Plan by the better part of five years and, indeed, was initially promulgated in the conditions of the New Economic Policy in 1924—the very social system which the Five-Year Plan overthrew.

The twin assimilation—of October to the Monolith, of Lef to Socialist Realism—receives a particular fillip from an observation made by both Groys and Golomstock. One of the most Orwellian encapsulations of the task of the Socialist Realist artist is that offered at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 by Andrei Zhdanov, quoting Stalin himself: writers were to be "engineers of human souls." This almost oxymoronic formulation produces a chilling effect and has come to stand as the hallmark of Stalinism's inhumanity and indifference to the individual. Both Groys and Golomstock argue for a continuity between the Constructivist project and this Stalinist conception of the artist. In Groys's case, the claim is rooted in a general invocation of the avant-garde concept of the "artist-engineer." His argument is that the utopian and unrealizable disposition of artists actually to shape the material form of the environment is nothing less than that which was taken over by Stalin and his cohorts—so that artists could now focus on the more manageable task of mind-fixing. What made the avant-garde's project "utopian" was that artists exceeded their brief by aspiring to affect the "base," an ambition Socialist Realism redressed by its focus on the "superstructure."

This is held to be its realpolitik. Golomstock's argument is essentially the same, except that he musters a quotation: Sergei Tret'iakov's image from the first issue of *Lef* (*Left Front of the Arts*), which Golomstock translates as "psycho-engineer." Tret'iakov's subsequent fate in one of Stalin's prison camps thus becomes a heightened instance of the avant-garde being devoured by the Frankenstein it helped to create, and by implication a grisly warning to any and all who find themselves attracted to the role of the "engaged artist."

The avant-garde notion of the engineer or constructor was part of an attempt to realign the practice of art with the business of socialist construction and to distance it from mysticism. As such, it partook of the central historical-materialist tenet that "social consciousness" is determined by "social being." To conflate this with the Stalinist panoply of repression and, by inference, with its well-known corruption of psychiatry in the treatment of dissidents owes more to Cold War ideology than to history. I would be naïve to claim that there were no points of contact among the avant-garde, the Revolution, and Stalinism. But how such a relation is conceived matters greatly. In marked contrast to the foregoing, Victor Serge wrote: "It is often said that 'the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning'. Well, I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs—a mass of other germs—and those who lived through the enthusiasm of the first years of the first victorious revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in a corpse—and which he may have carried with him since his birth—is this very sensible?"[19]

Distinct, on the one hand, from traditional claims of the Soviet avant-garde's relative political "innocence," and quite unequivocally dismissive, on the other, of any virtue attaching to its commitment to revolutionary politics, these arguments add a new dimension to the political meanings ascribed to the avant-garde. Coming when they do, they in a powerful sense complete the continuity thesis about Bolshevism and Stalinism. Long the staple of Western ideologists, this claim has often seemed to find its most vivid and persuasive rejoinder in the transformative élan of the revolutionary avant-garde. The effect of these interpretations, in the climate of the "new world order," is to close off that loophole in liberal-conservative ideology for good.

II

The foregoing survey of existing interpretations of the politics of the postrevolutionary Soviet avant-garde, cursory and schematic though it has been, reveals a deficiency. Only accounts in the second broad category (which I have dubbed the "revisionist" histories, in order to distinguish them both from the previously dominant sanitized or apologetic constructions of an apolitical art movement and from the recently emergent, conservatively inflected histories which play upon a claimed complicity with Stalinism as part of a wider project of burying affirmations of social revolution, the collective, and planning)—only these offer an adequate account of the institutions, debates, and formal and technical strategies of the avant-garde. "Only" is, of course, a relative term here. Such accounts have formed the central ground of interpretation of the avant-garde in recent years. But now that the situation in Russia has changed so fundamentally, there is no guarantee that this will remain the case. The identification of the Stalinist system with socialism has been so prevalent that the system's fall can, and perhaps will, contribute more readily to the displacement of social radicalism from the academic agenda than to the regeneration of such concern, which, in more propitious circumstances, the removal of one of its main obstacles might have permitted. Even those otherwise fruitful "revisionist" accounts, however, have not, on the whole, tended to place avant-garde developments securely within the wider context of debate and struggle which, in the 1920s, *was* the process of sustaining the Revolution and building the new life. On the other side, it goes almost without saying, the orthodox political histories have, for their part, devoted scant, if any, attention to artistic debates.[20] An obvious question arises, therefore. Is it possible, at present, to offer a more positive interpretation of the politics of the avant-garde which may situate it in a nuanced account of the postrevolutionary political process: more nuanced, that is, than a conception which, for all its detail, tends to see the Revolution as a species of natural force, an eruption whose lava flows into a variety of distinct spheres, only to harden into Stalin's iron realpolitik—another "natural" outcome of revolution in a backward country.

There is no small paradox in the readiness of liberal historians to ascribe a kind of determinism to postrevolutionary political history, as though a hardening of the arteries was the only possible outcome for the Revolution. Yet the 1920s in fact witnessed a contested political process the outcome of which was not certain. It has been argued that one reason why Trotskii failed adequately to oppose Stalin at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923, when the latter's power was far from established, let alone consolidated, was that Trotskii simply could not bring himself to take Stalin's threat to his own status and the gains of the Revolution seriously: "No contemporary, and he [Trotskii] least of all, saw in the Stalin of 1923 the menacing and towering figure he was to become."[21] If so, the miscalculation itself is dramatic enough. But what it indicates, more generally, is that Stalin*ism* as a system represented a position won from the defeat of other perspectives. Russia in the 1920s witnessed a continuing struggle over the balance of forces, economic, political, and cultural—a struggle intensified by the uncertainties of the international situation—rather than a royal road to the cult of personality.

When speaking of the politics of the avant-garde, it is fundamental to retain this sense of a political process. For the greater part of the period, however, there were no forces that resembled political parties in the contemporary Western sense. The Mensheviks and Right SRs (Social Revolutionaries), having been banned in June 1918 for association with "notorious counterrevolutionaries," had been rehabilitated later that year and early in 1919 and continued to exist throughout the Civil War, though their support eroded and both were effectively harried out of existence by the war's end. This coincided with the banning of organized fractions within the Party at the Tenth Congress in 1921. The situation at this point was grave: the war economy had extended a kind of military discipline over the whole of society, which was now in a pulverized condition; the Kronshtadt revolt had just been put down, at terrible cost; and massive controversy over the adoption of the New Economic Policy was threatening to tear the congress apart. Carr comments that the General Resolution on the Unity of the Party "seemed necessary and reasonable at the time."[22] Nonetheless, this decision came back to haunt the opposition to Stalin during the twenties, the problem being that the very organization of oppositional forces—even if in the cause of democratization—broke the rules and could be claimed, therefore, to violate Soviet democracy. The political process which took place, consequently, comprised more or less illegitimate formations, always subordinate to the state power, and increasingly so as power was concentrated further under the control of the centralized apparatus. This is not to say, however, that these formations were ipso facto marginal, or sectarian, let alone counterrevolutionary. Far from it: the main

oppositional grouping's central claim was defense of the legacy of October against increasing deviations and retreats.

Given this state of affairs, one is extremely unlikely to find in the historical record evidence of artists' explicit political commitments in any party or neoparty sense. In fact, any such commitments are, with the exception of a few general references to the Communist Party itself, as rare as they are in the documents of the Western avant-garde. This is presumably the origin, and one reason for the longevity, of claims for the apolitical nature of the Soviet avant-garde: one will search in vain for discussion of the political programs of Nikolai Bukharin or Trotskii, or indeed for extended discussion of specific political doctrines such as "socialism in one country" or even the Five-Year Plans (which do, of course, receive mention, but at most as *faits accomplis* rather than as specific political strategies). It may be useful in this regard to distinguish between a relatively organizational sense of politics and a more diffuse sense of political ideology. For if there is an absence of political commitment in the former sense, the record is saturated with examples of it in the latter.

The major artists and theorists without exception place their formal and technical innovations squarely on the basis of the sociopolitical achievement of the October Revolution. Undoubtedly, most of these figures developed their characteristic technical innovations in the period before the Revolution. From 1912 onward, however, with the Lena goldfield massacre, that period was in some respect itself one of rising political militancy—which contributed to the cultural climate. But more to the point, October gave these artistic developments a political focus and in so doing further transformed them. The result was a specific conjunction, a union even, of the formal and the political: an avant-garde practically transformed by a wider social revolution.[23] Such a conjunction was sustainable only as long as the Revolution itself and its own subsequent existence and prospects bore the marks of the wider restrictions and redefinitions undergone.

The salient feature of the Bolshevik Revolution, in a word, was that it was *extra*ordinary. It is arguable that the 1920s in Russia marked a particularly hideous form—or rather forms, for there were distinct stages—of normalization. It may be objected that there was nothing "normal" about forced collectivization and mass famine. But two things should be remembered. First, collectivization and the parallel industrialization program of the later decade were not the first response of the Soviet government to the need to rebuild the country. And second, however concentrated their particular form in Russia, increasing state interventions in the economy came to constitute the norm for all developed nations in the capitalist crisis of the 1930s: in Germany, Italy, and Japan, obviously, but also in the United States and Great Britain, levels of intervention both domestically and in international trade reached new heights. In the end, the building up of a national economy with its own industrial base was normal in a way that breaking the weakest link in the chain of international capitalism and proceeding to use that bridgehead to stimulate breaks elsewhere, was not.

The two emblematic works of revolutionary art belong to a period when commitment to the revolution was able to be, so to speak, homogeneous. Tatlin's model for the *Pamiatnik III-emu Internatsionalu* (*Monument to the Third International,* 1919–20, fig. no. 1) and Lissitzky's *Klinom krasnym bei belykh* (*Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge,* 1920, plate no. 138) both emanate from circumstances which, if scarcely constituting a "glorious dawn," nonetheless were self-consciously heroic. For Blok, events were epochal on a scale transcending even that of the French Revolution, and bore comparison only with the very beginnings of our tradition—which is to say, the start of the Christian era.

One of these emblematic works is three-dimensional, the other two-dimensional; both, however, transgressed their framing norms, of sculpture and of painting, respectively: one moved from constructed reliefs in the direction of architecture, the other from Suprematist painting in the direction of mass-produced posters. Both construct their primary message—of commitment to the all-transforming international socialist revolution—through an equivalent transformation of norms at the levels of perception and technique. It is this attempted integration on which their emblematic status depends as on nothing else, transcending the failure of either properly to be realized. They were, in fact, perhaps unrealizable. It is what one might call their materialistic idealism, emanating from a situation where the utopian seemed to be ingrained in reality—where heaven seemed to roll up like parchment, as Shklovskii wrote—that confers the resilience they have shown as images of twentieth-century revolution, that connotes so strongly the positive side of socialism, when so much that has been claimed in the name of that concept has been brutal and barren. It is both their success and their failure—and the marker, perhaps, of a wider success and failure than their own—that these unrealizable projects stand at the high-water mark of that union of social and aesthetic transformation toward which they must have seemed, at the moment of their making, only a first step. Both were produced in what later became defined as the "first period": that period of revolutionary upturn caused by World War I and its aftermath. It was marked domestically by War Communism and the struggle to secure the Revolution, and internationally by the founding of the Third, Communist, International to seize the moment and promote the extension of the Revolution on a worldwide basis. These spheres formed the respective contexts of Tatlin's and Lissitzky's interventions.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of these and similar works, given the general disrepute into which the Revolution has fallen—as an antidemocratic coup d'etat, for example—is the unproblematic nature of the avant-garde's commitment to the October Revolution. Maiakovskii later wrote: "To accept or not to accept? There was no such problem for me (and other Moscow futurists). It was my revolution. I went to the Smolnyi. I did everything that was necessary. Meetings began."[24] The avant-garde's dominance in the cultural field in these early years was not uncontested, either from within Party ranks or by Proletkul't (Proletarian Culture) or by more conservative artists. It did, however, exist, and the slogans about organization were backed up by action. Tatlin was not one for overextended rehearsals of intent; his record, however, speaks for itself. Tatlin's desire for a unified artists' organization, expressed as early as 1914, could have remained avant-gardist rhetoric. The Revolution, however, as well as putting into circulation the slogan of "building the new life," offered a variety of ways for doing so. Tatlin, in addition to his involvement with Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), organized the Union of New Tendencies in Art, an umbrella organization of left artists in Petrograd. This union, the Academy of Arts, and Ginkhuk (the State Institute of Artistic Culture) were the Petrograd equivalents of the avant-garde's institutional bases and organizations in Moscow, such as Vkhutemas and the First Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk. This ground is fairly well trodden. But without overemphasizing the avant-garde's prominence—which then tends to cause problems in accounting for its later tribulations—it is worth recognizing the depth of organizational and institutional, as well as theoretical, commitment to the practice of building the new life. The

conditions of War Communism seemed dramatically to draw a line between the new life and what had gone before. Conventional forms of class distinction and the bourgeois individualism connected to them were occluded by the enforced collectivity of the struggle to sustain the Revolution.

These conditions did not, however, last forever; and it is in the moves away from them that it becomes possible to speak of a rather different sense of a politics of the avant-garde. It is worth underlining, though, the way in which War Communism framed the project of Constructivism, of "material culture," and of "art into production." Still more fundamentally, however, War Communism constitutes the siting of the whole ethos of a single-minded bending of effort to one end, of suspicion toward all vestiges of the past—particularly anything related to a discredited sense of opulence, which included, of course, aesthetic contemplation, indeed anything carrying with it the stigma of leisured existence. Heroization of the Red Army, a total commitment to the security of the Revolution against the still extant White threat, and, in consort with those defensive tasks, the positive sense of a new world to be built from the ground up all militated against the toleration of revanchism.[25] The greatest single factor working in favor of the October Revolution was, of course, that it had been successful; audacity and courage broke through the hollowed-out protocols of the old. And now War Communism, apparently against even greater odds, had won again. As such, it was also a victory for the culture of the avant-garde, which, alone among the intelligentsia, had supported the Revolution. To the avant-garde, in the process of thinking its way out of bourgeois art for art's sake and formal experimentation into an integrated program for deploying the lessons of that past toward the building of the Communist future, the message must have been clear: "Press on." In sum, then, the major works of the avant-garde's new project of "art into production," that which defined both its distance from an art of contemplation and its commitment to participation in the wider revolutionary project, were in place by the end of the Civil War. But War Communism was something very like a Pyrrhic victory.

The New Economic Policy was adopted in March 1921 at the Party's historic Tenth Congress. NEP, a government-promoted reintroduction of capitalism in order to restart the shattered economy, could not have been more unlike War Communism. Centralized control of all areas was replaced by the fostering of private entrepreneurship. The working class, though numerically small, had been hegemonic in the worker-peasant alliance that allowed the Bolsheviks to oust the Provisional Government that had replaced the unlamented Romanov dynasty in February 1917. After the Civil War, with not only the bourgeoisie but also the proletariat socially atomized, the peasantry were the only social class to emerge relatively intact. NEP was summed up in Bukharin's advice to the peasantry: "Enrich yourselves." Which is to say, the balance of forces shifted from planning to that which is nowadays usually dubbed "enterprise," but for which the terms "greed" and "self-seeking" often do just as well. The balance shifted from town to country and from proletarians not just to peasants but to the "Nepmen," the new entrepreneurial class of merchants and middlemen which NEP brought into being—or rather, released from the amber into which they had been set by October and War Communism. NEP society was the dominant social formation in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, unlike both the heroic revolutionary period which preceded it and the increasing centralization of the Five-Year Plans which followed. In fact, it was out of the political contestation, the victories and defeats of NEP, that the Five-Year Plans were born. It has been convincingly argued, for example, by Michael Reiman, that what one might call the culture of the Five-Year Plans, rudimentary at first but growing in scope, was an ad hoc response to the eventual crisis of NEP, rather than the result of any long-term strategy, let alone a logical or predetermined outcome of the Revolution itself.[26] By 1927–28, the Revolution was, in any case, pretty much ancient history, there to be deployed behind whichever group was powerful enough to annex it and its prestige to its own particular program. From 1921 to about 1928, the conditions of NEP, not the crucible of War Communism in which it had been formed, were the operating conditions of the erstwhile avant-garde.

The attitude of the avant-garde toward NEP is, therefore, a matter of some importance to clarifying its politics. And, indeed, in a scattered but relatively consistent commentary, a position emerges. This is partly born of antipathy to a way of life in which, as Serge noted, "classes are growing up around us again." Thus Vertov, writing in 1926: "We have not come to cinema in order to feed fairy tales to the Nepman and Nepwoman lounging in the loges of our first-class movie theaters."[27] This was no fantasy. It finds corroboration in the diary kept by Walter Benjamin of his trip to Moscow. On a visit to the theater in December 1926, he notes, "a waft of perfume greeted me as I entered," and he continues: "I did not see a single communist in a blue tunic, but there were several types who would not have been out of place in any of George Grosz's albums."[28] This situation points to a second strand in the avant-garde's response to NEP. For it was the emergence of these new social layers and their considerable emphasis upon consumption that provided one important basis for the reinflation of those traditional approaches to art-making and the social role of art which had been eclipsed in the revolutionary period. The avant-garde was opposed both to NEP's reemergent social stratification and to the opening this afforded to more conservative types of cultural practice.

It is a commonplace of art history that the avant-garde was unpopular due to the "innate visual conservatism" of the population at large.[29] Avant-garde commentators themselves, however, offer a description of a more contested site. Stepanova said that photomontage was popular in workplaces and offices.[30] Brik, while he acknowledged the difficulties experienced by the Constructivists, implied a distinction between the relationship of the new techniques to workers' experience in production and the antipathy of the NEP bourgeoisie, with its preference for conventional notions of art as a luxury good.[31] More explicitly, Vertov remarked upon the new lease on life given to fictional films that "recall the old 'artistic' models just as Nepmen recall the old bourgeoisie."[32] At the same time, however, he also discerned a response along class lines, noting how *Kino-pravda* (*Cinema-Truth*) newsreels "are boycotted by film distributors, by the bourgeois and semibourgeois public" yet "shown daily in many workers' clubs in Moscow and the provinces with great success";[33] and he went on devastatingly to turn the tables on the new societal "normalization": "If the NEP audience prefers 'love' or 'crime' dramas that doesn't mean that our works are unfit. It means the public is." Fit or unfit for what, is the question; and it has only to be raised for the answer to be clear: it was the project of building a new collective society that was foundering under NEP conditions. As Shklovskii put it: "The great passion of Lef . . . was a desire to participate in the making of a new life."[34] Yet Serge repeatedly notes how under NEP "symptoms of bourgeoisification" became prevalent, how "money lubricated and befouled the entire machine just as under capitalism," how "by and large, order was returning"[35]—and whom this suited.

Vertov's advertising films for Mossel'prom (the Moscow

Agricultural Industry) and GUM, the state department store, were echoed in the mid-1920s by the various advertising and packaging projects undertaken by Rodchenko and Maiakovskii. In the light of our own sleek consumer economy, these frequently appear no more than quaint, yet in the context of NEP it is a serious point that Rodchenko, Maiakovskii, and Vertov were committing their expertise to the state sector. There were degrees of emphasis: Vertov, as remarked above, condemned crime films, while Rodchenko successfully designed covers for Marietta Shaginian's "Jim Dollar" detective stories. But this does little more than indicate that there was room for diversity within an overall avant-garde commitment to the legacy of the Revolution and struggle against its perceived betrayal under NEP. The evidence is in the state-sector advertisements, the candy wrappers with little verses promoting industry, and posters for "social responsibility" programs such as Rodchenko's *Knigi* (*Books*) for a literary drive in 1925. These are quite distinct from the emphasis on private enterprise and profit which had gained ground. And, should it need underlining, a *politics* was at stake here.

Politics is not simply a matter of committees. In a revolutionary situation, or during an attempt to sustain a revolutionary perspective, all social activity contains a political dimension, and this includes areas which bourgeois culture fences off as the province of private taste—as, paradigmatically, areas of freedom from politics. In 1936, one of the first things George Orwell noticed when he arrived in revolutionary Barcelona was people's clothes. There were virtually "no 'well-dressed' people at all." Nearly everyone was in "rough working-class clothes."[36] Though it has obviously on occasion been a signifier of political meaning, clothing, at least in this practical sense, has not normally been perceived as a site of political meaning, at least not until very recently. Yet in 1924 Tatlin produced his famous designs for a stove, a coat, and a suit. These are frequently treated as eccentricities, without a hope of going into production, at best an index of utopianism and, as such, evidence of the head-in-the-clouds mentality of "impractical" artists, whatever their Productivist rhetoric. Such an explanation is normative with respect to a cultural division of labor. The situation can, however, be read differently, as intentionally disruptive of such norms—a possibility which the orthodox assumption closes down. Tatlin and his colleagues did attempt to form working relations with organizations for the mass production of goods and textiles, but were generally unsuccessful. Larissa Zhadova quotes a contemporary observer, K. Miklashevski, to the effect that Tatlin, in a lecture, "expressed his dissatisfaction with authorities who did not really support his endeavors to work in industrial concerns."[37] This is to say, it was the "authorities" who appeared to frustrate the artist-constructors in their attempts to turn art into production, not the sheer impracticality of the projects in the first place. And these were managers of NEP concerns whom it behooved to make a profit rather than build a new society. As Maiakovskii commented in the first issue of *Novyi Lef* (*New Lef*) in 1927: "Market demand has become for many people the measure of value as far as cultural phenomena are concerned."[38] Serge spoke of the sometimes austere morality of Bolshevism, the egalitarianism of early Soviet society.[39] In like manner, the historian Selim Khan-Magomedov has noted as one of the key components of life after the Revolution which framed Constructivism "a marked asceticism in the habits, clothing, and official and social life" of the revolutionaries, as distinct from "the behavior of the social elite that had been reborn with the NEP."[40] Brik noted of Rodchenko's Constructivist design work that "artists turn their back on him. Irritated factory managers reject him. The petit-bourgeois goggles . . ."[41] Tatlin produced a montage contrasting his suit with bourgeois lounge suits, a contrast which is explicitly linked by Zhadova to NEP conditions. His captions claimed the new clothing "satisfies hygienic requirements and lasts long," whereas the other is "unhygienic and they wear it only because they think it is beautiful."[42] The contrast is perhaps a little stark for us. But what it implies is that Tatlin's is a piece of work less the product of unworkable eccentricity than of a refusal of NEP conditions at the level of clothing: a refusal of the reassertion of a bourgeois, market-fixated mechanism of fashion, and a determination to design for "this man [who] is a worker and will use the object in question in the working life he leads."[43]

Constructivist interventions in the field of practical design in the mid-1920s remained on a relatively small scale. There was perhaps more activity in the fields of theater and graphic design, but still it fell far short of the aspiration to frame a new way of life with a "culture of materials" which would dialectically help to precipitate a new consciousness, new kinds of social individuals who would themselves go on to live and, in turn, transform that new life. It is all too easy to see this failure, from the dubious vantage point of our own monopoly-capitalist economies, as a result either of the idealism of the projects themselves or the impatience of those "really" leading the revolutionary process for such luxuries when more basic products were required. There is obviously some truth in this—it has the ring of the way the world works. But the picture is complicated by the specific nature of the social formation which replaced War Communism and which gave renewed breathing space to social stratification and motivations more often associated with the bourgeois past. Small wonder that "building the new life" foundered in a society which powerfully foregrounded the reinstatement of elements of the old one. Constructivism in these conditions, trying to push ahead with the sociopolitical transformation put on the agenda by the October Revolution but subsequently marginalized by the New Economic Policy, had more the quality of a rearguard than an avant-garde action.

Benjamin was frequently drawn to comment on the situation obtaining both in literature and in the society at large. Only a day or two after his arrival in Moscow in 1926, he is noting "the political news: members of the opposition removed from important positions," a situation which he immediately links to "the Party's reactionary bent in cultural matters. The leftist movements which had proved useful during the period of wartime communism are now being completely discarded."[44] The effect of NEP for the Constructivists was obviously mixed. War Communism had saved the Revolution, but the militarization of society had wrecked the revolution's social base. NEP had saved the economy, and offered a more normal framework of legality for everyday civilian life, but at the cost of increasing stratification and the occlusion of the whole vision of a socialist society based in the working class. In such a situation, then, what was it for Maiakovskii to write, in 1925, "To build a new culture a clean sweep is needed. The sweep of the October revolution is needed"? Certainly, the significance of an appeal to October during NEP was far from univocal. For Serge's "fat shopkeeper enriched by the sale at speculative prices of articles manufactured by our socialist industry" it was time to breathe a sigh of relief that order was being restored and the dark days of 1919 put behind for good.[45] It is unlikely he would have apostrophized October's new broom other than to pay lip service to the origins of a new status quo. It was a different matter for the avant-garde. In 1923 Nikolai Aseev commented, "the waves of NEP were already rolling overboard in the revolutionary ship." One had to "hold onto the balustrades in order not to be swept into the sea of obscurantism and philistinism." In particular, "the honesty of those people who

were the first artists to have reacted positively to the appeal for the participation of the intelligentsia in the October revolution was considered suspect, and their value was constantly questioned."[46]

In such a situation, the attempt to press ahead with the program of "art into production" took on a specific coloring. Framed in 1921 by Aleksei Gan "in terms of the essential distinctive features and requirements of communism,"[47] when those "features" were extrapolated from the now abandoned War Communism, the very sense of "production" which art was to be directed "into" had undergone significant change. At the very least, rather than a universal rhetoric, "art into production" now connoted a specific view, one with its own history, built out of an acceptance of certain assumptions and a concomitant rejection of others—which latter were, moreover, in play as a new status quo at the level both of a market-oriented economy and an increasingly approved conventional art practice. Under NEP, that is to say, "art into production" signified in a system of differences: it was unlike other assumptions about art and about production. In May 1924, right in the middle of NEP, Tatlin offered a synoptic statement of what was still the task in his lecture on "Material Culture and Its Role in the Production of Life in the USSR": "to shed light on the tasks of production in our country, and also to discover the place of the artist-constructor in production, in relation to improving the quality both of the manufactured product and of the organization of the new way of life in general."[48] To an extent, of course, all shades of opinion spoke of the "new way of life," but for the Constructivists in general and Tatlin in particular this was an assertion of continuity with October and, indeed, with that prerevolutionary work which for them prefigured the social and political revolution. It was a restatement of such a perspective. As Tret'iakov later wrote, Lef had been formed "in the conditions of the New Economic Policy . . . Lef means Left Front, and Left Front implies opposition to any other front."[49] Khan-Magomedov has commented on this period: "Rodchenko's activity in the field of commercial graphic art was closely bound up with straightforward political propaganda . . . Many of the book and magazine covers designed by Rodchenko were really, despite their small format . . . political posters."[50] The question is, therefore: is it possible to be any more specific about these politics?

Dissatisfaction with NEP was not confined to the artistic avant-garde. That is, in fact, one of the central planks of this essay. An avant-garde art group in bourgeois society can, of course, withdraw into a specialized position which does not have any ready political correlation. That is the nub of claims for art's relative autonomy from society. It is not, however, to say that, even then, a politics cannot be legitimately attributed to such a grouping. In the case of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, however, various factors militate against concluding that such was the state of affairs. On the one hand, society was saturated with politics, anyway; on the other, the avant-garde actually aspired to an interventionist role. Their practice was not divorced from the political, or at least can be said to have had compacted into it a political dimension. The latter dimension is unlikely to have been the group's property alone, evolved by extrapolation solely from its own art practice or somehow preserved as a memory trace of the original "big bang" revolution. There is no reason why it should have been. The political process evolved, and different perspectives emerged as time went on. It is relatively improbable that a small-scale cultural grouping could have maintained a stance fundamentally at odds with the political order of the day if that order was otherwise in receipt of homogeneous support. It is far more likely that, in such a situation, its program would have been marked by retreats into more orthodox forms of artistic activity paralleling the wider sociopolitical retreats. It can, of course, be argued that Constructivism did undergo significant revision, for example, in the use of uncut photographs in factography. But this can be seen more as a modification and adaptation of the program than as a straightforward retreat from it.

There was, anyway, an approach to art-making which came very rapidly to be identified with NEP, with the sponsorship of official bodies such as the trade unions and the army, and the provision of conventional portraits for the new bourgeoisie NEP threw up. This was AKhRR. The position of so-called Realist art in the various groups which sprang up from the end of the Civil War onward is considerably more complex with regard to the relations between its form and its content than is often recognized—even in the case of AKhRR itself, the most "illusionistic" of the groups, let alone others like Ost (the Society of Easel Painters), which offered a kind of combination of avant-garde technique and socially significant depicted subjects.[51] Be that as it may, the fact remains that throughout this period AKhRR was at odds with the avant-garde art-into-production tendency; that *it* tended to be identified with NEP; and that the avant-garde did not significantly retreat to more conventional forms of art practice. This suggests the existence of a countervailing political-ideological force in the culture which could enable and sustain distance from the new status quo.

There were, in fact, two "waves" of such opposition. There had always been small oppositional groups even during the Civil War, but, with the exception of the Kronshtadt mutineers, these had been relatively marginal, and it is doubtful whether they exerted much gravitational pull. Circumstances changed, however, as NEP progressed. For some time, NEP, though apparently reasonably successful in the fundamental task of making the economy move again, had begun to generate its own problems. By 1923, largely because of the concessions to the peasantry, an imbalance arose between industry and agriculture. Industrial prices remained high because of the scarcity of manufactured goods. Conversely, agricultural prices were low, with the result that there was no incentive for peasants to sell their produce to the cities: they stood to make little from the transaction and there was not much in the way of manufactured goods they required to buy, anyway. Because of this "scissors" crisis, so named due to the way these divergent tendencies were represented on a graph, there arose again a serious threat to the worker-peasant alliance which NEP had been intended to bolster. Lenin was effectively inactive at this point (and would continue so until his death in January 1924), and the leadership of NEP fell to the "triumvirate" of Stalin (the Party Secretary), Grigorii Zinov'ev, and Lev Kamenev. An alternative proposal to cure the scissors crisis was put forward by Trotskii in April 1923 at the Twelfth Party Congress, a proposal which hinged on the concept of planning. As Isaac Deutscher has pointed out: "That planning was essential to a socialist economy was a Marxist axiom with which the Bolsheviks were, of course, familiar, and which they had always accepted in general terms. Under war communism, they imagined that they were in a position to establish immediately a fully-fledged planned economy . . . But after the introduction of NEP, when all efforts were directed towards reviving the market economy, the idea of planning suffered eclipse."[52] Faced with a retreat from the goal of a planned socialist mode of production, and with the concomitant decline in the social power of the working class relative to the peasantry, Trotskii now reintroduced the idea of "systematically broadening the scope of planning" with the ultimate aim of "thereby absorbing and abolishing the market."[53] Some sense of

the stakes involved can be gained from the argument of Trotskii's later article "K sotsializmu ili k kapitalizmu?" ("Toward Capitalism or Socialism?") of August 1925. NEP is there seen as both a combination of and a competition between these two "scissors" tendencies. Trotskii, however, notes that "if state industry develops more slowly than agriculture; if the latter should proceed to produce with increasing speed the two extreme poles [of] capitalist farmers 'above,' proletarians 'below,' this process would of course lead to a restoration of capitalism."[54]

In the cultural field, Tatlin wrote two reports in November 1924 on the work of his Section for Material Culture at the Petrograd Ginkhuk. That he had to do so, twice, is alone indicative of the pressure the project was coming under as the administration sought more biddable recipients for official funding.[55] But more to the point, Tatlin set his defense of a planned approach to the design of material culture in a context of "anarchy" reigning in production. This is, doubtless, in part an observation about design and production processes and the lack of headway being made by integrated "Constructivist" practice. But it also reads as a reflection on the more general productive conditions obtaining under NEP, and the absence of planning in the economy. Contemporary production, Tatlin noted, "in both town and country in all its manifestations," largely because of the continuing legacy of "industrial and domestic production inherited from the old world," was "in a state of anarchy." Production was "splintered into chance productive units," and experience as a whole was "abnormally individualized."[56] This abnormally individual experience of life and anarchic production process need to be set against the avant-garde's continued assertion of very different priorities. Their consistent appeal was to the notion of a "collective" way of life, a way of life which, moreover, needed to be "organized." Thus, the course which Rodchenko taught at Vkhutemas was envisaged in 1926 as producing a "new type of engineer" who would effect "the organization and rationalization of production."[57] Tatlin likewise viewed his role as that of the "organizer of everyday life" in an article of 1929. Quite contrary to these aspirations, daily life under NEP was, as Maiakovskii described it, a "way of life which has not been altered in almost any respect—the way of life which is now our worst enemy, which makes us bourgeois."[58] These arguments are consistent across the decade, yet under NEP, arguments about the need for organization and planned production would have been difficult for the Constructivists to sustain without examples of more concretely theorized programs in the political-economic sphere. Trotskii's proposals, however, although they came to constitute the cornerstone of a political program, basically went unheeded in 1923 by a Party organization which, in Deutscher's words, "considered NEP almost incompatible with planning," and thought it necessary instead to emphasize the "enterprise" economy's stability and longevity in order "to strengthen the peasants' and the merchants' confidence in it."[59]

Other developments were also afoot in the Soviet system. At the same time as the scissors crisis grew in the economy, the "blades" moving ever wider apart through the autumn, 1923 also saw the consolidation of the bloc of Party bureaucrats owing allegiance more to the central power structure than to the confidence of workers at the base. This led to a qualitatively new situation: an organization in which "alignments were temporary blocs around concrete proposals and issues" was replaced by one of "a permanent power caucus in the highest body of the party, whose purpose was to preserve control in its hands regardless of the issues at stake."[60] As the French socialist Boris Souvarine put it, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was being replaced by the "dictatorship of the secretariat." In the summer and autumn of 1923, because of the mixture of economic pressure and the lack of adequate avenues of political expression, a wave of industrial militancy struck Moscow and Petrograd, extending even to the possibility of a general strike: overall, the most powerful political challenge to the leadership since Kronshtadt. One result of this changed situation was the formalization and extension of the position broached by Trotskii at the Twelfth Congress in the Platform of the Forty-Six, a statement by a group of leading figures in the Party which criticized the authorities for their handling of the economy and the erosion of democracy. October 1923 is thus usually treated as marking the birth of the Left Opposition.

The pressure was sufficient, despite the ban on other parties and on oppositional groups within the Communist Party itself, to force the leadership to open up a debate in the pages of the press. The effect was swift, measurable not least by the doubling of *Pravda*'s circulation. The greatest effect was felt in the army—which had been Trotskii's base since he reorganized it to defend the Revolution in 1918—but the Left Opposition was also strong in the youth organizations and in the universities and other higher-educational institutions. Despite this considerable support for the opposition at the system's roots, however, the newly functioning bureaucratic apparatus, which had been in gear since the Party Congress in the spring, was able to ensure that by the time the Thirteenth Party Conference came around in January 1924, a support which in terms of voting at district level was running at thirty-six percent (and which was possibly even higher in individual party groups, for which results were not announced) was converted into a mere three delegates at the conference itself. By the time of the Thirteenth Congress a few months later, in May, Trotskii had been effectively isolated—a process which was then repeated in the international organization at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in June.

This very process of reaction does, however, lend a certain support to the hypothesis of a relationship between the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s and the political Left Opposition. In the wake of the opposition's decline, 1924 witnessed a major purge of the institutions of higher education. It is well known that Vkhutemas was one of the major institutional sites of Constructivism—though, as Lodder has established, the Constructivist influence was by no means coherent across the institution as a whole. (It is only recently, in the work of Lodder and others, that a clear picture of the scope of Vkhutemas has been offered.) Vkhutemas was not, however, an isolated institution but part of a system of institutions of higher education, the VUZy, and in particular of institutions of higher technical education (the VTUZy).[61] The precise relationship of Vkhutemas, from 1926 reorganized as Vkhutein (the Higher Artistic-Technical Institute), to the other institutions of higher technical education is not clear. A relationship did exist, however, since the original decree by which Vkhutemas was brought into being concerned its role in the reorganization and reconstruction of production in the country at large: a task which was assigned to a wide range of practical and technical specialisms, not something confined to the one institution. (A case in point is the Rabfak [the Workers' Faculty], quite often mentioned in accounts of Vkhutemas as an avenue whereby workers without previous qualification could be brought up to a sufficient standard to allow them to continue with the new art and design education. Rabfaks, however, were part of a system, attached to all the VTUZy, not an egalitarian feature of Vkhutemas alone.) It would be unusual if there were no contact between the students at such institutions, particularly in a period with a high profile of ideological and political activity. One obvious avenue would be through Party meetings, but interaction

would also have taken place more informally, not least in cultural pursuits. Thus in Petrograd in May 1923, Tatlin put on a memorial performance of Velimir Khlebnikov's play *Zangezi.* Supporting actors were largely drawn from the student body, and Tatlin's account mentions, in addition to art students from the Petrograd Academy, students from the university and the Mining Institute, one of the VTUZy. These institutions (in marked contrast to the situation in 1917, it should be noted, when being a university student was synonymous with support for the Whites) contained a high proportion of actively involved Communist students, a "large majority" of whom, according to Sheila Fitzpatrick, were for the Trotskiist opposition in 1923–24.[62] In 1924, a surprising ten percent of all Party members were students, and half of them were in institutions of higher technical education. In Moscow, furthermore, students comprised no less than twenty-five percent of the Moscow Party organization. A student himself is recorded as having commented: "It was a golden time for the Trotskyite Opposition."[63] With the defeat of the opposition, however, a tremendous purge took place. Narkompros's own statistics give the figure of 18,000 students expelled, though Fitzpatrick argues that the actual numbers were more than double this. More to the point, most expulsions occurred in "the more sullied and overcrowded artistic, socio-economic and pedagogical VTUZy."[64] Given the scale of this activity, it seems highly unlikely that the avant-garde within Vkhutemas, self-consciously positioned as a "left" within culture at the cutting edge of a new way of life, and against that life's erosion by the bourgeoisifying tendencies of NEP—could have remained isolated from the wider oppositional debate during 1923 and 1924. In fact, far from remaining isolated, it is quite likely to have drawn support from the left-oriented students, beleaguered as its adherents apparently felt in the NEP environment.

Later in 1924, in September, Trotskii's *Uroki Oktiabria* (*The Lessons of October*) was published. His account of the October Revolution and its legacy was clearly intended to be relevant to the struggle in 1924. Having remarked that "up to the present time we lack a single work which gives us a comprehensive picture of the October upheaval," he commented: "It is as if we thought that no immediate and direct benefit for the unpostponable tasks of future constructive work could be derived from the study of October."[65] He obviously thought otherwise. October could be used as a lens to bring into focus the struggle against counterrevolutionary forces in the bureaucracy and conservative aspects of the "worker-peasant alliance," which latter NEP was considered to be. The book's effect was to unleash a second phase of the antiopposition campaign, the cumulative result of which was that by 1925, the opposition which had originated in 1923 had been effectively silenced. The principal marker of this defeat in the period which followed, and one which was to have incalculable effects on the future of socialism, not to mention on the legacy of the October Revolution—and, indeed, on the revolutionary project of "building a new life"—was the formulation at the end of 1924 of the doctrine of "socialism in one country." The Bolshevik Revolution had been international in scope. According to Trotskii's theory of "uneven and combined development," a revolutionary outbreak could easily occur in a backward country, and not just in a major industrialized nation which had gone through its capitalist phase, such as Britain or Germany. There was no question, however, of such a revolution being more than a holding operation to stimulate further revolutions in those advanced countries. There are numerous statements of the implications of this view, but Lenin's argument to the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 is particularly clear: "Even prior to the Bolshevik revolution, as well as after it, we thought that the revolution would also occur either immediately or a least very soon in other backward countries and in the more highly developed capitalist countries. Otherwise we would perish."[66]

When the revolutionary wave ebbed after 1921 and the capitalist system managed to stabilize itself, the Russian Revolution was obviously going to have to try to hold out for longer than had been intended. NEP was one response to this development. The central point is that NEP was a temporary measure until the capitalist crisis reasserted itself and the tempo of struggle rose again, yet it also transpired that NEP seemed in its own fabric to be turning away from this perspective. As NEP appeared to accommodate more and more to the norm, it was precisely the formation of the Left Opposition within NEP, as Naomi Allen has argued, which now took on the original project: "The existence of an organized Opposition would resist the free expansion of the bureaucracy, subject it to criticism, and perhaps retard its development long enough to keep intact the roots of the proletarian dictatorship until conditions for its existence improved."[67] Such an awaited capitalist crisis did indeed occur with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the entry of the world system into profound slump during the 1930s, a slump which was only definitively terminated by the outbreak of World War II at the end of that decade. But by the time of the onset of the crisis at the close of the 1920s, the revolutionary movement had undergone profound change—and the main symptom was "socialism in one country." The idea of building up an independent industrialized state in Russia had been foreign to the Bolsheviks. It now became the central plan of policy—initially within the scope of the mixed, relatively unplanned, economy of NEP. Later, however, as NEP itself entered its terminal crisis, the stage was set for a "third period," which transformation is also important for understanding the later trajectory of the avant-garde.

For the moment, however, what should be noted is that the Left Opposition of 1923 and 1924, which had been crushed by 1925, began to rise again in a second incarnation in 1926. The paradoxical factor here was that those members of the triumvirate who had sided with Stalin to break the Left Opposition that was centered on Trotskii now began to fear the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the General Secretariat. In an abrupt about-face, Zinov'ev, with his power base in Leningrad, now joined forces with Trotskii to constitute a new and more powerful united opposition. By this time, Bukharin had become the main defender of NEP—of, as he famously put it, "socialism at a snail's pace"—and as such, Stalin's main ally against the opposition. This new opposition reached a peak in 1927, a peak, moreover, much higher than has often been thought. On the basis of new evidence, Reiman has argued that "the importance of the left opposition is often underestimated in the literature. It is considered an important current in Soviet ideological and political life, a kind of 'revolt of the leaders' . . . but many authors doubt that the opposition had any substantial influence on the mass of party members and even less on broader sections of the population. One can hardly agree with such views."[68] Reiman goes on to cite an impressive catalogue of opposition successes in various geographical regions, in sections of the organized working class in the major cities, and, once again, in the army and the higher education institutions. There is an international dimension here as well as a domestic one, which complicates the issue: just as the failure of the German revolution played a part in the formation of the opposition in 1923, so now the disastrous policies of the bureaucracy toward the revolution in China contributed to the force of the opposition in 1927.

Whatever the multiplicity of causes, the result was a rise in

mass meetings of industrial workers, underground strike committees, and suchlike. When a leading oppositionist, Ivar Smilga, was being got out of the way by assignment to a remote posting—quite a common tactic by the leadership—a crowd of two thousand people gathered, listened to speeches by Zinov'ev and Trotskii, and cheered Smilga to his train. Although the united/left opposition of 1926–27 aimed principally to promote the workers' resistance to the decline they were suffering under NEP, Fitzpatrick argues that "Opposition condemnation of NEP . . . probably did arouse a response among students."[69] There was also support in youth organizations. Overall, "opposition propaganda steadily grew in intensity. The opposition flooded party units with leaflets, pamphlets and other material contributing to a further decline in the Politburo's authority . . . By the end of July the situation in the party had taken fairly definite shape. The opposition succeeded in increasing its influence; it was beginning to think that a change in the party leadership might be attainable at the forthcoming 15th Party Congress."[70] Trotskii later estimated that in 1927 the opposition had 20,000 to 30,000 active members in Moscow alone.

Despite fierce internal conflicts among the leadership, culminating in the expulsion of Trotskii and Zinov'ev from the Central Committee, the opposition's influence continued to grow throughout the summer, leading to the publication in September 1927 of the *Platform of the Opposition.* This echoed many of the criticisms of NEP of the earlier opposition, citing the growth of money-commodity relations, increasing social stratification, and lack of democracy, and proffered as well a newer condemnation of the policy of economic autarky. The *Platform* runs to twelve chapters in some ninety pages. It notes that "there exist in our society these forces hostile to our cause—the kulak, the Nepman, the bureaucrat" and recommends a continuous struggle "on all sectors of the economic, political and cultural fronts."[71] A week after its publication, the *Platform* was banned. A major shift was necessary to implement the ban, requiring nothing less than that the leadership alter—that is, effectively break—the Party's own rules. The state security forces (the GPU), built up by the bureaucracy, were turned against the Party itself. Reiman comments: "Events quickly approached a climax. The opposition, mobilizing its considerable store of influence, tried to make a show of strength to turn the situation to its favour. During Leningrad's celebration of the 10th anniversary of the October revolution in mid-October 1927, the opposition suddenly received impressive support. Trotsky, Zinoviev and other oppositionists who found themselves by chance on one of the official reviewing platforms as the workers of Leningrad paraded past, found themselves the object of demonstrative greetings and cheers from the crowd of a hundred thousand."[72]

This situation was not allowed to repeat itself on the official anniversary of the Revolution on November 7th. Marches and meetings were broken up, speakers howled down. The GPU had entered fully onto the political stage, in consort with which another massive propaganda campaign was mounted. The October demonstration had proved to be the limit. The last demonstration by the Left Opposition took place on November 19, 1927. At the Fifteenth Party Congress, which opened on December 2nd, Trotskii along with seventy-five other leading members of the opposition was expelled from the Party. Next, Trotskii was informed by the GPU that he was to be deported under article 59 of the criminal code, which dealt with counterrevolutionary activity. But such a large crowd gathered on the proposed date, June 16, 1928—several in the crowd lay down on the railway tracks—that the authorities had to resort to deception. According to Carr's account, the departure was postponed for two days. Within twenty-four hours, however, Trotskii's apartment was broken into by armed police; he was driven to an outlying, cleared part of the station and forced aboard a special train which then linked up with the express well away from Moscow. After a journey by truck and sleigh conveyed him another 150 miles beyond the nearest railhead, Trotskii arrived in internal exile at Alma-Ata, at "the extreme confines of the USSR," on January 25, 1928. A year later, he was expelled from the Soviet Union altogether. In Reiman's summary, "the basis for the existence of any kind of opposition whatsoever inside the Soviet Communist Party had been destroyed. From then on opposition was an unequivocal political crime bringing stern punishment in its train."[73]

The picture that emerges, then, is of a nearly seven-year period, extending from the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 to the Fifteenth Congress in December 1927, during which the political direction of the Revolution was in a continual process of negotiation and contestation. The end results were a shift in basic premise from the internationalism of 1917 to the doctrine of building "socialism in one country," and the concentration of power in the hands of a central bureaucracy led by Stalin. There were two great waves of opposition to this from the left, in 1923–24 and again in 1926–27. This opposition stood for a return to those principles of October which it perceived to be undermined by NEP: that is to say, an emphasis on socialism rooted in the working class, a reversal of social stratification, a reassumption of planning in the economy, and increased democracy (as well as a complex international dimension with repercussions for the political policy to be pursued in places like Germany and China, and for the economic relationship of the Soviet Union to the capitalist world).

It had been common for the avant-garde in art at the time of the Revolution, and even before, to be referred to as left artists. Thus Tatlin was a member of the left bloc of the Union of Art Workers in Petrograd in the period between the two revolutions of 1917. He was also involved with the left federation of the Moscow Professional Union of Artists and Painters. The notion of an artistic left was quite prevalent, both as a form of self-description among artists to distinguish themselves from "bourgeois" tendencies and as a form of criticism by those, either close to the Party or laying claim to represent a "proletarian culture," who saw left art with its roots in the bourgeois avant-garde as occupying that space where petit-bourgeois individualism met anarchistic or libertarian "ultraleftism." This latter view must have received succor from Lenin's pamphlet critical of the council Communists and related groups, *Detskaia bolezn' "levizny" v kommunizme* (*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder,* 1920.) (It is perhaps worth pointing out that the epithet refers less to the childishness or immaturity of the attitude per se than to the relative youth of the Communist movement which, as such, is given to wild enthusiasms and excesses that need to be stabilized.) The point is, the identification of the avant-garde as an artistic left, in a rather diffuse sense, was commonplace, somewhat after the manner in which the term "Futurist" was deployed.

Things seem to be different, however, in the succeeding period. When Maiakovskii organized the Left Front of the Arts around the journal *Lef,* first published in March 1923, "left" was not a diffuse term but a label for a coherent grouping or, more likely, regrouping of forces intended to intervene in a changing situation. *Lef* lasted for seven issues and drew in most of the literary and artistic avant-garde at the levels of both practice and theory. It was quite a large magazine with a print run for the first issue of five thousand copies. Three thousand copies were printed of the third issue, and there were no less than four issues in 1923. There were only two, however, in 1924, and the

final issue, with a print run of only 1,500, came out early in 1925. Maiakovskii had, according to Brik, started to think about a new "organizational grouping" as early as the end of 1921, but the proposal was not worked out until a year later.[74] When the magazine came out in early 1923, the members of Lef referred to themselves as the "Bolsheviks of art" and quite explicitly saw their context as a situation where "now there is a respite from war and hunger," i.e., the New Economic Policy. The authorities' attention had previously been taken up with winning the Civil War. Now this was no longer the case, and time and resources could begin to be devoted to a variety of forms of reconstruction. However, the end of the Civil War and the introduction of NEP had given new strength to other cultural forces, such as figurative painting in the visual arts and a bolstering of more traditional forms (which Trotskii called "Classicism") in literature. The "Bolsheviks of art" needed a platform in order to redress the balance which under NEP seemed to be tilting away from them. Thus it seems that internal and external dynamics came together at the beginning of 1923: respectively, the need to articulate a coherent and believable redescription of the left perspective for a "*communist art* (as part of com-culture and communism in general!)" and a context which offered some hope for that argument finding a resonance. There is no point in dropping pennies down a well; conversely, one does not print five thousand copies of a magazine intended to influence only one's friends. Whatever it was that made the project of a Left Front of the Arts sustainable in 1923 clearly ebbed during 1924 and faded out altogether in early 1925. And there is no question of this being mere exhaustion on the part of Lef's members. Rodchenko and Maiakovskii continued their advertising work for the state stores and organizations. Both flung themselves into work for the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (*International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art*) in Paris. Rodchenko's reading room for a workers' club clearly embodied Constructivist-leftist principles, and Maiakovskii commissioned a new model of the *Monument to the Third International* from Tatlin—which Tatlin built in record time. It may be that there seemed to be more scope for an impact internationally than domestically, given what the Soviet cultural situation had become by 1925—with the added insurance policy that work celebrated abroad would be less susceptible to suppression at home.

At the end of 1926, Benjamin noted how the regime was "above all trying to bring about a suspension of militant communism, to usher in a period free of class conflict, to depoliticize the life of its citizens as much as possible"; "an attempt," he wrote, "is being made to arrest the dynamic of revolutionary progress in the life of the state."[75] This is not, of course, to say that everything was now lost. In a way, that is precisely the point: the situation was still contested. For all his registration of the changes taking place under NEP to the detriment of the left in both culture and politics, Benjamin was also able to appreciate the vitality which was still present in Soviet society: "Life here [is] so extraordinarily meaningful." He goes on: "The entire scheme of existence of the Western European intelligentsia is utterly impoverished in comparison to the countless constellations that offer themselves to an individual here in the space of a month." In a telling image, he likened life in the Soviet Union to conditions in the Klondike gold rush: "It is as insular and as eventful, as impoverished and yet in the same breath as full of possibilities."[76] When he returned to Berlin, he was moved to comment that, with all its civilization, "for someone who has arrived from Moscow, Berlin is a dead city."[77] Given this situation, one should then ask what it was that made *Lef* seem like a viable proposition again in 1927. And, having asked that question, one has to wonder why *New Lef* folded again in 1928. What doors opened, and then closed, in 1927 and 1928? For the timing, again, is crucial. As has been noted earlier, Maiakovskii's *New Lef* editorial spoke of the need to restart publication "because the situation of culture in the sphere of art has been completely messed up," and cited the equation of market demand with cultural value as the main problem.[78] Yet there was nothing new in this. Vertov had been slating the "caste of parasites," the "NEP shopkeepers" who "make drunkards of the proletariat using cinema-vodka" since 1923–24—since, in fact, the heyday of the first *Lef*.[79] What gave the spur to publish in January 1927 was that, despite the lack of a periodical, Maiakovskii perceived that "Lef has won and is winning in many sectors of culture."[80] Which is to say, there appeared to be an upturn in the fortunes of the left, a new audience for a reformulation of Lef's position. Once again, Benjamin notes the contradictory currents. On the one side, showing the weakness of the cultural left, is the fact that Grigorii Lelevich, a prominent figure on the proletarian journal *Na postu* (*On Guard*), was being sent away from Moscow at the Party's behest—as we have seen was also the case with political oppositionists. On the other is Benjamin's record of how Lelevich bemoaned the fact that his departure would cause him to miss a major speech to the Comintern by Trotskii, and how he also claimed that "the Party is on the verge of a turnabout."[81]

Things like magazines and organizations do not ebb and flow arbitrarily. Their rise and fall are the function of a complex dialectic of forces, internal and external dynamics whose confluence *is* the organization or the publication. It seems incontrovertibly to be the case that the need for a defined left front in the arts was fueled by a requirement to contest the threatened hegemony of more conservative cultural forces. These forces, in turn, were fueled by NEP. For its part, Lef was related to the ebb and flow of a wider Left Opposition to NEP. As this Left Opposition fought the growing political influence of "the kulak, the Nepman, the bureaucrat," so the left in the cultural field echoed the slogan with a perception of its own opponents as "rightist social strata, the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie."[82]

This is not to say that Lef was in any simple sense a cultural "reflection" of the Left Opposition or, indeed, that the latter's broad programs somehow overarched a more specific platform of the left in art. The *Platform of the Opposition,* all ninety-odd pages and twelve chapters, makes no mention whatsoever of art, literature, film, architecture, or culture generally; it is solely a political, socioeconomic document. Organizations of artists and writers, let alone the substantive beliefs they articulate, do not "reflect" political events. Such is not even an adequate statement of much maligned "vulgar" Marxism. Both political parties and cultural groups are superstructural with respect to an underlying economic mode of production. Nonetheless, a variety of shifting responses do occur between different, relatively autonomous spheres. In one of the many discussions among Asja Lacis, Bernhard Reich, and ordinary Russians in the sanatorium where Lacis was undergoing treatment, Benjamin notes almost wearily, "The issue was once again opposition within the Party."[83] The key phrase is "once again": the opposition was clearly a live issue. Not to relate the ebbs and flows of the left in art to the ebbs and flows of a more broadly constituted left, particularly in a situation such as that which prevailed in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, is to strip that cultural milieu of a whole dimension of its identity. One cannot help feeling that the persistent determination to do so has more to do with ideological shibboleths of our own culture than with any faithfulness to the revolutionary avant-garde. The reality of the Russian Revolution still threatens a capitalist system—a system both moral and economic—and

the more insistently it can be restricted in scope, rigidified, and made synonymous with the barbarism that supplanted it, the better, from such a point of view. To relate the avant-garde to a site of complex political (and social and moral) contestation is not, however, to reduce it to a reflex of that political struggle. The debates within the left front of the arts, within the various other institutions the cultural left inhabited, far exceeded in sophistication anything the political left ever generated about art, design, literature, or culture as a whole. Nonetheless, by its very nature that political left was alert to the practicalities of the situation in ways which often bypassed the artists, even though, ultimately, they were affected by them.

In terms, then, of the political spectrum of the Revolution and the NEP period, it appears fruitful to relate the erstwhile avant-garde, the left front of the arts, first of all to the ethos of October itself as this was worked out in the immediately postrevolutionary "heroic" phase of War Communism: planning, classlessness, rejection of the past, an almost tabula-rasa-like sense of building the new life from the bottom up, moving from analysis into synthesis. And then to relate it to the emerging perspective of a Left Opposition in which planning and workers' democracy remained priorities in the face of their erosion by the dominant forces of the New Economic Policy. The avant-garde, the left front, is thus related to the Left Opposition. It is so, however, not as a reflection but as kind of relatively autonomous equivalent. To borrow from a slightly different context Buchloh's felicitous rendering, it was its "historically logical aesthetic correlative." That is the claim of this essay: that on at least four grounds the left front of the arts can be read as the cultural correlative of the predominantly Trotskiist Left Opposition: in terms of hostility to NEP; in terms of a commitment to planning; in terms of a requirement for a level of working-class prosperity to consume the goods produced; and in terms of a requirement for industrial democracy to provide an environment in which the artistic-constructor/engineer might function.[84] Circumstantial evidence, such as the penetration of the institutions of higher education by the ideas and organization of the left, and the peaks and troughs of Lef's own activity, appears to support this argument. The alternatives, conversely, are less persuasive: that the avant-garde, even at the moment of October and in its aftermath, was devoid of a coherent political perspective. Or, if it may be said to have had a politics, that this was compatible with NEP.[85] For the reasons given above, neither seems likely. In addition to which, an opposing artistic grouping appears to have flourished under NEP conditions and to have been able relatively to marginalize the left avant-garde during the NEP period.

III

Two principal questions remain concerning the politics of the avant-garde. I will address them in succession. First: If indeed Lef was a kind of correlate to, or at least can be said to have functioned in respect of some productive relationship with, the Left Opposition, why did not the latter embrace it? The relationship among Formalism, Futurism, and Marxism has been the subject of considerable debate, and the usual view is that the "Marxists" disapproved of the first two—of Formalism vehemently, for appearing to sever the link between art and society, and of Futurism for its roots in the bourgeois avant-garde, its impracticality, and its incomprehensibility to ordinary people.

A reconsideration might begin by arguing that the "comprehensibility" issue has been overstated and does not allow sufficiently for developments in the erstwhile avant-garde's position, notably the prominent role played by montage and factography. There were also nuances to the avant-garde's concession that something valuable was being lost by abandoning "Art" *tout court* to the past. Distinctions emerged quite early between doctrinaire Productivist theorists and the more flexible members of Lef. Rodchenko exasperatedly remarked in an Inkhuk debate of April 1922 that "if we carry on discussing, there will never be any actual work";[86] endless attempts to clarify the theory, that is, would get in the way of what should be quite pragmatic responses to the demands of a changing productive context. Also, in an extraordinary allegory composed in 1925, Lissitzky wrote: "The term A[rt] resembles a chemist's graduated glass. Each age contributes its own quantity: for example, 5 drams of the perfume 'Coty' to tickle the nostrils of the fine gentry. Or another example, 10cc of sulfuric acid to be thrown into the face of the ruling classes. Or, 15cc of some kind of metallic solution that later changes into a new source of light."[87] This seems to be an elliptical proposition of three stages of art: the history of art since the Renaissance, in the service of the ruling class; art as an engaged, combative form of agitation and propaganda during the revolutionary period, against a class system; and, finally, art as a contribution to building the new world, a transforming element. The "metallic solution" may refer to practical design; the "new source of light" is, however, clearly more. As Lissitzky goes on to say: "This A[rt] is an invention of the mind, i.e. a complex, where rationality is fused with imagination."[88] Offering a different inflection to the continuing validity of a notion of art, Maiakovskii granted his famous "amnesty" to Rembrandt and acknowledged that, after all, the Revolution needed a sonnet as well as a newspaper. For his part, Rodchenko seems increasingly to have sought images produced in a modern, "mechanical" way that would jolt conventional perceptions of the world, rather than seeking simply to design new bits of it. Whether this is seen as a "retreat" or a development from a onesided initial position has much to do with the commentator's own perspective on and sympathy for the problems of a revolutionary art. The October group, formed as an umbrella organization for left artists in 1928, and as such one of the last attempts to frame a modified left position, likewise tried to effect a rapprochement between construction and design, on the one hand, and the production of images, on the other.[89]

It is worth recalling in this connection that the status of painting as a possible locale for radical cultural practice remains hotly contested to this day, and that the assumption that it was irrevocably tied to the past was widespread among the cultural left of the period and not confined to the Constructivists. Benjamin's essay of the mid-1930s, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"), is perhaps the locus classicus of the tendency. The aloofness of modern painting—with its rhetoric of an unlearned aesthetic sensitivity, so easily corrupted into apologetics for a social elite—has won it few friends among socialists. Vasilii Kandinskii's collapsing of socialism and historical materialism into the mire of bourgeois materialism and acquisitiveness is only one particularly glaring and uncontrite example. Painting's reactionary affiliations were not merely traceable to the "aura," as Benjamin termed it, in which unique works of art were bathed. The *institution* of avant-garde art was permeated by haut-bourgeois exclusivity and snobbishness—which is, presumably, what led Maiakovskii on his trip to Paris in the midtwenties to liken French artists, with the exception of Fernand Léger, to "slimy oysters." In such a perspective, the readiness of the left avant-garde to search for ways to democratize art, to render it useful to the revolutionary social project, rather than simply to bury

it and have done, takes on a rather different aspect.

Turning now to the central issue of the historical confrontation between the avant-garde and the Left Opposition, we can locate its main site in Trotskii's *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (*Literature and Revolution*).[90] This study, written mostly in 1923 and published in 1924, is contemporaneous with the first phase of the Left Opposition's ascendancy; as such, it is as close as one is likely to get to an authoritative Left Opposition theory of art. The text, particularly its passages on Tatlin's Tower, has been subject to cavalier quotation and excerpting, designed to prove how intolerant the Party leadership was of the avant-garde, how the walls were closing in even by 1924, and how the course was set for the final "Marxist" closure on free artistic experiment that was realized in the early thirties. In fact, any even moderately receptive reading of Trotskii's full text cannot fail to register its relative openness. Not the least interesting feature of it is that a figure with Trotskii's commitments should, at that period, devote a full-length treatment to this range of questions at all. As for the views he articulates: he is unequivocally critical of theoretical Formalism (not surprising, since it was unequivocally critical of Marxism), regarding it as a species of Idealism. However, in the spectrum of artistic tendencies reviewed, from aesthetically conservative positions, Symbolism, and the literary "fellow travelers" through advocates of a distinctive "proletarian culture," Trotskii repeatedly gives the benefit of the doubt, and indeed a kind of priority, to the Futurist-Lef nexus. What he will not do is accede to demands that the Party recognize any particular grouping, Lef included, as the authentic voice of Communist art. For Trotskii, socialist, let alone Communist, culture lies in the future. The shape it will take will be derived from a classless society that does not yet exist. In the period of the "proletarian dictatorship," the main criterion to be applied when judging a work of art is the extent to which it helps in the future realization of such a culture. When weighed in these scales, Lef, though found ultimately wanting by Trotskii, nonetheless comes out fairly well.

It has to be remembered that Trotskii was not an art critic and, at this date, was not overly familiar with the products of the European avant-garde, having had other things on his mind for most of the preceding two decades since the "dress rehearsal" of 1905. Given the unfamiliarity of that avant-garde's devices and the threat these must have posed to a consciousness raised on the norms of Enlightenment/classical culture, it is Trotskii's bias in favor of toleration rather than dismissiveness that deserves our attention. His relative openness to Modernist technical devices is marked—compared, for example, to Lukács's positions developed in the later twenties and thirties. Where Trotskii undoubtedly struggles is with post-Cubist techniques, broadly speaking, of collage-montage and construction. The most sustained discussions he offers in this respect are of Maiakovskii's "150,000,000" and Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International.* What is quite clear is that the "flatness" involved in post-Cubist work, literary as well as visual, its relative "all-overness," such that conventional compositional dramatics and focuses are denied, its suspension of narrative developments and climaxes, the abrupt shifts it employs rather than orthodox modulations, violated Trotskii's canon of judgment: "The principal fault of futurist poetry even in its best examples, lies in the absence of a sense of measure . . . [Maiakovskii's images] quite often disintegrate the whole and paralyze the action . . . the whole piece has no climax . . . The parts refuse to obey the whole. Each part tries to be separate," and so on.[91] Trotskii's weak arguments about function in his treatment of Tatlin's Tower are little more than the sculptural equivalent of his difficulties before Maiakovskii's poem or, indeed, a painting. "What is it for" replaces "what does it represent" as the *cri de coeur* of one whose categories are being brought into question without his having the resources adequately to reply. As ever, the response is to deploy the criteria of the previously accepted paradigm as natural, indexed—according to the author's political disposition—to "competence" or to "popularity."

There is nothing unusual about this kind of critical difficulty, it is one of the effects of specialization in modern culture. (It is interesting that Trotskii adopts approximately the same kind of suspended judgment, underwritten by a fundamental concern for the security of the Revolution, for contemporary scientific developments.) Few enough could, in the early 1920s, write with understanding about Cubist devices. What Trotskii does is to try to rescue the impetus of the work, of which he approves, for a kind of traditional humanism from whose refusal as the stock-in-trade of normative art that "impetus," paradoxically, is derived. Little enough of this was clear at the time. For all his condemnation of "pure" Formalism in 1923–24, it is an intriguing question what Trotskii would have made, given his relative openness to and curiosity about avant-garde art, of the "social Formalism" of Mikhail Bakhtin, Pavel Medvedev, and Voloshinov which emerged in the mid- and late 1920s. This is one of those conjunctions, however, which the history of the twentieth century remaindered before it had chance to be born. As it is, Trotskii's somewhat rotund categories failed to mesh fully with the avant-garde work which came under his review. This is not, however, to place his arguments in a presumed continuum of suppression, an assertion which his status as leader of the political opposition to that "continuum" would contradict. Notwithstanding his critical difficulties with Futurism, some the result of relative ignorance, some fruitful and generative, Trotskii's overall assessment is clear: "Though remaining, in some respects, a Bohemian revolutionary offshoot of the old art, futurism contributes to a greater degree and more directly and actively than all other tendencies, in forming the new art."[92]

Trotskii's text, though authoritative, is not, however, the only one we have which sheds light on the attitude of the political Left Opposition to the avant-garde. Nikolai Gorlov, a prerevolutionary Old Bolshevik, allied in the early 1920s with Trotskii, wrote a reply to him, as well as a pamphlet running to sixty pages and entitled *Futurizm i revolutsiia* (*Futurism and Revolution*).[93] Both were published in 1924, the former in *Lef.* In the words of the editor of a 1975 French compendium, Gorlov's pamphlet "represents an exemplary attempt (albeit an isolated one on the part of a politician)" to clarify the relation between artistic issues and "the new economic and social structures born of the revolution."[94] Gorlov is more perspicacious than Trotskii about the relations of existing art with bourgeois society. In particular, his technical grasp of the avant-garde's innovations exceeds Trotskii's, resulting in prolonged textual analysis of Maiakovskii's poetry based on the claim that "Futurism has emancipated the word."[95] He goes on: "It is time to understand that form and content are one, that the new content will inevitably be cramped in the old form, and that the old form has become for us a barrel organ on which you can play nothing but 'Farewell.'"[96] In Gorlov's compelling image, the left avant-garde, Futurism, constituted "the red army of words."[97]

This is not, of course, to imply that political supporters of the Left Opposition would necessarily be sympathetic to left art. There just is not such a symmetry between politics and aesthetics, then or now. Nonetheless, in the two examples we have of discussions of avant-garde art by Left Opposition figures there is no out-and-out rejection of the avant-garde.

Rather, the converse: there are the beginnings of what could have been a constructive dialogue with it. It is perhaps not irrelevant that Trotskii was to form a more explicit alliance with the leading representative of another left avant-garde over a decade later. André Breton's trajectory may shed an oblique light on what was not possible for the Soviet avant-garde.

IV

The second of the two concluding questions concerns the relationship of the left avant-garde to Stalinism. Of all questions, this is the most insistent at the present time, and is likely to continue to be so as Stalinist culture is opened up to scrutiny. The manner in which conservative accounts are already beginning to elide the differences between the two has been noted above. This dynamic in the scholarship of the present period sharply points up the need for the accurate historical positioning of the avant-garde, not least to recover and sustain its examples for radical positions in the present—positions which are likely to find themselves more rather than less beleaguered amid the liberal triumphs of any "new world order" than heretofore. In a study of Klutsis, Margarita Tupitsyn has recently described this issue as the big "off-limits" question.[98] Likewise, Bois's attention was inescapably drawn to it with regard to Lissitzky, where the question of continuity between the different phases of his career becomes urgent. Bois's answer was to claim significant *dis*continuity: "I therefore propose the following thesis: there is indeed a schism between . . . the 'Brechtian' Lissitzky and the 'Stalinist' Lissitzky."[99] Bois saw this "schism," furthermore, not as one between a formally pure avant-garde and an instrumentalist view of art but, importantly, as one "between two ways of conceiving the relations between art and ideology." I believe that Bois is substantially correct in his suggestive analysis of the way in which technical radicalism can, and was intended to, function not purely aesthetically but as "a radical critique of the social order."[100] His essential point is that Lissitzky was at first able to sustain a radical suspension of alternatives, to destabilize the spectator's spatial assumptions—as analogues for social assumptions—without replacing them with readymade solutions; but that, as the dictatorship grew in power, it overwhelmed this fragile possibility and inserted its own new/old closures into the sphere of graphic and ideological work alike. "As long as Lissitzky kept intact the utopian force of his (political) desire," the radical project was sustainable; but "as soon as the circumstances closed off his utopian impulse," he was faced with no possibilities other than silence or service.[101]

The foregoing discussion of the Left Opposition may have deepened understanding of the context which helped the avant-garde to sustain the transformative force of its political desire. In similar vein, it may help to know the precise nature of the "circumstances" which finally "closed off" this impulse—not least because such knowledge may suggest why, for some at least, service won out over silence. This is always, one suspects, going to be puzzling to those of a liberal cast of mind: how can avant-garde artists bring themselves to serve a totalitarian dictatorship? The answer can only be coercion! Conversely, to conservatives, that service confirms the iniquity of those who lend their support to violent revolution in the first place.

The preceding account can shed some light on this "inexplicable" transformation by once again situating the left front in art in terms of a wider left in the Soviet political process of the 1920s. The paradox is that the final defeat of the Left Opposition at the end of 1927 quickly seemed to be reversed as the policies of the left apparently rose phoenixlike from the ashes of opposition to become the Party leadership's new official position. There is insufficient space here to dwell on this shift, but, in brief, what happened was twofold. Although some Trotskiists and in particular Trotskii himself remained opposed to the Stalinist bureaucracy—and were cast into outer darkness for it—others, and in addition those behind Zinov'ev, quickly turned around and sought readmission to the fold. Simultaneously with these political shifts, the economic contradictions of NEP finally came to a head. Some of the flavor of the situation comes out in a memorandum from Maksim Litvinov to Russian diplomatic representatives abroad, dated February 9, 1928: "In the last few days the economic situation, contrary to earlier expectations, has deteriorated sharply. Serious breakdowns in supply have already occurred on the food market which will probably force the workers' and peasants' government to start rationing the most important food items within the next few days . . . The situation is to be regarded as extremely serious . . . I repeat once again that the workers' and peasants' government is seriously concerned about the future course of events."[102] Crisis in the countryside was matched by crisis in the cities. Major food shortages forced people onto the private market where prices were higher, which had the effect of producing de facto wage cuts. Consequently, strikes broke out. Added to this, old machinery in the factories was wearing out anyway under the drive to increase production, with the result that the condition of workers deteriorated. The circumstances of those who were unemployed was worse. The result was that "alcoholism, prostitution, 'hooliganism' and crime assumed frightening dimensions, amounting to a veritable social disaster."[103] The leadership's response was to revert to the "extraordinary measures" of War Communism, which in this case essentially amounted to a war on the peasantry in the form of the forced extraction of food for the cities. This process involved the leadership around Stalin turning on its erstwhile NEP ally, Bukharin, who now assumed leadership of a short-lived Right Opposition dedicated to preserving NEP and the system of supports for the peasant. This turn against the right, and against NEP, and the rapid resumption of a rhetoric, if not yet a reality, of planned intervention in the economy—which then led quickly to the adoption of the Five-Year Plan proper and, concomitantly, to a renewed emphasis on industry rather than agriculture, i.e., on the worker rather than the peasant—conspired to convey an impression to only too willing oppositionists that the Party had finally seen the light and adopted the program of the left.

This impression was strengthened by a dramatic increase in propaganda against the new "right deviation," as well as, once again, the pronouncement of a new line in the International. This referred to a "third period," a period of new class antagonisms following on the period of stabilization to which NEP had been a response. The "third period" constituted a lurch to ultraleftism, an assertion of "class against class," according to which, for example, social democrats became, rather than potential allies of Communists against capital, class enemies indistinguishable from Fascists as upholders of international capitalism. The rhetorical madhouse which the international Communist movement became—wherein that movement was effectively reduced to a tool of Russian foreign policy—was accompanied both in the Soviet Union and abroad by a renewed emphasis on "proletarianism."

Many erstwhile Left Oppositionists now became the staunchest defenders of the new "left" turn—of militant proletarianism and, in particular, of the Five-Year Plan. That this allegedly left turn had nothing to do with either Bolshevik internationalism—its basis, after all, was the slogan of "socialism in one country"—or with improved conditions *for* the workers, escaped notice in the welter of propaganda in an

increasingly centralized political system which now lacked any place for dissent. Workers occupied center stage for propaganda. The point was, they had to. They were the ones who were making the sacrifices to build up the new autarkic economy: heroes of propaganda on the one (mythical) hand, victims of "primitive socialist accumulation" on the other (all too real) one. Contrary to appearances at the time, what was happening was far from an implementation of the left's policies in favor of a working-class-based socialist democracy; it was the final defeat of such a vision. Carr in his definitive history of the process speaks of a "counterrevolution." Deutscher calls it Stalin's "second revolution." Reiman refers to "a complex break with the meaning and essence of the social doctrine of socialism."[104] Alex Callinicos sums up the situation: "'Socialist' industrialization in the USSR was made possible not simply by the destruction of the peasantry but by the intense exploitation of the very class which in theory ruled the country and was supposed to be the main beneficiary of the changes involved."[105] Even Trotskii was not completely clear about what was going on. For most people, the wave of propaganda about the "third period," the left turn, and the great leap to build up a workers' state before it was crushed by the imperialists carried all before it. As Stalin put it in 1931: "The pace must not be slackened. We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must close this gap in ten years. Either we shall do it, or they will crush us."[106] If the left front of the arts was indeed influenced by the fortunes of the Left Opposition, it would not be entirely surprising to find committed avant-gardists throwing their technical expertise behind the institution of the Five-Year Plan.

One of the points which needs to be borne in mind here is the class position of artists and designers, not to mention theorists. They were not proletarians. They would not have experienced the sharp end of the exploitation mounting in the factories and mines. Quite the contrary: the misery in the countryside and the superintensification of productivity in industry would all have been mediated through the terms of the very propaganda campaign whose articulation *was* the site of the contribution of the designers. The chance to participate in the great leap revolved around belief in the official image (unless one wants to postulate mendacity of a degree which seems highly unlikely). A hint of the pressures and adjustments involved comes through in a comment by Lacis to Benjamin shortly before he left the Soviet Union in January 1927. She claims he does not understand what is going on, and tells him how, shortly after her own arrival in Russia, she had wanted to return to Europe, "because everything seemed finished in Russia and the opposition was absolutely correct." What Lacis is at pains to impress upon Benjamin, however, is that *she* had been wrong. Now she understands that things are changing. What is happening is "the conversion of revolutionary effort into technological effort." Now, "revolutionary work does not signify conflict or civil war but rather electrification, canal construction, creation of factories."[107] The ideology of "socialism in one country" and the way it was presented, as if a corner had been turned so that practical work on the new society could begin, seeped into the perspectives even of those who had originally been hostile to the turn events were taking. This is not to say that material circumstances did not count for something. At the very time during the First Five-Year Plan when industrial wages were falling by fifty percent, Stalin incorporated into his program systematic differentials in favor of managers and specialists. It is not unknown, after all, even in our own impeccable institutions of higher enlightenment, for hearts and minds to follow wage packets.

One of the key social roles in any system is that of technician-specialist. The notion in a workers' democracy is that these individuals are controlled by the mass of workers through the organs of that industrial democracy. In a capitalist system, as, indeed, in the bureaucratic system operating by that time in the Soviet Union, their functions are, however, managerial. With the so-called Shakhty trial in 1928, which set the pace for the show trials of the thirties, a scare was unleashed against foreign specialists as "saboteurs." Concomitantly, the need for new "Soviet specialists" was proclaimed. It is probably in this context that it becomes possible to understand Rodchenko's enthusiasm for transferring jurisdiction of Vkhutein from Narkompros—which was now seen as hopelessly generalist and tainted with Anatolii Lunacharskii's old-fashioned liberalism—to Vesenkha, the Council of the National Economy and prime mover in the call for new Soviet experts. This is an instance of the way in which the situation in the late twenties, after all the difficulties experienced by the left under NEP, seemed to offer a new lease on life to the erstwhile avant-garde project of the "artist-constructor." When the first groups of Rodchenko's students graduated from Dermetfak (the combined Woodworking and Metalworking faculties) in 1928 and 1929, this was the context into which they fitted. Commentary on the event in the Constructivist-influenced architectural press enthused that "Until today our industry has had no specific core of specialists working on the rational construction of articles used in everyday life . . . Vkhutein has now begun to turn out specialists of this type."[108]

Given this kind of productive locale, it is unlikely that figures such as Rodchenko and Lissitzky saw through to the problems of the working class at the base of the system. Or, to the extent that they did, it is, conversely, very likely that they believed themselves to be involved in the amelioration of the workers' condition rather than the bolstering of the very system which oppressed them. Thus Lissitzky in his 1930 *An Architecture for World Revolution* explicitly accords to the architect the role of leading emancipatory force for the "new life," given the fact that, left to their own devices, the "masses . . . tend to be shortsighted as far as their own growth is concerned."[109] Without this idealization, both of the role of the architect/designer/engineer and of the nature of the society that was actually being built out of the crash industrialization and forced collectivization of the First Five-Year Plan, how could Lissitzky have written that "in our country the factory has ceased to exist as a place of exploitation and as a hated institution," and continue that, under the Five-Year Plan, "the factory has become the real place of education: the university for new socialist man"?[110] The myth by which they were completely carried away could not have been further from the truth. Quite the reverse of crucibles of socialist education, the factories were increasingly places of exploitation of the working class. No less a figure than Lazar' Kaganovich, one of Stalin's closest collaborators on the Central Committee, argued, somewhat at variance with Lissitzky's claim, that "the earth should tremble when the director walks round the plant."[111]

It is extremely difficult to think oneself into a situation of such contradictions, not that the system inhabited by Western academics today is free of its own. Klutsis, a Latvian as well as an Old Bolshevik—a potentially fatal combination in Stalin's Russia—became one of the most powerful graphic voices of the Five-Year Plans and an honored designer involved in work for international exhibitions. None of this prevented him from being arrested in 1938 and shot in a prison camp amid a purge directed not only against national minorities but, tellingly, against remnants of the Left Opposition (some of whom, with unlikely heroism, had continued to organize in the Gulag). Lissitzky survived. So did Rodchenko, who in 1930

documented the building of the White Sea Canal in characteristically dramatic, formally dynamic, photographs. The White Sea Canal has since been revealed as effectively a mobile forced-labor camp in which tens if not hundreds of thousands died. At the time, along with Magnitogorsk and Dneprostroi, it was one of *the* prestige construction projects. The myth was that previously antisocial elements underwent voluntary socialist reeducation, working to the music of their own orchestras and supervised only by a few benign Interior Ministry police. Western enthusiasts such as Louis Aragon were completely bowled over by the project, and in Aragon's case it was instrumental in confirming his break with Surrealism and Trotskiism and accession to an orthodox Communist position which he sustained for the rest of his life. What did Rodchenko see? What could he have done about it, anyway? It was not easy even to stop working in Stalin's Russia without drawing attention to oneself. And again, there is the question of belief.

This takes us a long way from the question of the artistic left front's relation to a political Left Opposition, and the distance doubtless increases as the 1930s go on. Yet such a range of possibilities, posed most starkly by the alternatives of a retreat into silence or an embrace of the official line, did confront the avant-garde at the end of the 1920s. Even the choice of "silence" was a relative one and depended, in part, on the resources an artist or designer needed in order to carry on practicing. Thus disfavor as experienced by the architect Ivan Leonidov did lead to silence. In Tatlin's case, his eccentricity may be thought to have increased with the *Letatlin* project (1929–32). Thereafter, he withdrew into work for the theater and a private—and apparently occasional—return to painting. Klutsis and Lissitzky, on the contrary, seem to have gone about the propaganda task with some enthusiasm. Rodchenko's work appears to have split into "official" graphic design, on the one hand, and his private, melancholy circus paintings, on the other. This resumption of the two wings of bourgeois "fine" and "applied" art stands as fair testimony to the failure of the project of the synthesizer, the artist-constructor, building the new society from a wholly original and specific practical position.[112] The most catastrophic and implacable recognition of that failure was Maiakovskii's. Just days before his suicide in 1930, he used the metonym of a candy wrapper to show how everything had gone wrong. Futurists had fought against Classicism, against the cultural values of bourgeois society. In this spirit, Maiakovskii himself and Rodchenko had worked for Mossel'prom and other state enterprises in an attempt to make new values fundamental to the daily life of the socialist society. Yet even in 1924, that daily life was unregenerated, sustained by the conditions of an economic policy which was allowing, even inviting, the old back in. The revival of the opposition in 1926–27 gave a glimmer of hope—sufficient, at least, to restart *Lef*. The apparent belated recognition of the left's policies by the leadership, and the formulation of the Five-Year Plans, carried many along with it. This conjunction stimulated the formation of the October group. Maiakovskii even tried once again to draw closer to proletarianism by seeking membership in RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), this time to little avail. By 1930, Maiakovskii saw that all had been a mirage. What had happened was not the belated resumption of the values of the left but the final emplacement of a social formation which would bury the left and its revolution for generations. At this moment, in a meeting, as a gesture of friendship, a woman gave Maiakovskii a candy, with a Mossel'prom label on one side and a picture of the Venus de Milo on the other.

The ridiculous little item was like a condenser for everything that had gone wrong: the "twenty years of work," as well as the October Revolution, which had given that work practical focus, taken it out of the realm of the avant-garde cenacle, and appeared to offer it a world to work with. Maiakovskii's recognition was bleak: "So, the thing you've been fighting against for twenty years has now won."[113] His conclusion had a remorseless logic, matched perhaps only by Benjamin's later strictures about the need for the radical Communist intellectual to "denature" his work if necessary, to render it useless to all rather than usable by the enemy.[114] Maiakovskii was, in fact, used by his enemy when canonized as poet of the Revolution by Stalin in the mid-1930s in a grotesque about-face. Even Boris Pasternak, no friend of the Revolution, commented that this was Maiakovskii's second death, one for which he was not responsible. Not everyone was possessed of Maiakovskii's insight. The ideological power of the dictatorship was colossal. And the Five-Year Plans were, seemingly, successful: the Soviet Union built while the capitalist world largely stagnated. Designers had an important place, and were presumably gratified to serve what Lissitzky in 1930 still saw as the development of "a Socialistic society."[115] No one who has not taken up an oppositional position against the weight of a society's dominant readings should feel legitimated to criticize Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Klutsis, and others who designed for Stalin in the 1930s, particularly after Fascism became the main enemy. It was, though, a long way from October: closer, one might say, to the Berlin Wall than to Tatlin's Tower, both monuments in their own ways to Communism and what became of it. Now that the Wall has come down, international socialism may mean something again. Whether it does so or not is an open, yet concrete question: "open" as the Tower, "concrete" as the Wall; and as real as the relation of art and politics.

Notes

I would like to thank Steve Edwards for encouraging me to complete this essay, and my editor Jane Bobko for her invaluable contribution to improving the manuscript.

Lenin's remark in the epigraph was made in Zurich during the First World War in conversation with a young Romanian Dadaist, Marcu. Quoted in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951), p. xviii.

1. John Bowlt, "The Old New Wave," *New York Review of Books,* February 16, 1984, p. 28.

2. Vladimir Maiakovskii, letter to Nikolai Chuzhak, January 23, 1923, quoted in Wiktor Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky,* trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Gollancz, 1972), p. 315. Woroszylski's "biography" consists of a collage of quotations from the writings of Maiakovskii and his contemporaries.

3. Andrei Nakov, "Stylistic Changes—Painting Without a Referent," trans. Susan Spund, in David Elliott, ed., *Alexander Rodchenko,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), pp. 56–57.

4. Vassily Rakitin, "The Avant-Garde and the Art of the Stalinist Era," in Hans Gunther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 185.

5. El Lissitzky, "Proun Space," in *An Architecture for World Revolution,* trans. Eric Dluhosch (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), p. 138.

6. El Lissitzky, "Basic Premises," in *Architecture for World Revolution,* p. 27.

7. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts,* trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 58.

8. Rakitin, "Avant-Garde and Art," p. 186.

9. Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America,* April 1988, pp. 161–81.

10. Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 2.

11. Ibid., p. 140.

12. Ibid., p. 145.

13. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 82–119.

14. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3–18.

15. See Boris Groys, "The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde," in *Culture of the Stalin Period,* pp. 122–47, and Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art: In the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China,* trans. Robert Chandler (London: Collins Harvill, 1990). All quotations that follow are from these two works. On Golomstock, see also Paul Wood, "The Retreat from Moscow," *Artscribe* 88 (September 1991), pp. 48–53.

16. Bois, "El Lissitzky," p. 175.

17. Lenin, in July 1918, quoted in Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern* (London: Bookmarks, 1985), p. 7.

18. E. H. Carr, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–1929,* vol. 3, pt. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 1018.

19. Victor Serge, quoted in Peter Sedgewick, introduction to *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941,* by Victor Serge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. xv–xvi. The passage is quoted again in Alex Callinicos, *The Revenge of History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 25. The opening chapters of this book contain further arguments for the discontinuity of Bolshevik Marxism and Stalinism.

20. A partial exception here is the work of Sheila Fitzpatrick: *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1978).

21. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 93.

22. E. H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917–1929* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 34.

23. On this shift, see Paul Wood, "Art and Politics in a Workers State," *Art History* 8, no. 1 (March 1985), pp. 105–24.

24. Vladimir Maiakovskii, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* pp. 185–86.

25. In this connection, a word of caution is in order for those who leap to condemn Osip Brik for his probable involvement at this time with the Cheka. Whatever the state security organs later became, it was at that time a privilege to defend the Revolution against its enemies on a "front" which paralleled the actual fighting front of the Red Army. Feliks Dzerzhinskii himself is described by Deutscher (*Prophet Unarmed,* p. 85) as "incorruptible, selfless and intrepid," a complex figure who existed in permanent tension between the sordid demands of the Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle against a Counterrevolution and a "lofty idealism," which made him in his comrades' eyes a Savonarola of the Revolution. A similar austerity seems to have characterized Brik.

26. Michael Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism: The U.S.S.R. on the Eve of the "Second Revolution,"* trans. George Saunders (London: I. B. Tauris, 1987).

27. *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (London: Pluto, 1984), p. 73.

28. Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* ed. Gary Smith, trans. Richard Sieburth, *October* 35 (Winter 1985), p. 44.

29. David Elliott, introduction to Elliott, *Alexander Rodchenko,* p. 6.

30. Varvara Stepanova, "Photomontage," in Elliott, *Alexander Rodchenko,* p. 93.

31. Osip Brik, "Into Production," in Elliott, *Alexander Rodchenko,* pp. 90–91, 130–31. See also Osip Brik, "Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements of 1917–1930," in "Osip Brik: Selected Writings Presented by Maria Enzensberger," *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974), pp. 35–118. See especially p. 69. I also discuss this point in my "Art and Politics in a Workers State." See especially pp. 114–15.

32. *Kino-Eye,* p. 13.

33. Ibid., p. 32.

34. Viktor Shklovskii, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 312.

35. Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin,* trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Monad Press, 1973), pp. 39–40.

36. George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 9.

37. K. Miklashevskii, "Hypertrophy in Art," quoted in Larissa Zhadova, ed., *Tatlin,* trans. Paul Filotas et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 137 n. 35.

38. Vladimir Maiakovskii, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 415.

39. Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin,* pp. 57–58.

40. S. O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work,* ed. Vieri Quilici, trans. Huw Evans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 99.

41. Osip Brik, quoted ibid., p. 171.

42. Vladimir Tatlin, quoted in Zhadova, *Tatlin,* p. 143.

43. Vladimir Tatlin, quoted ibid., p. 268.

44. Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* p. 11.

45. Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin,* p. 40.

46. Nikolai Aseev, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 299.

47. Alexei Gan, "On the programme and work plan of the group of Constructivists," quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 92 n. 14.

48. Vladimir Tatlin, quoted in Zhadova, *Tatlin,* p. 252.

49. S. Tretyakov, "We Raise the Alarm," in "Documents from *Novy Lef,*" ed. and trans. Ben Brewster, *Screen* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1971–72), pp. 60ff.

50. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 146.

51. See Paul Wood, "Realisms and Realities," in *Modern Art: Practices and Debates,* book 3, forthcoming.

52. Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed,* p. 41.

53. Lev Trotskii, speech to the Twelfth Party Congress, April 20, 1923, quoted ibid., p. 100.

54. Leon Trotsky, "Toward Capitalism or Socialism?" in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition,* ed. Naomi Allen, vol. 1 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), p. 322.

55. Tatlin's old rival, Malevich (at this time director of Ginkhuk), added his voice to the criticism of Tatlin's way of running his department.

56. Vladimir Tatlin, "Report of the Section for Material Culture's Work for 1923–1924" and "Report of the Section for Material Culture's Research Work for 1924," in Zhadova, *Tatlin,* pp. 254–57.

57. Editorial in *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* 5–6 (1926), quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 207.

58. Vladimir Maiakovskii, statement in discussion on Futurism with Proletkul't, 1923, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 317.

59. Deutscher, *Prophet Unarmed,* p. 100.

60. Naomi Allen, introduction to *Challenge of the Left Opposition,* vol. 1, p. 35.

61. Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility,* p. 3.

62. Ibid., p. 95.

63. Ibid., p. 96.

64. Ibid., p. 100.

65. Leon Trotsky, *The Lessons of October,* in *Challenge of the Left Opposition,* vol. 1, pp. 199–200.

66. Lenin, quoted in Irving Howe, *Trotsky* (London: Fontana, 1978), p. 79.

67. Allen, introduction to *Challenge of the Left Opposition,* vol. 1, p. 29.

68. Reiman, *Birth of Stalinism,* p. 19.

69. Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility,* p. 103.

70. Reiman, *Birth of Stalinism,* pp. 23–24.

71. *The Platform of the Opposition,* in Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition,* ed. Naomi Allen and George Saunders, vol. 2 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1980), pp. 302–3.

72. Reiman, *Birth of Stalinism,* p. 32.

73. Ibid., p. 35.

74. Osip Brik, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* pp. 311–12.

75. Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* p. 53.

76. Ibid., p. 72.

77. Ibid., p. 112.

78. Vladimir Maiakovskii, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 415.

79. *Kino-Eye,* p. 48.

80. Vladimir Maiakovskii, quoted in Woroszylski, *Mayakovsky,* p. 415.

81. Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* p. 15.

82. "Declaration of the Constructivists," in "Documents from *Lef,*" ed. and trans. Richard Sherwood, *Screen* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1971–72), pp. 25–58.

83. Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* p. 60.

84. This aspect is discussed further in Wood, "Art and Politics in a Workers State."

85. This is an area fraught with difficulty. Annette Michelson, in her introduction to *Kino-Eye,* cites Karl Radek's 1931 criticism of Vertov's *Entuziazm* (*Symphony of the Donbass*). Radek had been an oppositionist who, since 1928, had thrown in his lot with the Stalinist bureaucracy. For Michelson, this conservative political turn, which constitutes "the place and position from which he was speaking," makes it "hardly an accident" that Radek was driven to dismiss Vertov's work (*Kino-Eye,* p. lviii). The case of Bukharin is interesting and arguably more complex. He is generally acknowledged to have been, along with Trotskii and Lunacharskii, one of the main Bolshevik figures who evinced an interest in and a sophisticated understanding of artistic developments. Yet Bukharin became an ally of Stalin's in promoting NEP from its outset; in the later 1920s, after the defeat of Trotskii, he was the figurehead of the Right Opposition on whom Stalin next turned. Initially, however, before the emergence of the splits under NEP, Bukharin had indeed been perceived as a leader of the left of the Party. There would be far-reaching implications for an argument that claimed that the ultimate failure of his peasant-oriented road to socialism found some prefiguration in a split between his aesthetics and his politics. Whereas in the case of the Left Opposition and Lef, although that relation is never fully articulated (to the detriment, it must be said, of the political project no less than the artistic one), a passage remained open: a passage through which there have moved such tensioned figures as Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht and

their descendants in the postwar period who have attempted to resist both the complete sundering and the complete implosion of art and politics.

86. Aleksandr Rodchenko, quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 115.

87. El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry," in *Architecture for World Revolution,* p. 142.

88. Ibid.

89. A brief discussion of October's significance is offered in Wood, "Realisms and Realities."

90. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution,* trans. Rose Strunsky (London: RedWords, 1991).

91. Ibid., pp. 181–82.

92. Ibid., p. 50.

93. Nicholas Gorlov, "On Futurisms and Futurism: Concerning Comrade Trotsky's Article" and *Futurism and Revolution,* in *The Futurists, The Formalists, and the Marxist Critique,* ed. Christopher Pike, trans. Christopher Pike and Joe Andrew (London: Ink Links, 1979), pp. 169–80 and 181–242, respectively.

94. Gérard Conio, preface to Section 3 of Pike, *Futurists,* p. 162.

95. Gorlov, *Futurism and Revolution,* in Pike, *Futurists,* p. 211.

96. Ibid., p. 199.

97. Ibid., p. 211.

98. Margarita Tupitsyn, "Gustav Klutsis: Between Art and Politics," *Art in America,* January 1991, pp. 41–47.

99. Bois, "El Lissitzky," p. 167.

100. Ibid., p. 168.

101. Ibid., p. 175.

102. M. M. Litvinov, Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, memorandum to diplomatic representatives of the USSR, February 9, 1928, reprinted in Reiman, *Birth of Stalinism,* pp. 138–42.

103. Reiman, *Birth of Stalinism,* p. 55.

104. Ibid., p. 86.

105. Callinicos, *Revenge of History,* p. 32.

106. Stalin, quoted in Hallas, *The Comintern,* p. 123.

107. Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* p. 82.

108. *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* 3 (1929), quoted in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* pp. 212–13 n. 48.

109. El Lissitzky, "The Club as a Social Force," in *Architecture for World Revolution,* p. 44.

110. Ibid., p. 57.

111. Lazar' Kaganovich, quoted in Callinicos, *Revenge of History,* p. 35.

112. I have not been able fully to address the relations of Malevich's work to the political perspective explored in this essay. Although it is, of course, distinct from Constructivism, I see no reason to suspect that his work radically violates the view presented here, at least for the greater part of the period investigated. His later work, however, does appear to pose specific problems. The prevailing tendency has been to dismiss his return to figuration as an oddity or a capitulation to the burgeoning forces of Social(ist) Realism. Major exhibitions such as that at the Stedelijk Museum in 1989 have now surely buried this argument. I address the works briefly in my "Realisms and Realities"; so, too, does Charles Harrison in his "Abstraction," in *Modern Art: Practices and Debates,* book 2, forthcoming. In political terms, a question remains: what did it mean that Malevich turned again to depictions of peasant life at precisely the time of the forced collectivization of agriculture and the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class," as Stalinist rhetoric chillingly has it? Whatever the answer to this question, a recently published letter of April 8, 1932, from Malevich to Vsevolod Meierkhol'd makes clear that for him the return to figuration was not a break with the Revolution but a way of safeguarding it and preventing the return of Classicism and Naturalism:

> *Painting has turned back from the non-objective way to the object, and the development of painting has returned to the figurative part of the way that had led to the destruction of the object. But on the way back, painting came across a new object that the proletarian revolution had brought to the fore and which had to be given form, which means that it had to be raised to the level of a work of art . . . I am utterly convinced that if you keep to the way of Constructivism, where you are now firmly stuck, which raises not one artistic issue except for pure utilitarianism and in theatre simple agitation, which may be one hundred per cent consistent ideologically but is completely castrated as regards artistic problems, and forfeits half its value. If you go on as you are . . . then Stanislavski will emerge as the winner in the theatre and the old forms will survive. And as to architecture, if the architects do not produce artistic architecture, the Greco-Roman style of Zyeltovski will prevail, together with the Repin style in painting (Kazimir Malevich, "Two Letters to Meyerhold,"* Kunst & Museumjournaal *6 (1990), pp. 9–10).*

113. Vladimir Maiakovskii, quoted in Christopher Pike, introduction to *Futurists,* p. 19.

114. Walter Benjamin, letter to Gershom Scholem, April 17, 1931, in Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship,* trans. Harry Zohn (London: Faber, 1982), pp. 231–33.

115. El Lissitzky, "Housing Communes," in *Architecture for World Revolution,* p. 42.

The Artisan and the Prophet: Marginal Notes on Two Artistic Careers

Vasilii Rakitin

Which is worth more: wind or stone?
They're both priceless.
—Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov

The epic literatures of many peoples, in both East and West, feature sagas in which two heroes, equal in prowess, are pitted against each other. Valiant warriors on both sides watch their duel with bated breath . . .

The first of two events that determined the fate of art for a long time to come—and not just in Russia but in many other countries—took place in Moscow in the spring of 1914:

Dear Sirs,

On the 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th of May this year the studio of Vladimir Tatlin (37 Ostozhenka, apartment 3) will be open from 6 to 8 P.M. for a free viewing of his SYNTHETIC-STATIC *compositions. In addition, at seven o'clock on the aforementioned days, the Futurist Sergei Podgaevskii will dynamically declaim his latest poetic transrational records.*[1]

A hand-lettered placard mounted above the entrance to the apartment proclaimed: BEHOLD THE TRICK!

Podgaevskii could not simply read his verses—he had to "dynamically declaim" them. And they were not even verses, either, but "poetic transrational records." The choice of words is indicative of a change of mood in Moscow artistic circles, of a gravitation toward the transrational and the alogical. Toward Dada in place of Futurism.

Tatlin used metallic netting and smoked glass in one of the compositions on display, which people claimed was a depiction of a "tearoom at night."[2] They were, however, hard pressed to say what was represented in the other "synthetic-static" works, which had been hung alongside Tatlin's beautiful and perfectly legible set and costume designs for Mikhail Glinka's opera *Zhizn' za tsaria* (*A Life for the Czar,* 1836). (The 1913–14 Mir iskusstva [World of Art] exhibitions at which these designs had been displayed[3] coincided with celebrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg of the tricentenary of the Romanov dynasty—celebrations which were themselves operatic in their grandeur.)[4] Observers today wish to see a connection between Tatlin's *Les* (*Forest,* 1913) design for Glinka's opera and his first reliefs. But the break between them is obvious. There is no smooth transition. Tatlin took not a step but a leap into the unknown.

Nonetheless, Tatlin, with childlike cunning, continued to try to convince the public that there was no particular difference between his new work and old—although he did fear he would not be believed. In December 1914, he was invited to contribute as a member of World of Art to the *Khudozhniki Moskvy—zhertvam voiny* (*Artists of Moscow for the Victims of the War*) exhibition, where again he showed his designs for *A Life for the Czar.* Yet two or three hours prior to the opening, he arrived with his *Zhivopisnyi rel'ef* (*Painterly Relief,* 1914)—a composition of wire, iron, cardboard, and enamel on board—and proceeded to hang it as if that were nothing out of the ordinary. The organizers endeavored to remove the relief from the exhibition—such an eccentric prank, such an aesthetic curiosity, did not suit a flag-waving, patriotic exhibition! Thanks, however, to the insistence of several other artists—and because spectators had already begun to filter into the exhibition halls—Tatlin's relief was allowed to remain.[5]

The following year, Sergei Shchukin, one of the most significant collectors of the new painting, bought a relief by Tatlin out of the *Tramvai V* (*Tramway V*) exhibition in Petrograd, paying what seemed to Russian artists a fantastic price—three thousand rubles.[6] For that amount of money one could purchase fifteen to twenty landscapes by the enterprising "father of Russian Futurism," David Burliuk, or two or three splendid paintings by one of the most popular and prominent

artists of the time, Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin. Amazement bordered on shock. What was the secret of a few boards and pieces of iron and wire, all of which could be found in any barn or garbage dump?

In the late autumn of 1915, another artist in Moscow, Kazimir Malevich, was attempting to convince his colleagues in Futurist and Dada happenings to gather "under a new banner."[7] He proposed that the poets of yesterday's Futurism "change the means of battle with thought, content, and logic . . . advance Alogism after Futurism"—in essence, that they learn from the example of his Alogist paintings. Malevich even provided examples of his own of the new poetic structures:

Papuans bored, but
Cottage second-class
Ticket. Park. Arch.

These lines loosely match his painting *Stantsiia bez ostanovki. Kuntsevo* (*Through Station: Kuntsevo,* 1913, fig. no. 2), while another of Malevich's examples brings to mind his *Korova i skripka* (*Cow and Violin,* 1913), sometimes called *Vid s balkona* (*View from the Balcony*):

The cow ate a palm
Alma-Tadema
Adam Goat Goose.[8]

It was evident that all the innovators in painting were "no longer Futurists"[9] and that "Futurism" had survived only as a general notion useful in dealing with a public accustomed to the labeling of everything new and up to the minute as "Futurist." The participants in the *0.10* exhibition, held in Nadezhda Dobychina's gallery in Petrograd in 1915–16, called the show the "last Futurist exhibition"—the last that the artists striving to attain "zero form" wanted. Yet the *Magazin* (*The Store*) exhibition, organized by Tatlin and held in Moscow in 1916, would be called "Futurist." And during the Civil War years, "Futurism" would once again be a synonym for everything new, leading an exasperated Lenin to cry, "Can we not find any reliable anti-Futurists!"[10]

The true manifesto of the new movement in painting—Suprematism—was neither the leaflet with a statement by Malevich distributed at the *0.10* exhibition[11] nor the speeches he gave at debates and lectures nor even his polemical treatise *Ot kubizma k suprematizmu* (*From Cubism to Suprematism*),[12] an eccentric experiment in philosophical prose, but Malevich's *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square,* 1915) itself, his "icon."

The icon is a sign of the other world, of sacred harmony, and a witness to higher spiritual values. But the majority of Malevich's followers, raised on the Futurists' irreverent attacks on the old and obsolete, did not immediately comprehend the iconic meaning of the *Black Square.* Malevich's detractors proved to be more insightful. They intuitively understood the historic importance of Malevich's gesture—he hung the *Black Square* at the *0.10* exhibition in the traditional place of the icon—yet, in their holy terror, they confused the new harmony and new artistic idealism with the march of the "oncoming boor."[13]

"We are all primitives of the twentieth century," announced Ivan Kliun.[14] He used the word "primitive" in reference not to Primitivism, the stylistic tendency prevalent in the early 1910s, but to the beginning of a new era in the evolution of art and to vanguard artists as bearers of a new artistic consciousness, powerful and whole. Tatlin's reliefs and Malevich's Suprematism were the most important stimuli in the self-determination of other avant-garde artists, who were not troubled by the divergence and even the glaring contradiction between Tatlin's and Malevich's paths. In order to clarify their own tasks, it was important that artists define themselves in relation to the new concepts. Formal innovation acted in and of itself, provoking argument, elucidation, and refutation. It was, that is, an aesthetic provocation, a challenge.

Thus Liubov' Popova and Kliun countered Tatlin with their own variations on the relief, admixing Tatlin's experiments and the "sculpto-paintings" of Aleksandr Arkhipenko and, in Popova's case, the work of the Italian Futurists Umberto Boccioni and Ardengo Soffici, as well; in Petrograd, Lev Bruni made reliefs influenced by Tatlin. What was at stake here, of course, was not the affirmation of the spatial relief as a special new genre—the reliefs of Vladimir Burliuk, Kliun, and Vasilii Ermilov (who produced reliefs in Khar'kov in the early 1920s) were based upon different principles. Rather, Tatlin's reliefs acted as conduits to new spatial concepts and to a gradual recognition of a new attitude toward art in general.

Many artists—such as Ivan Puni, Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Ol'ga Rozanova (whose works were frequently entitled *Suprematizm* [*Suprematism*] in exhibition catalogues)—experienced Malevich's Suprematism as if it were an inoculation against the disease of illusionism and Naturalism, and then quickly went beyond it. After the February Revolution of 1917, the artists of Supremus—a group centered around Malevich in Moscow in 1916–17, which had planned, but was never able, to publish a journal of the same name—joined the so-called young or left federation of the Moscow Professional Union of Artists and Painters. And by 1920, Malevich's solo show at the Sixteenth State Exhibition in Moscow was essentially the exhibition of a living classic.

No one among Suprematism's "fellow travelers" had any desire, as Malevich wished they did, to develop specifically Suprematist principles further. The independence of each artist from the general rubric was clear to all the participants, bar none, in Suprematist ventures. Thus Varvara Stepanova observed bluntly that "Rozanova's Suprematism is contrary to that of Malevich . . . For Malevich, color exists solely to distinguish one plane from another; for Rozanova, the composition serves to reveal all the possibilities of color on a plane." She took particular note of the "minimalism" of Rozanova's most recent work, where "one color [develops] into a self-sufficient painting."[15] Even the seemingly orthodox Suprematist Kliun quickly changed tack, searching out his own concepts of abstract form and constructing his compositions on the interrelation of color and light (on the change in color wrought by light and contrasts, and the influence of adjacent colors on the alteration of form).

Tatlin's reliefs and Malevich's *Black Square* introduced a new artistic yardstick. Competition with the Paris school, which had been the main engine in the evolution of new Russian art circa 1910, lost its meaning.

In about 1920, it would "suddenly" become evident that changes had taken place or were in the offing in many countries—that the scale of artistic values was shifting. Parisian artists would respond to the crisis with Purism and the aesthetics of Le Corbusier, and later with Surrealism. For the time being, however, the signal events were those occurring to the east of Paris. In Moscow and Petrograd, in Holland and Germany, and in Eastern Europe, artists were not only promoting but in their own way transforming new ideas. The Bauhaus, with a minimum of rhetoric, with "workmanlike efficiency," so to speak, for a time resolved all real and imagined conflicts and contradictions—between "free creative work" and society's claim on the artist's work; between logic and rationalism and spontaneity and intuition; between

technology and metaphysics—in its notion of a "total art" in active relation with its surroundings. In the 1920s, the question of "epoch and style" was not merely theoretical. And in the art of this period, Malevich and Tatlin are constantly the twin catalysts.

The world as a sense, independent of the image, of the idea—this is the essence of the content of art. {My} square is not an image, just as a switch or socket are not the current.

—Malevich[16]

By the time Tatlin's reliefs and Suprematism appeared, a certain stage in the evolution of the new Russian art had come full circle—a stage that, according to Malevich, was initiated by those now seemingly happy and carefree sensualists, the Impressionists. Vanguard Russian artists especially esteemed Claude Monet, whom they perceived—as they did Cézanne and Van Gogh, and later Picasso—as "more Russian than the Russians." Those in Malevich's circle were always and unreservedly admirers of Fernand Léger, while Tatlin prized the lyrical Impressionism of Mikhail Larionov, which combined virtuosity with sincere feeling.

Cubism taught discipline of form and fostered a taste for analysis. It was, for Malevich, the pivotal—or, better yet, central—event in painting's evolution from Impressionism to Suprematism. Among the slogans of Malevich's students—the members of Unovis (the Affirmers of the New Art)—in Vitebsk were the following:

If you want to study art, study Cubism!
You want to learn painting? Begin with Cubism!
If you don't want to become a fashionable painter, begin by studying Cubism!
If you are an artist and do not work cubistically, then begin working this way immediately!
You want to experience the beauty of the fourth dimension? Begin studying Cubism!
If you want to become a creator, study Cubism!
Do you want to reign over nature? Study Cubism!
If you don't want to be ruled by nature, begin studying Cubism![17]

In other words, there was no way to become a contemporary artist without first passing through Cubism.

For Tatlin, Cubism was something worth knowing, yet he evinced no desire to adopt it. Nor, however, did he feel any need to reject it—he was, of course, far from concurring with Félix Vallotton's celebrated utterance: "Cézanne? I choose, with all due respect, to ignore him." In the studio on Ostozhenka, which Tatlin rented with the artist Nikolai Rogovin, he drew nudes in the style of Cubism (whenever other artists congregated and they were able to hire a model). Many such studies remain, in albums and even on loose sheets of paper.

But no Cubism was allowed into his painting—no variations on the paintings in Shchukin's gallery or those illustrated in magazines. Tatlin's devices for deforming nature (devices as important to Expressionism as to Cubism), his "distortions," had more in common with the violation of perspective in icons (but not in primitive art) than with the canvases of the Parisian painters. (It was precisely in 1911–12 that the "antiquity" of the vanguard art of Tatlin became manifest.)

And Futurism? For Malevich and Tatlin, its reign was a time when artistic life itself became a work of art.

Malevich entertained long and seriously both the idea of dynamism and the linked notion of art as pure energy. "I paint energy, not the soul."[18] Energy and the energetics of tension are subjects ever present in his reflections on art—though he

fig. 1
Vladimir Tatlin
Counter-Relief, *ca. 1916.*

fig. 2
Kazimir Malevich
Through Station: Kuntsevo, *1913.*

invests these concepts with his own meaning, viewing both dynamism and energy from the vantage point of absolute art.

In first describing his reliefs as "synthetic-static compositions," Tatlin emphasized their non-Futurist character.

Alogism formed a sort of neutral zone between the trends of the early 1910s and non-objective art and Constructivism. Tatlin contented himself with hanging the BEHOLD THE TRICK! placard, while Malevich (if one isn't blindly accepting the suggestions embedded in his own writings) found himself at a turning point. A turning point to nowhere, and then to "his" Suprematism, of far greater importance than Cubism. Irony for a time allowed the question, Where next? to remain unanswered; it permitted a second's breathing space in the uninterrupted pursuit of new forms. Alogism offered everything—Cubism's geometric planes, Futurism's strangeness and urban kitsch (lettering from advertisements and signboards)—immediately and simultaneously. It was harmony in disharmony. Not synthesis, not the birth pangs of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* but a backed-up stream of artistic reflexes and utterances vis-à-vis contemporary devices and concepts in art. Today we can trace an entirely logical path from Alogism to the montage of the 1920s.

In Malevich's case it was also significant that the Alogist estrangement of meaning encouraged scrutiny of the structure of the painting; it revealed the "pure element" of form: the surface plane.

Of course, Malevich, in passionately absorbing each *ism,* failed to notice that he was parodying them. The parody evolved from his desire to do everything not only better but absolutely right. He was a born systematist; he had to model everything into his own—and, in his opinion, faultlessly exact—world of Impressionism, Cézannism, and Cubism. And if everything was to be exact and complete, he had to circle back and to reexamine himself again and again. Hence it seemed to him, after he had completed his own series of Cubist experiments, that no one in Russia had yet created a truly Cubist work. But, had he worked in France, would he have found a Parisian artist who had?

Malevich's Alogist works, like things *an sich,* are products of the disengagement of form from the objects of perception. These works operate on two levels, that of abstract planes concealing some unknown world and that of irony vis-à-vis the subject that is possibly depicted.

Suprematism liberated these disengaged planes and endowed them with new meaning. New form engendered, or predetermined, new meaning.

This was the winding-up of the old (although the "old" was not very long out of its infancy) and the beginning of the new.

Tatlin navigated among the various *isms* in art like an icebreaker threading a path among floes that threaten to crush it. His was the most logical and the most unforeseen solution—to make not life but the materials existing in life both the subject of art and art itself.

He saw no need to repudiate anything. The polemical debates about art were of no special interest to Tatlin, and not because he wasn't one for talking—he was, in fact, a first-rate raconteur—but because he discerned no particular sense in them. Tatlin was a naturalist, the keenest of observers, who did reject willful intervention. He proceeded "from the bottom up," not from a general idea—the fourth, fifth, sixth, or whatever dimension—but from the life of materials. From the life of materials, and not from materials as such.

Materials have properties such as elasticity, weight, and tension. Line, tone, and color. Old photographs of the reliefs—without the retouching that each time cancels a little more of the complexity of their structure—reveal a subtlety of *faktura* (density or manipulation of material) and light and shade. The attainments of painting have not been lost. The refinement and intricacy of the linear-rhythmical relationships of painting are, rather, preserved. The riddle of Tatlin's reliefs, unsolved by those in both East and West who have reconstructed them, is how emptiness became an artistic space, how it acquired a subtle poetic meaning.

Tatlin's reliefs embodied a new artistic methodology: the aesthetics of real materials in real space (naturally, both these concepts change, and constantly, over time and space). Tatlin's conversations with young artists from the Apartment No. 5 studio on Vasil'evskii Island in Petrograd, and with the critics Sergei Isakov and Nikolai Punin, led to the following, entirely logical, formulae:[19]

Impressionism $\dfrac{\textit{spectrum}}{\textit{power of color}}$

Cézannism $\dfrac{\textit{quality of color}}{\textit{composition of form}}$

Cubism $\dfrac{\text{faktura}}{\textit{consistent composition}}$

Tatlin (and Tatlinism) $\dfrac{\textit{material}}{\textit{real space}}$

And so, a new sign and a new reality.
Two faces of the age.

More accurately, a new life in art for the real. At the beginning, even Tatlin, it appears, did not fully grasp the significance of what he had discovered. It was no big deal. Every artist loves his material. No mere board but "a lovely little one," Tatlin would say. What unusual discoveries were there here? What art? Even in the booklet *Vladimir Evgrafovich Tatlin,* published at the height of art-world polemicizing, we find no theories—not even their facsimile—no manifesto, no ripostes. Only a decidedly straightforward biographical note and reproductions of his works.[20] An account of work produced between this date and that. Look for yourself and draw your own conclusions. Just as El Lissitzky said later in his *Suprematicheskii skaz pro dva kvadrata* (*A Suprematist Tale about Two Squares,* 1922): "Construct yourselves."

Vera Pestel', who dedicated her painting *Tatlin s banduroi* (*Tatlin with Bandura*)[21] to Tatlin, writes ingenuously in her memoirs about how much she, Sof'ia Karetnikova, Popova, and Nadezhda Udal'tsova liked Malevich's bright and cheerful geometric paintings. Pestel' and the others made decorative sketches in the Suprematist style for the Verbovka collective, whose peasant women embroidered scarves, handbags, muffs, and carpets with these designs.[22] And the four artists even decorated the club of the left federation of the Moscow Professional Union of Artists and Painters with Suprematist designs.[23]

Malevich's formation of the Supremus group, which good friends of Tatlin's and former admirers of his art (Udal'tsova and Pestel' again) either joined or associated with, was, of course, a blow to Tatlin's pride as an artist. This despite the fact that both Malevich's formal investigations and his strategems to inaugurate a movement were foreign to Tatlin, as if from another planet.

The stories recounted by Pestel', Valentina Khodasevich,[24]

and Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia,[25] who knew Tatlin well (but not each other), paint a picture—full of sympathy—of a "holy fool of Futurism," a man suspicious to the point of absurdity, to the brink of phobia. He openly suspected Malevich of artistic espionage, though it is difficult today to detect the traces of any crime. Tatlin erected something like a tent, but one that could be locked, in the middle of his studio on Staro-Basmannaia Street in the Nemetskaia sloboda region of Moscow. God forbid Malevich should see what he was up to and get ahead of him.

This is a continuation, as it were, of the old "futurization" of artistic life. What happens in art and the stories told about it are artistic facts of identical interest. History immediately decks itself out as myth.

Tatlin's "phobia" was clearly provoked by Malevich, who derived satisfaction from mystifications and practical jokes. Tatlin, of course, also liked to tell tales. They always contained, it's true, a kernel of truth, yet the accounts of his journeys and adventures changed and were embroidered with each retelling. Did he, pretending to be a blind man, play his bandura at an exhibition of Russian art and handicrafts in Berlin in the winter of 1914? He did. And did he speak with and kiss the hand of the Kaiser's wife? Those who heard his captivating tales did not much care whether, in fact, he had. Had he been in Paris? He had. The sculptor and later art historian Boris Ternovets,[26] the sculptor Vera Mukhina,[27] and Jacques Lipchitz[28] all recalled Tatlin's traveling to France after his "stint" playing the bandura in Berlin. In her diary, Popova recorded Tatlin's story about how, right before his departure from Paris for Moscow, he visited "Pavel" Picasso himself (Russians liked to switch from the Spanish name to its Slavic equivalent).[29] After seeing Picasso's Cubist constructions, Tatlin said, he began to work according to other principles.

fig. 3
Vera Pestel'
Composition, *1915–16.*

Malevich's mystifications were of a different variety. He matched Baron Munchausen in flights of fantasy and inspiration. A simple photograph. The artist with a Polish acquaintance in Germany.[30] Two figures. On the back is the inscription: "Le Corbusier and me in Dessau." Malevich was certainly in danger of being found out, yet the very act of rewriting the history of contemporary art afforded so much pleasure. And why wouldn't Le Corbusier have come and offered a salute to the renowned Kazimir from the city of Petrograd?

As a polemicist, Malevich remained a man of the Futurist era and its romantic mythology. In one of his letters from Vitebsk to David Shterenberg in Moscow—a letter written in 1921, when the organization of the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition,* Berlin, 1922) was only beginning to be discussed—Malevich took pains to emphasize that he was an ideological worker in art. And that the Berlin exhibition would be of interest to him only if his "icons"—the *Black Square, Chernyi krug* (*Black Circle*), and *Chernyi krest* (*Black Cross*)—were exhibited. And exhibited only, moreover, under the rubric *Suprematizm. Rossiia. 1913* (*Suprematism: Russia, 1913*).[31]

Nineteen thirteen? By now this date has been quoted any number of times.[32] As if Suprematism's having in fact emerged somewhat later than 1913 could diminish its significance in the history of twentieth-century art and discredit it in its own eyes. To be sure, many such "improved chronologies" have been discovered and will continue to be discovered in accounts of the art of this century. Yet Malevich, who was a genius at hypnosis, convinced not only everyone else but even himself that he had inaugurated Suprematism in 1913—and not in any other year. His account of his own career is full of datings of works according not to the year in which they were produced but the year in which they were conceived.[33]

The opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (*Victory over the Sun,* 1913) was, of course, a major event in the history of Russian Dadaism. But in the history of Suprematism? All attempts to read the origins of Suprematism in Malevich's fortuitous and rather banal set design for the opera (the square in his sketch of the curtain was a form virtually foreordained by the box shape of the stage) reiterate Malevich's own carefully planted suggestion. He caught a lot of fish with this line. Though that certainly casts no shadow on the historic importance of Suprematism.

Malevich's mystifications not infrequently force one to scrutinize his works and principles more closely.

The young artists in Vitebsk and Smolensk, at the most fifteen to eighteen years old, asked Malevich about the origins of the first Suprematist works and of the *Black Square.* Malevich improvised brilliantly. Using the principle of analogy. According to a famous anecdote in the history of nineteenth-century Russian art, the prominent historical painter Vasilii Surikov could not, no matter how he tried, get the coloring he wanted in his painting *The Boyarina Morozova* (1887) until he saw the solution in life: a black crow on white snow. Thus Malevich told his students this story: one day, following a spate of inclement weather—at the time he was living in Moscow, in the Sokol'niki district, in a house rented by Kliun—he went to the window and was stunned by the contrast between the freshly fallen, blindingly white snow and the black knapsack on the back of a boy leaving the house for school. Even if the story was a complete fabrication, it was spectacularly convincing.[34] Malevich wrote to Mikhail Matiushin to announce his *fevralizm* (Februaryism) in painting.[35] So what if the absurdly (like so many other of his works shown at the *0.10* exhibition) entitled *Zhivopisnyi realizm mal'chika s rantsem* (*Painterly Realism of a Boy with Knapsack,* 1915) is not a black square but a composition of two squares—one large and one small?[36]

Such anecdotes, worthy of Vasari, only confirm the role played by emotional impulse.

Iron, glass, and marble. Malevich, as a man with a refined artistic sensibility, could not have remained oblivious to the originality of Tatlin's works. Yet if Suprematism was the end-all and be-all of contemporary painting's evolution from Impressionism, if it was the single truth, the existence of Tatlin put the problem on a different plane, namely: where is the truth?

Tatlin? It was impossible not to notice him. Just as it was impossible not to recognize his talent. And Malevich—the polemicist and "solipsist" of innovation—asked his students and followers to repeat after him: Tatlin does not transcend the confines of Cubism.[37] He represents only a stage in the evolution of Cubism. Variations rather than repetition, maybe, still not true innovation. You must go forward—follow me—onward to the new harmony. One of Malevich's students in Vitebsk, marching in step with the cult of the great leader promoted from above, even thought up a slogan: "Long live Unovis—the path to a Suprematist future—and long live Kazimir Malevich, the true guide along this path!"[38]

For Tatlin, however, "iron blocked the horizon."[39] And his task was to "rupture the ring of the horizon."

Malevich was born a prophet, mystifier, leader, and artistic dictator. And he was very human; he often endured humiliations[40] and had learned how to find his way out of any situation. In Petrograd in the 1920s, for example, confronted by complete repudiation of his art, he conceived a kind of applied research, the "science of art," to which he summoned vanguard artists now bereft of social standing.

For Tatlin, being an artist was never too complicated. He was not the leader of any movement or group, nor did he yearn to be such, even if he did enjoy indisputable authority among art professionals, both vanguard and not.[41] He was not overly impressed by the fine artistic intuition that nature had given him. It seemed a given, like a good ear for a musician. And others had the same gift. The sharpness and precision of the eye was the most important thing. Absolutely no approximations or imitations of artistic impression. Visual perception meant the eye's tactile sensation of every portion of a work. Sight, therefore, had to be put under the control of touch.[42]

The eye both sees and touches the work. It sees and feels the painting-like warmth of tone of the wood, the elasticity and tension of the iron, the cable giving under the iron's weight. Every rhythm of form. The light and shadows of every facet of the relief. Aesthetics resides in the "selection of materials," in the fit of their contradictions. Precious mahogany and palisander, for example, are conjoined with an ordinary piece of iron used for roofing and drainpipes. The relief—to quote Vladimir Maiakovskii's verse—is "a nocturne on a drainpipe flute."

In Tatlin's *Doska No. 1* (*Board No. 1*) of the winter of 1916–17, wood and paint combine to create a play of color halftones, interstices, and transitions. In its power and subtlety, this work is comparable to the masterpieces of icon painting.

Tatlin was born to make plastic art, nature, and technology into one great new whole. He was not a man of particularly wide intellectual interests. Malevich's philosophical prose summons numerous associations with the philosophy of writers whom he not only had not read (though he had, for example, read Schopenhauer) but of whom he had not even heard. Tatlin didn't provide such a goldmine of self-sufficient intellectual constructs. But he did have a broad grasp of the problem. In his work, material and space strove to become absolutely perfect categories. Material lives a profoundly organic life, it embraces life in its entirety as a new system of the senses. Everything is perfected. But Tatlin's was not the notion—which had given academic painters no peace—of the masterpiece as such. It was, rather, the idea of absolute plastic harmony, in which artisanry and the senses are inseparable. In this regard, Tatlin—poorly educated, lacking any desire to assert himself through polemical jousting, a classic outsider—had more in common with the brilliant Renaissance intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, than with any artist of his own time . . .

And yet, why did the outsider Tatlin enter the legendary battle with Malevich? What was at stake?

Let us note: Tatlin, speaking about his Tower—his "dynamo-form"—declared iron and glass the "materials of the new Classicism."[43]

On the one hand, he proceeded, as always, from the nature of materials. And here his reasoning dovetailed with the logic of architects designing industrial structures: "In reinforced concrete we have not only a new material but, of far greater consequence, new constructions and a new method for designing buildings. Therefore, in using [reinforced concrete], we have to renounce the old traditions and concern ourselves with meeting new tasks."[44] Let us also note that Tatlin began to work on his Tower at the same time as construction commenced on the engineer Vladimir Shukhov's radio tower in Moscow. (The radio tower, as originally envisioned, was to reach a height of 350 meters.)[45]

On the other hand, Tatlin invested the phrase "materials of the new Classicism" with an artistic significance. A definition of new canons of form with the aid of new materials.

In Petrograd in 1923, Malevich's student, Il'ia Chashnik, completed a study for the cover of the never-published *Suprematizm kak novyi klassitsizm* (*Suprematism as the New Classicism*).[46] Slogans like "Back to Ingres!" weren't at issue, but

rather, once again, a definition of new long-term laws for the construction of form.

We must conclude, returning to the rivalry between Malevich and Tatlin, that theirs was a contest not over leadership but over truth—over which path in contemporary art was the true one. Malevich, otherwise a diplomat and pragmatist, was in no mood for conciliation on this score. While Tatlin, according to the memoirs of Punin (who endeavored in a variety of circumstances to reconcile Tatlin to reality), was incapable of compromise in almost any situation.[47] Tatlin's entire life, as a matter of fact, confirms this assertion.

History does not wait. It lays down an ultimatum.

—*Pitirim Sorokin*[48]

The Civil War presented both vanguard artists with a dramatic dilemma.

The new art had been born of the struggle for a self-sufficient artistic language and a non-objective artistic world. Now the state wanted to make art a mere vehicle for agitprop,[49] to limit it to an educational function—to illustration of the requisite slogans and notions. What was important to the new state was "not to carry out a revolution in art (which is impossible) but to put art at the service of the revolution."[50] These words were repeated by Party cultural functionaries from one year to the next, and almost verbatim.

Malevich and Tatlin had different—yet, in some sense, similar—reactions to this development.

"Decoration of the city for revolutionary festivities"—this neutral bookkeeper's formulation on an invoice fit the superrevolutionary decoration of Vitebsk to a tee, until the authorities understood that the propaganda effect of this work was nonexistent, if not negative. In all honesty, who, finding himself in a strange and joyous world of particolored planes, was about to mull over revolution and counterrevolution? These decorations were experiments in a new mural painting, experiments in Suprematist design, yet the words and agitprop phrases incorporated in them were incidental and ineffective. Why is the beautiful composition of colored planes on Nikolai Suetin's panel accompanied by the slogan "Religion is the opium of the people"? Which religion? What opium? And what people—drug addicts, perhaps? The man on the street could hardly have cared less. Some people were stopped by the vividness of the colors. Others jumped back from the strange combinations of geometric forms out of a textbook. Did people stand before Lissitzky's poster *Klinom krasnym bei belykh* (*Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge,* 1920, plate no. 138) and decipher its symbolism? Only the dynamics of its composition made any impression.

Examining agitprop art from such a "bourgeois," consumerist vantage helps one comprehend the "aesthetic scissors," that is, the divergent blades of the artist's interest in working in an urban space and his obvious (in many cases) indifference to the tasks of abstract propaganda.

As one of the leaders at the Moscow Art Board of Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), Tatlin was privy to efforts to carry out the so-called Plan for Monumental Propaganda—monuments to progressive revolutionary and cultural figures of the past. Several of the names on the list of candidates drawn up by the intellectuals were crossed out "at the top." Without discussion. Case closed. The philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, for instance, and Cézanne, a classic in the eyes of new artists in Moscow. Documents that might reveal how the Art Board reacted to Cézanne's removal from the list have not, it seems, survived. (In 1920, the art club at Vkhutemas [the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops] would be named the Cézanne

fig. 4
Nikolai Prusakov
Study for a Stove, *1920.*

Club.) Yet it is clear that this mechanical approach to the task at hand and treatment of monuments as illustrations on an assigned theme did not suit Tatlin at all. "Monumental propaganda" might just as well have been called "sculptural propaganda."[51]

Tatlin's Tower was conceived in direct argument with the Plan for Monumental Propaganda and the manner in which it was slated to be implemented. In order to work on his project, Tatlin had to leave Moscow in 1919 for Petrograd, where, with Punin's help, he managed to get a modest subsidy, materials, and a place to work: the former mosaics workshop of the Academy of Fine Arts. The workshop's former director, the ceramicist Petr Vaulin, protested. Now was the very time to be thinking about "erecting houses and temples of the people, decorated with mosaics."[52] He had no idea that Tatlin was occupied with a similarly impractical project. The Tower was one in a series, stretching far back in history and culture, of architectural constructions that were monuments and icons of their age. A series that began with the legendary Tower of Babel and included, in Russia, the church in the village of Kolomenskoe outside Moscow and (a later addition) the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, erected to mark the defeat of Napoleon.[53]

The spirals of the Tower, like serpentine mountain roads, energetically wound their way up into "Malevich's heavens."

The Tower's abstract, cosmic symbolizing of perception lent its functional intentions a particular cast. It was made "from iron, glass, and revolution," but also from reverie, hunger, and isolation. The Tower might possibly house a cafeteria—a dream in a time when food was scarce—and studios for artists, too. In it, the dynamism of life acquired the solemnity of a chorale. A monument in half-frozen and half-deserted Petrograd, a monument on the banks of the Lethe—built for no specific city, for no specific country. A monument to the ruin of the times and a monument to the spirit of absolute freedom.

The world had collapsed and the world lived.

It was both the creation of the artist and the voice of history.

"An absurd and naïve, monstrous beast with a radio-telegraph horn on its head and the legislative assembly of the Third International in its belly"?[54]

"The Council of People's Commissars would flee from such a building on the first sunny day and, camped out nearby on the grass, would immediately issue a decree that Tatlin's tower is for rent, at public auction, to horticulturists wishing to grow pineapples."[55]

The Tower was a sign and symbol not of revolutionary Russia but of the new era in its entirety.

Tatlin's Tower was immediately perceived and adopted by artists in the 1920s as the sign of a new artistic consciousness, not as a monument to the Third International. What was the connotation of "Third International" for Tatlin? A common phrase of the Civil War period. At the time, Izo Narkompros, for example, was planning to publish (but never did) a multilingual journal entitled *Internatsional iskusstva* (*Art International*). Both Tatlin and Malevich prepared texts for it, Tatlin's contribution consisting of clear, extremely brief "theses."[56] The artists' International denoted not establishment of a Bolshevik dictatorship all over the globe but lifting of the curse of disunion from humanity.

There were few who found the Tower to produce an agitprop effect any more persuasive that of the Suprematist panels. This was no targeted attack of the sort found in Sergei Eizenshtein's films.

When the model of the Tower was first exhibited, in Petrograd in November 1920, the opening—which was called, as the idiom of the time dictated, a meeting—was attended by stunned representatives of the Petrograd art world, astonished at what they beheld, and—for form's sake; after all, it was a meeting—by a handful of sailors and Red Army soldiers. In December the model was exhibited in Moscow at the Eighth Congress of Soviets; it was displayed among diagrams, posters, and other types of agitprop and didactic production at the former Association of the Nobility. Pavel Mansurov, the young non-objective artist from Petrograd who designed the exhibition, did a good job of "serving up" Tatlin. But the delegates didn't bite. The Tower unleashed a storm at a discussion of the model at Vkhutemas's Cézanne Club. There both Naum Gabo and Lissitzky argued for it as the most concrete of architectural projects, which needed to be realized not so much today as tomorrow.[57] Both would eventually do a great deal to popularize the Tower in the West.

A version of the model was displayed—as if it were a standard agitprop object, like the inevitable bust of Lenin—at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (*International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art*) in Paris in 1925. And at the *Voina v iskusstve* (*War in Art*) exhibition in Leningrad in 1930. After which the model was dismantled and stored away somewhere. With time, all of its parts were lost. A section of one of its spirals was used for a brief period as a ladder.

Balanced, "middle-of-the-road" opinions were virtually absent in the first debates about the Tower. Either a work of genius or a nonentity. The years of engagé Realism, it would seem, resolved the impasse in favor of nonentity.

One modest informant about the debate over the Tower reported: "If the idea of the monument is truly new and valuable, then it will never die. Prophets have not always been stoned and imposters have not always succeeded."[58]

Others left {Russia}, but as it turned out, those who stayed on had also left.

—*Vladimir Veidle*[59]

Neither Tatlin nor Malevich was deceived by the turn of phrase. *They* did not believe that "revolution and 'revolution in art' are the same thing."[60] They had an opportunity to join forces, if not in the struggle for the new art, then at least in resisting the advent of engagé art. Punin arranged a temporary truce between the warring sides. He facilitated Tatlin's invitation to Ginkhuk (the State Institute of Artistic Culture). Students held meetings to demand that Malevich and Tatlin teach at the Academy of Fine Arts.[61] At the *Petrogradskie khudozhniki vsekh napravlenii* (*Petrograd Artists of All Trends*) exhibition in Petrograd in 1923, work both by Tatlin and by Malevich's school was displayed. Hardly anyone realized that this was not the beginning but the end of the era of artistic freedom.

Tatlin, as he said, was "bored." He loved his work and materials and did not like to give the impression that he was occupied with anything other than his own work.

Malevich was diverted by the game of art as science. He was living, as it were, a second life in art, from Impressionism to Suprematism, and often appeared already to have gone beyond the boundaries of Suprematism. Where?

The analytical investigations of the Suprematists of Unovis in Vitebsk and at Ginkhuk stimulated new types of creative work: Suprematist architecture, on the one hand (it would be more correct to say three-dimensional Suprematist architectonics), and "painterly-plastic realism," on the other. The latter was no repetition of the Impressionism of Monet or the painting of Léger, of the flickering metallic *faktura* of the Cubism of their teacher, or of exercises on the magnetism of

fig. 5
Konstantin Vialov
Relief, *1919.*

the interrelations of Suprematist forms. The individuality of each person was expressed in the process of experiencing the world in painting. Here there was a certain merger of artists who had been members of Malevich's circle and artists who had passed through Matiushin's school. A preference for the universal gave way to the private. Suetin's paintings juxtaposed the traditions of Suprematism with the mysticism of old Russian art. In his own works, Malevich was not infrequently the exponent of the group's ideas rather than the initiator of the new. At times this led to conflicts, yet his students' respect for their teacher remained unchanged.[62]

Tatlin did not support the beautiful mystification of Malevich. He was "hounded out" of Ginkhuk and left for Kiev. There he worked for two years in the Department of Dramatic, Cinematic, and Photographic Arts of the Kiev Art Institute. His students constructed complicated interiors on the principle of his counter-relief. (This is somewhat reminiscent of Kurt Schwitters.) Clashes among groups and movements in Ukraine? Nothing of the sort interested him.[63]

The rector of Vkhutein (the Higher Artistic-Technical Institute), the sociologizing Pavel Novitskii, invited him back to Moscow to teach. A small circle of attentive students quickly formed around him in Vkhutein's Ceramics Faculty.[64] But in the more "visible" Wood- and Metalworking Faculty, Tatlin was clearly not understood—even though his colleagues there included Gustav Klutsis, Lissitzky, and Rodchenko.[65] Tatlin spoke of his work in the same words as they, yet was plainly unable to draw up a teaching program. That his students produced work not at all similar to that of students in the other workshops went unnoticed.

Tatlin proposed bionic principles for constructing artistic form . . .

The influence of my art is expressed in the movement of the Constructivists, of which I am the founder.

—*Tatlin*[66]

Tatlin's path and that of Suprematism in the 1920s are shaded by their attitude toward Moscow Constructivism—the central phenomenon of Russian art of that decade.

Constructivism attempted to answer all the questions posed by the era. It took into account Tatlin's experience, as well as the Suprematism fiercely rejected by the theorists close to him. It even answered the hopelessly difficult question of how art can function amid the collapse of normal human society by advancing an art that participated directly in the process of building life—that is, production art. The term "production art" was then applied in, as it were, two dimensions: art for life (excluding easel painting and sculpture "needed by no one") and new constructive approaches to the solution of the tasks of this art (or these arts).[67]

Malevich placed an equals sign between Constructivism as a new method in art and the ideas of utilitarianism, which he disparaged as "subsistence art." Constructivism thus meant service—by new devices, in a new style—of the agitprop and utilitarian needs of society.

Rodchenko? Long after Rodchenko had countered Malevich's spiritual meditations in *Beloe na belom* (*White on White,* 1918) with his art of the abyss, of the void—*Chernoe na chernom* (*Black on Black,* 1918, plate no. 240)—Malevich still, among his circle of followers, spoke Rodchenko's name as something absolutely negative.

A certain movement emerged within Unovis. A movement that did not renounce the language of Suprematism, yet worked with the new constructive forms. Lissitzky and Klutsis; Chashnik's tribune and Suetin's architectural designs of 1921. This trend contributed a great deal to the art of the 1920s. In it we find the working out of, or demand for a solution to, problems of new architectural form, design, and book art. Lissitzky, who thought in categories of an epoch's single style, considered this trend and the activities of Obmokhu (the Society of Young Artists) in Moscow to be the sources of a new international constructive style.

Obmokhu remains one of the myths in the history of Constructivism. It hindered both Gabo, the romantic of a new technological art, and Lissitzky. For a very simple reason. Rarely in the works of Obmokhu do we encounter new methods of strictly artistic thinking—methods that, for example, are obvious in Lissitzky (who, given his striking receptivity to "outside influences," might easily seem on the surface an eternal "eclectic"). Rather, in many works by the members of Obmokhu (Karl Ioganson's simple structuralist constructions are one exception), "engineerism" is advanced as the new, topical, up-to-the-minute theme of art. Not infrequently a construction is not truly constructed but merely depicted. A similar phenomenon can be observed among Obmokhu's contemporaries, the painters of the Electroorganism group.[68]

Tatlin? Well, of course, his Tower did initiate Constructivism as a special trend in Moscow. The Tower was one of the indispensable icons of the international style of the 1920s, figuring in publications on painting and sculpture, on design and architecture. It was as essential to them as it was virtually useless in the concrete context of Moscow artistic life. Of course, the Tower's unseen presence was a very important factor. Yet the Moscow Constructivists invented their own history. Tatlin was not excluded from it, but he was not granted any advantages, either.[69]

The impulse provided by Tatlin and the actual evolution of the idea of Constructivism in Moscow during the 1920s diverged objectively and decisively.

Organic artistic culture, toward which Tatlin was moving during these years, and Constructivism were no less opposed than were Suprematism and Constructivism. (Although many Constructivist projects—at least outwardly, on a stylistic level—preserved an echo of Suprematism.)[70]

The Constructivists recklessly spoke of replacing art with life and wanted to make the object of production the object of art.[71] Tatlin built a stove in his room to keep from freezing, sewed a specially tailored coat to keep from shivering in the wind, and cut himself a comfortable work suit.

Playing with the industrial production of an object was not the last motivation of the design solutions of the Moscow Constructivists. Tatlin's designs are those of a Robinson Crusoe who finds himself on an uninhabited island. And in this sense—given the actual conditions in Russia at the beginning of the 1920s—he was more of a realist than were the Moscow Constructivists creating lovely designs disengaged from real life. This was no utopia, not fantasies of the unrealizable, but the fashion of the day, full of life and energy—had life been normal. Tatlin's designs are the designs of a hunter wintering in the taiga and not counting on any help from anywhere.

The Constructivists affirmed the model of a life which could be—for them, the form of art determined new forms of life. Tatlin criticized the Constructivists—the "so-called Constructivists"—for their imitation, as it appeared to him, of contemporary style.[72]

Letatlin (1929–32) is a flying bird, Tatlin's bicycle, on which one can "sail" through the air.

In artistic circles reactions varied yet all struck basically the same chord: "he's flown out of art," "a move into technology,"[73] "an amazing character, but absolutely no artist."[74]

And in nonartistic circles: "a work of art."[75]

The causes and effects were confused.
Tatlin: "Nature is more clever than mechanics."
His speculative and sincere critics:

In the depths of that worldview, out of which Letatlin *wishes to fly, the heavy reactionary biases of the departing class are thickening. {The accusatory tone of the prosecutor is heard.} And what are they? Worship of nature, hostility to the machine, an adjustment of technology to the feelings of the individual person, naïve faith in the "wisdom" of organic forms, withdrawal from the industrial world.*[76]

This is indeed hard to square with the popular saying of the Stalinist era: "You can't wait for charity from nature! Our task is to take it from her."

It was a true perversion that unwashed and illiterate Russia, the Rus' of Chekhov and Bunin, allowed itself the luxury of Chekhov and Bunin, and, moreover, of Skriabin, Vrubel', and Blok.
—Mikhail Levidov[77]

It is not at all surprising that the art of the 1930s ignored both Tatlin and Malevich.

In Moscow's strange and Disneylandish Central Park of Culture and Rest, people jumped from a parachute tower reminiscent of Tatlin's monument.[78]

Suetin created a pylon with the text of the Soviet constitution for the *Exposition internationale des arts et des techniques* (*International Exhibition of Art and Technology,* Paris, 1937) in the shape of an arkhitekton—and no one even noticed.[79]

Tatlin painted landscapes, still lifes, and portraits, but did not exhibit them.

Malevich, with his strikingly developed social instinct, once again attempted to outdo everyone upon his release from jail (after having been arrested in Kiev in 1930). In an ordinary composition of colored stripes he included a row of galloping cavalrymen (plate no. 397). You want a "Soviet" picture—here, take it! Many artists, incidentally, made similar gestures during these years when the "Soviet theme painting" was affirmed as the basis of Soviet art. Malevich did not gain much by such a strategy and he resorted to it extremely rarely. It didn't help at all. One of his students still has a letter to Malevich (it arrived one day after his death) notifying him that his request for a pension had been turned down.[80]

The first steps of Pop Art, the art of *assemblage,* the flying apparatus of Ponamarenko, Joseph Beuys's felt suits . . . Lucio Fontana, Mark Rothko, Minimalism—in which Suprematism and Constructivism were finally reconciled—the Zero group.

Marcel Duchamp, Kazimir Malevich, Kurt Schwitters, Vladimir Tatlin.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Todd Bludeau

Notes

The quotation in the initial epigraph is taken from A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov, *Slovo kak takovoe* (Moscow: EUY, 1913), p. 3.

1. A copy of this announcement of the exhibition in Tatlin's studio is in the Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, f. 121, d. 117, l. 61.

2. This relief was reproduced in Ivan Puni, *Sovremennaia zhivopis'* (Berlin: Frenkel', 1923), p. 30.

3. The exhibitions were held not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg but in Kiev as well.

4. The festivities—which included fireworks and floats along the Neva River in St. Petersburg and a procession of "boyars" in Red Square in Moscow—were matched in scale only by such mass spectacles as *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in Petrograd in 1919–20.

5. The episode was reported in the Moscow press. See, for example, "Dve vystavki," *Nov'* 152 (December 23, 1914), and "Khudozhniki—zhertvam voiny," *Rannee utro* 232 (December 7, 1914). Malevich was among the "victims" whose works were removed by the jury prior to the opening of the exhibition.

6. Shchukin's "coup" was reported in the morning edition of *Birzhevye vedomosti* 14706 (March 4, 1915).

7. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, September 24, 1915, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, quoted from E. F. Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1974 god* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), p. 187.

8. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, January 1916, private archive, Frankfurt.

9. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, September 24, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 188.

10. Quoted in *V. Lenin i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo. Dokumenty. Pis'ma. Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1977), p. 445.

11. Two leaflets were distributed at the exhibition, one with statements by Malevich, Ivan Kliun, and Mikhail Men'kov, the other with statements by Ivan Puni and Kseniia Boguslavskaia. A small booklet containing both leaflets was also published.

12. K. Malevich, *Ot kubizma k suprematizmu. Novyi zhivopisnyi realizm* (Petrograd, 1916). The brochure was in fact printed in December 1915, in time for the opening of the *0.10* exhibition.

13. See, for example, Aleksandr Benua, "Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka," *Rech',* January 9, 1916. The expression "oncoming boor" was Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's (see his "Eshche odin shag griadushchego khama," *Russkoe slovo,* June 29, 1914). See also Jane A. Sharp, "The Critical Reception of the *0.10* Exhibition: Malevich and Benua," in this volume.

14. A. Kruchenykh, I. Kliun, and K. Malevich, *Tainye poroki akademikov* (Moscow, 1916), p. 30.

15. Varst [Varvara Stepanova], "Vystavka Ol'gi Rozanovoi," *Iskusstvo* 4 (February 22, 1919), p. 3.

16. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Konstantin Rozhdestvenskii, April 21, 1927, private archive, Moscow.

17. Unovis slogans, 1920, private archive, St. Petersburg: GIZ.

18. "Khudozhniki na dispute ob AKhRR," *Zhizn' iskusstva* 6 (1924).

19. N. Punin, *Tatlin (protiv kubizma)* (St. Petersburg: GIZ, 1921), pp. 17–18. Lev Bruni devised these formulae in 1916.

20. The booklet, like Malevich's *Ot kubizma k suprematizmu,* was published in time for the opening of the *0.10* exhibition. Sergei Isakov's article "K kontr-rel'efam Tatlina" appeared simultaneously in *Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh* 12, pp. 46–50; *Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh* was also the publisher of *Vladimir Evgrafovich Tatlin.*

21. This work is known only from old photographs. Pestel'ʼs family also retains letters of hers from the early 1950s in which she mentions Tatlin.

22. One of the most recent publications on the Verbovka collective is *Ornament and Design. Nadezhda Udaltsowa. Varvara Stepanowa. Alexandr Rodchenko* (Moscow and Frankfurt am Main: Gallery Manege, 1991).

23. This according to Pestel'ʼs memoirs.

24. V. Khodasevich, *Portrety slovami* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), p. 106. In this publication, her reminiscences about Tatlin have, unfortunately, been severely abridged.

25. S. Dymshits-Tolstaia, "Vospominaniia," 1939–40, Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, f. 700, ed. khr. 249.

26. L. S. Aleshina and N. V. Iavorskaia, comp., *B. N. Ternovets. Pis'ma. Dnevniki. Stat'i* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1977), p. 242.

27. In Paris, Mukhina saw Popova often, and it is likely that she met Tatlin through Popova.

28. Lipchitz, who had been living in Paris for some time, acted as a translator for Tatlin.

29. See A. Strigalev, "O poezdke Tatlina v Berlin i Parizh," *Iskusstvo* 2 (1989), pp. 39–43, and *Iskusstvo* 3 (1989), pp. 26–30.

30. The photograph has been published in K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933,* ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), vol. 1, ill. 5.

31. Kazimir Malevich, letter to David Shterenberg, February 16, 1921, private archive, Moscow.

32. The date 1913 appears without caveat in the catalogue, *Desiataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka. Suprematizm i bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Otdel IZO Narkomprosa, 1919)—both in Malevich's statement (p. 16) and in Stepanova's (p. 7).

33. This was owing, in part, to Malevich's desire to "improve" his old works in advance of his trip to the West in 1927 and his solo show at the State Tret'iakov Gallery in 1929. The resulting confusion in dating was particularly apparent at the Malevich exhibition held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1989.

34. This story evidently had its origins in conversations with his followers in Vitebsk and Smolensk in 1920.

35. The term *fevralizm* is, nonetheless, likely tied to the white, "snowlike" backgrounds of the paintings.

36. A postcard reproducing the painting, with a contemporary inscription on the reverse identifying the work, is reproduced in Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1981), p. 57. The inscription is in fact Malevich's own.

37. Malevich gave his view of the history of Russian Cubism in the context of European Cubism—and of Tatlin's place in the historical process—in articles published in Ukrainian in the Khar'kov journal, *Nova heneratsiia* (*New Generation*), in 1928. Both have been published in English; see "The Constructive Painting of Russian Artists and Constructivism," in K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933,* ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 74–84.

38. Unovis slogans, 1920, private archive, St. Petersburg.

39. Quoted in Dymshits-Tolstaia, "Vospominaniia."

40. Malevich was threatened with arrest toward the end of his stay in Vitebsk, but was spared, thanks to the help of Robert Fal'k. In 1927 and in 1930, however, he was arrested.

41. It was owing to his stature that Tatlin became a leading figure in the reform of artistic life after the February Revolution.

42. Tatlin, who attached little importance to dates, gave 1912—and sometimes 1913 and 1914—as the year in which he advanced this slogan.

43. V. Tatlin, T. Shapiro, I. Meerzon, and P. Vinogradov, "Nasha predstoiashchaia rabota," *VIII s"ezd sovetov. Ezhednevnyi biulleten' s"ezda* 13 (January 1, 1921), p. 11.

44. *Zodchii* 19 (1915), p. 198.

45. The Eiffel Tower, by comparison, is 300 meters tall.

46. Private archive, United States.

47. On the relations between Punin and Tatlin, see I. Punina, "N. Punin. Kvartira No. 5," *Panorama iskusstv* 12 (1989), pp. 162–98.

48. P. Sorokin, "Otpravliaias' v dorogu," *Utrenniki* 1 (1922), p. 11.

49. Viktor Shklovskii appealed: "In the name of agitation, remove agitation from art," in his *Khod konia. Sbornik statei* (Moscow and Berlin: Gelikon, 1923), p. 45.

50. These are the words of A. Skachko, one of the most prominent cultural officials of the period, in *Vestnik iskusstv* 5 (1922), pp. 2–3.

51. The monuments erected were chiefly of a traditional variety, with little that was innovative about them. Although the "Anketa profsoiuza skul'pturov-khudozhnikov" ("Questionnaire of the Professional Union of Sculptors") did attempt to draw attention to contemporary forms: "Does the monument meet the requirements of plastic culture? Does it express the law of the deformation of forms?"

52. Quoted from a document in the Izo Narkompros archives.

53. See A. Strigalev, "O proekte pamiatnika III Internatsionala khudozhnika V. Tatlina," in *Voprosy sovetskogo iskusstva i arkhitektury* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1973), pp. 408–52.

54. N. Radlov, *O futurizme* (St. Petersburg: "Akvilon," 1923), p. 48.

55. K. Miklashevskii, *Gipertrofiia iskusstva* (Petrograd, 1924), p. 59.

56. Typescripts of Tatlin's theses and some of the other articles prepared for the journal are held in both state and private archives in Russia.

57. The discussion is mentioned in N. Khardzhiev, "Pervyi illiustrator Maiakovskogo. K 90-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia

V. Tatlina," *Moskovskii khudozhnik,* December 18, 1975. Since Maiakovskii—who was present—returned from Petrograd on December 11th and appeared at the Polytechnic Museum on the 12th, the discussion evidently took place on December 13th.

58. *Petrogradskaia Pravda,* December 1920, quoted from an undated newspaper clipping in the collection of A. Korsakova, Moscow.

59. V. Veidle, "Iskusstvo pri sovetskoi vlasti," in *Mosty. Sbornik statei k 50-letiiu russkoi revoliutsii* (Munich: Tovarishchestvo zarubezhnykh pisatelei, 1967), p. 44.

60. Ibid., p. 38.

61. Such a resolution was passed, for instance, at a meeting of Unovis in Petrograd on October 14, 1922.

62. See, for example, Il'ia Chashnik and Nikolai Suetin, letter to Kazimir Malevich, October 4, 1924, published in *Suprematismus* (Zurich: Galerie Schlegl, 1989), pp. 50–51.

63. I. Vrona, "O Tatline," 1967, private archive.

64. Tatlin considered Aleksei Sotnikov exceptional among his students in Moscow, and Moris Umanskii and Iakov Shtoffer among those in Kiev.

65. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 680, op. 3, ed. khr. 208, l. 238.

66. Quoted from a biographical note written by Tatlin in 1929, published in *Tatlin* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1987), p. 328.

67. Production art is widely discussed in the publications of VNIITE, Moscow, in the 1970s. For a different view, see A. Mazaeva, *Kontseptsiia "proizvodstvennogo iskusstva" 20-kh godov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).

68. On Obmokhu, see Aleksandra Shatskikh, "A Brief History of Obmokhu" and Christina Lodder, "The Transition to Constructivism," and on the Electroorganism group, Irina Lebedeva, "The Poetry of Science: Projectionism and Electroorganism," in this volume.

69. Constructivism began in approximately 1920, with the activities of the group for "mass action" whose members included both Aleksei Gan and Rodchenko.

70. Aleksei Gan's typographical layout of *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* (*Contemporary Architecture*)—the journal of Constructivism in architecture—is one example.

71. In an effort to reconcile abstraction and production art, Boris Kushner advanced the term *bespredmetnaia khudozhestvennaia kul'tura* (non-objective artistic culture) in a lecture at the House of Publishing, Moscow, on March 20, 1922.

72. Tatlin's text in the catalogue for the exhibition of his *Letatlin* sketches at the Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow, 1932) is particularly contentious vis-à-vis the Moscow Constructivists.

73. E. Kronman, "Ukhod v tekhniku. Tatlin i 'Letatlin,'" *Brigada khudozhnikov* 6 (1932), pp. 19–23.

74. Quoted in A. Efros, *Mastera raznykh epokh* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1979), p. 547.

75. *Letatlin* was described as "not so much . . . an invention as . . . a sui-generis work of art" in N. Frausek, "Iskusstvo v tekhniku," *Tekhnika,* April 9, 1932, p. 4.

76. K. Zelinskii, "Letatlin," *Vecherniaia Moskva,* April 6, 1932, p. 2.

77. M. Levidov, *Prostye istiny. O chitatele i pisatele* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1927), pp. 154–55.

78. A. Voegeli, *Sowiet-Russland* (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1936), Tafel 3.

79. Nikolai Suetin, letter to Anna Leporskaia, 1937, Collection N. N. Suetina, St. Petersburg.

80. Rozhdestvenskii Archive, Moscow.

fig. 1
Ivan Puni
Poster, 0.10: The Last Futurist Exhibition, *1915.*
Lithograph, 74 x 55.5 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

The Critical Reception of the *0.10* Exhibition: Malevich and Benua

Jane A. Sharp

The prominent St. Petersburg critic Aleksandr Benua (also known as Alexandre Benois) begins his review of the *0.10* exhibition (Petrograd, 1915–16) and of Kazimir Malevich's latest innovation—Suprematism—with the admission that he is not in a position to judge vanguard art, that it is "absolutely foreign to me." And in a self-reflexive passage of the text he explains why: "But what I see at the exhibitions of our 'ultra-Modernists, as such' simply leaves me cold and indifferent. I do not sense the 'spirit of art' and I just become bored at them. In this [reaction] a certain psychologizing manifests itself: I become interested not in what I see but in the reasons why it leaves me cold. My psychologizing is confused and full of contradictions, bringing forth ever renewed floods of fatigue and, again, boredom."[1]

But these first observations are deceptive; Benua's topos in fact calls attention to the immense significance of Malevich's inauguration of Suprematism. Above all, the review is apocalyptical. Benua articulates his response to Suprematism in terms of the horror of the unknown as well as in terms of a certain horror of uniformity—the possibility of endless repetitions of faceless, figureless canvases. For Benua, the *0.10* exhibition was not simply the "last Futurist exhibition" (as the show was subtitled); it represented the end of painting altogether and not the beginning of a new "national style." Moreover, Benua did not interpret the *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square,* 1915, fig. no. 2) as a sign of radical social engagement or *épatement* as he did earlier vanguard work. Instead, he describes the *Black Square* as a tabula rasa, a "complete zero" that has made representation (as a response to the natural world) irrelevant to a completely decadent "indifferent" society. The review proclaims a watershed moment in the vanguard artist's challenge to and absorption into the status quo: the "boorishness" and "Americanization" of Russian society predicted by Benua (and by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii in an earlier review) has in fact been achieved, and no one has noticed.[2]

This reaction has its reverse parallel in a number of comments by vanguard artists and critics after the Revolution when the *Black Square* came to represent the very face of the ongoing revolution and the new society that it sought to create. Like the earliest theorists of the European avant-garde in the mid-nineteenth century, El Lissitzky understood and valued the dynamic power of the radically new in art to predict or even effect radical political and social change.[3] In his essay of 1920, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction," Lissitzky presents his view of the *Black Square* as the harbinger of a new cosmic era: "for us SUPREMATISM did not signify the recognition of an absolute form which was part of an already-completed universal system. on the contrary here stood revealed for the first time in all its purity the clear sign and plan for a definite new world never before experienced—a world which issues forth from our inner being and which is only now in the first stages of its formation. for this reason the square of suprematism became a beacon."[4] Following the Revolution, Lissitzky cast the aims of Suprematism in political terms by counterpointing parallel descriptions of the successive upheavals brought about through art and Bolshevik Communism: "into this chaos came suprematism extolling the square as the very source of all creative expression. and then came communism and extolled work as the true source of man's heartbeat."[5]

Landmarks in the periodical criticism of the times (such as Benua's review of *0.10*) reveal that the alliance forged between stylistic innovation and radical social politics which we ascribe to the revolutionary era was grounded in earlier perceptions of avant-garde art. Benua's response to Suprematism as the herald/revealer of social and aesthetic cataclysm shows how the

reception of avant-garde art before the Revolution determined the artist's paradoxical status as a "leftist" wielding considerable authority after the Revolution. In order better to understand this condition, we must recognize first that both left artists and leftist politicians drew their authority in the new society from the radical contexts of their prerevolutionary activities.

Malevich was sufficiently disturbed by Benua's review to write an angry reply, which he intended to have published in a daily newspaper but instead sent directly to the critic himself.[6] In the letter, Malevich reproaches Benua for dominating a system that has exhausted itself and survives only to impede the new. But his response is more than a complaint lodged against the status quo. In language that abounds with social and political metaphor, the letter threateningly predicts the system's violent demise: "You have deprived the academy and museum of any real significance. You have made them strictly partisan exhibitions and thus a tool, the casemate of a prison, a restraint on freedom of thought. You have set up your commonplace clichés there and built up a reputation for them; and the work of anyone that follows your pattern faithfully can hang alongside yours in your exhibitions . . . You have all the tools to erase everything that is not made in your image, but canvas is strong and the garret serves as the boor's gallery and museum. Your grandchildren will get the canvases out from there and will wring the neck of your system."[7]

Of course, a little over a year later, with the October Revolution, the system that Benua represented for Malevich would be overthrown and, by 1920, with the inception of Unovis (the Affirmers of the New Art) in Vitebsk, Malevich's own collective "system" would be installed. His program, like the statutes designed by a number of artists in the years of War Communism, functioned as a critique of the Imperial academic system by replacing its teacher/student hierarchy with a collective workshop structure. The significance of this inversion of social hierarchy and its synecdochical relation to the birth of Suprematism was articulated even before the formal transformation of the Vitebsk Popular Art School into Unovis. The cover of Malevich's pamphlet *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* (*On New Systems in Art*) collapses the primary geometric forms of Suprematism and the admonition that "the overturning of the old world of arts will be etched across your palms" (recto); the notice on the verso reads "Work and edition by the workshop [*artel'*] of artistic labor at the Vitebsk Svomas" (fig. no. 3).[8]

This attack and counterattack between critic and artist epitomizes communication before the Revolution between vanguard artists of Malevich's generation and their critics. The exchange manifests the contradiction inherent in the vanguard's position as a movement of opposition to a dominant social structure and aesthetic system which it essentially seeks to replace. Similarly, Benua's discussion of Malevich's work, like his evaluation of other vanguard artists, particularly Natal'ia Goncharova and David Burliuk, is at once an extended critique and a measure of the avant-garde's impact on prerevolutionary Russian society. Although Benua would periodically claim he was bored by the vanguard artist's posturing, a summary reading of his reviews of any number of avant-garde exhibitions before the Revolution would lead us to attribute to him any reaction but ennui. Indeed, Benua was extremely vocal in his hostility to Russia's fledgling vanguard. A prominent artist himself, cofounder of the journal *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*) in 1898, and an art historian, Benua became in 1908 the chief art critic of the daily St. Petersburg newspaper *Rech'* (*Speech*), which published each month his reviews of artistic and theatrical events. He was the among the first critics to isolate and describe the new Primitivism manifested in vanguard exhibitions beginning with the Golubaia roza (Blue Rose) exhibition of 1907.[9] In 1912 he wrote a blistering critique of avant-garde polemics, "Kubizm ili kukishizm" ("Cubism or *Je-m'en-foutisme*"), which focused on the interpretations of French Cubism by David Burliuk and other artists.[10] He may be credited as one of the critics who defined and named the avant-garde, using the terms *peredovaia molodezh'* (vanguard youth), *levye* (leftists), and *futuristy* (Futurists) somewhat indiscriminately in referring to the artists of Petersburg and Moscow who formed the groups Soiuz molodezhi (Union of Youth), Bubnovyi valet (Jack of Diamonds), and Oslinyi khvost (Donkey's Tail). (In his review of the *0.10* exhibition, he would describe Malevich's group as the *krainii levyi flang* [extreme left flank] of the art world.) Together with Iakov Tugendkhol'd, Sergei Makovskii, and Maksimilian Voloshin, all contributors to major newspapers as well as to the influential art journal *Apollon* (*Apollo*), he was a powerful arbiter of taste among the art-going (and art-buying) public; as Malevich would claim with good reason a few years later, "without the stamp of Benua and his associates, no work of art could receive civil rights and life's benefits."[11] Malevich continued by listing the names of artists who had both suffered from and profited by the attention of Benua and his colleagues: "This was the case with Vrubel, Musatov, P. Kuznetsov and Goncharova, whom they finally recognized after throwing mud at them for a long time; but how many have still not been acknowledged!"[12] Malevich's response, in other words, recognizes that the critics (Benua in particular) who so successfully dominated and controlled the art market played a primary role in defining the avant-garde as a marginal, radical force.

Benua's antipathy to avant-garde art appears to have peaked earlier, in 1912, with his cutting reviews of the Union of Youth exhibitions which took place in St. Petersburg and included members of the Moscow avant-garde as well.[13] His criticisms of vanguard art typically center on the Russian artist's accursed proclivity for assimilating external influences. In Benua's view, Russian art is so assimilative that its history and the vanguard's place in this history must be characterized as nonevolutionary. Vanguard innovations in style do not point toward a movement laying the basis for a new school or "national style"; rather they appear as "nothing else but equilibristic stunts, somersaulting in the air." Benua situates this observation, however, in the context of Russian society. Deprived of social support (a stable, informed audience), contemporary art appears to be "arbitrary" and "impermanent"—it can only reflect the current fashion or trend. He argues that despite the remarkable talents involved, vanguard artists share a common trait: they produce "hurried, unthought-through work—shoddy goods [*deshevka*]. This is the absence of what is called a school."[14] Although this attack was leveled at the vanguard youth in general, in his review of Malevich's Suprematist work Benua uses similar metaphors: "And this is not merely the hoarse cry of the carnival barker [*zazyval'shchik*] but the main 'trick' in the puppet show [*v balaganchike*] of the very last word in culture."[15]

By the end of 1913, however, with the opening of Goncharova's mammoth solo exhibition in Moscow, Benua seemed to have reconciled his wholly negative view of vanguard culture with a new appreciation of the expressive power of Primitivism and even of Cubo-Futurism in Russian art. His comments on this occasion reflect his broader anxiety over the "difficulties" inherent in reading vanguard art, prefiguring his critique of Malevich in 1916. In this respect, Benua's review remains an important record of the process of public and critical acceptance that this exhibition initiated for Goncharova's work and for vanguard art generally. Like his

fig. 2
Kazimir Malevich
Black Square, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 79.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

fig. 3
Kazimir Malevich
Cover for his On New Systems in Art, *1919.*
Lithograph, 23 x 37.2 cm.
Collection of Prints and Drawings,
The Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.

critique of Malevich's work, this earlier review is unusually self-reflexive; it mediates between references to his previously negative evaluation of Goncharova's work and soul-searching examinations of the reasons for his present capitulation:

I went again to Goncharova's exhibition in part to test my first impression, in part simply to delight in it. It turns out I had not gone astray the first time, I was not mistaken. On the contrary, today I sensed even more clearly that this is a great talent and a true artist. Generally speaking, I believed her even more, and consequently I may change completely my whole attitude toward the kind of painting which she represents . . . I saw at this exhibition many old familiar paintings which were in our {World of Art} and other exhibitions. It means a great deal to see them now within the artist's whole oeuvre. Their "talent" was always clear to me and I got into many arguments with close friends over this. But I did not completely "believe in them." Much of her art seemed a pose to me, a distortion and youthful joke. Now I am ready to believe in the complete sincerity of a master and at the same time it is absolutely clear to me that it is not Goncharova who needs to learn but we who must learn from her, as it always follows that one should learn from all the great and strong. No, this is not ugliness or distortion but the very opposite: the intention (accomplished) to become perfectly connected with oneself; to express in the simplest way that which is hidden in the soul and bursts to the surface.[16]

Paradoxically, it is now Benua who comes to the vanguard artist's defense, countering Goncharova's detractors by arguing that much of her work, especially her earliest paintings and pastels, is "completely 'acceptable,' accessible to the comprehension of those who have only an amateurish interest in art."

Benua's acceptance of Goncharova's work, however, like his acceptance of the new trends it represents, does not read as a step toward the commodification of a previously "militant" artistic message.[17] Rather, it is a disruptive, continuously equivocal process for him that requires a complete reevaluation of the whole vanguard tradition which he had dismissed just the year before in his essay "Cubism or *Je-m'en-foutisme*":

As with my experience last year in Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin's gallery, I lived through a lot in the past two days at Goncharova's exhibition. Now I can no longer consider as heresy even the most extreme dislocations {sdvigi}*, that nightmarish abracadabra that has issued from Picasso and has infested all of the vanguard youth, here and in the West. These pictures still disturb me, yet I now clearly feel that they exist within the realm of art.*

Benua's lengthy discussion of Goncharova's work registers in actuality what Viktor Shklovskii later defined as an aim of *ostranenie* (making strange) in literature—the deliberate impeding of the viewer's perception.[18] Developing his new insights into the pictorial forms of Cubism and Futurism, Benua describes his response to a roomful of Goncharova's latest and most trying Futurist works, her urban machine and factory images:

In accordance with the new formulae of painting: objects are depicted as precisely fragmented and incorrectly reconstituted colors, terrifyingly "raw"; through forms, which only with great difficulty are identifiable with forms in reality, some sort of "half-spoken" signs pass by. One has to look at the painting, and involuntarily read what is said there. One's attention is intensified—even more than that, it is tormented. Looking at such pictures requires suffering.

Benua's appreciation of his dilemma is contingent upon recognizing in Goncharova's language and subject matter signs of the modern age, which he, like so many artists of his generation, transposes into an apocalyptic vision of the future. In this context, the vanguard artist appears as a clairvoyant of the encroaching industrial era—the machine its new god. Benua ultimately finds positive value in Goncharova's work, which he now interprets as a messianic expression of the impending battle with the "philistinism" and "American devilry" associated with developed capitalism in Russia. He concludes that this trend can only be overcome or reversed by "looking for the revelation of God in everything, turning away from superficial stagnation and [instead] constantly penetrating into the essence of things." The difficulty in reading the image has the effect of slowing down perception, allowing the viewer to contemplate the relationship of the fragmented forms to his or her life experience. For Benua, who finds a direct correspondence between the *faktura* (density) of Goncharova's canvases and real perceptual phenomena, her art becomes the "sincere" and "honest" reflection of a world in turmoil. Thus, Benua assures his readers that the "suffering" experienced in viewing Goncharova's work is essentially beneficial, even redemptive.

Two years later, in his review of the *0.10* exhibition, Benua reversed this position. Malevich's *Black Square* cannot redeem society—it is the icon of a cardinal sin: humankind's arrogant elevation of the self (and the machine) above nature and God—the *Black Square* is blasphemy. Benua expresses this view in no uncertain terms, repeating the words *koshchunstvo* (blasphemy) and *koshchunstvovat'* (to blaspheme). It is clear that, with the advent of the *0.10* exhibition, Benua shifted his critique of vanguard art from accusations of epigonism and eclecticism to the hostile recognition that with Suprematism Malevich had truly advanced a coherent new style in painting.

In order to understand Benua's extreme reaction to the first presentation of Suprematism, we must examine his quasi-religious, quasi-social/political rhetoric in more detail. Benua's critique focuses on the way in which the *Black Square* was hung in the exhibition: "high above, right under the ceiling, in the 'holy place'"—in the traditional place of the icon (fig. no. 4). Because of Malevich's choice in hanging the painting, the *Black Square* does not merely constitute an analogue to the icon and thereby acquire similar authority as an image; the *Black Square* actually *replaces* the icon. By usurping the seat of the icon, the *Black Square* diagrams the destruction of one set of values and the installation of a new hierarchy—the dominion of forms over nature. Benua explains: "Without a doubt, this is the 'icon' which the Futurists propose as a replacement for the Madonnas and shameless Venuses [*besstyzhie venery*], it is that 'dominion' [*gospodstvo*] of forms over nature." Malevich's system signals the encroachment of an insidious rationalistic logic into the realm of aesthetic experience, at the base of which lies a "horrific means of mechanical 'renewal' [*mekhanicheskoe 'vosstanovlenie'*] with its machinishness." This act of blasphemy even penetrates Benua's description of the *Black Square*: it is a "Black Square in a white frame" (here Benua uses the term that denotes the setting of the icon—*v belom oklade*—to describe the frame). His language clearly indicates a refusal to acknowledge the evolution of Malevich's art; his concern to expose Malevich's blasphemous act prevents him from taking any notice of Suprematism's own dependence upon the icon (a source for Malevich's Primitivism of circa 1910–12).

Thus, he claims that the *Black Square* issues from and serves only to illustrate Malevich's "sermon of zero and death," his statement (nearly identical to the first paragraphs of *Ot kubizma k suprematizmu* [*From Cubism to Suprematism*]) published in a leaflet which was distributed free at the exhibition.[19] In Benua's view, Malevich's claim to authority, to "dominion" or "supremacy" (whence the term Suprematism is derived), is

fig. 4
View of the 0.10 *exhibition showing Malevich's* Black Square *in the "icon's place," center top.*

ahistorical, for it is achieved only through pride, by self-assertion. The point and purpose of his essay—to demonstrate the destructive force of Malevich's blasphemous act—are achieved through references to a chief biblical sin, that of vainglory: "[This] is not a chance little episode that occurred on the Field of Mars; it is one of the acts of self-affirmation the source of which has as its name the abomination of desolation. It asserts itself through arrogance, haughtiness, and by trampling over all that is dear and tender; it will lead only to death."[20] Text and review combined, this is an account of "absolute origins"[21] that has no equivalent in Russia's past cultural experience. The force of the disruption that the advent of Suprematism hailed is mirrored in the passion of both the artist's and the critic's language.

A year later, in his review of the *Sovremennaia zhivopis'* (*Contemporary Painting*) exhibition held at Nadezhda Dobychina's gallery (where the *0.10* exhibition had also been held), Benua continues his attack on the ahistoricity of Suprematism, asserting that Malevich's "little circles, squares, and sticks have only given birth to Aleksandra Ekster's exercises."[22] Benua's review is a willful misstatement, since we know that within the year (1916–17) a number of artists—including Nadezhda Udal'tsova, Ivan Puni, Liubov' Popova, Ol'ga Rozanova, Ivan Kliun, and Mikhail Men'kov, among others—had adopted Suprematism as their own and formed the group known briefly as Supremus.[23] Benua's purpose, however, is consistent with his long-standing commitment to exposing the commercial self-interest and "trickery" of avant-garde art.

Malevich's written response is a protracted attack on Benua's system, his authority, and the value which he attaches to mimesis. (Indeed, most vanguard critiques of the art establishment link mimesis with the power obtained by specific artists and critics in the academy and press.) In the first section of the letter, Malevich counters Benua's argument by asserting that mimetic representation, based on the canons of Roman and Greek art, has long ceased to have any value for society. Furthermore, he claims that critics like Benua and Merezhkovskii have failed to see the future in the new; instead, he writes, "Merezhkovsky stands on the new age's square amidst the furious vortex of machines both on earth and in the sky; he stares with blind eyes and continues to hold Caesar's bone above his gray head and to shout about beauty."[24] Contesting Benua's argument that Suprematism is ultimately destructive, he asks, "but how has the World of Art enriched our own times?" and responds with a parodistic description of Benua's own painting: "He has given us a couple of crinoline petticoats and a few uniforms from the time of Peter the Great." Similarly, he matches Benua's biblical rhetoric with his own. His account of the difficulties the avant-garde artist faces in countering Benua's system of "commonplace clichés," which dominates by entrapping unsuspecting young artists desperate to exhibit and attain fame, is a *cri de foi* far more eloquent than his manifesto, *From Cubism to Suprematism:*

> *I possess only a single bare, frameless icon of our times (like a pocket), and it is difficult to struggle.*
>
> *But my happiness in not being like you will give me the strength to go further and further into the empty wilderness. For it is only there that transformation can take place.*
>
> *And I think you are mistaken when you say in reproaching me that my philosophy will destroy millions of lives. Are you not, all of you, like a roaring blaze that obstructs and prevents any forward movement?*[25]

Malevich's statement engages one of the principal motifs in Benua's review, that of the vanguard artist as social outcast. Extending his metaphor of the carnival barker, Benua makes an analogy between the cries of the barkers on the streets of Petrograd and the vanguard's claim for legitimation in Russian culture. He writes: "You see that they are artists, that they have the right to a critical evaluation. And yet everything that they say and do rings out with such cries of poverty that pity, which had been verging on respect, yields to some kind of internal panic, and one wants to run away in any direction (even to the lackey-like Petrograd artists) without looking back, only so that one might no longer see those shapes bent by the bitter cold, those painted faces, or hear those horrible cracking voices."[26]

Malevich's dialogue with Benua essentially confirms Benua's analogy—that the vanguard artist acts out in the world of art the experiences of the unenfranchised, the true outcasts in society. This analogy explains, in part, the passion of Malevich's response to Benua—clearly more was at stake in his inauguration of Suprematism than the advancement of a new "style." Malevich's battle was one of empowerment and entitlement in a society which viewed art, politics, and morality as essentially and implicitly integrated.

It is ironic that Benua failed to appreciate the historical evolution of Malevich's work. For there is every indication that Malevich, more than any other vanguard artist of his generation (with the possible exception of Mikhail Larionov), sought to promote a historical context for the inauguration of his movement that would validate his claim for recognition. If Malevich asserted that "the face of my Square cannot become merged with a single master or age," he also affirmed, practically in the same breath, that "I, too, am a stage of development."[27] This statement sets forth the paradox embodied in the avant-garde artist's position, overlaying the values Malevich clearly attached to historical views of his own artistic evolution (and the possibility of engendering a "school") with his desire to create a style that was absolutely unfamiliar to his contemporaries.

Malevich's statement epitomizes the dialectic operating within Modernist discourse on originality and imitation. Inasmuch as Malevich claimed his place in history as the originator of a unique style, his contribution required a context for its interpretation. The desired interpretation (the originality of Suprematism) could be assured only by establishing relationships to preceding artistic trends and by the generation of a following among like-minded artists. Malevich's dual concern echoes in the work and theoretical writings of other left artists throughout the 1920s. The will among vanguard artists to invent or trace their artistic evolution runs up continually against their momentous ruptures with the past and their utopian interest in generating a new origin for the art of the future. Here again, Malevich stands out; the charts which he generated through teaching at Vitebsk and, after 1921, in Petrograd/Leningrad are unique if characteristic. They map the evolution of modern art from Realism to Suprematism and ascribe the generation of a new characteristic form (the "additional element") to a master artist at the head of each new movement. In this way Malevich could diagram his place within an evolutionary model of art history and at the same time point to his unique contribution, the "additional element" contained within Suprematism.[28]

Benua's reaction to the *0.10* exhibition and his analogy between the vanguard artist and the carnival barker provide part of the background for Malevich's historicizing efforts. Like other vanguard artists, Malevich tended to counter critics' misinterpretation of his art, and their authority, by generating his own stylistic history. Evgenii Kovtun and Charlotte Douglas have traced the evolution of Malevich's ideas that led to the development of Suprematism as a style by drawing principally on the remarkably revealing correspondence

fig. 5
Kazimir Malevich
Set design: Act II, scene 5, for Aleksei Kruchenykh,
Victory over the Sun, *1913.*
Pencil on paper, 21 x 27 cm.
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theater and Musical Arts.

between Malevich and his close friend and associate, Mikhail Matiushin.[29] References to this correspondence have tended to further Malevich's own interpretive aims: to aggrandize and mystify the creative act of invention (or "self-creation").[30] As this correspondence confirms, by May 1915 Malevich had come to attribute the historical evolution of his new style to a particular origin in his work—to his set designs for *Pobeda nad solntsem* (*Victory over the Sun,* 1913), a performance on which he had collaborated with Matiushin and the poets Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov.[31] Douglas has drawn our attention particularly to the set design for Act II, scene 5 (fig. no. 5) and its "square-within-a-square format" as a design that was "halfway to [the Suprematist square's] realization."[32] Yet Malevich's own intentions *are* realized here—for he had written to Matiushin asking that he include in a new edition of the libretto (planned but never published, according to Kovtun) an illustration of this particular work. Through this publication, the stage backdrop would serve as a testament documenting the origins and evolution of Suprematism. Thus Malevich writes to Matiushin: "I would be very grateful if you would include my drawing of the curtain for the act in which the victory took place . . . This drawing will be of immense significance for painting. That which was done unconsciously now bears unexpected fruit [*neobychainye plody*]."[33]

Malevich's concern to identify a point of origin for Suprematism and at the same time to advance Suprematism as a new origin in a continuous historical evolution of styles explains the tremendous secrecy with which he guarded the work that he painted in this year. In a manner that has no parallel in Russia, Malevich was determined to *author* Suprematism. It was advanced specifically as his signature style. Both Kovtun and Douglas assert that until the autumn of 1915 no one except Matiushin knew what Malevich was working on in his studio, but that on or just before September 25, 1915, Ivan Puni surprised Malevich with an unexpected visit and saw his latest work. Malevich immediately wrote Matiushin, urging him to move ahead with the brochure: "Now, no matter what, I must publish the brochure on my work and christen it and in so doing protect my rights as author."[34] A few days later he informs Matiushin of the aftereffects in the Moscow art world, noting that a bitter debate over the creation of a new direction has arisen, but that "no one knows the how or the what of it," and everyone wants to study his (Malevich's) notes. Still, for the larger public, Malevich's new work remained unknown. As late as November 25th, he could write to Matiushin, "The name everyone knows, only the content no one knows. Let it *remain a secret.*"[35]

The control with which Malevich manipulated the inauguration of Suprematism can also be understood in the light of Benua's frequent reviews or critiques of vanguard epigonism. Two external factors impinged both on Malevich's concern over the historical representation of Suprematism's origin and on Benua's response. First, the rapid pace at which artists were exposed to new trends and producing new work, together with the constant turnover of exhibitions and debates and the flood of reviews, had effected a perceptible acceleration of change in the art world. As early as 1909, Benua characterized this phenomenon as uniquely Russian. In February of that year, he wrote a polemical critique of the Russian art world that begins with the observation: "There is not a day when a new art exhibition does not open. This would be interesting if our groups of artists were organized according to essential [common] features or strivings determined by each group. But nothing of the sort . . . In a provincial manner, divisions occur among artists here for the most absurd reasons . . . and so now simultaneously a mass of exhibitions have opened of a 'midsize type' in which all the

same artists participate, and the character of the work from one group to the next is indistinguishable."[36]

Internecine feuds among artists as well as reviews of art exhibitions testify to the spirit of competition which this pluralism of the art world engendered. From the 1911–12 season on, vanguard groups were beset by factionalism, with artists continually realigning themselves. The Donkey's Tail group was formed initially by artists who, with Larionov and Goncharova, broke away from the Jack of Diamonds.[37] Although they exhibited together, Malevich feuded with both Larionov and Tatlin, and Malevich's invention of Suprematism was in part fueled by his long-standing rivalry with both artists.[38] This struggle for ascendancy and legitimation was mapped out in the installation of the *0.10* exhibition, with Malevich and his supporters occupying one room while Tatlin and his group (including Popova, Vera Pestel', and Udal'tsova) were positioned in another; the sign PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS marked the difference between them.

Malevich's efforts during the year preceding the exhibition manifest the profound competitiveness that shaped all aspects of vanguard activities. In this sense his writings conveyed a very clear public message which linked the historical legitimation of his new style with assertions of its superiority over other potential contenders. In 1915, Malevich's letters to Matiushin record Malevich's frustration with the contemporary art scene and with its eclecticism, and articulate the sense among artists that a new coherent movement was needed. As Malevich puts it, "In Moscow they are beginning to agree with me that we must present ourselves under a new banner."[39] Thus, while he asserts the need to present a coherent movement through the *0.10* exhibition, he wonders if anyone else has advanced a rival theory or style and continues by giving the reasons why he finds Suprematism the best name for his: "But it will be interesting to see: will they give [this banner] a new form? I think that Suprematism is the most appropriate [name], since it signifies supremacy [or dominion—*gospodstvo*]."[40] He attached tremendous importance to the text which first bore the name of the style (*From Cubism to Suprematism*) and which had been published by Matiushin in time to be sold at the exhibition. Thanking Matiushin, Malevich writes, "It will advance my position tremendously" and again a few days later, "the brochure is playing an important role for me."[41] In the context of vanguard rivalries, there could be no mistaking the value which Malevich placed on competitive public access to his work and on control over the means and process of its critical reception.

An equally important consideration for Malevich was the changing makeup of the public and the shifts in its reaction to the vanguard debates and exhibitions. Outside of published criticism, the social composition of the urban Russian public is extremely difficult to document. Reviews, however, give a good indication of the turnarounds in the public response to vanguard art. In his "Cubism or *Je-m'en-foutisme*" of 1912, Benua writes that just two years earlier, portions of Burliuk's speech on Cubism would have created a scandal. Benua makes these comments in order to illustrate "how fast we have declined," indicating that by 1912 segments of the public had become inured or even attracted to the vulgarity of vanguard debates and exhibitions. The year 1910 is in fact an appropriate one to mark, since it constitutes the beginning of this generation's series of confrontations with the public in the exhibition space. The first Jack of Diamonds exhibition (which included work by Malevich, Goncharova, Larionov, and Tatlin together for the first time) opened to cries of scandal in December 1910,[42] a year later, at a public debate organized by this group, Larionov announced the platform of the Donkey's Tail group to jeering crowds.[43] By 1912, the public usually attended these debates in the hope of witnessing a scandal or fight (notorious incidents were always documented in the press). In 1913 Larionov was tried and fined for having punched one artist in the face and thrown the podium into the audience.[44] But in 1913 there were also signs of acquiescence, of public acceptance of provocations and, indeed, of new "radical" painting.

The overwhelming success of Goncharova's solo exhibition in Moscow at the end of 1913 is the first significant measure of public acceptance and critical acclaim for the vanguard artist. Paintings which had been considered radical just a year ago were now appreciated or accepted by the same public and described in the press as "accessible." A reviewer in *Moskovskaia gazeta* (*The Moscow Gazette*) declared: "It seems that Rayist and Futurist art are becoming stylish [*modnyi*]. In a little while, both Goncharova and Larionov will be acclaimed on the level of Korovin and Kustodiev."[45] The same reviewer writes that the success of the opening night was completely unexpected by the organizers and made Goncharova an instant sensation. His summary of the "successful components" of the evening focuses primarily on the appeal her exhibition had as a social diversion, uniting in symbiotic agreement the vanguard artist as *provocatrice* and her receptive audience: "Packed halls, 'chic' public, the incredulous looks and confused smiles of those who were leaving, the ironic 'witticisms' and independent poses of the brave, a couple of Futurist characters persistently competing for attention in orange jackets and with carnations braided in their hair, the blushing-for-joy Goncharova and the magically-appearing-in-twenty-places-at-once Larionov."[46] Thus, the fresh appeal of Goncharova's art is set, within the context of the exhibition space, as that of a new type of urban spectacle—dominated by an elite Muscovite public that now included the vanguard artist.

There are parallel contemporary accounts of the public-debate forum which by 1913 had become an established event. A booklet published in Moscow in 1914 chronicles the reciprocity between the audiences and the organizers of these vanguard debates.[47] Observing that the debates have become increasingly frequent and varied, the anonymous author writes:

> *If one studies carefully the different lectures, and particularly the debates, one comes to the inevitable conclusion that they are no more than a shameless and open exploitation of popular entertainment. It is frequently so hapless, and crude {an exploitation}, that one has to wonder why the public reacts with such relative calm to these lowbrow transgressions.*
>
> *By the way, the public, for the most part, gets what it is looking for. And it is usually looking for a scandal.*
>
> *The participants in debates and lectures have reckoned beautifully with this search for scandal and organize them relatively skillfully. To the naïve person it may seem that the scandal arose suddenly, without warning. Whereas the entrepreneur has invited a particular opponent (especially from among the Futurists), knowing full well in advance that he will create a scandal.*[48]

The new reconciliation of the "radical" and the "acceptable" in the public reception of vanguard art and in the forum of the debate explains much about the seemingly contradictory responses to the *0.10* exhibition. Thus, among the reviews of that exhibition, we find a number of wholesale rejections of the work shown there as well as a few of the most subtle positive

fig. 6
Ol'ga Rozanova
Cupboard with Dishes, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 64 x 45 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

fig. 7
Nadezhda Udal'tsova
Kitchen, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 66 x 81.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

appraisals. One of the more negative reviewers connected Suprematism with Tatlin, exclaiming that "the audacity of Futurism has given birth to Suprematism, sincerity has turned into a joke at the public's expense. And not a trace of painting remains. Only tinplate."[49] Like Benua in his earlier reaction to Goncharova's Cubo-Futurist work, the reviewer describes his appreciation of the difficulties inherent in looking at the Cubo-Futurist painting, contrasting that perceptual process with the new work on view:

You squint, you blink, you unexpectedly study the corners of the painting on the canvases of the Futurists.

But not with the Suprematists. The work is dry, monotonous, there is neither painting nor individuality. Malevich is like Popova, Popova is like Puni, Puni is like Udal'tsova. You can't distinguish between them.

Negative reviews such as this one are typical of the majority of reviews of avant-garde art and, in their leveling of individualities, rationalize the competitive spirit of vanguard enterprises—both exhibitions and debates. The dialogue between Benua and Malevich is unusual precisely because of the passion and personal nature of the attack. It was in the interest of those in control to underplay the shock of avant-garde transgressions and to neutralize, as the reviewer does above, difference as a function of vanguard innovation. In this context, the positive reviews are more interesting, for they display far more critical sophistication than the negative ones (Benua's aside). And, while reviewers occasionally take sides, they openly refer to artists' concern with their place in history, engaging in a more explicit way the question of originality and *posledovatel'nost'* (succession). For example, Matiushin praises both Malevich's and Tatlin's work and, not surprisingly, asserts that Suprematism gives "the strong impression that it is the oncoming shift [*sdvig*] in art."[50] Regarding Tatlin ("without a doubt, a great artist"), he argues that despite the "intensity of his constructive idea," his earlier reliefs are stronger works of art.[51] Matiushin's review is of greater importance as an indicator of the degree to which the language of criticism and theory had developed by 1915 (he speaks of the "strength of painterly masses," of the "dynamism of colors," of "color planes," and so forth). He notes in closing that the competition among artists for *pervenstvo* (primacy) undercuts the development of their ideas: "Whoever says the last word is king!"[52]

Aleksandr Rostislavov's review, published in the same journal as Benua's, is the strongest positive review of both Malevich's and Tatlin's work.[53] He first notes that the exhibition marks a "difficult shift [*tiazhelyi sdvig*]" in the "changing forms of art." Meanwhile, he argues, this exhibition does constitute the end of a tradition (Cubo-Futurism), whose past has become clearly associated with the work of French artists, primarily Cézanne and Picasso. He observes that the tremendous speed of creative "inventiveness" is underscored by the fact that "yesterday's innovators are today's 'elders'" and are not represented at this exhibition (he probably had Goncharova, Larionov, Vasilii Kandinskii, and Burliuk in mind). He then discusses both Suprematism and Tatlin's counter-reliefs in a way that has no parallel in Russian art criticism before the Revolution. His review of Malevich's paintings concludes with the question: "Doesn't this geometricization have something to say . . . this planar painting of such secretive and appealing complexity and mystery?" He observes of Tatlin's *Kontr-rel'ef* (*Counter-Relief*, 1914–15, plate no. 70) "only an artist could so combine these materials . . . and harmonize the intersecting surfaces and inflections. Moreover, the mechanical work itself is not easy where the materials must strictly serve a preplanned totality." Likewise, he notes the skill with which Rozanova in *Shkaf s posudoi* (*Cupboard with Dishes*, 1915, fig. no. 6; compare plate no. 46) and Udal'tsova in *Kukhniia* (*Kitchen*, 1915, fig. no. 7; compare plate no. 39) manipulate form and color.

Rostislavov reads an agenda into Malevich's coordination of text (*From Cubism to Suprematism*) and event (the inauguration of Suprematism itself), questioning the linear history the brochure purports to establish. He observes that, from Impressionism to the present day, painting has indeed moved away from mimeticism to "self-contained painterly means of expression." But he notes that others (he names Kandinskii) have reached "non-objectivism" and implies that this path may not lead "in strict sequence to Malevich's Suprematism." By citing both Kandinskii's work and Tatlin's achievement in creating the counter-relief, he essentially challenges the notion of singular stylistic histories, and points instead to the many manifestations of abstract art in Russia. Moreover, he laments the disappearance of Cubo-Futurist "painterly-ornamental perceptibility" and concludes that "the inventiveness and rapid advancements made by new artists cannot be doubted, but the question remains: are not concepts of form in art in a state of chaotic ferment?"[54]

Although diametrically opposed, Benua's and Rostislavov's reviews both register the assimilation of vanguard art to an unprecedented degree. By rejecting Malevich's claims in the first place, Benua demonstrates the extent to which success as an artist was determined by the artist's hegemonic conception of "style." Rostislavov's equivocation reveals, in contrast, a different sense in which "style" could be understood in Russia in 1915: as personal and pluralistic.[55] And significantly, despite Malevich's effort, he remained unconvinced that Suprematism would transform the chaos of today into tomorrow's order. The reception of Suprematism thus points to a broader phenomenon, the transformation of the avant-garde from oppositional strategists and instigators of public scandal into historians of their own recent past. Malevich's affirmation in written texts of his own place in history, like his return in the 1920s to figurative painting of earlier Primitivist themes, continued and extended his quest for legitimacy in a factional and highly politicized cultural environment.

Benua's review of the *0.10* exhibition has been overlooked by most contemporary scholars, even dismissed, no doubt because its tone and content demythologize avant-garde artists' claims to absolute originality. Yet this text, perhaps more than any other, represents the paradoxical status of the Russian avant-garde before the Revolution as outsiders who turned to their advantage concepts of originality and succession which had marginalized them. Malevich's response to Benua, read in the context of his correspondence with Matiushin, reveals both a public and a private creative concern over the legitimation of Suprematism in an art world marked by competition, stylistic eclecticism, and real social and economic disenfranchisement. Both Benua's and Rostislavov's reviews give shape to what might be called the politics of originality. The unique succession of "isms" in the art of the 1910s, documented by published manifestos and often by the press, reveals that the "anxiety of anticipation"[56] among artists in Russia was equal to that experienced by the West European avant-garde. And significantly, in light of the work displayed in the present exhibition, this suggests in turn that the tenor of competition and debate during the critical mid-teens prepared the ground for the combative responses of the same generation of artists to artistic pluralism in the 1920s.

Notes

1. Aleksandr Benua, "Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka," *Rech',* January 9, 1916, p. 3.

2. Benua (and Malevich as well; see note 6) was responding to an article by the writer Dmitrii Merezhkovskii entitled "Eshche odin shag griadushchego khama," which was originally published in the Moscow daily newspaper, *Russkoe slovo,* June 29, 1914. This article, whose title may be translated "The Oncoming Boor Is One Step Closer," refers to the intelligentsia's anxiety over social philistinism and the commercial exploitation of culture during the period immediately preceding the Revolution in Russia.

3. Several of the earliest of recent studies on the theory of the avant-garde, including Renato Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde,* trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1968), trace the relationship of avant-garde aesthetics and social and political radicalism to the first and second quarters of the nineteenth century in France. Linda Nochlin's exploration of the avant-garde in France, published originally in 1968 in *Art News Annual,* cites the French utopian socialist Henri de Saint-Simon and the Fourieriste art critic Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant. See her essay, "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830–1880," in her *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 2. Laverdant is also quoted in Poggioli: "Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer." *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* p. 9.

4. El Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts,* trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), p. 327. The lowercase letters reproduce the style in Lissitzky's original text.

5. Ibid.

6. "A Letter from Malevich to Benois," May 1916, in K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933,* ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 42–48. Andersen states (p. 243n) that Malevich intended to publish it. Instead, he apparently sent the letter directly to Benua, for it concludes with the postscript: "Since the doors of the press are closed to us I am writing to you personally." The letter is located in the Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, f. 137, d. 1186, l. 1–3. Excerpts were previously published in Russian in Lev N. Diakonitsyn, *Ideinye protivorechiia v estetike russkoi zhivopisi kontsa 19—nachala 20 vv.* (Perm': Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), pp. 214–15. The quotations in this essay are adapted from the published English translation.

7. "Letter from Malevich to Benois," p. 45.

8. K. S. Malevich, *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* (Vitebsk: Unovis, 1919). The cover is reproduced in Larissa A. Zhadova, *Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, 1910–1930,* trans. Alexander Lieven (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), plate 185. For a full discussion of the "collective" nature of the Vitebsk school (later Posnovis and Unovis), see Aleksandra Shatskikh, "Unovis: Epicenter of a New World," in this volume.

9. A. Benua, "Povorot k lubku," *Rech',* March 18, 1909, p. 2. Sergei Makovskii was another critic to identify Primitivism as a trend among a new generation of artists. For a summary of and excerpts from Makovskii's writings, see John E. Bowlt, "The Blue Rose Movement and Russian Symbolism," *Slavonic and East European Review* 51, no. 123 (April 1973), pp. 161–81, reprinted in *Russian Art, 1875–1957: A Collection of Essays* (New York: MSS Information Corporation, 1976), pp. 63–93.

10. A. Benua, "Kubizm ili kukishizm," *Rech',* November 23, 1912, p. 2. It was this review, no doubt, that incited Burliuk to publish his counterattack as a booklet entitled *Galdiashchie Benua i novoe russkoe natsional'noe iskusstvo* (St. Petersburg, 1913). The book took the form of an artificial debate with Benua in which Burliuk quoted long excerpts from Benua's writings interspersed with his own commentary.

11. K. S. Malevich, "Zadachi iskusstva i rol' dushitelei iskusstva," *Anarkhiia* 25 (March 23, 1918). As translated in "The Problems of Art and the Role of Its Suppressors," in Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933,* vol. 1, p. 49. The essay is an important retrospective critique of the power individual critics exercised (both Benua and Iakov Tugendkhol'd are named). Although the essay was published with the signatures of Aleksei Morgunov and Aleksei Gan in addition to that of Malevich, Andersen attributes the text to Malevich. For his discussion of Malevich's participation in this journal, see ibid., p. 244n.

12. Mikhail Vrubel', Viktor Borisov-Musatov, Pavel Kuznetsov, and Natal'ia Goncharova were all major participants in avant-garde exhibitions at different points in time before the Revolution.

13. The organizers of the Union of Youth (1910–14) were Mikhail Matiushin and Elena Guro. Members of the group and participants in their exhibitions were Pavel Filonov, Ol'ga Rozanova, Iosif Shkol'nik, Vladimir Markov (Waldemars Matvejs), David Burliuk, Kazimir Malevich, and Vladimir Tatlin. A number of members of the Muscovite Donkey's Tail group exhibited in Union of Youth exhibitions, notably Natal'ia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov. See E. F. Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1974 god* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), p. 178 n. 19.

14. Aleksandr Benua, "Sezan i Gogen," *Rech',* January 27, 1912, p. 2.

15. In the review of the *0.10* exhibition, Benua paradoxically attributes some positive value to these "tricks." He praises Tatlin using the very same terminology with which he criticizes Malevich: "I am familiar with Tatlin's theatrical designs in which there is a charming and original quality of color and an unusual balancing [*ekvilibristika*] of line-[illeg.]. Perhaps this is only trickery, but even trickery is already an art, and for this talent is required." Benua, "Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka," p. 3.

16. Aleksandr Benua, "Dnevnik khudozhnika," *Rech',* October 21, 1913, p. 4.

17. Goncharova's work had been censored from exhibitions on several occasions, first in March 1910; as a result, she was tried in December 1910 for pornography, but acquitted. See Jane A. Sharp, "Redrawing the Margins of Russian Vanguard Art: Goncharova's Trial for Pornography in 1910," in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture,* ed. Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sander, and Judith Vowles, forthcoming.

18. Victor Erlich translates Shklovskii's term *zatrudnennaia forma* as "deliberately impeded form," but as his analysis of this concept reveals, the term refers both the artist's act of "creative deformation" and to the perceptual process. Citing Shklovskii, he writes: "The act of creative deformation restores sharpness to our perception, giving 'density' to the world around us. 'Density (*faktura*) is the principal characteristic of this peculiar world of deliberately constructed objects, the totality of which

we call art.' . . . Another crucial aspect of the 'deliberately impeded form' . . . is rhythm—a set of contrivances superimposed upon ordinary speech." Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine,* 3d ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 177–78.

19. K. S. Malevich, *Ot kubizma k suprematizmu. Novyi zhivopisnyi realizm* (Petrograd, 1916). Although the brochure is dated 1916, a number of reviews document that it was sold at the exhibition when it opened on December 17, 1915. According to Evgenii Kovtun, it was published in two more editions in 1916, the second in Petrograd, the third in Moscow. See Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 181 nn. 28, 31.

20. Benua's paranoid response also has its precedent in a number of responses to Goncharova's solo exhibitions in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. A self-appointed critic, Valentin Songaillo, published a separate pamphlet on the occasion of her Moscow exhibition. Like Benua in his later critique of Malevich, Songaillo casts his language in quasi-religious terms, labeling Goncharova an "antiartist" in an obvious parallel to the Antichrist. This pamphlet did in fact achieve its intended effect of censoring Goncharova's exhibition. When the show (significantly reduced in size) opened in St. Petersburg in March 1914, police raided the building and seized all of her religious paintings in accordance with a *zapret* (ban) invoked by the "spiritual censorship committee" of the Orthodox Church. On this occasion she was also accused by the press of blasphemy. See Jane A. Sharp, "Primitivism, 'Neoprimitivism' and the Art of Natal'ia Goncharova, 1907–14." (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992), chapter 4.3.

21. I refer to Richard Shiff's seminal writing on the history of this concept, and particularly to his discussion of the "classic" in "The Original, the Imitation, the Copy, and the Spontaneous Classic: Theory and Painting in Nineteenth-Century France," *Yale French Studies* 66 (1984), pp. 27–54, where, referring to Quatremère de Quincy's writings on the classic Greeks, he observes: "They *initiated* a tradition characterized by a system and principle and served as an *absolute* origin, not a mere member, like any other member, of a sequence of copies" (p. 37). His discussion of this concept has extremely important implications for Malevich's view of his own originality, and his anxiety over his success at enlisting followers and having "copyists" who would simultaneously (and paradoxically) both ensure his place in history as an "absolute origin" and devalue his contribution, as will be seen in what follows.

22. Aleksandr Benua, "Vystavka 'Sovremennoi russkoi zhivopisi,'" *Rech',* December 2, 1916, p. 2. Malevich did not exhibit work in this show; among the participants were David Burliuk, Nikolai Kul'bin, Chagall, Kandinskii, Popova, and Udal'tsova.

23. During the course of 1916 the group was formed and a publication planned; Malevich refers to the publication of a journal in his correspondence with Mikhail Matiushin as early as 1915. See Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 186. Due to the events of war and revolution, the publication was never realized.

24. "Letter from Malevich to Benois," p. 43.

25. Ibid., p. 45.

26. Benua, "Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka," p. 3.

27. "Letter from Malevich to Benois," p. 44.

28. For more details regarding these charts, see Troels Andersen's translations from Russian to English in Troels Andersen, *Malevich,* catalogue raisonné of the Berlin Exhibition, including the collection in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1970), pp. 115–36 and Linda S. Boersma's essay, "On Art, Art Analysis and Art Education: The Theoretical Charts of Kazimir Malevich," in *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Russian Museum, Leningrad, the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1989), pp. 206–23. This linear evolutionary concept of art history was firmly entrenched in Russia by 1914, and the models were primarily West European. Iakov Tugendkhol'd writes, for example, of Matisse and Picasso: "If the work of Matisse represents the extreme and logical conclusion of the prophecies of Gauguin, then Picasso's painting represents the paradoxical completion of Cézanne's." Ia. Tugendkhol'd, "Frantsuzskoe sobranie S. I. Shchukina," *Apollon* 1–2 (January–February 1914), p. 28.

29. Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu"; Charlotte Douglas, "*0–10* Exhibition," in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910–1930: New Perspectives,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 34–40 and *Swans of Other Worlds: Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), pp. 35–47.

30. Rosalind Krauss has called the avant-garde artist's discourse on originality (she refers specifically to Marinetti's 1909 manifesto) a "parable of self-creation" and explains: "more than a rejection or dissolution of the past, avant-garde originality is conceived as a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth." Malevich is one of her sources; she observes, regarding his famous pronouncement "Only he is alive who rejects his convictions of yesterday," that "the self as origin has the potential for continuous acts of regeneration, a perpetuation of self-birth." See Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Post-Modernist Repetition," *October* 18 (Fall 1981), pp. 47–66, reprinted in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art in association with David R. Godine, 1984), p. 18.

31. For details regarding the performance and its relationship to Suprematism, see Charlotte Douglas, "Birth of a 'Royal Infant': Malevich and 'Victory over the Sun,'" *Art in America,* March–April 1974, pp. 45–51, and her revised text in *Swans of Other Worlds,* pp. 35–47.

32. Douglas, *Swans of Other Worlds,* p. 46.

33. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, May 27, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," pp. 185–86. In his notes, Kovtun quotes from another, unidentified letter from Malevich to Matiushin which clarifies Malevich's image: "The curtain depicts the black square, the embryo [*zarodysh*] of all possibilities—in its development it acquires awesome power" (p. 180). That the correspondence dates to May 1915 suggests that Malevich may indeed have worked to Suprematism through a reexamination of his designs for *Victory over the Sun.* It is clear from the correspondence, at any rate, that his recognition of the historical value of the designs occurred simultaneously with the creation and development of his Suprematist paintings.

34. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, September 25, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," pp. 180–81.

35. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, November 25, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 189.

36. He names the Soiuz russkikh khudozhnikov (the Union of Russian Artists), Salon, Novoe obshchestvo (the New Society), Obshchestvo peterburgskikh khudozhnikov (the Society of Petersburg Artists), Akvarelisty (the Watercolorists), and the Osennii salon (the Autumn Salon). Aleksandr Benua, "Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. Obilie vystavok," *Rech',* February 13, 1909, p. 2.

37. The split occurred in November–December 1911 as a result of Larionov's disagreement with the official registration of the Jack of Diamonds group; Larionov and his supporters countered this move by announcing the separate organization of a series of exhibitions beginning with the Donkey's Tail show, which took place in Moscow in March–April 1912. His critique of the Jack of Diamonds group was publicized in the daily press; see "Ssora khvostov s valetami," *Golos Moskvy* 285 (December 11, 1911), p. 5.

38. See Vasilii Rakitin, "The Artisan and the Prophet: Marginal Notes on Two Artistic Careers," in this volume.

39. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, September 24, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 187.

40. Ibid.

41. Kazimir Malevich, letters to Mikhail Matiushin, November 22 and 25, 1915, in Kovtun, "K. S. Malevich. Pis'ma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 189.

42. Gleb Pospelov has documented the reception of the Jack of Diamonds exhibition extensively in his article "O valetakh bubnovykh i valetakh chervonnykh," *Panorama iskusstv 1977* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1978), pp. 127–35, and more recently in *Bubnovyi valet. Primitiv i gorodskoi fol'klor v moskovskoi zhivopisi 1910–kh godov* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1990), pp. 98–114.

43. A summary of the debate was published in a daily newspaper: "Moskva. Khudozhestvennyi disput," *Protiv techeniia* 22 (February 18, 1912), p. 3. For an account in English, see Benedikt Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer,* ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1977), pp. 81–84.

44. These incidents occurred at a debate organized in conjunction with the *Mishen'* (*Target*) exhibition on March 23, 1913; a summary of the trial was published as "Futuristy na sude," *Golos Moskvy* 240 (October 18, 1913), p. 5.

45. F. M., "Chrezvychaino udavshiisia vernisazh," *Moskovskaia gazeta,* September 30, 1913. In these reviews Goncharova is frequently compared with Konstantin Korovin (1861–1939), a graduate of the Imperial Academy of Arts (who received the title of Academician in 1905) and one of Larionov's teachers at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. Boris Kustodiev (1878–1927), a former student of Repin's at the Imperial Academy, received the title of Academician in 1909.

46. Ibid.

47. "O lektsiiakh i disputakh," *Al'manakh Verbnogo bazara. Moskovskii sezon 1913–14* (Moscow: Levenson, 1914), pp. 12–18.

48. Ibid, pp. 12–13. The author describes the public as being predominantly composed of young women from the provincial intelligentsia.

49. B. Lopatkin, "Futurizm–Suprematizm," reprinted in Herman Berninger and Jean-Albert Cartier, *Les Années d'avant-garde, Russie—Berlin, 1910–1923,* vol. 1 of *Pougny: Catalogue de l'oeuvre* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1972), p. 56.

50. M. Matiushin, "O vystavke 'poslednikh futuristov,'" *Ocharovannyi strannik. Al'manakh vesennii,* 1916, p. 17.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. A. Rostislavov, "O vystavke futuristov," *Rech',* December 25, 1915, p. 3.

54. Ibid.

55. The succession of avant-garde exhibitions in 1915—*Moskva. 1915 god* (*Moscow: The Year 1915,* Moscow), *Tramvai V* (*Tramway V,* St. Petersburg), and *Vystavka kartin levykh techenii v iskusstve* (*Exhibition of Paintings of Left Trends in Art,* St. Petersburg)—must have confirmed the sense of extreme pluralism in vanguard art.

56. This term is borrowed twice: from Richard Shiff's adaptation of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" (*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973]). See Shiff, "The Original, the Imitation, the Copy, and the Spontaneous Classic," pp. 27–31, 52–54.

Unovis: Epicenter of a New World

Aleksandra Shatskikh

Unovis (the Affirmers of the New Art), though it has been variously labeled a group, a collective, a school, a commune, an organization, and a program, is a phenomenon without parallel in the history of early Soviet art and defies classification. In its origins and day-to-day existence, Unovis betrayed many features of a sui-generis religious fraternity or variety of Masonic lodge. Unovis itself, adopting the revolutionary terminology of the era, preferred the description of a "party in art." This "party" of the artistic avant-garde, so its members believed, was called upon to ensure, through both theory and practice, the emergence of new forms of life via the evolution of new systems in art. The wide range and variety of its endeavors, its broad influence and tangible achievements, do, however, permit one to characterize Unovis as a unique (and largely realized) utopian model—firmly rooted in the ideas of Russian culture of the first decades of the twentieth century—of "art into life."

Kazimir Malevich was Unovis's moving force and architect. Like other leaders of the Russian avant-garde (such as Mikhail Larionov, Mikhail Matiushin, and David Burliuk), Malevich was endowed with exceptional organizational abilities. An irresistible urge to forge artistic alliances marked his career from the beginning; in Kursk at the close of the nineteenth century, for example, he had set up a studio, patterned after the Parisian academies, as a gathering place for artists with common interests. The general situation in European art—where the founding of one's own movement, endowed with a name, theory, and disciples, had become the pinnacle of self-affirmation for the vanguard artist—added fuel to Malevich's organizing efforts. In the mid-1910s, he assembled some ten artists under the banner of the movement he had inaugurated in painting, Suprematism. The group was called Supremus, and only the events of World War I prevented the undertaking's achieving its full promise.

Malevich nourished the idea of establishing an authoritative artistic center, which would fulfill multiple functions, over the course of many years. The planning that came to final fruition in the creation of Ginkhuk (the State Institute of Artistic Culture) in Leningrad went back to 1917. In September of that year, Malevich, who had been elected president of the Art Department of the Moscow Council of Soldiers' Deputies, wrote to Matiushin: "I've conceived a number of projects, to wit, organizing the First People's Academy of Arts in Moscow; my idea was warmly received, and the ball's rolling—soon I'll open several small departments of those cells which on a broad scale will constitute the Academy."[1] His work as a teacher in the State Free Art Workshops in Moscow and Petrograd was an additional spur to Malevich's ambitious plans. And the Vitebsk Popular Art School—especially during Malevich's first year and a half there—proved an ideal laboratory for the development of Malevich's ideas.

Malevich, accompanied by El Lissitzky, arrived in Vitebsk from Moscow at the beginning of November 1919[2] and was appointed to a teaching position at the Popular Art School, an institute of higher education founded and headed by Marc Chagall, a Vitebsk native. At the time, workshops were conducted at the school by Vera Ermolaeva, Nina Kogan, Lissitzky, Iurii Pen, Aleksandr Romm, Chagall, and the sculptor David Iakerson. Mikhail Veksler, Ivan Gavris, Evgeniia Magaril, Georgii and Mikhail Noskov, Nikolai Suetin, Lazar' Khidekel', Lev Tsiperson, Ivan Chervinko, and Lev Iudin were among the students. Il'ia Chashnik, who had spent a term at the Popular Art School and in the autumn of 1919 had enrolled with Malevich at the State Free Art Workshops in Moscow, followed his teacher back to Vitebsk.

Malevich was immediately occupied with a number of ventures. A week after his arrival, the *Pervaia gosudarstvennaia*

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vystavka kartin mestnykh i moskovskikh khudozhnikov (*First State Exhibition of Paintings by Local and Moscow Artists*)—which included works by Chagall, Malevich, Vasilii Kandinskii, Ol'ga Rozanova, Robert Fal'k, and others—opened in Vitebsk. Lectures and public meetings were held in conjunction with the exhibition, and Malevich's appearances at them attracted large audiences. The chance to publish his theoretical text, *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* (*On New Systems in Art*), written in the summer of 1919, had been one of the motivations for Malevich's move to Vitebsk. Now that complex treatise furnished the basis for his lectures and speeches and was augmented by the "Ustanovlenie A" ("Statute A"), written on November 15, 1919. In the new appendix Malevich codified the tenets he presented to his students.

Lissitzky and the students in his graphics workshop printed *On New Systems in Art* lithographically and in an edition of one thousand copies, as specified by Malevich.[3] *On New Systems in Art* was the embryo of the "visual book" subsequently cultivated by Lissitzky. For Malevich's followers and students, the brochure was also painting's "declaration of independence" from objectivity, proclaiming the commandments of a "new testament"—among which the most significant was the injunction to introduce into art a "fifth dimension, or economy."

The zeal and homiletic power of Malevich's lectures—he had entered his prophetic period—worked their influence, above all, on those in his audience primed to apprehend the dizzying transition from figurative, representational art to art that was non-objective. Lissitzky, Ermolaeva, and Kogan were among the first to become fervent supporters of Malevich.

Almost in a matter of days, Lissitzky, an architect by training and until recently under the influence of Chagall, brushed aside figuration and the intricate decorativeness of his earlier work—which had been strongly colored by the traditions of Jewish culture—and plunged, with his native facility and passion, into non-objective art. A vestige of his stormy "romance" with Suprematism and its creator would remain with Lissitzky for the rest of his life: the "transrational" phrase from the opening of *On New Systems in Art*—"*U-el-el'-ul-el-te-ka,*" which became a sort of anthem or motto for Unovis—was the inspiration for Lissitzky's adopted name, first El and later El'.[4]

Ermolaeva and Kogan had come to Vitebsk from Petrograd (where their association began with the founding of the City Museum; their assignments to Vitebsk by Izo Narkompros [the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment] came one on the heels of the other) and were exponents, as their early works attest, of a figurative art making decorative use of devices of the avant-garde. At the Vitebsk Popular Art School, Lissitzky, Ermolaeva, and Kogan popularized Malevich's theories and formed among themselves a group of "elder Cubists."

The new artistic "party" grew at breakneck speed; as in a fairy tale, events unfolded over the course not of days but of hours. The tempo was set by the receipt, in November 1919, of a significant (and sizable) commission—decorations for the anniversary of the Vitebsk Committee to Combat Unemployment—to be filled in a brief span of time: the anniversary fell on December 17th. Malevich and Lissitzky made the preliminary sketches and plans for the decorations,

fig. 2
El Lissitzky
Cover for Unovis Almanac No. 1, *1920.*
Pencil, india ink, and gouache on paper, 35.5 x 25.5 cm.
Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

fig. 1
Malevich (center) and members of Unovis en route from Vitebsk to the First All-Russian Conference of Teachers and Students of Art in Moscow, 1920. Lissitzky, Kogan, Ermolaeva, Chashnik, Khidekel', Iudin, and Magaril are among those pictured.

while teachers and students collaborated on their execution. Intensive labor was required to produce the enormous number of Suprematist decorative panels that adorned the White Army Barracks building, which housed the committee, as well as embroidered banners, slogans, and stage decorations for the committee's festive convocation. Such possibilities of practical application were from the beginning Suprematism's greatest attraction and immediately won over the majority of students at the Vitebsk school. Suprematism's entry into the "utilitarian world of things" would be the cornerstone of Unovis.

The aura in which Malevich and his work were bathed grew tenfold in the wake of a trip by the Vitebsk students and teachers to Moscow to view Malevich's first solo show, open from the end of 1919 through the beginning of 1920 at the Sixteenth State Exhibition. (The architect Moisei Lerman, who was among the Vitebsk students, has described this trip and the exhibition, as well as his vague recollection of encountering Vladimir Maiakovskii there.)[5] Malevich, their new leader, had all the necessary credentials: revolutionary innovation in his work, a fully thought-out theory, clear methods for advancing toward the new, and superior artistic results.

On January 19, 1920, the Vitebsk students organized Molposnovis (the Young Followers of the New Art). Nine days later, they joined forces with their teachers, the "elder Cubists," and Molposnovis was succeeded by Posnovis (the Followers of the New Art).

The members of Posnovis were determined to introduce new forms into all types of creative endeavor, and the celebration of Front Week in 1920 offered them an opportunity to try their hand. They decided to present the legendary opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (*Victory over the Sun*) on February 6th, the first day of Front Week; the stage and costume designs for this production were created by Ermolaeva under Malevich's general direction (plate no. 152). Nina Kogan contributed the world's first "Suprematist ballet"—a curious and underappreciated venture, astonishing in its conception: Kogan proposed to show the "sequential unfolding of the movement of forms itself," crowned by the "supremacy of the black square" (plate no. 151).[6] (It should be noted that the idea of a "non-objective cinematography" put forward much later by Malevich was to some degree anticipated by Kogan's ballet.) And Mikhail Noskov gave a public lecture on the new art (he, together with his brother, Georgii, played a conspicuous role in the life of the Vitebsk school, Posnovis, and later Unovis; after 1922, unfortunately, all trace of the brothers vanishes).

With these successes, the members of Posnovis grew confident of their powers and resolved to represent themselves henceforth not merely as followers of the new art but as its affirmers. Unovis was born on February 14, 1920.[7] The name, an acronym in keeping with the verbal shorthand and word coining of the times, was greatly to Malevich's liking—he named his daughter Una in Unovis's honor. And the new word spawned others: *unovisets* (Unovist), *unovisskii* (Unovistic), and *unovizm* (Unovism). The ease with which "Unovis" entered the Russian language was an acknowledgment of the reality and vitality of a phenomenon for which no other word existed.

The months from November 1919 through May 1920 may be called Unovis's period of Sturm und Drang. Unovis's problems, working conditions, and the nature of its production are documented in detail in the typewritten *Al'manakh Unovis No. 1* (*Unovis Almanac No. 1*), completed by June 1920 (fig. no. 2).[8] A wealth of material by Malevich himself appears in the *Almanac,* wherein he devotes significant space to the notion of "collective creative work." (It was the precisely the possibilities for "collective creative work" that kept Malevich in Vitebsk for two and a half years.) His article "O 'Ia' i kollektive" ("On the Ego and the Collective")—in which Malevich expresses the views that served as the theoretical underpinning of Unovis—contains echoes both of the philosophy of "communality" (filtered through the prism of Russian Symbolism) and of the doctrines of the ruling political party, which gave the collective primacy over the individual: "'Collectivism' is one of the paths designated on the road map to achieving the 'world-man,' but it is perhaps still merely one of the necessary crossings restraining on its main highway millions of egos; it offers only an instant of forces converging for the perfection of the creative image of 'being'; in it, each ego preserves its individual force, but in order to move toward perfection the self must be destroyed—just as religious fanatics destroy themselves before the divine being, so the modern saint must destroy himself before the 'collective' and before that 'image' which perfects in the name of unity, in the name of conjunction."[9]

One of the practical consequences of Malevich's theorizing was a conscious striving among the members of Unovis for impersonality and anonymity; they signed their works not with their own names but with "Unovis." Unovis was among the first artists' groups in the twentieth century—if not the very first—to create and exhibit its production under a collective name. (Obmokhu [the Society of Young Artists] was for a long time credited with pioneering this practice. Obmokhu's group signature, however, arose out of entirely different circumstances; it was the result of artel-style practices in the executing of commissions.)[10]

The notion of "collective creative work" has not been a recurring feature of Russian culture alone but has enticed many of the great creative minds of our times. In postrevolutionary Russia, however, the utopian doctrines that had been one wellspring of the state's ideology would be turned upside down through the creation of a totalitarian regime, and the country would pay a heavy price for the attempt forcibly to translate speculative theories into reality. The dark side of a utopia of enthusiasts creating a new way of life according to a single blueprint compulsory for all would very quickly take its toll on Unovis's founder and his followers; Malevich would come to know the oppressive might of the official art that eventually attained power and state support. In 1927—with Ginkhuk, which had in some respects been the successor to Unovis, already closed—Malevich attached a note to the manuscripts he was leaving in the West, explaining, with some distress, the nature of those texts: "[Since I find] myself at the time under revolutionary influence, there may be powerful contradictions with my present form of defending Art, i.e., in 1927. These positions are to be considered genuine."[11] It must be said, to the credit of Malevich and his colleagues likewise "under revolutionary influence," that they never resorted to violent action against the "old guard." The members of Unovis did not regard destruction or abolition as their primary task; they were, rather, creators and cultivators of a new art and a new world. The legendary anecdotes about Malevich's persecution of Chagall prove, upon closer inspection, neither simple nor clearcut.[12] And it is also worth noting that Pen, the academic painter of the Wanderer school who was Chagall's first teacher, remained in his workshop at the Vitebsk school throughout the period that Unovis was based there.

In Malevich's eyes, "collective creative work" greatly expanded the domain of the new art, and the introduction of art into life was to be entrusted to a Council for the Affirmation of New Forms in Art, an elected administrative body that would be affiliated with the Vitebsk Provincial Department of People's Education. The "Plan raboty Soveta" ("Agenda of the Council"), which was published in the *Unovis Almanac No. 1,* contained five lengthy sections.[13] A good

portion of the council's mission was realized by Unovis, even though the Vitebsk authorities were, naturally, not inclined to organize such a body.

Unovis went before the Russian art public in June 1920, at the First All-Russian Conference of Teachers and Students of Art. Led by Malevich, the members of Unovis brought to Moscow an exhibition of their work, the *Unovis Almanac No. 1* (which had been hurriedly prepared in time for the conference), and Malevich's *On New Systems in Art.* A specially printed handbill, "Ot Unovisa" ("From Unovis," fig. no. 3), was distributed among the conference participants, who included representatives from all the provincial Free State Art Workshops as well as those in Moscow and Petrograd; the handbill, which opened with an insistent "We want, we want, we want," issued this appeal: "Under the banner of Unovis, let everyone join together to clothe the earth in new forms and meanings." Although the Vitebsk delegates missed the opening of the conference and arrived near its end, their projects and programs—notable for their careful thought, scope, and clarity—their passionate speechmaking, and their exhibition moved Unovis clearly to the fore.[14] It was also in June 1920 that Unovis rose to preeminence among the new art schools and that its influence spread to other cities: direct ties were established between Vitebsk and Perm', Ekaterinburg, Saratov, and Samara (in addition to Smolensk and Orenburg, where followers of Malevich's—Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro in the former, and Ivan Kudriashev in the latter—headed branches of Unovis).

It was with public artistic work—the creation of a "new utilitarian world of things"—that Unovis launched its expansion; during 1920–21, there was no undertaking or holiday in Vitebsk in which Unovis did not have a hand. Streets, buildings, signboards, trams, and even ration cards were decorated with Suprematist designs (plate nos. 127–129, 144, 148–150). Unovis had for the time being to work within the existing environment, and Suprematist designs served, more often than not, as new ornaments for buildings and objects of considerably older vintage. Yet the utopian idea of transforming the world on the basis of the formal potential of Suprematism had brought architecture within Unovis's compass. Architecture, it was generally accepted, was the necessary starting point of a new synthetic style. "Having established the specific plans of the Suprematist system," Malevich wrote in December 1920, "I am entrusting the further development of what is already architectural Suprematism to young architects in the broad sense of the word, for only in Suprematism do I see an era of a new system of architecture."[15]

The European Futurists are well known for their neoromantic schemes for humanity's settlement of the cosmos. Velimir Khlebnikov, Vasilii Chekrygin, and Malevich were their Russian counterparts, whose way had been prepared by Nikolai Fedorov's "philosophy of the Common Cause." In 1918, Malevich had described hypothetical architectural complexes in such articles as "Architecture as a Slap in the Face to Ferroconcrete."[16] The formulation "Suprematism is the new Classicism" would come later, following Unovis's move to Petrograd, but the need to create new architectural forms was first recognized, and the initial planning steps taken, in Vitebsk.[17] The architecture workshop (variously named at different times) was one of the most popular at the Vitebsk school and was headed by Lissitzky from the autumn of 1919 until his departure from Vitebsk in late 1920 (whereupon Chashnik and Khidekel' became the workshop's guiding figures). Lissitzky's talent for "integration" (as Selim Khan-Magomedov has aptly described it) had exceedingly significant consequences for Unovis.[18] Lissitzky fostered a strong utilitarian

fig. 3
"From Unovis," 1920.
Lithograph, 46 x 37 cm.
Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

fig. 4
Unovis: Handbill of the Vitebsk Creative Committee *1 (November 20, 1920), with Chashnik's project in center column.*
Lithograph, 58.5 x 51 cm.
Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

bias, and his professional training and striving for practical results were the bridge that led the innovators of Unovis "out of cold laboratories" and into the real world.

At the end of 1919, Lissitzky introduced three-dimensional elements into his new non-objective compositions. Such forms had, of course, been present in Malevich's earliest Suprematist works: at the *0.10* exhibition (Petrograd, 1915–16), he had shown a canvas incorporating a rectangular parallelepiped and cube. Malevich, however, included three-dimensional forms in his works only rarely, inasmuch as they engendered an illusory space that was at odds with the metaphysical space of the Suprematist canvas. Lissitzky's "bars," "plates," and "cubes," on the contrary, became permanent presences in his work, their execution betraying the practiced hand of the draftsman.

In Lissitzky's elegant works created under the influence of Suprematism, lines, planar shapes, and volumetric elements are combined at will. The "war of opposites," the disharmony that inevitably arose between surface-planarity and spatiality, was further exacerbated by Lissitzky's mixing of perspectives; he constructed almost every form according to a different vanishing point. The result was that each element "flew" into the composition along with the space it occupied and the *sdvig* (dislocation or shift) of colliding spaces provoked frustration in the viewer (the *sdvig,* of course, would become a favorite device of the Constructivists).

Lissitzky devised the name proun (from *proekt Unovisa* [project of Unovis] or *proekt utverzhdeniia novogo* [project of the affirmation of the new]) for these works only following the birth of Unovis; one does not encounter the term before mid-1920. (In Lissitzky's texts in the *Unovis Almanac No. 1,* the word "proun" was not employed once, even though a version of the composition celebrated thereafter as *Proun 1A: Most 1. Eskiz* [*Sketch for Proun 1A: Bridge 1,* 1919–20, plate no. 205] appeared as an illustration to one of his pieces. The formulations Lissitzky did use in the *Almanac*—"projects for new forms of utilitarian structures," "elaboration of tasks of the new architecture," and "projects for monumental decorations"—show him groping for the label that would carry such weight in the future.)

From the beginning, Lissitzky rejected any and all orientations in space for his prouns; he intended them to have neither top nor bottom, hence his use of varying perspectives. It was in the logic of three-dimensional forms, however, that they gradually grew heavy, were pulled "to earth," and demanded a reckoning with the laws of gravity. (It might be noted that Iakerson, also an architect by training—like Lissitzky, he had studied in the architecture and building faculty of the Riga Polytechnic Institute, but his enthusiasm for sculpture won out over his other interests; at the Vitebsk Popular Art School, Iakerson replaced Ivan Til'berg as head of the sculpture workshop[19]—made abundant use of three-dimensional forms in his work during 1920, yet he did so—and from the start—entirely in accordance with the laws of gravity.)

This adaptation of the principles of architectural drawing to Suprematism (a venture similar to that in which Gustav Klutsis was engaged at about the same time as Lissitzky, and perhaps even somewhat earlier) would be a catalyst for Malevich's arkhitektons.

The practical needs of the new state and of Soviet public life, which yielded Unovis commissions for decorations for speaker's rostrums to be used at mass meetings and demonstrations, were another factor in Suprematism's turn toward architecture during the Vitebsk years. Initially, Malevich, Lissitzky, and others confined themselves to decorating the rostrums' façades with Suprematist designs, into which they worked slogans and inscriptions, and did not alter

№
число:
год:

УНОВИС. – АНКЕТА.

Имя:
Возраст:
Адрес:

1. Что изучаешь?
2. Какую идею и форму стремишься установить в искусстве?
3. Какое суждение имеешь о новых системах в искусстве и какое произведение из всех известных тебе в истории искусства является для тебя образцом?
4. Изучал или изучаешь прошлыя состояния живописи: классицизм, реализм, академизм, импрессионизм – какое твое суждение о них с точки зрения современности?
5. Готов ли бороться за установление определенной идеи и формы в искусстве?
6. Знаком ли с мировоззрением Уновиса?
   а) его идеологией;
   б) его связью с современностью;
   в) его политикой действия в искусстве их соответствием политики в жизни.
   С чем согласен, с чем несогласен?
7. Готов ли утверждать в жизни мировоззрение Уновиса в целом или какую либо определенную истину его?
8. Готов ли бороться за реализацию принятой истины?
9. Знаком ли с общим планом развития в школе Уновиса? На какой ступени находишься сам; чем для тебя является материал?
   Холст;
   Натура;
   Краска;
   Др. средства.
10. Признаешь ли след. положения Уновиса?
   а) школы искусств являются аппаратами постройки культуры новой гармонии утилитарного мира вещей;
   б) искусствоодвлатели всегда партийны и утверждают всем не новое то прошлое мировоззрение отсюда
   в) партийность школы является необходимостью;
   г) школа дает познание материала;
   материал является средством выражения систем;
   система ведет к познанию формы творческой отсюда
   д) школа дает познание систем.

В каких отделах Уновиса будешь работать: агитационном, литературном, живописном, архитектурном, или строительно-технич. сист.

Ответы должны быть даны в виде подробных рукописей, лишь в исключительных случаях с мотивировкой в краткой форме. Имя, возраст и адрес должны быть указаны на настоящем листе анкеты.

fig. 5
"Unovis Questionnaire," 1920–21.

the basic shape of these primitive structures (plate nos. 130, 147). However, Chashnik—one of the most talented of Malevich's followers and only twenty-six at the time of his death in 1929—created a project for a "tribune under the sign of Suprematism" for a square in Smolensk. Chashnik's project, illustrated in one of Unovis's publications (fig. no. 4), was later developed by Lissitzky (plate nos. 140–141) and served as the basis for his *Leninskaia tribuna* (*Lenin Tribune,* 1924, plate no. 142). Though acclaim for the *Tribune* accrued solely to Lissitzky, he always emphasized that the work was an "Unovis project."

Malevich's Suprematist system was born of the all-embracing *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square,* 1915). The abyss of the *Black Square,* its philosophical ambiguity—it constituted both "all" and "nothing," both "non-objectivity" and "omni-objectivity"—made Malevich's masterpiece a sui-generis "project," a dense nucleus of meanings that Malevich spent his entire life extrapolating. Suprematist paintings—self-sufficient and primary "in the ranks of all the things of the world"—were the first issue of the *Black Square* and its infinitude: "With his brush the artist creates a new sign; this sign is not a form for apprehending what has already been prepared, built, and brought into existence in the world—it is a sign of the new, of what is in the process of being built and appearing in nature through the artist."[20] These Suprematist canvases were, Malevich wrote, sign-projects containing "proto-images of the technical organisms of the future Suprematist [world]."[21] Thus projection—the creation of blueprints or plans of the future Suprematist organization of the world—became the essential hallmark of Unovis's collective work and "project" the chief label for its production (a 1920 Unovis periodical, for example, authored by Chashnik and Khidekel', was entitled *Aero. Stat'i i proekty* [*Aero: Articles and Projects*]).

The "utilitarian world of things" so passionately proclaimed by Unovis did not coincide with the world that, during the same period, the Productivists (the future Constructivists) were seeking to create. Malevich and the members of Unovis wished to comprehend the "real" foundations of the universe and its "organic-natural transformation"—Suprematism acquired an ontological dimension. Malevich devoted virtually all of his time in Vitebsk to the writing of philosophical and theoretical treatises—some of which have yet to be published[22]—which defined the nature of the "utilitarian organisms" that made up the "unified system of the world architecture of the earth." The most advanced among Unovis's members understood and shared Malevich's views. Chashnik, for example, conceived Suprematist works (which he called outright "blueprints" and "plans") as projects for and instruments of a new universe and a new systematization of the world. The aims of the architectural and technical faculty created in Vitebsk in 1921 included, according to Chashnik, "study of the system of Suprematist projection and the designing of blueprints and plans in accordance with it; ruling off the earth's expanse into squares, giving each energy cell its place in the overall scheme; organization and accommodation on the earth's surface of all its intrinsic elements, charting those points and lines out of which the forms of Suprematism will ascend and slip into space."[23]

The differentiation of *real'nost'* (reality) from *deistvitel'nost'* (actuality) was one of the foundations of Malevich's theory. "Reality" lay concealed behind the world's objective envelope, and this envelope had to be torn open and the shackles of *predmetnost'* (objectivity) and *razum* (reason) broken in order to ensure the appearance of a new "Realism"—first in art and subsequently in the world at large. "Actuality," by contrast, was illusoriness incarnate, enslaving man's soul. Malevich and the members of Unovis aspired to create a new "reality," whereas the Productivists and Constructivists remained, in the

fig. 6
Unovis seal, reproduced in Lissitzky's A Suprematist Tale about Two Squares, *1922.*

Unovis view, servants of "actuality" ("lackeys of the factory and of production," as Malevich acerbically described them). The rivalry between Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin—who had taken non-objectivity in such contradictory directions—went back many years[24] and was manifest at the start of the 1920s in the competition between Unovis and Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture) and between Unovis and Obmokhu. The feud came into the open in December 1921, when more than two hundred Unovis works were exhibited at Inkhuk (members of Unovis were there to elucidate their displays, while Malevich delivered a lecture and participated in discussions).[25] The antagonism between Suprematism and Constructivism was plain to see; the two movements seemed opposite poles in the artistic transformation of the world.

(Lissitzky had been in Moscow from the end of 1920. A member of Inkhuk, he espoused a diluted, compromised version of Suprematism. Lissitzky and Malevich had gone radically different ways, though their personal relations—unlike those between Tatlin and Malevich—remained intact. The title of the journal founded by Lissitzky and Il'ia Erenburg in Berlin in 1922, *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* [*Object*], was a programmatic one, announcing a certain polemic with the "non-objectivity" [or "omni-objectivity"] of Suprematism.)

The tension between the poles of Suprematism and Constructivism that colored numerous areas of early Soviet artistic life existed inside Unovis, as well. It was not Lissitzky alone who integrated impulses from one and the other system. The canvases of Iudin and Tsiperson—who were staunch adherents of Unovis—used layers of paint to achieve relief effects; incorporated sawdust, shavings, sand, and even seeds; and are evidence of the study in Vitebsk of the properties of heterogeneous materials and of attention to *faktura* (density). Moreover, certain members of Unovis—Veksler, Kogan, Georgii Noskov, Suetin, Khidekel', Chashnik, and Iudin—graduated from the Vitebsk Practical Art Institute with the title of "artist-Constructivist."[26]

Unovis's pedagogical system was an integral part of its work. Even while Chagall was still at the helm of the Vitebsk Popular Art School, Unovis proclaimed the creation of a "Unified Painting Audience." When Chagall left in June 1920, Ermolaeva became the school's director; when the school was reorganized as the Vitebsk Practical Art Institute, she became rector and remained in that position until her own departure for Petrograd in the summer of 1922 (Malevich was chairman of the Council of Professors). The Unified Painting Audience was based on the program evolved by Malevich in the Moscow and Petrograd State Free Art Workshops. Ermolaeva and Kogan bore primary responsibility for putting that program into effect in Vitebsk, with Kogan in charge of the introductory course and Ermolaeva supervising students' methodical progress through the disciplines of Cézannism, Cubism, and Cubo-Futurism. (This advancement "from Cézanne to Suprematism" replicated Malevich's own evolution.) Malevich's role was to analyze student assignments and independent work through lectures and conversations intended to "diagnose" a student's talents and possibilities.

The implementation of Malevich's program did not, however, go entirely smoothly, and his analysis of the obstacles and their causes, as well as his careful observation of students' progress in apprehending the different systems of painting, led him to what he subsequently labeled the "theory of the additional element [*pribavochnyi element*] in painting." (In Vitebsk, Malevich used the terms *dobavka* [supplement] and *dobavochnyi element* [supplementary element].) The essence of his theory was that each new trend in painting represented an artistic complex begotten by one specific plastic "gene," a kind of formula-sign from which, as from the nucleus of a cell, the complex organisms of Impressionism, Cézannism, Cubism, and

fig. 7
Members of Unovis, 1921. From left, foreground: Suetin (with black square sewn to his sleeve), Efros, Veksler, Roiak, unidentified, and Chervinko; background: Iudin, Chashnik, Ermolaeva, Khidekel', Kogan, and Malevich.

fig. 8
View of the Unovis display at the Petrograd Artists of All Trends *exhibition, 1923.*

fig. 9
Kazimir Malevich
"Unovis (Aff{irmers} of New Forms in Art): Manifesto of the Suprematists," May 2, 1924.
Malevich Archive, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

so on evolved. The straight line—the track of a point moving in space, and Suprematism's fundamental stylistic component—was declared the Suprematist "gene." Suprematism's "additional element" was, however, a summit few of Malevich's followers attained (Malevich critiqued the work of Ermolaeva and Kogan no less than that of his students). In 1925, in his article "Vvedenie v teoriiu pribavochnogo elementa v zhivopisi" ("Introduction to the Theory of the Additional Element in Painting"), Malevich would emphasize the Vitebsk origins of his theory and claim that many of his students had been "ill" from the additional element of Cézanne's painting, and that they had found the Cézannist Fal'k more attractive than himself (Fal'k taught in Vitebsk for several months in 1921, and took a number of Vitebsk students with him to the Moscow Vkhutemas [the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops]; though Fal'k was a

member of the "old guard," Malevich never abandoned his sympathy and respect for him).[27]

To some extent, Unovis's pedagogical practices also embodied Malevich's notions of "collective reason" and "collective creative work." The most advanced students became teaching assistants: they conducted classes, delivered papers and lectures, and discussed and evaluated student work (and each other's). Gavris, Georgii Noskov, Suetin, Khidekel', Chashnik, and Iudin were serving in such a capacity by 1921. Khidekel' and Chashnik were responsible, moreover, for making the architectural and technical faculty the apex of the school. Chashnik wrote in 1921: "The study and apprehension of all systems of the new art in our painting faculties lead to the ultimate real faculty, the architectural and technical faculty . . . The architectural and technical workshop is the crucible of all the other faculties of Unovis, to which all creative individuals, as a unified collective of builders of the new forms of the world, must aspire."[28]

As a thinker, Malevich encouraged reflection and theoretical speculation in his followers, and under his demanding tutelage, Kogan, Khidekel', Chashnik, Iudin, and others gradually revealed a talent for both pedagogical and formal experimentation. And in order to graduate from the Vitebsk school, a student had not only to present the Council of Professors with an art work as his diploma project but to compose a theoretical treatise.[29] Chashnik drew a "Skhema postroeniia Vit[ebskikh] gos[udarstvennykh] khud[ozhestvennykh] tekhnicheskikh masterskikh" ("Structural Plan of the Vit[ebsk] St[ate] Art[istic]-Technical Workshops"), awarding to the student who had completed all courses the title of "consummate learned architect."[30] Iudin recorded his reflections on and experiments with color and form (the latter conducted in close contact with Ermolaeva) in his unique diary full of plans and tables. With the help of his colleagues in Vitebsk, Malevich laid the foundations of the "creative laboratory institute" which had been envisioned in the "Agenda" of the Council for the Affirmation of New Forms in Art and which would become a reality in Ginkhuk.

Malevich was the author of a vast unified oeuvre, in which the plastic and the verbal, works of art and of philosophy, were aspects of a single creative utterance about the world. The same was true of the "collective creative work" of Unovis. The rich and extensive body of writings by Lissitzky, Ermolaeva, Kogan, Chashnik, Khidekel', Iudin, Mikhail Kunin, Gavris, Mikhail Noskov, L. Zuperman, Osip Bernshtein, and others spans a wide range of genres—essays, treatises, explanatory notes, programs, projects, diaries, and letters—and is crowned by the works of Malevich himself, which were published under the Unovis imprint. Unovis's published works are, however, but the tip of the iceberg. One can only hope that the important documents still held in archives will be released and published in the near future.

It had been owing to Chagall's efforts, during his tenure as Commissar of Arts for Vitebsk, that a number of canvases by Russian artists of all movements—from members of Mir iskusstva (World of Art) to left painters—had been sent to the city to form the basis of a museum of contemporary art. Under Malevich's influence—and Malevich had been one of the most active of the museum reformers during the first months of the Soviet state—the Vitebsk museum was quickly transformed from a museum of contemporary art into a museum of painterly culture. The Vitebsk museum housed the fullest and most representative collection of Russian avant-garde works—it had eighteen canvases by Rozanova alone—of any provincial museum with the exception of the Rostov museum (whose collection had been assembled by Liubov' Popova). Space for the collection in Vitebsk was tight, and the majority of the paintings were stored at the Vitebsk Practical Art Institute. Temporary exhibitions of these works, often installed according to Malevich's instructions, were held at the school and served as material for his lectures and critiques. Malevich, Iudin wrote in his diary, "rendered a diagnosis" on the works of virtually every member of the Russian avant-garde.

Unovis was a "party" that accepted all comers; anyone—poet, musician, actor, or artisan—who wished to promote the "augmentation" of the world with new forms could join. Natan Efros, for example, who would become famous as a professional reader and reciter of poetry, was a member of Unovis's Tvorkom (the Creative Committee) in 1921. (Being a member of Unovis was not, however, generally synonymous with being a Suprematist—the Unovis member had to strive to become a Suprematist.) In the autumn of that year, Unovis, in furtherance of its goal of extending its influence to all creative endeavors, inaugurated the "Unovis Evening," a showcase for contemporary poetry, music, and theater. The first evening in the series, held on September 17, 1921, featured Efros in a solo performance of Maiakovskii's *Voina i mir* (*War and the Universe*), with stage design by Ermolaeva and Tsiperson, and Malevich reading his own poems.[31]

The Unovis "party," like any other, had its own program and bylaws. Applicants were required to complete the highly detailed "Anketa Unovisa" ("Unovis Questionnaire," fig. no. 5). A Working Committee, elected by all members and soon renamed the Creative Committee, supervised all "party" activities. (Once branches of Unovis had been established in other cities, the Vitebsk committee became the Central Creative Committee.) It was a collegial body, with no chairman; Ermolaeva was its secretary, and Bernshtein its clerk until his early death in 1922. Important documents were endorsed with the Unovis seal (fig. no. 6), which had been produced from a drawing by Lissitzky.[32] Malevich, Ermolaeva, and Kogan were permanent members of the Creative Committee during 1920–22; Lissitzky, Chashnik, Khidekel', Gavris, Suetin, Georgii Noskov, Chervinko, Iudin, and Efros all served on the committee at one time or another.

Unovis either organized or participated in a number of exhibitions, the first in Vitebsk in February 1920, when works by members of Posnovis/Unovis were shown as part of the school's student showcase. In June 1920, Unovis exhibited its works at the First All-Russian Conference of Teachers and Students of Art in Moscow. A one-day Unovis exhibition was held in Vitebsk on March 28, 1921. In December 1921, again in Moscow, Unovis exhibited at Inkhuk.[33] At a display in Moscow in March–April 1922 of works by students from the provincial art schools, those by Unovis were pronounced the most interesting.[34] Another exhibition was held in Vitebsk in May 1922. At the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition*) in Berlin during the autumn of 1922, Unovis displayed its works in a collective entry. Unovis made its final appearance at the *Petrogradskie khudozhniki vsekh napravlenii* (*Petrograd Artists of All Trends*) exhibition in Petrograd in 1923. Its sixty-odd entries, ranging from Cubism to Suprematism, offered a summation of its work and were exhibited—the paintings of Malevich not excepted—under the group's name (fig. no. 8).

Malevich and the members of his "party" assumed that branches of Unovis would be established throughout the world, and made several efforts at entering on the international stage. Unovis sent materials to Germany in 1921, for instance, and addressed a letter to Dutch artists in February 1922.[35] Suprematism was "exported" to Poland by Strzemiński and Kobro, who moved there in the early 1920s, and it served as the point of departure for Strzemiński's Unizm (Unism)—a Polish term that echoed the Russian "Unovism."

When he established the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius proclaimed a "joyfully creating commune, for which the Masonic lodges of the Middle Ages are the ideal prototype" as his goal. With its own watchword (the "transrational" *U-el-el'-ul-el-te-ka*), bylaws, program, and emblems, Unovis was akin to such a Masonic lodge. The Unovis fraternity's ritual extended even to the clothing of its members—Malevich himself was a prime example: his white apparel and white hat dramatized his passage into white Suprematism, which carried the "white world (world-structure), affirming the sign of purity of man's creative life." And in his diary Iudin mentions sewing a special Unovis red jacket.

Unovis took as its motto Malevich's Suprematist slogan: "The overturning of the old world of arts will be etched across your palms," to which, a short while later, "Wear the black square as a sign of world economy" was appended. And indeed, Unovis's members sewed the black square, their "Masonic emblem," onto the cuffs of their sleeves—the part of their clothing nearest their palms (fig. no. 7). Only Lissitzky employed the red square as an emblem of Unovis (in his design for its seal), and that was in tribute to the prevailing atmosphere in society: "Draw the red square in your workshops as a sign of the world revolution in the arts." Malevich and the true Unovis Suprematists always considered the black square—the "icon" and "zero form" of Suprematism—to be the symbol of Unovis.

The transfer of art-educational institutions from the jurisdiction of Narkompros to that of Glavprofobr (the Chief Administration for Professional Education) in 1921 marked the beginning of difficult times for Unovis. The Vitebsk teachers went unpaid for a considerable period; neither the central nor the local authorities offered the school any support. Unovis's utopian trust in the Soviet government's desire to build a new life on the basis of new forms in art was shattered and revealed as untenable.

Ten students were graduated from the Vitebsk Practical Art Institute in May 1922, after which Unovis ceased its activity in Vitebsk. By the beginning of June, Malevich was in Petrograd, to which Ermolaeva also returned; one after another, numerous members of Unovis—including Suetin, Khidekel', Chashnik, Iudin, Khaia Kagan, Magaril, and Efim Roiak—followed suit. Many among them became associates of the Institute for the Study of the Culture of Contemporary Art at the Museum of Artistic Culture (later Ginkhuk), where Malevich had been named director. Yet even in Petrograd/Leningrad, Malevich was unwilling to part with Unovis. His draft of "Unovis (utv[erditeli] novykh form Iskusstva). Manifest suprematistov" ("Unovis [Aff(irmers) of the New Forms in Art]: Manifesto of the Suprematists," fig. no. 9) dates from May 1924.[36] And at the end of 1924, in an open letter to artists in Holland, Malevich argued the necessity of creating "Unovises" throughout the world.[37]

Malevich's efforts to revive Unovis in new soil did not, however, meet with success. Under the weight of changed living conditions and social patterns, the phenomenon born in Vitebsk vanished. The future will tell us the true worth of the rich legacy that was left behind.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Jane Bobko

Notes

1. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, September 8, 1917, Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. XXV/9, l. 21.

2. On the circumstances of Malevich's move to Vitebsk, see A. Shatskikh, "K. Malevich v Vitebske," *Iskusstvo* 11 (1988), pp. 38–43.

3. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Ol'ga Gromozova, 1920, Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. XXV/9, l. 13–13ob. Published in Shatskikh, "K. Malevich v Vitebske," p. 43.

4. The first instances of Lazar' Lisitskii's use of the "article" El, and then El', are to be found in the *Unovis Almanac No. 1.* With the switch to German and the Latin alphabet, he signed his name "El Lissitzky." There are no grounds for the belief that Lissitzky chose *el'* because that is the pronunciation in the Russian alphabet for the letter *l,* his first initial; at the time, the word *liudi* was the guide to pronunciation. There is no question that Lissitzky's unusual name, hardly a pseudonym, was inspired by Malevich's highly musical "transrational" line, which had deep meaning for the members of Unovis; Malevich cited it repeatedly, and Chashnik's 1924 inscription in his fiancée's album called on her to "remember this madman . . . whose way of life is *U-EL-EL.*" See *Ilya Grigorevich Chashnik: Lyucite/1902–Leningrad/1929; Watercolors, Drawings, Reliefs,* catalogue for exhibition at Leonard Hutton Galleries (New York: Leonard Hutton Galleries, 1979), p. 11.

5. Moisei Lerman, conversation with author, Moscow, June 15, 1988.

6. N. Kogan, "O suprematicheskom balete," *Al'manakh Unovis No. 1,* l. 21.

7. The date—April 14th—given in Larissa A. Shadowa, *Suche und Experiment: Aus der Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Kunst zwischen 1910 und 1930,* trans. Helmut Barth (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1978), p. 309, and in Shatskikh, "K. Malevich v Vitebske" is incorrect.

8. The *Unovis Almanac No. 1* was "constructed" in five typewritten copies. Lissitzky's use of the verb *stroit'* (to construct), an obvious synonym for *konstruirovat',* is highly revealing of his evolving approach to the "construction of the book." The *Unovis Almanac No. 1* played a significant role in the development of Lissitzky's book design.

Today there are two known copies of the *Almanac,* one in private hands in Moscow, the other in the Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 76/9. All references in this essay to the *Almanac* are to the latter copy. A good portion of the contents of the *Almanac* has been published in Shadowa, *Suche und Experiment,* pp. 303–17.

9. K. Malevich, "O 'Ia' i kollektive," *Al'manakh Unovis No. 1,* l. 6ob.

10. See Aleksandra Shatskikh, "A Brief History of Obmokhu," in this volume.

11. Kazimir Malevich, note, May 30, 1927, Malevich Archives, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Reproduced in *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the State Russian Museum, Leningrad, the State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (Amsterdam and Moscow: Stedelijk Museum, 1988), p. 52.

12. See Alexandra Shatskikh, "Chagall and Malevich in Vitebsk. History of their relations," *Bulletin AICARC* 1–2 (1989), pp. 7–10.

13. The "Plan raboty Soveta" has been published in Shadowa, *Suche und Experiment,* p. 317.

14. "Materialy I-oi Vserossiiskoi konferentsii uchashchikh i uchashchikhsia iskusstvu," 1920, Central State Archive of Russia, Moscow, f. 2306, op. 23, d. 116. See also G. L. Demosfenova, "K istorii pedagogicheskoi deiatel'nosti K. S. Malevicha," in *Stranitsy istorii otechestvennogo dizaina,* Trudy VNIITE, vyp. 59 (Moscow: Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut tekhnicheskoi estetiki, 1989), pp. 143–70.

15. K. Malevich, *Suprematizm. 34 risunka* (Vitebsk: Unovis, 1920), p. 4.

16. K. Malevich, "Arkhitektura kak poshchechina betono-zhelezu," *Anarkhiia* 37 (April 6, 1918).

17. See Shadowa, *Suche und Experiment,* pp. 90–94.

18. See S. O. Khan-Magomedov, "L. Lisitskii. Rol' v stileobrazuiushchikh protsessakh i v stanovlenii dizaina," in *Stranitsy istorii otechestvennogo dizaina,* pp. 24–43, and "Novyi stil', ob"emnyi suprematizm i prouny," in *Lazar' Markovich Lisitskii, 1890–1941,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, and the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (Moscow and Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, 1990), pp. 35–42.

19. On Iakerson, see A. Shatskikh, "Dereviannaia skul'ptura D. Iakersona," in *Sovetskaia skul'ptura 8* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1984), pp. 160–69.

20. *Al'manakh Unovis No. 1,* l. 120b.

21. Malevich, *Suprematizm,* p. 2.

22. A number of Malevich's previously unpublished texts appear in D. Sarab'ianov and A. Shatskikh, *Kazimir Malevich. Zhivopis'. Teoriia,* forthcoming.

23. Il. Chashnik, "Arkhitekturno-tekhnicheskii fakul'tet," *UNOVIS* 2 (January 1921), p. 14.

24. See Charlotte Douglas, "Tatlin and Malevich: History and Theory 1914–1915" (Paper delivered at the international symposium, Vladimir Tatlin. Leben. Werk. Wirkung, Städtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, November 25–27, 1989).

25. See Vassilii Rakitin, "Malevich und Inkhuk," in *Kasimir Malewitsch zum 100. Geburtstag,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1978), pp. 284–98.

26. "Spisok okonchivshikh Khudozhestvenno-prakticheskii institut v 1922 godu v mae mesiatse," State Vitebsk Regional Archive, f. 246, op. 1, d. 260, sviazka 17, l. 390ob.

27. K. Malevich, "Sorok piat'. Vvedenie v teoriiu pribavochnogo elementa v zhivopisi," 1925, private archive, Moscow, pp. 21–22. Malevich wrote a brief article on Fal'k in 1924. See K. S. Malevich, "Fal'k," in K. S. Malevich, *The Artist, Infinity, Suprematism: Unpublished Writings, 1913–33,* ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Hoffmann (Copenhagen: Borgens Forlag, 1978), pp. 125–27.

28. Chashnik, "Arkhitekturno-tekhnicheskii fakul'tet," p. 12, 15.

29. Iudin's diaries for 1922 contain sketches for his diploma work (Manuscript Division, State Saltykov–Shchedrin Public Library, St. Petersburg, f. 1000). For Chashnik's diploma work on "Metod suprematizma" ("The Suprematist Method"), see *Ilya Grigorevich Chashnik,* pp. 20–24.

30. *Ilya Grigorevich Chashnik,* no. 57.

31. *Izvestiia Vitebskogo gubernskogo Soveta krest'ianskikh, rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov* 208 (1920).

32. Lissitzky's drawing for the Unovis seal was reproduced on the final page of his *Suprematicheskii skaz pro dva kvadrata* (Berlin: Skify, 1922). Chashnik's "Structural Plan of the Vit[ebsk] St[ate] Art[istic]-Technical Workshops" is one of the documents that bear the seal. See *Ilya Grigorevich Chashnik,* no. 57.

33. This information comes from documents in the State Vitebsk Regional Archive, f. 837, op. 1, ed. khr. 59, l. 63, 87, 111ob.

34. *Vestnik iskusstv* 3–4 (1922), pp. 27–28.

35. K. S. Malevich, "A Letter to the Dutch Artists," in K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915–1933,* ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 183–87. The fate of the materials sent to Germany is unknown.

36. K. Malevich, "Unovis (utv[erditeli] novykh form Iskusstva). Manifest suprematistov," May 2, 1924, Malevich Archive, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

37. K. Malevich, "Otkrytoe pis'mo gollandskim khudozhnikam Van-Gofu i Bekmanu," *Zhizn' iskusstva* 50 (1924), pp. 13–14.

1
Kazimir Malevich
Red Square (Painterly Realism: Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions), *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 53 × 53 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

2
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Painting: Eight Red Rectangles, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 57.5 x 48.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

3
Kazimir Malevich
Four Squares, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 49 x 49 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

4
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Painting, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 62 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

5
Kazimir Malevich
Untitled, *ca. 1916.*
Oil on canvas, 53 x 53 cm.
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

6
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism: Non-Objective Composition, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

7
Kazimir Malevich
Dynamic Suprematism (Supremus No. 57), *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 80.3 x 80.2 cm.
Tate Gallery. Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery, 1978.

8
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism, *1915–16.*
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

9
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism: Yellow and Black,
1916.
Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 70.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

10
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Composition, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 97.8 x 66.4 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

11
Kazimir Malevich
Black Square, *1929.*
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

12
Ivan Kliun
Ozonizer, *1914.*
Oil on canvas, 75 x 66 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

13
Ivan Kliun
Landscape Rushing By, *ca. 1914–15.*
Oil on wood, wire, metal, and porcelain,
74 x 58 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.
Gift George Costakis.

14
Ivan Kliun
Non-Objective, *1914–15.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 62 cm.
Astrakhan Kustodiev Picture Gallery.

15
Ivan Kliun
Landscape Rushing By, *1914.*
Oil on canvas, 55.5 x 61 cm.
Regional Art Museum, Kirov.

16
Ivan Kliun
Suprematist Composition, *1916.*
Oil on board, 35 x 23 cm.
Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen.

17
Ivan Kliun
Non-Objective Composition:
Suprematism, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 49 x 44 cm.
State Art Museum, Iaroslavl'.

18
Ivan Kliun
Suprematism, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 89 x 70.7 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

19
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

20
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

21
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

22
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

23
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

24
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

25
Ivan Kliun
Untitled, *1917.*
Oil on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

26
Vera Pestel'
Still Life, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 49 cm.
State Art Museum, Nizhnii Novgorod.

27
Vera Pestel'
Still Life, *1917–18.*
Oil on canvas, 78.5 x 70 cm.
State Museum of Fine Arts,
Nizhnii Tagil.

28
Samuil Adlivankin
Still Life: Non-Objective Composition, *1920.*
Oil on board, 52.5 x 41 cm.
State Art Museum, Iaroslavl'.

29
Ivan Puni
Window Washing, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 85 × 67 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

30
Ivan Puni
Suprematist Composition, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 86.5 x 56.5 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

31
Ivan Puni
Still Life: Relief with Hammer,
1914, restored 1920 by the artist.
Gouache on cardboard with hammer,
80.5 x 65.5 x 9 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

32
Ivan Puni
Baths, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, with artist-painted frame,
73 x 92 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

33
Ivan Puni
Relief with Saw, *1915.*
Wood, sheet iron, cardboard, glass, and gouache, 76 x 72 x 15 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

34
Ivan Puni
Suprematist Relief, *1915.*
Oil and gouache on wood, cardboard, and tin, 70 x 50 x 9 cm.
Private collection, Zurich.

35
Ivan Puni
Suprematist Relief Sculpture, *1915, reconstruction 1920s.*
Painted wood, metal, and cardboard mounted on wood panel, 50.8 x 39.3 x 7.6 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation (fractional gift), 1983.

36
Aleksei Morgunov
(Non-Objective) Composition,
1916–17.
Oil on canvas, 88 x 65 cm.
Regional Art Museum, Kaluga.

37
Aleksei Morgunov
Composition No. 1, *1916–17.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 62 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

38
Mikhail Men'kov
Tramway No. 6 (Cubism), *1914.*
Oil on canvas, 82 x 51.5 cm.
State Art Museum, Samara.

39
Nadezhda Udal'tsova
Kitchen, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 161 x 135 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

40
Nadezhda Udal'tsova
Painterly Construction, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 106 x 79 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

41
Mikhail Men'kov
Non-Objective, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 63 x 54 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

42
Mikhail Men'kov
Newspaper, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 71 cm.
State Art Museum, Ulianovsk.

43
Mikhail Men'kov
Symphony (Violin), *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 63 x 60.5 cm.
State Art Museum, Samara.

44
Ol'ga Rozanova
Room, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 100 x 77 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

45
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition
(Flight of an Airplane), *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 118 x 101 cm.
State Art Museum, Samara.

46
Ol'ga Rozanova
Cupboard with Dishes, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 62 x 38 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

47
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 78.5 x 58 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

48
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 102 x 94 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

49
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 66 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

50
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 90 x 74 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

51
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 62.5 x 40.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

52
Ol'ga Rozanova
Non-Objective Composition, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 64 cm.
State Art Museum, Ulianovsk.

53
Aleksandra Ekster
Movement of Planes, *1916–17.*
Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 76 cm.
State Museum of Fine Arts,
Nizhnii Tagil.

54
Aleksandra Ekster
Constructive Still Life, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 121 x 100 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

55
Aleksandra Ekster
Non-Objective, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 53 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

56
Aleksandra Ekster
Dynamic Composition, *1916.*
Gouache and pencil on paper,
66.7 x 50.5 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

57
Liubov' Popova
Objects, *1915.*
Oil on canvas, 61 x 44.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

58
Liubov' Popova
Jug on a Table (Plastic Painting),
1915.
Oil on cardboard mounted on panel,
59.1 x 43.3 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.
Gift George Costakis.

59
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic with Three Stripes, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 107 x 89 cm.
Collection E. V. Murina and D. V. Sarab'ianov, Moscow.

60
Liubov' Popova
Portrait, *1916.*
Oil on canvas, 53.5 x 35.5 cm.
Irkutsk Regional Art Museum.

61
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 53.5 x 40 cm.
State Surikov Art Museum, Krasnoiarsk.

62
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 44 x 35.5 cm.
Tobol'sk State Historical-Architectural Museum.

63
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 106 x 88 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

64
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 105 x 80 cm.
Regional Historical Museum, Sloboda.

65
Liubov' Popova
Orange Architectonic, *1918.*
Oil on cardboard, 59 x 39.5 cm.
State Art Museum, Iaroslavl'.

66
Liubov' Popova
Painterly Architectonic, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 105.5 x 89 cm.
Uzbekistan State Museum of Fine Arts, Tashkent.

67
Aleksandr Vesnin
Non-Objective Composition,
1917–18.
Oil on canvas, 53.5 x 43 cm.
State Architecture and Art Museum,
Rostov-Iaroslavskii.

68
Aleksandr Vesnin
Composition, *1917–18.*
Oil on canvas, 89.4 × 107 cm.
The Rothschild Art Foundation.

69
Vladimir Tatlin
Complex Corner-Relief, *1915,*
reconstruction no. 5 (edition of five) 1982
by Martyn Chalk.
Paint, iron, aluminum, and zinc,
78.8 x 152.4 x 76.2 cm.
Courtesy Annely Juda Fine Art, London.

70
Vladimir Tatlin
Counter-Relief, *1914–15.*
Iron, copper, wood, and rope, 71 x 118 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

71
Vladimir Baranov-Rossine
Non-Objective, *1918*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 51 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

72
Vladimir Baranov-Rossine
Composition, *1917–18.*
Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 51.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

73
Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia
Glass Relief, *ca. 1920.*
Mixed media on glass, steel frame,
24 x 17.5 x 5 cm.
Courtesy Rosa Esman Gallery,
New York.

74
Sergei Sen'kin
Suprematism, *1922.*
Oil on glass, 36.5 x 28 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

75
Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia
Glass Relief, *early 1920s.*
Oil on glass, 39 x 44.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

76
Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia
Composition: Compass, *ca. 1920.*
Sand, rope, aluminum paint, and oil on canvas, 69 x 53 cm.
State Art Museum, Samara.

77
Vladimir Lebedev
Relief, *1920.*
Wood, metal, and oil on board,
84.7 x 53.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

78
Vladimir Lebedev
Still Life with Saw, *1920.*
Oil, collage, and wood on plywood,
55.5 x 80 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

79
Vladimir Lebedev
Still Life with Boot, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 107 x 77 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

80
Vladimir Lebedev
Cubism, *1922.*
Oil on canvas, 108 x 62 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

81
David Zagoskin
Construction, *1921–22.*
Collage and oil on canvas mounted on board, 60 x 48.5 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

82
Władysław Strzemiński
Tools and Products of Industry,
1919–20.
Oil, cork, tinplate, metal, and plaster on canvas mounted on board, 44.5 x 33 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

83
Władysław Strzemiński
Meter, *ca. 1919.*
Cord, ceramic spools, oil, and foil on board, 81 x 58 cm.
State Art Museum, Samara.

84
Valentin Iustitskii
Painterly Easel Construction, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 75 x 89 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

85
Valentin Iustitskii
Painterly Easel Construction, *1921.*
Oil and wood on board, 46 x 49 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

86
Valentin Iustitskii
Painterly Construction with Wire,
early 1920s.
Oil and wire on canvas mounted on cardboard, 70 x 62 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

87
Vasilii Ermilov
Composition, *early 1920s.*
Knife, matchbox, wood, and sandpaper, 48.7 x 38.2 cm.
Collection L. Zhadova Family, Moscow.

88
Vasilii Ermilov
Composition No. 3, *1923.*
Construction of wood, brass, varnish, and paint, 82 x 43 x 7.5 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation (fractional gift), 1983.

89
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Cover for Aleksei Kruchenykh, Tsotsa,
1921.
Collage and pencil on paper,
17.8 x 13.8 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova
Archive, Moscow.

90
Ol'ga Rozanova and Aleksei Kruchenykh
Illustration for Universal War, *1916.*
Paper and fabric collage on paper,
21.6 x 17.8 cm.
Courtesy La Boetie Inc., New York.

91–96
Olga Rozanova and Aleksei Kruchenykh
Illustrations for Universal War, *1916.*
Paper and fabric collage on paper, all approximately 21.6 x 31.5 cm (dimensions vary).
Cabinet des estampes, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.

97
Varvara Stepanova
The Third Warrior, *illustration for Aleksei Kruchenykh,* Gly-gly, *1919.*
Collage and india ink on paper, 15.5 x 11 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

98
Varvara Stepanova
Cover for Rtny kholme, *from the series* Colored Graphics, *1918.*
Gouache on paper, 23.5 x 18.2 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

99
Varvara Stepanova
Sketch for Study the Old, but Create the New, *ca. 1919.*
Gouache on paper, 26.2 x 22.5 cm.
Collection Krystyna Gmurzynska-Bscher, Cologne.

100
Vladimir Kozlinskii
Poster, Long Live May 1st!, *1920–21.*
Gouache, watercolor, and whiting on cardboard, 100 x 66.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

101
Ivan Puni
Sketch for decoration of Liteinyi Avenue, Petrograd, 1918.
Watercolor, india ink, and whiting on paper, 62 x 47.4 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

102
Ivan Puni
Still Life with Letters: "Spectrum," "Flight," *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 124 x 127 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

103
Natan Al'tman
Design for decorations for Palace Square, Petrograd, for the first anniversary of the October Revolution: design for the passage between the Winter Palace and Exerzierhaus, 1918.
Collage, watercolor, and india ink on paper, 20.6 x 39.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

104
Natan Al'tman
Design for decorations for Palace Square, Petrograd, for the first anniversary of the October Revolution, 1918.
Oil on plywood, 52 x 72.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

105
Natan Al'tman
Design for decorations for Palace Square, Petrograd, for the first anniversary of the October Revolution: design for the General Staff Arch, 1918.
India ink, colored paper, and collage on cardboard, 22 x 28.5 cm.
State Museum of the History of the City of St. Petersburg.

106
Natan Al'tman
Design for decorations for Palace Square, Petrograd, for the first anniversary of the October Revolution, 1918.
India ink, pencil, collage, and colored paper on cardboard, 37 x 32.5 cm.
State Museum of the History of the City of St. Petersburg.

107
Natan Al'tman
Russia: Work, *1921.*
Charcoal on paper mounted on mahogany, 98.2 x 49.3 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

108
Natan Al'tman
Petrocommune, *1921.*
Oil and enamel on canvas, 104 x 88.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

109
Gustav Klutsis
Workers of the World, Unite!, *design for propaganda kiosk, screen, and loudspeaker platform, 1922.*
Watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper, 32.9 x 24 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

110
Gustav Klutsis
Project for a construction for the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution, 1922.
India ink and watercolor on paper, 68 x 49.2 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

111
Gustav Klutsis
Design for Screen/Radio-Orator No. 5, *1922.*
Colored india inks and pencil on paper, 26.6 x 14.7 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

112
Gustav Klutsis
Design for a screen, 1922.
Watercolor and india ink on paper, 24.6 x 16.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

113
Gustav Klutsis
Design for a stand, 1922.
India ink on paper, 17.5 x 26.7 cm.
State Art Museum of Latvia, Riga.

114
Aleksandr Vesnin
Proposal for a Monument to the Third Congress of the Communist International, *1921.*
Gouache on paper, 53 x 70.5 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley and the Katherine S. Dreier Bequests.

115
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Newspaper Stand, *1919.*
India ink, watercolor, pencil, and varnish on paper, 53.5 x 35.5 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

116
Aleksei Morgunov
Sketch for cover for Art International, *1919.*
Pencil and gouache on paper, 31.7 x 23.8 cm.
Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow.

117
Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia
Study for cover for Art International, *1919.*
Gouache, collage, and varnish on paper, 16 x 20.6 cm.
Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow.

118
Antonina Sofronova
Study for banner, Central Committee of the Textile Workers Union, *1922.*
India ink, gouache, and collage on paper, 28.6 x 21.1 cm.
Collection Krystyna Gmurzynska-Bscher, Cologne.

119
Antonina Sofronova
Study for banner, Food Workers Union, *1922.*
Collage on paper, 24.4 x 17 cm.
Collection Krystyna Gmurzynska-Bscher, Cologne.

120
Antonina Sofronova
Study for banner, Central Committee of the Textile Workers Union,
not dated.
Ink, gouache, and collage on paper,
30 x 20 cm.
Collection Krystyna Gmurzynska-Bscher,
Cologne.

121
Vasilii Ermilov
Exhibition project, Kanatka, *1928.*
Gouache and collage,
38.5 x 27.5 cm.
Museum Ludwig (Collection Ludwig, Cologne).

122
Vasilii Ermilov
Relief, *1924.*
Wood, metal, and oil on sandcloth,
77.5 × 77.5 cm.
Galerie Dr. István Schlégl, Zurich.

123
Kazimir Malevich
Cover for document folder for the Congress of Committees on Rural Poverty, 1918.
Lithograph, 42.2 x 64 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

124
Kazimir Malevich
Study for cover for document folder for the Congress of Committees on Rural Poverty, 1918.
Gouache, india ink, and watercolor on paper, 32.7 x 41.3 cm.
Pushkin House, St. Petersburg.

125
Kazimir Malevich
Study for cover for document folder for the Congress of Committees on Rural Poverty, 1918.
Gouache, india ink, and watercolor on paper, 28.9 x 29 cm.
Pushkin House, St. Petersburg.

126
Kazimir Malevich
Principle of Mural Painting, *1919.*
Gouache, watercolor, and ink on paper,
34 x 24.8 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

127
Vera Ermolaeva
Suprematist Construction, *sketch for festive decoration of Vitebsk, 1920. Graphite pencil, india ink, and watercolor on paper, 13.5 x 20.7 cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.*

128
Vera Ermolaeva
Suprematist Construction, *sketch for festive decoration of Vitebsk, 1920. Watercolor and india ink on paper, 20.5 x 11.4 cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.*

129
Vera Ermolaeva
Suprematist Construction, *sketch for festive decoration of Vitebsk, 1920. Watercolor and india ink on paper, 17.4 x 11.4 cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.*

130
Kazimir Malevich
Speaker's rostrum, 1920.
Watercolor and india ink on paper,
24.8 x 33.8 cm (recto and verso).
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

131
Ivan Kudriashev
Design for the First Soviet Theater, Orenburg, 1920.
Watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper mounted on board, 21.2 x 53.4 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

132
Ivan Kudriashev
Design for the First Soviet Theater, Orenburg, 1920.
Pencil and gouache on paper mounted on board, 13.3 x 39 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

133
Ivan Kudriashev
Automobile, *sketch for decoration for the first anniversary of the October Revolution, Moscow, 1918.*
Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper mounted on cardboard, 24.8 x 34.6 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

134
El Lissitzky
Untitled (Rosa Luxemburg), *1919–20.*
Gouache, pencil, and ink on paper,
9.7 x 9.7 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

135
El Lissitzky
Study for poster (variant), Proletarian Postal Workers, Remember the Year 1905, *1919–20.*
Gouache, india ink, and graphite pencil on paper, 18.2 x 22.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

136
El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism, *study for curtains for the meeting room of the Committee to Abolish Unemployment, 1919.*
Gouache, watercolor, graphite pencil, and india ink on paper, 49 x 62.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

137
Artist Unknown
Smolensk Rosta poster, Organize a Week of the Red Gift Here and Everywhere, *ca. 1920.*
Lithograph, 26.5 x 58.7 cm.
Collection Merrill C. Berman.

138
El Lissitzky
Poster, Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, *1920.*
Lithograph, 49 x 69 cm.
Lenin Library, Moscow.

139
Nikolai Kolli
The Red Wedge, *decoration for the first anniversary of the October Revolution, Moscow; perspective, 1918.*
Pencil, watercolor, and india ink on paper, 33 x 20.5 cm.
State Shchusev Museum, Moscow.

140
Il'ia Chashnik and El Lissitzky
Project for a tribune for a square in Smolensk, 1920.
Gouache, graphite pencil, and india ink on paper, 48.2 x 37.8 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

141
Il'ia Chashnik and El Lissitzky
Project for a tribune for a square in Smolensk, 1920.
Gouache, graphite pencil, and india ink on paper, 33 x 37.8 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

142
El Lissitzky
Lenin Tribune, *1924.*
Gouache, india ink, and photomontage on cardboard, 63.8 x 48 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

El Lissitzky

Tatlin at Work, *illustration for Il'ia Erenburg,* Six Tales with Easy Endings, *1921–22.*
Watercolor, pencil, and photomontage on paper, 29.2 x 22.8 cm.
Eric Estorick Family Collection.

144
Aleksandr Tseitlin
Ration Card, *1920.*
Gouache, india ink, and graphite pencil on paper, 17.5 x 18.8 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

145
Nikolai Suetin
Study for cover for Maksim Gor'kii, Vladimir Lenin, *1924.*
Watercolor and ink on paper, 25.1 x 19.3 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

146
Il'ia Chashnik
Platter, Lenin, *1924.*
Porcelain.
Central Lenin Museum, Moscow.

147
Nikolai Suetin
Project for Unovis Tribune, *1921.*
Gouache on paper, 35.8 x 26.7 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

148
Nikolai Suetin
Train Car with Unovis Symbol en Route to the Exhibition in Moscow, *1920.*
Watercolor, india ink, and gouache on paper, 27.5 x 43.8 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

149
Nikolai Suetin
Project: Decoration of a Vitebsk Tramcar, *1921.*
Colored ink on paper, 43 x 62.3 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

150
Nikolai Suetin
Project for a Signboard, *1920.*
Gouache on paper, 26.7 x 35.7 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

151
Nina Kogan
Study for set design for a Suprematist ballet, Vitebsk, 1920.
Gouache, watercolor, and india ink on paper, 22 x 31.5 cm.
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theater and Musical Arts.

152
Vera Ermolaeva
Set design for Aleksei Kruchenykh, Victory over the Sun, *Vitebsk, 1920.*
Woodcut with watercolor additions, 16.7 x 20 cm.
Private collection, Germany.

153
Kazimir Malevich
Study Suprematis 52 System A4, *1917.*
Charcoal and watercolor on cardboard, 69 x 49 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

154
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Drawing, *1917.*
Pencil and black chalk on paper, 32 x 24.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

155
Kazimir Malevich
Vertical Suprematist Construction, *1917.*
Pencil on paper, 46 x 33.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

156
Kazimir Malevich
Vertical Construction (Suprematist), *1917.*
Black chalk on paper, 41 x 29.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

157
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Painting, *1921–27?*
Oil on canvas, 84 × 69.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

158
Kazimir Malevich
Future Planits for Leningrad:
Pilot's House, *1924.*
Graphite pencil on paper, 30.5 x 45 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

159
Kazimir Malevich
Modern Buildings: Suprematism,
1923–24.
Pencil on paper, 36 x 53.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

160
Kazimir Malevich
Arkhitekton "Alpha", *1923–24.*
Plaster, 31.5 x 80.5 x 34 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

161
Kazimir Malevich
Suprematist Painting, *1921–27?*
Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 51 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

162
Kazimir Malevich
Sketch for Fabric Ornament No. 12, *1919.*
Watercolor and india ink on paper, 36.2 x 27 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

163
Kazimir Malevich
Fabric Ornament No. 15 for Batiste and Cotton, *1919.*
Graphite pencil on paper, 35.6 x 27 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

164
Kazimir Malevich
Motifs for a Suprematist Fabric, *1919.*
Watercolor on paper, 36.2 x 27 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

165
Kazimir Malevich
Fabric Ornament No. 10 for Cotton, *1919.*
Watercolor on paper, 35.8 x 27.1 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

166
Nikolai Suetin
Textile design, 1924.
Watercolor on paper, 18.5 x 28.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

167
Nikolai Suetin
Textile design, 1921–22.
Watercolor and india ink on paper,
19.6 x 28.1 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

168
Nikolai Suetin
Composition with Yellow Stripe,
early 1920s.
Oil on plywood, 39.8 x 39.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

169
Nikolai Suetin
Black Square, *early 1920s.*
Oil on plywood, 39.5 x 39.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

170
Il'ia Chashnik
Design for a cigarette case; three variations, 1927–28.
India ink and silver paint on paper, 32.8 x 47.6 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

171
Il'ia Chashnik
Design for applied art, 1926–27.
Colored ink on paper, 47.9 x 33.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

172
Il'ia Chashnik
Design for applied art, 1927–28.
Colored ink on paper, 47.3 x 32.9 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

173
Il'ia Chashnik
Suprematism, *1922–23.*
Oil on canvas, 85 x 57 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.
Gift George Costakis.

174
Il'ia Chashnik
Vertical Axes in Motion, *1922–23.*
India ink and watercolor on paper,
29 x 21.6 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

175
Il'ia Chashnik
Red Square (Unovis), *1921.*
Watercolor and india ink on paper,
21.4 x 19.4 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

176
Il'ia Chashnik
Color Lines in Vertical Motion, *1923–25.*
Watercolor on paper, 35.5 x 25.5 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

177
Il'ia Chashnik
Circles in a Suprematist Cross, *1926.*
Watercolor, india ink, and pencil on paper, 29.8 x 20.9 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

178
Il'ia Chashnik
The Seventh Dimension: Suprematist Stripe Relief, *1925.*
Painted wood, paper, cardboard, and glass, 26 x 22.5 x 1.4 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

179
Il'ia Chashnik
Study for advertising poster, Soviet Screen No. 4, *1920s.*
Black and red india ink on paper, 98 x 66 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

180
Il'ia Chashnik
Architectonic Relief, *1926.*
Plaster mounted on board,
16.4 x 18.7 x 2.6 cm.
The Rothschild Art Foundation.

181
Il'ia Chashnik
Suprematist Cross Architecton, *1926.*
Pencil on paper, 22 x 17.5 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

182
Il'ia Chashnik
Cosmos—Red Circle on Black Surface, *1925.*
India ink and watercolor on paper, 37.2 x 32.8 cm.
Collection Thomas P. Whitney.

183
Il'ia Chashnik
Supremolet (Suprematist Planit),
1927–28.
India ink on paper, 62.4 x 84.6 cm.
Collection Lew Nussberg, United States.

184
Il'ia Chashnik
Design for Supremolet, *1927.*
Pencil and india ink on paper,
50.9 × 71.9 cm, 62.8 × 84.8 cm matted.
Collection Lew Nussberg, United States.

185
Kazimir Malevich
Teapot, 1923, reproduction early 1970s.
Porcelain, 16.5 cm high.
State Historical Museum, Moscow.

186
Kazimir Malevich
Model for a cup, 1923, reproductions 1984
by Iurii Kraivanov.
Porcelain, Dmitrov Porcelain Factory
(reproduction), 6.5 cm high,
9 cm diameter.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

187
Kazimir Malevich
Plate with Suprematist design, 1923.
Porcelain, 24.8 cm diameter.
Gilman Paper Company Collection.

188.1
Il'ia Chashnik
Soup bowl, Suprematism, *1920s.*
Overglaze and stenciling on porcelain, State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd, 25 cm diameter.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

188.2
Nikolai Suetin
Plate, 1923.
Overglaze and stenciling on porcelain, Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Leningrad, 23 cm diameter.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

190
Nikolai Suetin
Cup and saucer, Suprematism, *1923.*
Overglaze on porcelain, State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd, cup 6.5 cm high, 7 cm diameter, saucer 14.5 cm diameter.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

189
Nikolai Suetin (design) and Varvara Rukavishnikova (execution)
Cup and saucer, 1923.
Overglaze on porcelain, State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd, cup 7.3 cm high, saucer 15.9 cm diameter.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

191
Nikolai Suetin and Il'ia Chashnik
Inkstand, 1923–25.
Overglaze on porcelain, State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd, 6.5 cm high, 13 x 16 cm base.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

192
Irina Rozhdestvenskaia
Tea service with Suprematist design, 1930–31.
Stenciling on porcelain, creamer 8.8 cm high, sugar bowl 8.3 cm high, cup 5.6 cm high, saucer 15.1 cm diameter, cup 5.6 cm high, saucer 15.1 cm diameter.
State Historical Museum, Moscow.

193
Nikolai Suetin
Tea service with Suprematist design, 1930.
Overglaze on porcelain, sugar bowl 10.2 x 13.2 x 10.6 cm, cup 5.5 x 11.3 x 9.7 cm, saucer 15 cm diameter, teapot 13.5 x 10.3 x 8.3 cm, creamer 13.5 x 10.3 x 8.3 cm, cup 5.5 x 11.3 x 9.7 cm, saucer 15 cm diameter.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

194
Nikolai Suetin
Plate with Suprematist design, 1930.
Painting on porcelain, 22.4 cm diameter.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

195
Nikolai Suetin
Tea service with black-and-green Suprematist design, 1930.
Porcelain, teapot 15.4 x 21.5 x 12 cm, cup 7.5 x 9.5 x 7.4 cm, saucer 14.6 cm diameter, sugar bowl 11.7 x 15.3 x 10.5 cm, tray 35 cm diameter, creamer 11.5 x 13.8 x 9.3 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

196
Nikolai Suetin
Vase, 1933.
Porcelain, Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Leningrad, 23.5 cm high, 7.5 x 6.2 cm base.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

197.1
Nikolai Suetin
Vase, 1927–early 1930s.
Porcelain, Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Leningrad, 25.5 cm high, 9.5 x 9.5 cm base.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

197.2
Nikolai Suetin
Vase, early 1930s.
Porcelain, Lomonosov Porcelain Factory, Leningrad, 24.5 cm high, 12 x 12 cm base.
Kuskovo State Porcelain Museum.

198
Lev Iudin
Composition, *1921.*
Graphite pencil on paper, 9.8 x 7.2 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

199
Lev Iudin
Composition, *1920–21.*
Ink, black and graphite pencil, and gouache on paper, 21.1 x 12.8 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

200
Lev Iudin
Composition (Head), *1921.*
Graphite pencil on paper, 18.5 x 11 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

201
Lev Iudin
Cubism, *1920–21.*
Oil on canvas, 42 x 28 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

202
Lev Tsiperson
Cubism, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 54 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

203
Ivan Gavris
Violin (Cubism), *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 107 x 70 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

204
Attributed to El Lissitzky
Composition, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 58 cm.
State Museum of Ukrainian Art, Kiev.

205
El Lissitzky
Sketch for Proun 1E: Town, *1919–20.*
Graphite and gouache on paper,
18.1 x 22.8 cm.
Eric Estorick Family Collection.

206
El Lissitzky
Sketch for Proun 1A: Bridge 1,
1919–20.
Gouache on paper, 8.5 x 15 cm.
Eric Estorick Family Collection.

207
El Lissitzky
Town, *1919–20.*
Oil and sand on plywood, 47 x 63.5 cm.
State Mustafaev Azerbaijan Museum of Art, Baku.

208
El Lissitzky
Construction Floating in Space,
1920.
Lithograph with graphite annotations,
49.8 x 51.1 cm.
Collection Maslach Family.

209
El Lissitzky
Proun P23, No. 6, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 52 x 77 cm.
Eric Estorick Family Collection.

210
El Lissitzky
System of the Theater, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

211
El Lissitzky
Study for cover for Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, and graphite pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

212
El Lissitzky
The New One, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, silver paint, and graphite pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

213
El Lissitzky
Troublemaker, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun,". *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, silver paint, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

214
El Lissitzky
Cowards, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

215
El Lissitzky
Sportsmen, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
India ink, gouache, varnish, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

216
El Lissitzky
Reader, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, silver paint, varnish, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

217
El Lissitzky
Old-Timer, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, varnish, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

218
El Lissitzky
Futurist Strong Man, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
Gouache, india ink, and graphite and black pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

219
El Lissitzky
Gravediggers, *from* Figures from A. Kruchenykh's Opera "Victory over the Sun," *1920–21.*
India ink, gouache, varnish, silver paint, and graphite pencil on paper, 49.4 x 37.9 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

220
El Lissitzky
Proun 93 (Spiral), *ca. 1923.*
Pencil, india ink, ink, gouache, and colored pencil on paper, 49.9 × 49.7 cm.
Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg, Halle.

221
El Lissitzky
Study for Proun G7, *ca. 1922.*
Collage, watercolor, crayon, and graphite on cardboard, 47.9 x 39 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

222
Lazar' Khidekel'
Yellow Cross, *1923.*
Oil on canvas, 53 x 62 cm.
Collection M. L. Khidekel',
St. Petersburg.

223
Sergei Sen'kin
Non-Objective Composition, *1920.*
Oil on cardboard, 100 x 81 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

224
El Lissitzky
Proun H333, *1923.*
Gouache and collage with multicolored paper and airbrush on paper, 44.5 × 44 cm.
Private collection, Munich.

225
Khaia (Anna) Kagan
Composition, *1927–28.*
Oil on canvas, 100 × 55 cm.
Collection V. A. Dudakov and M. K. Kashuro, Moscow.

226
Khaia (Anna) Kagan
Decorative tray, ca. 1925.
Overglaze on faience, 30 cm diameter, excluding handles.
Collection V. A. Dudakov and M. K. Kashuro, Moscow.

227
Khaia (Anna) Kagan
Suprematism (Composition), *1928.*
Oil on canvas, 88 x 66 cm.
Museum Ludwig (Collection Ludwig, Cologne).

228
Vasilii Kandinskii
Red Spot II, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 131 x 181 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich.

229
Vasilii Kandinskii
White Cross, *January–June 1922.*
Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 110.6 cm.
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

230
Vasilii Kandinskii
Composition: Gray Oval, *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 105 x 133.5 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg.

231
Vasilii Kandinskii
Composition No. 224 (On White I),
1920.
Oil on canvas, 95 x 138 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

232
Vasilii Kandinskii
White Oval, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 80 x 93 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

233
Vasilii Kandinskii
Blue Segment, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 120.6 x 140.1 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York.

234
Vasilii Kandinskii
White Center, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 118.7 x 136.5 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York. Hilla Rebay Collection.

235
Vasilii Kandinskii
Circles on Black, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 136.5 x 120 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York.

236
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Composition No. 64/84 (Abstraction of Color: Elimination of the Density of Color), *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 74.5 x 74.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

237
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Black on Black, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 84.5 x 67 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

238
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Points: Composition No. 119, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 47 × 37.5 cm.
Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne.

239
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Composition No. 66/86 (Density and Weight), *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 122.3 x 73 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

240
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Non-Objective Painting: Black on Black, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 81.9 x 79.4 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist, through Jay Leyda, 1936.

241
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Non-Objective Painting (Lines), *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 84.5 x 71.1 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist, through Jay Leyda, 1936.

242
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Non-Objective Composition, *1918.*
Oil on board, 53 x 21 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

243
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Dissipation of a Plane, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 79 × 70.5 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

244
Vladimir Stenberg
Composition, *1920.*
Colored pencil on paper, 21 x 13.9 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

245
Vladimir Stenberg
Construction, *1920.*
Ink on paper, 25.4 x 19.3 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

246
Konstantin Medunetskii
Composition, *1920.*
Pencil and orange crayon on paper, 26.8 x 23.4 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

247
Konstantin Medunetskii
Construction, *1920.*
Brown ink on paper, 27 x 19.1 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

249
Karl Ioganson
Constituction, *1921.*
Colored pencil and pencil on paper,
31.8 x 24.3 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

248
Karl Ioganson
Composition, *1921.*
Colored pencil, ink, and pencil on paper,
24.1 x 32.3 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

250
Boris Korolev
Construction, *1921.*
Pencil on paper, 35.4 x 25.9 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

251
Boris Korolev
Composition, *1921.*
Pencil and gouache on paper,
16.1 x 10.6 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

252
Aleksei Babichev
Composition, *1921.*
Pencil on paper, 49.5 x 34.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

253
Aleksei Babichev
Construction, *1921.*
Ink, gouache, and pencil on paper,
52.1 x 28.2 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

254
Nadezhda Udal'tsova
Red Nude, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm.
State Architecture and Art Museum,
Rostov-Iaroslavskii.

255
Aleksandr Drevin
Suprematism, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 107.2 x 86.8 cm.
Yale University Art Gallery.
Gift Société Anonyme.

256
Aleksandr Drevin
Painterly Composition, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 124 x 95 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

257
Liubov' Popova
First Half of the Spectrum, *from her response to Vasilii Kandinskii's Inkhuk Questionnaire on color, 1920.*
Gouache on paper, 21 x 27 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

258
Liubov' Popova
First Half of the Spectrum, *from her response to Vasilii Kandinskii's Inkhuk Questionnaire on color, 1920.*
Gouache on paper, 19.2 x 27.6 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

259
Liubov' Popova
First Half of the Spectrum, *from her response to Vasilii Kandinskii's Inkhuk Questionnaire on color, 1921.*
Gouache on paper, 17.5 x 41.3 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

260
Liubov' Popova
First Half of the Spectrum, *from her response to Vasilii Kandinskii's Inkhuk Questionnaire on color, 1920.*
Gouache on paper, 17.7 x 42.2 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

Popova
Untitled, *1920.*
Gouache and paper collage on paper,
30 x 23.2 cm.
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York.

262
Liubov' Popova
Composition, *1920.*
Gouache and paper collage on paper,
44.4 x 30 cm.
Private collection.

263
Liubov' Popova
Composition, *1921.*
Gouache on paper, 34.3 x 27.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

264
Aleksandr Vesnin
Cover for exhibition catalogue,
5 x 5 = 25, 1921.
Pencil, oil, and whiting on cardboard,
22 x 12.6 cm.
State Shchusev Museum, Moscow.

265
Liubov' Popova
Space-Force Construction, *1921.*
Oil on plywood, 69 x 52 cm.
Primor'e Regional Picture Gallery,
Vladivostok.

266.1
Liubov' Popova
Constructivist Composition, *1921*
Oil on board, 93 x 61.5 cm.
Private collection, England.

266.2
Aleksandr Vesnin
Abstract Composition, *1921.*
Oil on cardboard, 95.5 x 63 cm.
State Shchusev Museum, Moscow.

267
Liubov' Popova
Space-Force Construction, *1920–21.*
Oil with marble dust on board,
112.6 x 112.7 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

268
Varvara Stepanova
Construction, *ca. 1921.*
Collage on paper, 35.9 x 22.9 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

269
Liubov' Popova
Study for exhibition catalogue,
5 x 5 = 25, 1921.
Colored pencil and collage on paper,
23.1 x 15.6 cm.
State Shchusev Museum, Moscow.

270
Varvara Stepanova
Study for poster for the second part of the 5 x 5 = 25 exhibition, 1921.
Collage and gouache on paper,
28 x 25 cm.
Collection Krystyna Gmurzynska-Bscher, Cologne.

271
Varvara Stepanova
Figure, *1921.*
Oil on plywood, 125 x 71.5 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

272
Varvara Stepanova
Five Figures on a White Background,
1920.
Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 97.5 cm.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

273
Aleksandra Ekster
Composition, *ca. 1921.*
Gouache on paper, 42 x 39 cm.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Edmund Hayes and Charles W. Goodyear Funds, 1974.

274
Aleksandra Ekster
Construction, *1922–23.*
Oil on canvas, 89.8 x 89.2 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation (fractional gift), 1983.

275
Aleksandra Ekster
Color Construction, *1922.*
Oil on canvas, 62 x 66 cm.
Dagestan Museum of the Arts,
Makhachkala.

276
Aleksandra Ekster
Construction of Color Planes, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 89 x 89 cm.
State Radishchev Art Museum, Saratov.

277
Aleksandra Ekster
Construction of Lines, *1923.*
Gouache and watercolor on paper, 56 x 56 cm.
Private collection.
Courtesy Rachel Adler Gallery.

278
Konstantin Medunetskii
Color Construction, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 87.6 x 61.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

279
Konstantin Medunetskii
Color Construction No. 9, *1920–21.*
Oil on board, 60.5 x 37.5 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

280
Konstantin Medunetskii
Color Construction No. 7, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 62 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

281.1
Konstantin Medunetskii
Spatial Construction, *1921,*
reconstruction 1992 by Michael Duchting.
Steel and wood, 61 x 40 x 13 cm.
Collection Dieter Zaha, Kassel.

281.2
Konstantin Medunetskii
Spatial Construction, *1921,*
reconstruction 1992 by Michael Duchting.
Steel and wood, 84 x 44 x 39 cm.
Collection Dieter Zaha, Kassel.

282
Konstantin Medunetskii
Spatial Construction, *1919–20.*
Tin, brass, steel, and painted iron on painted metal base, 46 cm high.
Yale University Art Gallery.
Gift Société Anonyme.

283
Vladimir Stenberg
Color Construction No. 12,
1920–21.
Mixed media on canvas, 52 x 45 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

284
Vladimir Stenberg
Color Construction No. 13, *1919–20.*
Mixed media on canvas, 45 x 52 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

285
Vladimir Stenberg
Color Construction No. 10,
1920–21.
Mixed media on canvas, 52 x 45 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

286
Vladimir Stenberg
Color Construction No. 4, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 75 × 38.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

287
Georgii Stenberg
Non-Objective Composition, *1920.*
Watercolor, india ink, and whiting on paper, 30.4 x 18.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

288
Georgii Stenberg
Color Construction, *1919.*
Oil and metallic paint on cardboard, 27 x 17 cm.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund, 1976.

289
Georgii Stenberg
Color Construction of Materials
No. 7, *1920.*
Metal, sand, bluing, glass, and oil on board, 46 x 26 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

290
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Spatial Construction No. 5, *1918, reconstruction.*
Painted aluminum, 47.5 x 37.5 x 21 cm.
Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen.

291
Vladimir Stenberg
Spatial Construction KPS 29, *1921, reconstruction 1977.*
Brass tubes, steel rods, hardwood painted with black lacquer, and steel wires, 275 x 60 x 52 cm, including base.
Collection Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg, Dokumentation konstruktive Kunst.

292
Vladimir Stenberg
Spatial Construction KPS 42 N IV,
1921, reconstruction 1973.
Aluminum, 264 x 70 x 130 cm.
Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne.

293
Georgii Stenberg
Spatial Construction KPS 51 N XI,
1921, reconstruction 1973.
Browned and chromium-plated iron, glass, and wood, 220 x 100 x 61 cm.
Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne.

294
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Oval Hanging Spatial Construction No. 12, *1921, reconstruction by Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, 1970. Varnished plywood, 54 x 80 x 50 cm. A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.*

295
Katarzyna Kobro
Suprematist Construction (Suspended), *1921. Steel, 43 x 28 cm. Private collection.*

296
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Hanging Spatial Construction, *1921, reconstruction 1982. Aluminum, 59 x 58 x 59 cm. Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne.*

297
Katarzyna Kobro
Abstract Sculpture 1, *1924.*
Glass, metal, and wood,
72 x 17.5 x 15.5 cm.
Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

298
Antoine Pevsner
Composition, *1917–18.*
Oil on canvas, 80 x 52 cm.
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
Gift Mrs. Pevsner, 1964.

299
Antoine Pevsner
Still Life: Absinthe, *1922–23.*
Oil on canvas, 75.5 x 49 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

300
Naum Gabo
Constructed Head No. 2, *1916.*
Steel, 45 x 40.5 x 40.5 cm.
Collection Nina Williams, England.

301
Naum Gabo
Maquette for Constructed Torso, *1917–18, reassembled 1985.*
Cardboard, 117 cm high.
Berlinische Galerie, Museum für moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur, Berlin.

302
Antoine Pevsner
Gray Tone, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 62 x 49 cm.
Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne.

303
Naum Gabo
Design for a Construction, *1918.*
Pencil on paper, 40.5 x 27.3 cm.
Collection Nina Williams, England.

304
Naum Gabo
Study for an Outdoor Construction, *1917.*
Pencil on paper, 23 x 23.5 cm.
Galerie de France, Paris.

305
Naum Gabo
Study for a Tower, *1917.*
Pencil on paper, 40.3 x 28.5 cm.
Berlinische Galerie, Museum für moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur, Berlin.

306
Naum Gabo
Study for a Square in Moscow, *1919.*
Pencil on paper, 42 x 35 cm.
Collection Thomas P. Whitney.

307
Naum Gabo
Column, *ca. 1923, reconstruction 1937 by the artist.*
Perspex, wood, metal, and glass, 105.3 x 73.6 x 73.6 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

308
Gustav Klutsis
Study for poster, Electrification of the Entire Country, *1920.*
Ink, gouache, and collage on paper, 46.3 x 27.5 cm.
Collection Merrill C. Berman.

309
Gustav Klutsis
Dynamic City, *1919.*
Gouache, foil, photomontage, collage, and pencil on paper, 37.5 x 25.8 cm.
State Art Museum of Latvia, Riga.

310
Gustav Klutsis
Dynamic City, *1919.*
Oil with sand and concrete on board,
87 x 64.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

311
Gustav Klutsis
Construction, *1921.*
India ink, gouache, pencil, and sealing wax on paper, 66.6 x 41.4 cm.
State Art Museum of Latvia, Riga.

312
Gustav Klutsis
Construction, *1921.*
Pencil and ink on paper, 52.1 x 43.5 cm.
State Art Museum of Latvia, Riga.

313
Gustav Klutsis
Construction, *1921.*
Gouache, ink, silverbronze, and sealing wax on paper, 81.7 x 66.5 cm.
State Art Museum of Latvia, Riga.

314
Elena Afanas'eva
Color and Space , *1924–25.*
Oil on canvas, 29.2 x 39 cm.
Barry Friedman Ltd., New York.

315
Elena Afanas'eva
Color Composition, *1924–25.*
Oil on canvas, 33 x 33.3 cm.
Barry Friedman Ltd., New York.

316
Gustav Klutsis
Chromatic Table, *from* Color Discipline Textbook for Vkhutemas Students, *1924–30.*
Collage and india ink on paper, 30.8 x 20.8 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

317
Mikhail Matiushin
Table from Guide to Color: Rules of the Fluctuations of Color Combinations, *1932.*
Gouache on cardboard, 12.5 x 143 cm.
Collection A. V. Povelikhina, St. Petersburg.

318
Mikhail Matiushin
Table from Guide to Color: Rules of the Fluctuations of Color Combinations, *1932.*
Gouache on cardboard, 12.5 x 143.5 cm.
Collection A. V. Povelikhina, St. Petersburg.

A Brief History of Obmokhu

Aleksandra Shatskikh

Studies of early Soviet art invariably devote a great deal of attention to the Society of Young Artists, or Obmokhu. The activity of its members proved an enabling factor in the emergence of Constructivism in the five years following the October Revolution, and the careers of many prominent artists traced their beginnings to Obmokhu. Yet, as scholars have noted, the history of Obmokhu has not been entirely clear; numerous questions have remained unanswered.

While researching the history of the First Free State Art Workshops, I have brought to light a number of circumstances and factual details which make it possible to strip away persistent inaccuracies in and distortions of the history of Obmokhu and to establish a more precise chronology and authentic account of the group's activity.

Both Soviet and Western scholars have relied above all on V. M. Lobanov's *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki za poslednie 25 let* (*Artists' Groups over the Last Twenty-Five Years*), published by AKhR (the Association of Artists of the Revolution) in 1930, for their information on Obmokhu. For Soviet art historians, Lobanov's slender volume was for many decades nearly the only comprehensive work treating the multiple facets of artistic life in the immediate postrevolutionary years. Because Lobanov was a participant in and witness to the events he described, subsequent generations attributed to his book all the merits of a primary source; Lobanov's information, because it was firsthand, seemed authoritative and trustworthy. As a result, no critical judgment was brought to bear on the book: Lobanov's facts were neither doubted nor checked, and his mistakes and inaccuracies were reproduced in the work of one writer after another—as they are even today. Yet one needn't look far to determine that the book does, indeed, contain errors of fact. Thus, for example, Lobanov insists—and more than once—that the Twenty-First State Exhibition, which opened in March 1921, was the last exhibition organized by Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment).[1] The truth, however, is that both the Twenty-Second State Exhibition (on which more below) and the Twenty-Third (the hardly obscure exhibition of Marc Chagall's murals for the State Jewish Kamernyi Theater in Moscow) were also organized by Izo Narkompros.[2]

Lobanov was the official historian of and apologist for AKhR, and his book is a product of its times: it is undisguisedly tendentious, a polemic bent on repudiation of Izo Narkompros. It was Lobanov's aim to demonstrate, on the one hand, the bankruptcy of Izo Narkompros's pluralistic policy and, on the other, the weakness and unviability of various "Formalist" tendencies and movements in postrevolutionary art. Singling out Obmokhu—whose chief significance lay, according to Lobanov, "not in the formulation or realization of this or that artistic slogan so much as in its being a pioneer in the creation of new artists' groupings based, unlike the eclectic Narkompros exhibitions, on a selection of artists united by a shared principle"[3]—and juxtaposing it to other artists' associations served Lobanov's strategy. AKhR aspired to power, and its ideologues saw a concentrated "strike force" of artists as the chief means of attaining it. Lobanov chose Obmokhu, so it appears, in order to demonstrate the efficacy of such a ploy. The "postscripts," inaccuracies, and deliberate suppression of certain facts of Obmokhu's history in Lobanov's book were dictated by this biased purpose.

In the summer of 1919, at the moment of highest tension in the Civil War, a general mobilization into the Red Army was announced, and many students of the former Stroganov School in Moscow, who had just finished their first year at the new First Free State Art Workshops, were sent to the front. One of those called up was Georgii Shchetinin, who had been among the most active reformers of artistic education "from below"; he

fig. 1
The "workshop without a supervisor," First State Free Art Workshops, Moscow, 1920. From left, seated: Zharova, Kozlova, and Svetlov; standing: Prusakov, unidentified, Menshutin, Zhukov, Aleksandrov, I. Mistriuk, and Naumov.

had done immense organizational work at the school over a number of years.[4] At his departure, Shchetinin made a close friend pledge both to carry on his work at the First Free State Art Workshops and to write him regularly and in detail about everything that happened there. Shchetinin's friend was Georgii Echeistov, a student of Vladimir Favorskii's and later a well-known graphic artist, and he kept his promise to Shchetinin. Both young men were acutely aware that history was being made around them and through them, and they carefully preserved their notes, letters, and other papers. The 1919–21 correspondence between Echeistov and Shchetinin is invaluable, for it records events as they occurred and is marred by none of the distortions that afflict later reminiscences and memoirs.[5]

In a brief letter of September 15, 1919, Echeistov told Shchetinin, among other things: "A group 'without a supervisor' has formed out of Grigor'ev's workshop, and I'm in it. I'll work under G. Iakulov in a special workshop and learn about theater, and one can earn money with him." These lines require some elucidation: a reform introduced in the first months of the Soviet state had led to the creation of the experimental Svomas (Free Workshops), where a master-and-apprentice system, modeled on the utopian ideal of the Renaissance studio, was the basis of art education. The new professional schools in both Moscow and Petrograd were composed of individual workshops, in which classes were conducted by artists elected supervisors by the students. At the First Free State Art Workshops, created from the former Stroganov School, there were not only individual but special workshops, in which students of different classes could study; special workshops in stage and costume design were run by

fig. 2
Lentulov's workshop, First State Free Art Workshops, Moscow, 1920.
Standing, third from right, Komardenkov; center, Lentulov.

Aristarkh Lentulov, Fedor Fedorovskii, and Georgii Iakulov. Iakulov was highly regarded by the students, participated in many of their undertakings, and helped them to endure the hardships of those years. He put his workshop on an "economic" footing from its very first months: he paid wages for work, obtained commissions for his students, and so on.[6] A portion of the students at the First Free State Art Workshops, in particular those who at the time of the Revolution had been in the Stroganov School's senior classes, were entitled to study exclusively in the special workshops.[7]

According to a report written by Shchetinin, there were eighteen workshops in all at the First Free State Art Workshops (twelve in painting, three in sculpture, and three in architecture).[8] One of the painting workshops was headed by Boris Grigor'ev, who lived in Petrograd and made infrequent visits to Moscow (at the end of 1919, he and his family would leave Russia for good). At the beginning of the 1919–20 academic year, the students in Grigor'ev's workshop chose, for a number of reasons, to reject their teacher elected the year before and to form a group "without a supervisor," as was permitted under the provisional bylaws of the Free Workshops. In a draft autobiography, Echeistov later indicated: "At about this time my artistic credo begin to take shape under the influence of the Futurists (artists, painters, and poets). I didn't care for any of the Russian artists, I liked the French in Shchukin's gallery. So I joined up with Prusakov and Naumov, who had organized a workshop without a supervisor."

Aleksandr Naumov, a brilliantly gifted artist who died at an early age, and Nikolai Prusakov, who would become well known as a poster artist and designer, were among the school's most talented students, and had already received their basic professional training at the old Stroganov School. In 1919–20, Echeistov, Naumov, and Prusakov were joined in the "workshop without a supervisor" by Grigorii Aleksandrov, S. I. Egorov, Nikolai Glushkov, Klavdiia Kozlova, Nikolai Menshutin, Sergei Svetlov, Lidiia Zharova (who married Naumov in 1920), and Petr Zhukov (fig. no. 1). According to the testimony of Zharova-Naumova, Sergei Kostin and Mikhail Sapegin, among others, were frequent visitors to the workshop, where life drawing was well taught.[9] Like Echeistov, certain of the students in the "workshop without a supervisor"—Aleksandrov, Menshutin, Sapegin, Svetlov, and Zhukov—continued to study in Iakulov's stage-design workshop.

The "workshop without a supervisor" remained in existence until the spring of 1920. A number of the students, particularly those who were already clear about where their artistic futures lay and those who were employed filling commissions, considered their educations at an end and were given certificates attesting to their having completed a course of higher education. In the Free Workshops, and initially at Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops), there were no strict prerequisites for graduation—a student presented his work to the Council of Professors, and if the Council judged the work to be mature, the young artist was given a certificate of completion. (It is for this reason that the graduation dates of the Free Workshops' and Vkhutemas's first graduates vary so widely.[10])

Over three days at the end of September 1919, Echeistov wrote a long letter (dated September 27–29) to Shchetinin, giving him the latest news:

What can I write "about art in Moscow"? It's tight. I'm counting on our workshops. As soon as I'm free {of his duties as secretary of the students' executive committee}, what a journal I'll start (unless I get lazy). Still, my being secretary pays off—I've been in the thick of things. A society of young artists, Obmolkhud, is being organized. I wrote the bylaws. (I emended them today, they need reworking and

fig. 3
Poster for Obmokhu exhibition, Moscow, May 2-16, 1920. Collection N. D. Lobanov-Rostovsky.

polishing.) Sapegin, Naumov, Prusakov, Komardenkov, Kostin, and I—and, I can't remember, Stepanov and Denisovskii, too, I think—are the directors. We're organizing it to combat the artists in authority who exploit young talents (the Kostin–Grigor'ev incident and others)."

Echeistov's letter unambiguously attests that Obmolkhud, as Obmokhu was first called, began forming only in the autumn of 1919; the group could not, therefore, have held an exhibition in the spring of 1919, as Lobanov asserts. It should be noted that the young artists did not treat the organization of their society lightly but erected it on a carefully laid foundation; the group had bylaws,[12] elected directors (Nikolai Denisovskii, endowed with exceptional organizational skills, later became its president), and a seal.

All of the artists listed by Echeistov—with the exception of Sapegin, Aleksei Stepanov, and Echeistov himself—have been recognized by scholars as members of Obmokhu. The participation of both Sapegin—a student of Iakulov's and a future stage designer—and Stepanov—also a student of Iakulov's, who later worked at the State Jewish Kamernyi Theater—in the early stages of the organization of Obmokhu appears quite probable. As for Echeistov, a fire in the "workshop without a supervisor" in late 1919–early 1920 led him into a deep depression, and he stopped working. "The fire in our workshop," Echeistov wrote in his autobiography, "destroyed an enormous number of drawings completed over this time. It was a tremendous loss; I did almost nothing for the whole next year."[13]

With what exhibition of 1919 has the first Obmokhu exhibition been confused? At the end of the 1918–19 academic year at the First Free State Art Workshops, the new art school's first full year of operation, a showcase exhibition was held at the school's quarters at 11 Rozhdestvenka. At the exhibition, on view in June 1919, the works of students and teachers were displayed together, by workshop (the very organizing principle, that is, that Lobanov claims was Obmokhu's innovation). A large informative notice in the newspaper *Iskusstvo* (*Art*) is unambiguous on this point:

EXHIBITION OF WORKS OF THE STATE FREE ART WORKSHOPS

The first exhibition of more than one thousand works from the state industrial workshops closed on July 1st. The exhibition was divided up according to individual and decorative-and-production workshops. The workshops of the artists F. Fedorovskii, G. Iakulov, A. Lentulov, P. Konchalovskii, A. Morgunov, V. Tatlin, A. Grishchenko, B. Grigor'ev, Ul'ianov, the sculptor Vatagin, and others were represented.[14]

The author of the notice—in all likelihood Shchetinin, who published an extensive report on the First Free State Art Workshops' first year in the next issue of *Art*—emphasizes that "the exhibition itself was clearly organized as a decorative and production one. Still, the principle of revolutionizing everyday life is manifestly shared by the workshops of the artists G. B. Iakulov (very successful signboards for factories and public buildings), F. F. Fedorovskii (the maquettes for folk-dance performances were of interest), and, in part, A. V. Lentulov (stage-design maquettes) and by the students working out new types of posters, books, street and train decorations, and so forth." Lobanov's list of the kinds of work exhibited in what he calls the first Obmokhu exhibition, in the spring of 1919, matches the list in the notice.

The displaying of works by students and teachers as a single work of the entire workshop at the First State Free Art Workshops show, mistaken for the first Obmokhu exhibition, has caused Iakulov and Lentulov to be included among

Общество Молодых Художников

fig. 4
Invoice from Obmokhu to Narkompros, October 28, 1920. The document is stamped with two Obmokhu seals designed by Vladimir Stenberg.
Central State Archive of Russia, Moscow.

Obmokhu's members. Yet, as will become clear below, Iakulov and Lentulov never participated in Obmokhu's exhibitions and cannot be counted as members of the group (as they are in numerous descriptions of Obmokhu and in articles and monographs on their work).

The "decorative and production" principle singled out in the description of the exhibited works—a principle that was to enable the "revolutionizing of everyday life"—is especially noteworthy. The introduction of "art into life"—the chief slogan of the future Productivists and Constructivists—was naturally bound to play a defining role in the educational program of the First Free State Art Workshops. But the evolution and instilling of new forms followed a turbulent, contentious course; Echeistov wrote in the September 27–29, 1919, letter cited above: "Tatlin is leaving for Petrograd for good, with tears in his eyes because he wasn't understood at the Stroganov; and he won't have anything to do with the Second Workshops [the Second State Free Art Workshops, created from the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture], doesn't acknowledge them. He got a commission and is going."[15] Open conflicts between the "purists" and Productivists would soon rattle artistic life, and the departure of the wounded Tatlin anticipates, as it were, the schism inside Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture)—though at Inkhuk, it would be the easel painters who would depart, leaving the field to the Productivists.

The principle of exhibiting by workshop adhered to at the 1919 showcase exhibition did shape the true first Obmokhu exhibition, which opened in May 1920 at the First Free State Art Workshops at 11 Rozhdestvenka. The poster announcing the exhibition (fig. no. 3) read:

First State Free Art Workshops
(11 Rozhdestvenka)

Sunday, May 2nd at 1 p.m. Opening of the Obmokhu (Society of Young Painters) exhibition.

Participants: A. Naumov, S. Svetlov, N. Denisovskii, S. Kostin, V. Stenberg, G. Stenberg, K. Medunetskii, V. Komardenkov, A. Perekatov, A. Zamoshkin, Eremichev, D. Iakovlev.

Opening remarks will be delivered by A. V. Lunacharskii.

Speakers: Comrades L. B. Kamenev,
O. D. Kameneva,
D. P. Shterenberg,
O. M. Brik,
G. B. Iakulov.

Admission on opening day is by invitation, and unrestricted on other days.

The exhibition will be open May 2–16, from 1–6 p.m.

The "workshop without a supervisor" and the "Iakulovists" and "Lentulovists" (not listed alphabetically but grouped by workshop on the poster) were represented at the exhibition. For a number of the students—including Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Vasilii Komardenkov, Aleksandr Zamoshkin, and Prusakov—the exhibition marked the occasion of their graduation. Sketches for festive decorations of streets and buildings and for the decoration of trains and ships, posters, designs for stage sets and costumes, and experimental works were on display.

The usefulness of such design work for various educational and propaganda undertakings of the Soviet state was obvious, and the leaders of Narkompros, headed by Anatolii Lunacharskii, decided to create an agit-production workshop from Obmokhu. Space for the workshop was found in the

Настоящим ОБМОХУ приглашает
ВАС на открытие ВТОРОЙ ВЕ-
СЕННЕЙ выставки ОБМОХУ
22го мая 1921го года в 1 час дня.
Б. Дмитровка д. 11.
участвуют:
Н.Ф. Денисовский
М.А. Еремичев
А.Н. Замошкин
К.Иогансон
В.П. Комарденков
С.Н. Костин
Г.А.Стенберг
А.И.Наумов
А.С.Перекатов
Н.П. Прусаков
А.И.Родченко
С.Я. Светлов
К.Н-Медунецкий
В.А.Стенберг

fig. 5
Invitation card to Obmokhu exhibition, Moscow, May–June 1921.

former Fabergé shop at 4 Kuznetskii most (on the corner of Neglinnaia Street), and funds for outfitting it were approved by Narkompros in September 1920.[16]

Obmokhu functioned not only as an association of like-minded artists but, above all, as a Productivist artel, filling commissions and serving the artistic needs of the new society and the new state. Surviving documents give some idea of Obmokhu's activities in 1920–21: Narkompros's Financial Department paid out specific sums "for the execution of a poster supporting the Decree on the Abolition of Illiteracy," "for the execution of four stamps for the All-Russian Special Commission to Abolish Illiteracy," for stencils, ornaments, slogan boards, and so on. A commission for "thirty-six monumental panels," to be made from sheets of iron roofing, was received and filled (fig. no. 4). The accounts and financial documents were signed by both Denisovskii, Obmokhu's president, and by Vladimir Stenberg, who signed himself as "chief of production" (and sometimes as president).[17]

This artel work provided the members of Obmokhu with their livelihood. Orders, which came chiefly from the departments and commissions of Narkompros, were filled collectively, hence the credit for them was also collective—the artel's "artistic production" was signed only "Obmokhu." Payment was likewise shared equally among all members who had helped fill a commission—and these included artists who never displayed their work at Obmokhu's exhibitions.[18]

It was the second Obmokhu exhibition, known in the scholarly literature as the third, that ensured the group's fame. That it was indeed the second rather than the third is reflected in the invitation card to the exhibition (fig. no. 5), whose announcement of Obmokhu's *Vtoraia vesenniaia vystavka* (*Second Spring Exhibition*) has been a source of bewilderment to scholars trusting Lobanov's enumeration.[19] The exhibition poster prepared by Komardenkov (fig. no. 6) states explicitly, moreover, that the exhibition was organized by Narkompros; it was officially the Twenty-Second Exhibition of the Central Section of Izo Narkompros. Lobanov skipped over this fact, which didn't jibe with his scheme of antithetical "eclectic Narkompros exhibitions" and exhibitions of "artists united by a shared principle." The exhibitors listed on the invitation card were, with the exception of Karl Ioganson and Aleksandr Rodchenko, mechanically transcribed by Lobanov onto his list of the "founders of Obmokhu."[20]

The second Obmokhu exhibition opened in Moscow on May 22, 1921, at 11 Bol'shaia Dmitrovka, the former Mikhailova Salon. Though Rodchenko and Ioganson participated in the exhibition, their works, along with those of Konstantin Medunetskii and Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, were shown in a separate hall—constituting, as it were, an exhibition within the exhibition, as the famous installation photographs documenting the displays of only Rodchenko's "faction," confirm. Those months were a period of turmoil for the proponents of production art, and in that context the second Obmokhu exhibition was used as a forum for asserting the new forms championed by the First Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk, a group which had formed in the spring of 1921 and almost all of whose members (Aleksei Gan and Varvara Stepanova were the exceptions) participated in the second Obmokhu exhibition. So voluminous is the literature, generously sprinkled with documentary material, that has been devoted to the emergence and development of Constructivism in Russian art that there is no need to dwell here on the significance of the second Obmokhu exhibition. It ought rather to be emphasized that, thanks to this exhibition, the character of Obmokhu has forevermore been painted, so to speak, in Constructivist colors. For both contemporaries and succeeding generations, Obmokhu has been indissolubly

fig. 6
Poster for Obmokhu exhibition, Moscow, May–June 1921. Collection N. D. Lobanov-Rostovsky.

linked with the early stage of Constructivism, overshadowing and supplanting other aspects of Obmokhu's collective endeavor. The discussions which took place at Inkhuk in late 1921 solidified Obmokhu's status as a "society of Constructivists."

The "color constructions," "constructions of spatial structures," and "spatial constructions" shown at the second Obmokhu exhibition were the fruit of "laboratory Constructivism," of the theoretical and practical formulations worked out by the First Working Group of Constructivists, to which the five exhibitors with Obmokhu—Ioganson, Rodchenko, Medunetskii, and Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg—belonged from the first months of Inkhuk's existence. The "constructions of spatial structures" exhibited by the Stenbergs also had a direct connection with the program of study and student assignments in the special laboratory of Vkhutemas's Architecture Faculty which Vladimir Stenberg—senior assistant in the laboratory—had developed in close collaboration with the laboratory head, Anton Lavinskii.[21]

The conjunction of "laboratory" works of early Constructivism, on the one hand, and, on the other, distinctly utilitarian posters promoting the measures of the All-Russian Special Commission to Abolish Illiteracy made for the diversity and heterogeneity of both the second Obmokhu exhibition and the production of Obmokhu as a whole. Further self-definition by the participants in Obmokhu's exhibitions and crystallization of their artistic aspirations could lead only to splintering and the collapse of the society. The Stenbergs and Medunetskii formed a group of their own, forthrightly calling themselves Konstruktivisty (the Constructivists); their exhibition opened in January 1922.

In the autumn of 1922, the members of Obmokhu showed their work at the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition,* Berlin); Obmokhu's president, Denisovskii, had expended great effort on collecting and organizing work for the exhibition.[22] It is impossible, however, to label this Obmokhu's last collaborative venture, for each of Obmokhu's members showed his own individual works. In contrast to, say, the "Vitebsk school"—which was set off both at the exhibition and in the exhibition catalogue—Obmokhu did not exhibit as such in Berlin; by the time of the Berlin exhibition, Obmokhu no longer existed.

"The members of Obmokhu," Lobanov writes, "organized their fourth exhibition in conjunction with the Congress of the Comintern, showing their current Productivist works."[23] Nineteen twenty-three is the year assigned to this putative exhibition in the first volume of *Vystavki sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva* (*Exhibitions of Soviet Fine Art*), a reference work cited in all subsequent publications.[24] There was, however, no Congress of the Comintern in 1923; congresses were held in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1924, 1928, and 1935. An extensive program of cultural events did coincide with the Third Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow in June–July 1921. The Hotel Kontinental', where the congress delegates were housed, was the site of an exhibition that included works by Kazimir Malevich, Tatlin, Il'ia Mashkov, and others; a fragment of this exhibition is visible in a photograph taken of a group of delegates.[25] Lobanov was surely describing this 1921 exhibition, inasmuch as in November 1922 all events in honor of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern were held in Petrograd; and in 1923, as has already been noted, there was no congress at all. It is highly unlikely that Obmokhu mounted two different exhibitions in June 1921; the second Obmokhu exhibition on Bol'shaia Dmitrovka, which opened at the end of May and was, consequently, on view in June, *was* Obmokhu's response to the Congress of the Comintern. A number of works by Obmokhu apparently were shown at the Hotel Kontinental' exhibition (information on this exhibition is extremely hard to come by), but one would be hard pressed to call it the fourth Obmokhu exhibition.

The catalogue of the *Vtoraia vystavka kinoplakata* (*Second Exhibition of Film Posters*), held in Moscow in February 1926, is the last place in which the name Obmokhu appears to denote the affiliation of one or another artist. It is true that only Naumov, Prusakov, and Grigorii Borisov (Prusakov's collaborator on many film posters) are listed here as members of Obmokhu. Neither the Stenbergs nor Medunetskii nor Rodchenko, all of whom also participated in the exhibition, are cited as such (which is only natural in the case of Rodchenko: like Ioganson, he was never identified anywhere as a "member of Obmokhu"). This forces one to assume that, for the former members of the First Working Group of Constructivists, the alliance with Obmokhu was a brief episode; they did not in the mid-1920s include themselves among its active members.

These facts about the history of Obmokhu, then, are clear. The association initially called Obmolkhud began forming in the autumn of 1919 at the First Free State Art Workshops, the former Stroganov School. Its initiators were students in the "workshop without a supervisor" (Aleksandrov, Echeistov, Egorov, Glushkov, Kozlova, Menshutin, Naumov, Prusakov, Svetlov, Zharova, and Zhukov), joined by the "Iakulovists" (Denisovskii, Kostin, Medunetskii, and Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg) and the "Lentulovists" (Mikhail Eremichev, Iakovlev, Komardenkov, Perekatov, and Zamoshkin). A portion of the first group (Aleksandrov, Echeistov, Egorov, Menshutin, Svetlov, and Zhukov) were also students of Iakulov's.

Obmokhu organized two exhibitions. The first Obmokhu exhibition was held May 2–16, 1920, at the First Free State Art Workshops at 11 Rozhdestvenka, the second (the Twenty-Second Exhibition of the Central Section of Izo Narkompros) in May–June 1921 at the former Mikhailova Salon at 11 Bol'shaia Dmitrovka. It is possible that Obmokhu participated in a June 1921 exhibition, at the Hotel Kontinental' on Teatral'naia Square, that coincided with the Third Congress of the Comintern. Those who participated in the two Obmokhu exhibitions were Denisovskii, Eremichev, Iakovlev, Ioganson, Komardenkov, Kostin, Medunetskii, Naumov, Perekatov, Prusakov, Rodchenko, Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Svetlov, and Zamoshkin. The activity of Obmokhu reached its peak in the 1920–21 season, after which it fell off; in 1922, Obmokhu ceased to function.

Following Obmokhu's dissolution, three of the participants in its exhibitions—Medunetskii and Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg—formed the Constructivists group in 1922, while in 1925 Denisovskii and Kostin joined Ost (the Society of Easel Painters). Denisovskii and Kostin, along with Svetlov, also participated in joint exhibitions with Iakulov, which were designated "exhibitions of Iakulov and his workshop."[26]

—Translated, from the Russian, by Jane Bobko

Notes

1. V. M. Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki za poslednie 25 let* (Moscow: Obshchestvo AKhR, 1930), pp. 87, 90. Lobanov was taken "at his word" by the compilers of *Vystavki sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva,* where the Twenty-First State Exhibition is likewise labeled Izo Narkompros's "last." *Vystavki sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva. Spravochnik* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1965), vol. 1, p. 74.

2. The invitation card reads: "June 1921. Twenty-Third Exhibition of the Central Section of Izo Narkompros. Murals by the artist Marc Chagall . . . In the hall of the State Jewish Kamernyi Theater (12 Bol'shoi Chernyshevskii)."

3. Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki,* p. 105.

4. On Shchetinin's life and work, see A. S. Shatskikh, "'Prorubaia okno v chelovecheskoe miroponimanie . . .' Zhizn' G. B. Shchetinina (1891–1921)," in *Panorama iskusstv 8* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1985), pp. 255–74.

5. Echeistov's letters and autobiography cited below are in a private archive, Moscow.

6. Nikolai Musatov, conversation with author, October 1985. Musatov, born in 1895, was a student of Iakulov's in the First Free State Art Workshops.

7. Thus Denisovskii and Musatov worked only in Iakulov's special workshop, Zamoshkin and Komardenkov only in Lentulov's, and so on.

8. G[eorgii] Shch[etinin], "I-yi god raboty gosudarstvennykh khudozhestvennykh masterskikh," *Iskusstvo* 7 (August 2, 1919), pp. 4–5.

9. Lidiia Zharova-Naumova, conversation with author, September 1983.

10. Thus Denisovskii gave 1919 as the year of his graduation, Komardenkov 1919 or 1920, and the Stenbergs 1920. As for the students in the "workshop without a supervisor," Aleksandrov, for example, graduated from Vkhutemas in 1924, Zhukov in 1920, Menshutin in 1922, Prusakov in 1920, and Svetlov in 1924. Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 91.

11. He was referring, according to Zharova-Naumova, to Grigor'ev's "appropriation" of the conception behind Kostin's stage-design work. A stage designer, painter, and graphic artist, Kostin—the nephew of N. N. Sapunov—later created many sets for the Bol'shoi Theater. Lidiia Zharova-Naumova, conversation with author, September 1983.

12. The bylaws Echeistov mentions evidently resembled to some degree those of Mastarchuv. Mastarchuv was created by Shchetinin and Echeistov in January 1919. See Shatskikh, "'Prorubaia okno v chelovecheskoe miroponimanie . . .,'" pp. 264–65.

13. A photograph of Zharova-Naumova taken in the burned-out workshop is reproduced in V. Dokuchaeva, *Lidiia Naumova* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1984), p. 8.

14. "Vystavka rabot pervykh gosudarstvennykh svobodnykh khudozhestvennykh masterskikh," *Iskusstvo* 6 (July 8, 1919), p. 2.

15. Echeistov's letter makes it possible to be still more exact about the date of Tatlin's departure from the Moscow Svomas and indicates one reason for it. The work commissioned from Tatlin was a monument in honor of the anniversary of the October Revolution; as work on the monument progressed, it became the model for the *Pamiatnik III-emu Internatsionalu* (*Monument to the Third International*).

16. "Agitatsionno-proizvodstvennaia masterskaia Vysshikh gosudarstvennykh khudozhestvennykh masterskikh. Smeta," Central State Archive of Russia, Moscow, f. 2306, op. 31, d. 617, l. 53.

17. Quoted from documents in the Central State Archive of Russia, Moscow, f. 2306, op. 31, ed. khr. 614, l. 83, 84, 98.

18. Komardenkov's memoirs, published in abbreviated form as *Dni minuvshie* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1972) are available in a fuller variant in the Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 1337, op. 3, ed. khr. 49. Written late in Komardenkov's life, these memoirs contain many inaccuracies and distortions, making it impossible to rely on them to establish a consistent history of Obmokhu. Many particulars recalled by the artist, however, do allow one to reconstruct the day-to-day life of Obmokhu. Komardenkov describes in detail Obmokhu's functioning as an artistic-production artel.

19. Christina Lodder has paid particular attention to this apparent inconsistency, but advances an unlikely proposition: "The invitation to the 1921 show used the title *Second Spring Exhibition* rather than *Second Exhibition,* so it is possible that this was the group's second spring exhibition but its third show overall. (According to Lobanov, the 1919 exhibition also opened in the spring.) This seems the most probable explanation." Christina Lodder, "Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s," in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the State Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 102.

20. Lobanov, *Kudozhestvennye gruppirovki,* p. 104.

21. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 681, op. 2, ed. khr. 411, l. 13.

22. V. P. Lapshin, "Pervaia vystavka russkogo iskusstva. Berlin. 1922 god. Materialy k istorii sovetsko-germanskikh khudozhestvennykh sviazei," *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie 1 (1982),* pp. 327–62.

23. Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki,* p. 105.

24. "Chetvertaia vystavka Obmokhu," in *Vystavki sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva,* p. 114. The information about the exhibition given here relies on a single source—Lobanov.

25. *Kommunisticheskii internatsional* 18 (1921), p. 4708.

26. See, for example, the notice "Vystavka Iakulova," *Ermitazh* 12 (August 1–7, 1922), p. 14.

fig. 1
View of Obmokhu exhibition, Moscow, May-June 1921.

The Transition to Constructivism

Christina Lodder

Constructivism is advancing—the slender child of an industrial culture.
For a long time capitalism has let it rot underground.
It has been liberated by—the Proletarian Revolution.
—Aleksei Gan (1922)

From painting to sculpture, from sculpture to construction, from construction to technology and invention—this is my chosen path, and will surely be the ultimate goal of every revolutionary artist.
—Karl Ioganson (1922)

The rediscovery of Russian Constructivism has been a striking phenomenon of the past decade. The movement has acquired a heroic status for certain critics and artists of a Postmodernist persuasion. At the same time, original works and documents have begun to emerge from the former Soviet Union, permitting a more detailed and complex historical understanding of the period. This essay focuses on the initial emergence of a Constructivist position within the Russian avant-garde and, in particular, on the extraordinary exhibition that marked its first public manifestation, the Obmokhu (the Society of Young Artists) show of May 1921.

The idea of Constructivism has become a critical commonplace, variously understood, but at the moment of its invention it clearly carried specific implications and a real polemical edge. The First Working Group of Constructivists, also known as the Working Group of Constructivists, was formed in March 1921, within Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture) in Moscow.[1] The group comprised Aleksei Gan, Varvara Stepanova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Karl Ioganson, Konstantin Medunetskii, and the brothers Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg.[2] They seem to have come together during the fascinating theoretical discussions conducted at Inkhuk during the previous three months, discussions which addressed the distinction that artists were starting to make between construction and composition as principles of artistic organization. The self-proclaimed Constructivists were united in their commitment to a viewpoint articulated by Rodchenko in January 1921: "All new approaches to art arise from technology and engineering and move toward organization and construction," and "real construction is utilitarian necessity."[3] Such a stance seemed indeed to crystallize their response to the pressing question of how artists could contribute to the new Communist order and celebrate the values inherent in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

In their draft program of April 1, 1921, written by Gan, the group proclaimed a new synthesis of art and industry. They wanted to relegate their purely artistic explorations to the role of "laboratory work," and to extend their experiments with manipulating three-dimensional abstract forms into the real environment by participating in the industrial manufacture of useful objects. They called the new type of activity that they envisaged "intellectual production," proclaiming that their ideological foundation was "scientific communism, built on the theory of historical materialism" and that they intended to attain "the communistic expression of material structures" by organizing their material according to the three principles of *tektonika* (tectonics, or the socially and politically appropriate use of industrial material), construction (the organization of this material for a given purpose), and *faktura* (the conscious handling and manipulation of it).[4]

The strategies they proposed included investigating the Soviet building industry and establishing links with committees in charge of production. These measures were to be accompanied by a highly organized propaganda campaign of exhibitions and publications that would include a weekly journal, *Vestnik intellektual'nogo proizvodstva* (*The Herald of Intellectual Production*) and a bulletin. Gan explained:

In order to put our work on show, an exhibition of Constructivist spatial works should be staged, as testimony not only to what we are doing today but also to what we are aiming for and the tasks that we have set ourselves.[5]

Accordingly, about two months after the formation of the group, some of the Constructivists showed their current practical work at the *Vtoraia vesenniaia vystavka* (*Second Spring Exhibition*) of Obmokhu, more commonly known as the third

Obmokhu exhibition, which opened on May 22, 1921.[6] Altogether, fourteen artists participated: Nikolai Denisovskii, Mikhail Eremichev, Aleksandr Zamoshkin, Vasilii Komardenkov, Sergei Kostin, Aleksandr Naumov, Aleksandr Perekatov, Nikolai Prusakov, and Sergei Svetlov, as well as the Constructivists Medunetskii and the Stenberg brothers—who were members of Obmokhu—and Ioganson and Rodchenko, who were specially invited to contribute to this one show.[7]

The previous history of Obmokhu reveals a radical political commitment that would also underpin Constructivism. Although the precise chronology of the group is still somewhat unclear, Obmokhu seems to have been set up in the autumn of 1919 by students from the "workshop without a supervisor" at the State Free Art Workshops in Moscow.[8] The members had also come together through their work on various agitational projects during 1918, particularly the decorations of Moscow's streets for the revolutionary festivals. Medunetskii and the Stenberg brothers, who were living together by this time, had decorated the Post Office on Miasnitskaia (now Kirov Street) for May Day 1918 with the help of Denisovskii.[9] Subsequently, it appears, they had worked with the other future members of Obmokhu to decorate the Rogozhsko-Simonovskii district of Moscow for November 1918.[10] The artists later contributed numerous posters to the government's propaganda programs, such as the Campaign to Abolish Illiteracy, and, according to V. M. Lobanov, Obmokhu's first exhibition was devoted to such agitational work, which was displayed anonymously to emphasize the collective nature of the group's production.[11] He described the contents of their second exhibition as mainly posters, with a small number of abstract works and *tsvetokonstruktsii* (color constructions), presumably paintings. Lobanov's description corresponds to A. A. Sidorov's review of the May 1920 show, which suggests that some three-dimensional constructions were shown; Sidorov mentions "a statue . . . by comrade Stenberg made of sheet metal," alongside paintings by Naumov and others in the style of Boris Grigor'ev and Georgii Iakulov.[12] Lobanov's account identifies Obmokhu's *Second Spring Exhibition* as, in fact, their third exhibition overall, and this was confirmed by Vladimir Stenberg many years later.[13] He recalled that the third Obmokhu exhibition was held "in a kind of salon-café on Bolshaya Dmitrovka Street and Kuznetsky Bridge."[14]

There was no catalogue for the exhibition, although the invitation card survives. Fortunately, two installation photographs were reproduced soon after the event: one view in the spring of 1922 in the journal *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* (*Object*), edited by El Lissitzky and Il'ia Erenburg in Berlin (fig. no. 1),[15] and the other the same year in the Hungarian avant-garde magazine *Egység* (*Unity*), published by Béla Uitz in Vienna (fig. no. 2).[16] The two images show adjacent corners of a large hall, in which constructions by Rodchenko, Ioganson, the Stenbergs, and Medunetskii are visible, as well as abstract paintings, some of which can now be identified as works by the Stenberg brothers and Medunetskii. The two photographs are devoted exclusively to the works by the First Working Group of Constructivists and give no indication of what the other nine artists showed. Indeed, *Egység* labeled its photograph of the exhibition "The Constructivists at the Obmokhu Exhibition" and included separate illustrations of work by Vladimir Stenberg and Ioganson (fig. no. 3).[17] The photograph of the Stenberg construction was almost certainly taken at the exhibition, as the molding on the ceiling conforms to that in the two views of the show. *Egység* also printed translations of the program of the Constructivist group ("A Konstruktivisták Csoportjának Programmja") together with "The Realistic Manifesto" ("Realista Kiáltvány") produced in August 1920 by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, albeit without mentioning the authors of either statement.[18] It is possible that the Prusakov picture reproduced in *Egység* was another exhibit, since it is captioned "Gépkonstrukció. Pruszakov ('OBMOHU'). Moszkva. 1921."[19] If so, this is the only evidence concerning the work of other artists in the exhibition. Although entitled *Machine Construction* in the Hungarian label, this is a schematized figurative image, posterlike in style and apparently evoking the proletariat at work and leisure. It thus serves to underline the essential innovation of the Constructivists—their evocation of a contemporary industrial imagery through the language of materials and abstract form rather than through illustrative subject matter. The show was certainly acclaimed at the time for its highly original explorations of a new kind of constructed sculpture. For instance, Ulen (possibly Lissitzky writing under a pseudonym), in a survey of Russian exhibitions published in *Object* in 1922, emphasized:

The exhibitions of Obmokhu were new in form. There we saw art works not only hanging on the walls but also and most importantly filling the space of the hall.

These young artists have assimilated the experiences of the former generation, they work well, they have a subtle feeling for the specific qualities of materials and construct spatial works. Moving between the technology of the engineers and the aimless expediency of art, they are trying to progress further.[20]

The artistic innovations of the works exhibited are discussed in more detail below, but it should be noted that the attitudes and meanings they embodied were in fact firmly rooted in contemporary Russian culture. At a very general level, industry and the machine were seen in revolutionary Russia as the essential characteristics of the working class and hence of the new Communist order. More practically, industrialization was also regarded by the Party and Lenin as the key to political and social progress and to the consolidation of the Soviet state. Lenin stated in 1918, after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk: "Those who have the best technology, organization, discipline and the best machines emerge on top . . . It is necessary to master the highest technology or be crushed."[21] This attitude was epitomized by his dictum "Communism equals Soviet power plus the Electrification of the Entire Country" and by his speech on December 22, 1920, to the Eighth Congress of Soviets (at which Vladimir Tatlin's Tower was displayed), in which he envisioned the future in the hands of the "engineers and agronomists" rather than of the "politicians."[22] With such official endorsement, the ideas of Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor concerning efficiency in industrial production attracted considerable interest.[23] In 1921 the first conference on Taylor's principles of time and motion (Taylorism) established NOT (the Scientific Organization of Work).[24] Aleksei Gastev, a poet committed to a utopian vision of the triumph of the machine and mechanization throughout Russian life, ran TsIT (the Central Institute of Labor), which was dedicated to studying the human machine and creating a new man through social engineering.[25] Platon Kerzhentsev, who had worked with Gan in Teo Narkompros (the Theatrical Department of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), wished to "introduce scientific principles not only into man's economic activity and production but into all organized activity and work."[26] These are merely instances of a prevalent discourse in which the machine was both metaphor for a new culture under construction and the practical means to rebuild the economy for the collective benefit of the people. Nevertheless, Gan—author of the Constructivists' program and Kerzhentsev's collaborator—links these ideas directly with the emergence of Constructivism.

fig. 2
View of Obmokhu exhibition, Moscow, May–June 1921.

The same fusion of ideological and practical imperatives underlay the growing idealization of the machine and the worker by some factions within the artistic community. In November 1918 a debate was held in the Winter Palace over the question of whether art was "A Temple or a Factory."[27] Nikolai Punin, the principal speaker, argued that bourgeois art with its sacramental character was no longer relevant and that a proletarian culture would generate a completely new kind of art: "It is not a matter of decoration but of the creation of new artistic objects. Art for the proletariat is not a sacred temple for lazy contemplation but work, a factory, producing artistic objects for everyone."[28] Later, the newspaper *Iskusstvo kommuny* (*Art of the Commune*) argued that the existing division between art and industry was itself "a survival of bourgeois structures,"[29] and Osip Brik announced that "art is like any other means of production . . . not ideas but a real object is the aim of all true creativity."[30] Such attitudes were reinforced by official policy. Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), committed to "art's penetration into industrial production,"[31] organized a conference in August 1919, where the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, pronounced that "there is no doubt that production art is closer to human life than is pure art."[32] Subsequently, an Art and Industry Commission was set up under the Council of People's Commissars to examine how art could be harnessed to improve the quality of industrial products.[33]

Since the Revolution, the avant-garde had, with some success, sought to establish itself as the representative expression of the new order. Developments after 1919, however, increasingly involved the accommodation of the new values and expectations outlined above, prompting a radical reevaluation of attitudes toward abstraction and traditional artistic media. Already in February 1919 Punin had declared:

Suprematism has blossomed out in splendid colour all over Moscow.

Posters, exhibitions, cafés—all is Suprematism. And this is extraordinarily significant. One can confidently assert that the day of Suprematism is nigh, and on that very day Suprematism must lose its significance in creative terms.

What was Suprematism? A creative invention without a doubt but an invention strictly confined to painting.[34]

Kazimir Malevich's departure from Moscow in the autumn of 1919 has indeed been attributed to his "creative isolation,"[35] and he later conceded that Suprematism had reached the climax of its influence that year.[36] Subsequent developments within Suprematism suggest the wider currency of the impulses manifest at the Obmokhu exhibition. Significantly, in Vitebsk Malevich began to adapt the Suprematist vocabulary to suit the creation of hypothetical architectural complexes.[37] Likewise, his follower Lissitzky evolved the proun as "an interchange station between painting and architecture";[38] and, lecturing in Berlin in 1922, he even declared:

Two groups claimed constructivism, the Obmokhu . . . and the Unovis {the Affirmers of the New Art} . . .

The former group worked in material and space, the latter in material and a plane. Both strove to attain the same result, namely the creation of the real object and of architecture. They are opposed to each other in their concepts of the practicality and utility of created things. Some members of the Obmokhu group . . . went as far as a complete disavowal of art and in their urge to be inventors, devoted their energies to pure technology. Unovis distinguished between the concept of functionality, meaning the necessity for the creation of new forms, and the question of direct serviceableness.[39]

Lissitzky's distinction was clearly valid by 1922, when positions had consolidated, although earlier there had perhaps been a broader consensus in the two groups' explorations of a machine-age aesthetic. On the one hand, as the Obmokhu exhibition demonstrates, the Constructivists did not immediately abandon the making of art objects. On the other, the Unovis group centered around Malevich also produced directly functional designs. In November 1920, the group's magazine published Il'ia Chashnik's project for a speaker's rostrum (later reworked by Lissitzky and known as the *Leninskaia tribuna* [*Lenin Tribune,* 1924, plate no. 142]), where the girder construction creates an emphatic aura of industrial utility.[40] Architectural and engineering projects were also apparently included in the 1920 and 1921 Unovis exhibitions in Moscow,[41] and by early 1921 Unovis had organized an architectural and technical faculty.[42]

In the gradual evolution toward a Constructivist stance within the Moscow avant-garde, particular attention should be paid to the role of Rodchenko as both artist and polemicist. In the spring of 1921 he was clearly the leading figure among the Constructivist contingent at the Obmokhu show. Whereas the others were still students, Rodchenko was one of the most progressive teachers at Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops) set up in December 1920.[43]

In January 1919, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Aleksandr Vesnin, and other members of Askranov (the Association of Extreme Innovators) had demanded an exhibition space from Izo Narkompros because of "the sudden death of Suprbez [Suprematism and Non-Objectivity], its vitality pouring into the Association of Extreme Innovators."[44] Although a cogent chronology of Rodchenko's evolution is still needed, it is clear that in general terms he was seeking to move beyond Malevich's more "metaphysical" aesthetic. He came to regard the creative act less as an expression of personal inspiration and more as a quasi-scientific investigation into the inherent properties of painting, such as tone, color, line, texture, and organization. Far from being a Modernist assertion of the "autonomy" of art, such a standpoint represented an attempt, akin to that of the Russian literary Formalists at precisely this time, to reconceive art as a specialized, quasi-scientific activity and the artist himself as a species of worker.

An aspiration to establish a science of art also inspired the foundation of Inkhuk in early 1920.[45] Rodchenko was among the original members and was in fact commissioned by the Institute to write his statement entitled "Liniia" ("The Line," 1921). In this important text, while discussing new approaches to the application of paint, to color, and especially to line as the dominant element in pictorial organization, he declared:

The imprecise, broken line that the hand draws cannot compete with the straight, accurate ruled line, which gives precision to the structure.

The craft of painting is striving to become more industrial.

Drawing in the old sense is losing its value and giving way to the diagram or the engineering drawing.

Faktura *in painting . . . is being forced out by mechanical techniques . . . which make it possible to analyze color, form, and material scientifically.*[46]

The document is a precise evocation of the paintings Rodchenko was creating around 1919 and 1920, such as *Konstruktsiia No. 97* (*Construction No. 97,* 1919), in which a machine-like precision in the articulation of the surface and the linear construction emphasizes the impersonal and analytical quality of the painting process. The titles that Rodchenko was now giving his paintings are expressive of these concerns and also, of course, interesting in light of the subsequent coining of

the term Constructivism.

It is important to be precise about the emergence of a new critical vocabulary. The noun *konstruktsiia* (construction), from the Latin *constructio,* was well established in Russian usage by the end of the nineteenth century. Like its English equivalent, it acquired clear connotations of engineering, referring to the construction of buildings, technological structures, or machines.[47] In 1912, the theorist Vladimir Markov had adopted the term *konstruktivnost'* (constructiveness) to denote the rational, logical aspect of art.[48] In early 1919, in the radical *Art of the Commune,* Ivan Puni used *konstruktsiia* in its strictly technical sense when he argued against the idea of production art and contrasted aesthetic criteria with the demands of *konstruktsiia:*

> *What are the principles of a contemporary industrial construction? Its principle is maximum utility . . . an artist does not have the right to interfere with the construction of an object, because an object simply will not be constructive* {konstruktivnyi} *if it is built according to the two principles of utility and aesthetics.*[49]

Indeed, it was precisely because *konstruktsiia* carried these connotations that the terms *konstruktor* (constructor) or *khudozhnik-konstruktor* (artist-constructor) first appeared in an artistic context to equate the maker of art with a worker in industry. Thus in December 1918 V. Dmitriev emphasized that the artist is "now only a constructor and technician."[50] Harnessing this technological emphasis to his own artistic techniques, Tatlin called his workshop at the State Free Art Workshops in Petrograd (where he started teaching in the spring of 1919) the Workshop of Material, Volume, and Construction.[51] Certainly, by early 1920, the idea of construction that underpinned the Constructivists' approach seems to have emerged sufficiently for Vasilii Kandinskii to issue a warning in his Inkhuk program:

> *Without any doubt, positive science can provide the Institute with extremely valuable material . . . Even though art workers right now may be working on problems of construction* {konstruktsiia} *(art still has virtually no precise rules), they might try to find a positive solution too easily and too ardently from the engineer. And they might accept the engineer's answer as the solution for art—quite erroneously. This is a very real danger.*[52]

The adoption of the term *konstruktsiia* to describe the works of art themselves may have been preceded, in fact, by the coining of *postroenie,* from the old Russian root *stroi* (a building, structure, or construct). This had a broad range of reference in general usage, embracing building structures, the construction of geometrical figures, structures of language and thought, and even the construction of a socialist society.[53] In the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition, *Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm* (*Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*), which opened in Moscow on April 27, 1919, Liubov' Popova referred to pictorial structure as *postroenie,* although she alluded to the strengths of the pictorial construction as "*sily konstruktsii.*"[54] At the same show, Rodchenko's titling of his 1918 paintings likewise employed *postroenie,* as in the groups of works under the headings of *Strogoe, nepodvizhnoe postroenie tsvetovykh ploskostei* (*Severe, Static Structure of Colored Planes*) and *Prostoe postroenie tsveta* (*Simple Structure of Color*).[55] The emerging artistic paradigm is epitomized by Gabo's statement in "The Realistic Manifesto" of August 1920, where he uses the verb *stroit'* (to construct) to emphasize the identification between art and scientific activities: "The plumb-line in our hand, eyes as precise as a ruler, in a spirit as taut as a compass—we construct our work as the universe constructs its own, as the engineer

fig. 3
Karl Ioganson
Study in Balance, *ca. 1920.*
Whereabouts unknown.

constructs his bridges, as the mathematician his formula of the orbits."[56]

Within a few months, however, *konstruktsiia* was evidently replacing *postroenie* in avant-garde discourse and acquiring a more specific ideological context. At the Nineteenth State Exhibition in Moscow in the autumn of 1920, Rodchenko exhibited sixteen works with the title *Konstruktsiia,* all but five dated 1919, alongside other works, of 1918–20, that he called *Kompozitsiia* (*Composition*).[57] The former were clearly paintings; the catalogue entry for no. 102 reads *Konstruktsiia No. 97 (na kornichevom)* (*Construction No. 97 {On Brown}*), and for no. 117 *Konstruktsiia, Maslo, No. 11 (na chernom)* (*Construction, Oil, No. 11 {On Black}*, 1920).[58] More research is needed to clarify the distinction and correlate the surviving works with the two categories. It appears that the constructions were more linear and flatly painted, as in *Construction No. 97,* whereas the compositions seem to have been more planar and spatial, and more modulated in texture and tone; an entry such as no. 90, *Kompozitsiia No. 78 (chernoe na chernom)* (*Composition No. 78 {Black on Black}*, 1918), recalls such paintings as *Chernoe na chernom* (*Black on Black,* 1918, plate no. 240). At the exhibition Rodchenko also showed ten *proekty konstruktsii* (projects for constructions) of 1920.[59] These were probably his designs for Zhivskul'ptarkh (the Synthesis of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture Commission), whose display apparently formed part of the exhibition.[60] Nikolai Khardzhiev later recalled seeing some of Rodchenko's "pseudo-architectural, dilettantish projects for buildings and a 'kiosk for the sale of literature.'"[61] In this instance, Rodchenko was using *konstruktsiia* in accordance with its established engineering usage. However, the polemical force of this new terminology, with its still more emphatic implications of a range of experience outside bourgeois categories of art, was most fully evident in Rodchenko's more metaphorical appropriation of *konstruktsiia* in the context of painting.

The immediate backdrop to the Obmokhu show was the artists' debates about the distinction between composition and construction that had been implicit in Rodchenko's contributions to the Nineteenth State Exhibition. These took place within the General Working Group of Objective Analysis at Inkhuk, which was opposed, as its name suggests, to the more subjective methods for analyzing works of art favored by Kandinskii, the founder and first director of the organization.[62] The oppositional faction included not only the future Constructivists but also painters such as Aleksandr Drevin, Popova, Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udal'tsova, the architects Vladimir Krinskii and Nikolai Ladovskii, and sculptors like Aleksei Babichev and Anton Lavinskii. After four months of discussion, between January and April 1921, the group gave rise to four distinct Working Groups, of which the first to be established was the Constructivists'.[63]

The participants discussed the issues both in general terms and in relation to analyses of specific works. They also produced pairs of drawings illustrating their personal understanding of what composition and construction entailed. In their statements, construction was generally conceived in terms of economy of materials, precision, clarity, and integration of overall organization, and conversely the absence of anything decorative, superfluous, or self-consciously aesthetic. The divergences revolved around certain fundamental problems. What were the relationships and the distinctions between construction in art and construction in the real world of structural design? How far was the concept of construction compatible with the medium of painting? In the evaluations of specific paintings, there was widespread agreement that Rodchenko's paintings alone authentically possessed the property of "construction."[64] Yet Rodchenko himself, like Ioganson, Medunetskii, and the Stenberg brothers, was increasingly taking the view that construction and painting were incompatible:

> *In structures executed on a surface, the "construction" is only the projection of a potentially real structure, which in its surface form is merely a particular type of sketch or design, and not a construction as such.*
>
> *A construction, which in the strict and pure meaning of the word is the organization of an actual object, can only be realized as material.*[65]

The most powerful catalyst to the emergence of three-dimensional Constructivism was undoubtedly the exhibition in Moscow, in December 1920, of Tatlin's model for the *Pamiatnik III-emu Internatsionalu* (*Monument to the Third International,* 1919–20, fig. no. 4), greeted by Vladimir Maiakovskii as "the first object of October."[66] Tatlin declared that in this work he was restoring the essential unity of painting, sculpture, and architecture, "[combining] purely artistic forms with utilitarian intentions": "The results of this are models which stimulate us to inventions in our work of creating a new world and which call upon producers to exercise control over the forms encountered in our new everyday life."[67] His monument was intended, in its ultimate realization, to be a functioning building, a third higher than the Eiffel Tower, that would act as an administrative and propaganda center for the Communist Third International, an organization devoted to fostering world revolution. Within its open structure of iron beams, four glazed volumes, rotating at different speeds, were to house the various executive, legislative, and propaganda offices of the Comintern. The structural components of contemporary engineering, iron and glass—for Tatlin, the "materials of the new Classicism"—were clearly intended to express the new social order; as Lissitzky later wrote: "*Iron* is strong, like the will of the proletariat, *glass* is clear, like its conscience."[68] Likewise the form Tatlin devised, the strong diagonal in conjunction with the two encircling spirals, expressed in symbolic terms the soaring utopian aspirations of Communism and the dynamic forces of historical progress.[69] The skeletal apparatus represented a distillation of new technology, evoking the girder construction of the Eiffel Tower itself, oil derricks, skeleton masts on ships, cranes, and mine shafts. The rotating transparent volumes within this structure summoned up the image of an enormous machine with gears and moving parts, a machine designed to generate world revolution. Appropriately, Tatlin's Tower was exhibited in the building where the delegates to the Eighth Congress of Soviets were meeting to discuss such issues as the electrification of Russia. The emphasis on utility, along with the scientific and industrial resonances of Tatlin's simple mathematical forms and contemporary materials, made the Tower a paradigm of new artistic possibilities for the avant-garde. The influence of the project is very apparent in the constructions shown at the third Obmokhu exhibition a few months later.

The Obmokhu exhibition included both spatial works and paintings conceived as "constructions." The installation photographs do not reveal whether Rodchenko exhibited any paintings. His most recent hanging constructions, however, clearly visible in fig. no. 2, show a marked change of emphasis in Rodchenko's three-dimensional work. In his *Belaia bespredmetnaia skul'ptura* (*White Non-Objective Sculptures*), which had been exhibited in 1919 (plate no. 290), the focus had been on building up flat geometric elements, probably made from card, to create quite complex configurations with overtones of urban architecture.[70] In contrast, the hanging spatial constructions examined the basic forms of Euclidean geometry in a more analytical way, investigating their internal spatial

fig. 4
Tatlin's model for the Monument to the Third International *on exhibition in Petrograd, November 1920.*

structure and dynamic potential.

The series seems to have been begun in late 1920; the square construction was illustrated as *Prostranstvennaia veshch'* (*Spatial Object*) and dated 1920 in *Kino-fot* (*Cinema-Photo*) 2 (1922), while the hexagonal work (plate no. 296) was subsequently reproduced as *Prostranstvennaia konstruktsiia* (*Spatial Construction*) and dated 1921 (*Cinema-Photo* 4 [1922]). This dating suggests that Rodchenko explored the simpler geometrical forms (such as the square) before moving to more complex forms such as the hexagon and ellipse. At the exhibition, these hanging works were suspended from a series of wires attached to the cornices and apparently spanning three corners of the hall. Only the triangle, ellipse, hexagon, and a portion of the circle are visible in fig. no. 2, although it is possible that more were displayed than the photograph suggests. The existence of at least five of these constructions is documented: the four works at the Obmokhu exhibition and the square construction reproduced in *Cinema-Photo.* Of these, only one survives: the ellipse (fig. no. 5; compare plate no. 294). All of the works share a common method of construction. Concentric geometrical shapes were cut from a single flat piece of plywood. These essentially two-dimensional elements were then rotated within each other to form a three-dimensional construction, with each element held in place by the wire and the outer element acting as a framework for the whole. After exhibition, the wires could be removed and the sculptures collapsed back into a series of flat elements for storage. Indeed, the various components of the triangle, square, and circle constructions are visible in the background of the well-known photograph of Rodchenko in his specially designed work-suit.[71] The constructions explored the growth of a single geometric form from the plane into three dimensions. The mathematical emphasis clearly reflects the Constructivists' scientific orientation. At their inaugural meeting in March 1921 they had decided to invite a "mathematics expert" as well as an "engineer-technician" to work in the group, and they later produced slogans such as "Art is a branch of mathematics, like all sciences."[72] It is probably no coincidence that the closest visual parallels to Rodchenko's hanging constructions are found in modern scientific instruments such as gyroscopes.

The effect of Rodchenko's suspending the works was to further deny the sensations of mass and materiality. The dynamic potential was also intensified by the free movement of the construction on its wire. According to Vladimir Stenberg, Rodchenko shined lights onto the constructions at the exhibition to enhance the reflective qualities of the silver-painted surfaces.[73] This suggests that Rodchenko would have used metal had it been available, and it recalls Tatlin's model for the Tower, which was also made in wood and painted silver, although intended ultimately to be constructed in iron. The simple mathematical forms and the sense of rotation and movement may likewise have been responses to the rotating glazed elements within the Tower.

For the younger artists, the three-dimensional work of Tatlin and Rodchenko demonstrated how a work of art might embody rather than merely illustrate a machine-age sensibility. Previously, contemporary technological themes had, indeed, comprised the subject matter of paintings by the Stenberg brothers and Medunetskii. Some of these have come to light in recent years, permitting at least a schematic reconstruction of these artists' early development. As might be expected, their work at this time was fairly eclectic. Both Vladimir Stenberg's *Worker by the Car* (ca. 1920?)[74] and Georgii Stenberg's *Crane* (1920) celebrate an industrial imagery appropriate to the new proletarian society, and their treatment suggests a degree of fusion between men and machinery. Georgii's painting is less descriptive, the composition flatter and more dispersed, and the use of color highly abstract. Such simplifications may have been a consequence of their concurrent work in poster design. The linear fluidity of *Crane* is developed further by Vladimir in his *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 4* (*Color Construction No. 4,* 1920, plate no. 286), where shapes and lines are disposed within a white ground, clearly indicating a new awareness of more abstract developments. In his *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 13* (*Color Construction No. 13,* 1919–20, plate no. 284), the central motif of four elongated red and black rectangles on a white ground is almost a direct quotation from Suprematism.[75]

Among the paintings in the Obmokhu exhibition were Vladimir's *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 10* (*Color Construction No. 10,* 1920–21, plate no. 285),[76] and *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 12* (*Color Construction No. 12,* 1920–21, plate no. 283), which are clearly discernible on the far wall in one view of the installation (fig. no. 1). The titles recall Rodchenko, as does the uncompromising austerity of the approach to color and design in these new works. It is interesting to compare Vladimir's *Color Construction No. 10* with his demonstration of "composition" (plate no. 244) from the pair of drawings he made for the Inkhuk debate. The painting is far more reductive, eliminating tonal modulation and artistic "touch" as well as rhythmical correspondences in the organization, while the elements are also less varied and autonomous. By taking certain lines right out to the frame and by running them parallel to the edges rather than at a tasteful diagonal, Stenberg ensured greater integration in the painting between the internal configuration and the painted object as a whole; whereas in the drawing, the design is a conventional "vignette" within a fictive aesthetic space. The painting evokes the impersonal graphic language of a diagram or some kind of mathematical illustration and as such it probably corresponds to Stenberg's idea of how a painting might be informed with the quality of "construction." Significantly, however, the drawing of a "construction" (plate no. 245) produced for the discussions is a study for a three-dimensional construction.[77] *Konstruktsiia prostranstvennogo sooruzheniia No. IV (zhelezo)* (*Construction of a Spatial Structure No. IV (Iron),* 1921, plate no. 292 [*Spatial Construction KPS 42 N IV*]),[78] shown at the Obmokhu exhibition, is evidently an elaboration of the same conception; the curved diagonal is identical, while the vertical support in the sketch has been developed into a more complex diagonal and vertical component (each comprising three bars) and some of the crossbars have been omitted.

The artists' exploration of new materials encompassed works which occupied an intermediate position between pure painting and sculpture. Thus another exhibit was Georgii Stenberg's relief, *Tsvetokonstruktsiia iz materialov No. 7* (*Color Construction of Materials No. 7,* 1920, plate no. 289), just visible behind his constructions in fig. no. 2. This utilized a variety of materials including sand, paper, wire, circular and cylindrical metal elements, and a glass tube containing ground blue pigment—an exploration of the diversity of tone and texture recalling Tatlin's counter-reliefs of 1914–16. Vladimir later recalled:

They weren't simple color constructions like other artists made. We saw what other artists were doing and then tried to do it differently.

. . . we had color constructions of four types: one, simple color constructions; two, color constructions involving texture; three, color constructions that were like bas-reliefs; and four, color constructions that involved perspective, that is they were spatial. These were all lost in a fire.[79]

A very different approach is evident in Georgii Stenberg's freestanding works such as *Konstruktsiia prostranstvennogo sooruzheniia No. 11* (*Construction of a Spatial Structure No. 11,* 1921,

fig. 5
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Oval Hanging Construction Number 12, *ca. 1920.*
Plywood, open construction partially painted with aluminum paint, and wire, 61 x 83.7 x 47 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquisition made possible through the extraordinary efforts of George and Zinaida Costakis, and through the Nate B. and Frances Spingold, Matthew H. and Erna Futter, and Enid A. Haupt Funds.

plate no. 293 [*Spatial Construction KPS 51 N XI*]), which is built up with a variety of small I-and T-beam metal elements enclosing a piece of glass. This work was probably executed in the spring of 1921 during the composition-versus-construction debates at Inkhuk and not long before the Obmokhu exhibition opened. A drawing entitled *Proekt konstruktsii* (*Project for a Construction,* signed and dated 1921) depicts a structure which is very close to this particular sculpture.[80] It demonstrates the same impulse to invest art with the materials and the impersonal finish of machine technology that is manifest in Vladimir Stenberg's *Construction of a Spatial Structure No. 4,* which is captioned *Hídrészlet-Konstrukció* (*Bridge Fragment Construction*) and dated 1921 in *Egység*.[81] The materials used, more uniform beam elements, evoke the prefabricated components of engineering construction and the entire conception here alludes, even more strongly, to a specific functional structure, or a fragment of one, such as a bridge or crane. The implied monumentality echoes Tatlin's Tower, as, of course, does the skeletal structure of standardized components and the general shift toward a machine aesthetic. Vladimir Stenberg later stressed that his constructions at this time were actually conceived as explorations that would eventually lead to projects for actual buildings.[82] Despite this assertion, the construction seems to have no direct technological application, but rather to exploit the language of technology to create an art work. It could even be argued, as Babichev did in 1922, that such works were "not rooted in any technical work" and were "in no way utilitarian" but represented "the confirmation of a new mechanical aestheticism."[83]

Not surprisingly, in view of their friendship, Medunetskii's artistic formation seems to closely parallel that of the Stenberg brothers. *Celebration* (ca. 1919), showing workers attending a revolutionary festival, recalls their work both formally and thematically.[84] His painted *Tsvetokonstruktsiia* (*Color Construction,* 1920, plate no. 278), has affinities with Georgii's *Crane* in its fluid handling and vivid color, and although Medunetskii's painting is ostensibly more abstract, it too evokes an imagery of metallic machine components. In *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 7* (*Color Construction No. 7,* 1921, plate no. 280), shown at the Obmokhu exhibition, the linear precision is analogous to that of Vladimir's *Color Construction No. 10,* and clearly the dominant influence on his work is Rodchenko. Likewise, Medunetskii's *Tsvetokonstruktsiia No. 9* (*Color Construction No. 9,* 1920–21, plate no. 279),[85] is reminiscent of Rodchenko's *Black on Black* paintings, which were exhibited at the Tenth State Exhibition, as well as his linear "constructions" of 1920. At the same time, it evokes an imagery of light projection.

Medunetskii's three-dimensional works (visible in fig. nos. 1–2) seem more purely abstract, less suggestive of functional forms than the Stenbergs' sculptures. They do, however, use industrially produced materials and elements. Thus in the one extant work, *Konstruktsiia prostranstvennogo sooruzheniia* (*Construction of a Spatial Structure,* usually known as *Spatial Construction,* 1920–21, plate no. 282), the metal circle has ridges on the inside and was evidently some type of coupling ring.[86] Yet the relationships between the components are far removed from those of any engineering structure. The shapes thread through each other with the minimum of contact, creating a very open, dematerialized form. Within this unifying configuration, the bent iron rod, painted red, is visually contrasted with the yellow sheen of the brass triangle, the more matte quality of the zinc ring, the S-shaped tin strip, and the painted marbling on the hollow cuboid, metal base. The construction is clearly an attempt to develop into three dimensions the type of linear spatial structure implied fictively in paintings such as *Color Construction No. 9.* This was equally true of the linear "drawing in space" of Medunetskii's lost iron and tin *Spatial Construction* (1921, plate no. 281.1), known from a photograph and also visible, alongside a series of comparable works, in one view of the Obmokhu installation.

It is unclear whether Ioganson included any paintings, but his constructions, too, demonstrate a preoccupation with linear structure. In 1929, László Moholy-Nagy illustrated one of Ioganson's works from the exhibition (fig. no. 3) as a *Study in Balance*, explaining that if the string was pulled the composition would change to another position and configuration while maintaining its equilibrium.[87] The similarity between the manner of jointing in *Study in Balance* and that of the other constructions by Ioganson on display (for example, fig. no. 6) suggests that all the works could be adjusted and possibly collapsed and that he was exploring the movement of skeletal, geometric structures in a more pragmatically experimental and explicitly technical manner than was Rodchenko in his hanging constructions. Ioganson's works do not evoke any specific structure, yet the use of standardized elements and the emphasis on the transformation of form might appear to have more direct application to utilitarian structures such as portable, fold-up kiosks or collapsible items of furniture. These "laboratory" works seem to have been made from wood, which probably reflects the shortage of alternative materials at this time. Ioganson's particularly rigorous antiaestheticism expressed in these works was forcefully articulated the following year:

> *Artists who used to paint pictures are rejecting the picture and are going over to the construction or "into industry," as the customary expression has it. But this approach to the construction employs the devices, the method, and the tools of "the old art" without a practical objective or a definite goal, such as is required for mechanical construction.*[88]

In early 1922, Medunetskii and the Stenberg brothers also presented a paper entitled "Konstruktivizm" ("Constructivism") at Inkhuk. They argued that the new approach was a response to the enfeebled state of contemporary "production culture," conditioned by "aesthetics," an inappropriate use of materials, and a wholly inadequate design methodology. In contrast, they defined the essential principles of Constructivism as spatial economy, functionalism, efficiency in the use of industrial materials, and rhythm resulting from the application of engineering technology. Finally, according to the surviving summary, they defined their own achievements and mission:

> *The first experimental works and their significance as propaganda.*
> *The abstract solution of the basic problems of Constructivism.*
> *The experimental design of the material spatial construction, and its interrelation with utility.*
> *Achievements in space, form, and rhythm.*
> *The communist expression of material spatial constructions.*
> *Russian industry under the banner of Constructivism and its significance in the world market.*[89]

This makes it clear that, from the start, the Constructivists were concerned not merely to promote a new aesthetic but to demonstrate their potential capabilities as designers of real objects and structures. "The first experimental works and their significance as propaganda" is presumably a reference to the 1921 Obmokhu exhibition, where they had sought to display their understanding of the essential principles of engineering construction, and their formal inventiveness within that framework, for the benefit of any manufacturers, administrators, or politicians who might care to observe and to give the artists a concrete role in building the new socialist

environment. Theirs was an immensely ambitious and idealistic outlook, perhaps conceivable only at a time when, in practice, almost nothing was being made or built in Russia. However, 1921, which witnessed the birth of the Constructivist movement in art, also saw the implementation of the New Economic Policy and the first stirrings of a revival of industrial production. By the following year the Constructivist ethos was gaining increased currency among the avant-garde, and many Russian artists had, in a more wholesale fashion, renounced the making of paintings and sculptures in favor of immersing themselves in the design of buildings and propaganda stands, furniture and textiles, posters, advertisements, and books. The Obmokhu exhibition in the spring of 1921 marked a key moment in the transition toward an authentically Constructivist practice.

fig. 6
Karl Ioganson
Spatial Construction, *ca. 1921.*
Wood and metal wire.
Whereabouts unknown.

Notes

I should like to express my profound gratitude to my husband Martin Hammer for his invaluable contribution to both the content and form of this essay.

The epigraphs are from Aleksei Gan, *Konstruktivizm* (Tver': Tverskoe izdatel'stvo, 1922), p. 19, as translated in John E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 222, and Karl Ioganson, "From Construction to Technology and Invention," trans. James West, in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the State Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 70.

1. See "Programma uchebnoi podgruppy konstruktivistov INKhUKa," 1921, private archive, Moscow, and "Report No. 1. The Assembly for the Organisation of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk" held on March 18, 1921, in S. O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work,* ed. Vieri Quilici, trans. Huw Evans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 289–90.

For details concerning Inkhuk, see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 78ff. and Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* pp. 55ff.

The name of the group has been given variously as the Working Group of Constructivists and the First Working Group of Constructivists. Archival material usually omits "First," but the group's first public pronouncement, published in August 1922 in the Moscow journal *Ermitazh* (*Hermitage*), used both names. See "Front khudozhestvennogo truda. Materialy k Vserossiiskoi konferentsii levykh v iskusstve. Konstruktivisty. Pervaia programma rabochei gruppy konstruktivistov," *Ermitazh* 13 (1922), pp. 3–4. The introduction in *Ermitazh* gave the group its full title, declaring that: "On December 13, 1920, the First Working Group of Constructivists was formed" (ibid., p. 3). It cited Rodchenko, Stepanova, and Gan as the founders and stated: "Directing their attention to the future culture of Communism and proceeding from present specific conditions, they worked out a program and production plan and started to enlist collaborators." These remarks were followed by "The First Program of the Working Group of Constructivists." The presence of both names in this publication suggests that they were used concurrently and interchangeably.

There is no archival evidence to support the assertion made in the *Ermitazh* announcement that the group was founded in December 1920. Gan repeated this elsewhere, notably in "Chto takoe konstruktivizm?" *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* 3 (1928), p. 79, and in *Konstruktivizm,* p. 3, where he also dates the group to 1920. Gan joined Inkhuk in 1920 (see Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 57), and although his participation in the debates is not documented fully, it is possible that the crystallization of the group's ideas and membership may have begun informally toward the end of 1920. The archives, however, suggest that the group's inaugural meeting was held on March 18, 1921 (see "Report No. 1," in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 289). Although Gan was not present, he was chosen to be a member of the organizing group and it was decided to invite him to work in the group (ibid., items 2 and 7). Ten days later, he presented his report on the program and work plan ("Report No. 2. Meeting of the Plenum of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk," ibid., p. 290). It is clear from the transcription of the ensuing discussion that Gan was responsible for the terms *tektonika, faktura,* and "construction," as well as for the attempt to create a coherent theory from the artists' rather vague ideas and aspirations (ibid., pp. 92–93 n. 14). It is also evident that although his program was ultimately accepted on April 1, 1921, there was a great deal of divergence among the members over precise meanings and specific details (ibid., p. 92).

2. All are listed in "Report No. 2," in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 290.

3. See "Protokol zasedaniia INKhUKa," January 1, 1921 and January 21, 1921, private archive, Moscow.

4. "Programma uchebnoi podgruppy" and Gan's draft program of the group that was approved on April 1, 1921 (reprinted as "Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk," in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 290). The draft program, with few alterations, was published in August 1922 in *Ermitazh* under "Front khudozhestvennogo truda." These ideas were further elaborated in Gan's treatise *Konstruktivizm,* which had appeared by the summer of 1922, when it was reviewed. See V. Zhemchuzhnyi, "Aleksei Gan 'Konstruktivizm,'" *Ermitazh* 9 (1922), p. 8.

5. See "Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk," in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 290, and the discussion of the March 28, 1921 meeting, ibid., p. 92 n. 14.

6. Date of opening from invitation card reproduced in Szymon Bojko, "Rodchenko's Early Spatial Constructions," in *Von der Fläche zum Raum/From Surface to Space: Russia, 1916–24,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1974), p. 18.

The invitation card referred to the show as the group's *Second Spring Exhibition.* According to V. M. Lobanov, the earliest chronicler of Obmokhu (writing in 1930), the 1921 show was the group's third exhibition. He listed four exhibitions organized by Obmokhu between its founding in 1919 and its dissolution in 1923. According to him, these shows took place in 1919, 1920, 1921, and 1922, the last in conjunction with the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in the summer of that year. (See V. M. Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki za poslednie 25 let* [Moscow: Obshchestvo AKhR, 1930], pp. 104–5). Lobanov's account has formed the basis for work by other scholars (see *Vystavki sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva. Spravochnik* [Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1965], vol. 1, pp. 37, 59, 74). Lobanov's labeling of the 1921 exhibition as the group's third show was also confirmed by Vladimir Stenberg (conversation with author, April 1974).

However, Aleksandra Shatskikh argues, on the basis of the correspondence between Georgii Echeistov and Georgii Shchetinin, that the group acquired its name only after September 1919, being initially called Obmolkhud, and that its first exhibition was held in May 1920, not in 1919 (see Aleksandra Shatskikh, "A Brief History of Obmokhu," in this volume). A contemporary review of the May 1920 exhibition, which explains the group's acronym, confirms this (A. A. Sidorov, "Khudozhestvennye vystavki," *Tvorchestvo* 2–4 [1920], p. 34). Although Lobanov gave the wrong year, the details of the show, as listed on the poster (reproduced by Shatskikh), correspond with Lobanov's account of the first exhibition, i.e., that it was held in the spring (opening on May 2nd) at the First State Free Art Workshops on Rozhdestvenka, and that Anatolii Lunacharskii and Lev Kamenev spoke at the opening. However, Lobanov's assertion that the first exhibition consisted entirely of agitational work does not accord with Sidorov's review, which described paintings and even a sculpture. Lobanov stated that the first exhibition (exclusively agitational work) was held on Rozhdestvenka, while the second (posters plus more formal investigations) was held in the

group's studio in the former Fabergé shop on the corner of Neglinnaia Street and Kuznetskii most. Although this indeed was the location of their studio, his account is somewhat confused. Certainly there seems to be no reason for Lobanov to have exaggerated Obmokhu's importance by adding another exhibition; although Obmokhu was an agitational and collective organization, its interest in formal experimentation was far removed from the Realist cause Lobanov espoused. In view of this—and given Vladimir Stenberg's assertions—it is possible that there were four shows in all and that there was another exhibition devoted entirely to agitational work. It is possible, moreover, that such an exhibition took place prior to the May 1920 exhibition, and this would explain why the opening of the May 1920 show—a show, after all, by a new group of young artists—had such a lineup of eminent speakers (Lunacharskii, Kamenev, Ol'ga Kameneva, David Shterenberg, Osip Brik, and Georgii Iakulov). Likewise, it is possible that there was another exhibition, perhaps more informal, in Obmokhu's studio at some time after the May 1920 show and before the end of the year. As the first exhibition opened in the spring, the 1921 show could still have been the group's *Second Spring Exhibition* as well as its third show overall. Certainly the inclusion of "spring" in the title is puzzling, particularly since it is more reminiscent of the salons of czarist Russia than of the postrevolutionary avant-garde.

7. The contributors are listed on the invitation card, reproduced in Bojko, "Rodchenko's Early Spatial Constructions," p. 18.

8. Shatskikh, "Brief History of Obmokhu." It was registered within the Subsection for Artistic Work of Izo Narkompros before May 1920. "Iz deiatel'nosti IZO," *IZO. Vestnik Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv N.K.P.* 1 (March 10, 1921), p. 4.

9. See Alma Law, "A Conversation with Vladimir Stenberg," *Art Journal,* Fall 1981, p. 223 and E. A. Speranskaia, ed., *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo pervykh let Oktiabria. Materialy i issledovaniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), p. 70.

10. Speranskaia, *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo,* pp. 92, 125 n. 167.

11. Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki,* pp. 104–5. It also contained "*levye iskaniia*" (left-wing or avant-garde explorations) which are not described. Clearly, for Lobanov the importance of Obmokhu lay in the fact that the "Productionist aspirations of the participants dominated over easel painting." Ibid., p. 106.

12. Sidorov, "Khudozhestvennye vystavki." He also suggests that this statue is well riveted.

13. Vladimir Stenberg, conversation with author, November 1974. See note 6 above.

14. Law, "Conversation with Vladimir Stenberg," p. 224. The invitation gave the address as 11 Bol'shaia Dmitrovka (reproduced in Bojko, "Rodchenko's Early Spatial Constructions," p. 18).

15. See Ulen, "Die Ausstellungen in Russland," *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* 1–2 (1922), p. 19, reprinted in I. Matsa, ed., *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let. Materialy i dokumentatsiia* (Moscow and Leningrad: Ogiz-Izogiz, 1933), p. 138, where it is dated 1920.

16. See *Egység* 2 (1922), p. 9.

17. Ibid., p. 7. The issue also contained photographs of a Gabo relief (p. 8) and an Unovis composition exhibited in Moscow in 1921 (p. 10).

18. Ibid., pp. 5–6.

19. Ibid., p. 8.

20. Ulen, "Die Ausstellungen in Russland," p. 19.

21. Quoted in Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 147.

22. V. I. Lenin, "Iz doklada Vserossiiskogo tsentral'nogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta i Soveta narodnykh komissarov o vneshnei i vnutrennei politike 22 dekabria," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1919), reprinted in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* pp. 63–64.

23. See Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams,* pp. 145–64. For contemporary enthusiasm about Ford's ideas, see I. M. Burdianskii, *Nauchnaia organizatsiia truda* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1925), pp. 23–25.

24. See L. Pamilla and V. Chukovich, *NOT—velenie vremeni* (Minsk: Belarus, 1973).

25. See E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924–1926* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 409–11.

26. P. M. Kerzhentsev, *Printsipy organizatsii. Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1968), p. 275, quoted in Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams,* p. 156.

27. M. L-in, "Miting ob iskusstve," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 1 (December 7, 1918), pp. 3–4, reprinted as "Miting ob iskusstve (24 XI 1918 g. v Petrograde)," in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* pp. 173–76.

28. Nikolai Punin, quoted in "Miting ob iskusstve," in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* pp. 175–76.

29. "Primechanie redaktsii," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 8 (January 26, 1919), p. 2.

30. Osip Brik "Drenazh iskusstvu," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 1 (December 7, 1918), p. 1.

31. David Shterenberg, "Pora poniat'," *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (Moscow: IZO Narkompros, 1921), p. 5.

32. "Rech' Narodnogo kommissara po prosveshcheniiu A. V. Lunarcharskogo," in *Pervaia vserossiiskaia konferentsiia po khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti. Avgust 1919* (Moscow: Podotdel khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv NKP, 1920), pp. 63–64.

33. See N. Kol'tsova, "Programma-deklaratsiia khudozhestvenno-proizvodstvennoi komissi," *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* 10 (1967), pp. 14–15.

34. Nikolai Punin, "O novykh gruppirovkakh," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 10 (February 9, 1919), as translated in Larissa Zhadova, *Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art 1910–1930,* trans. Alexander Lieven (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 322.

35. Anatolii Strigalev, "The Art of the Constructivists: From Exhibition to Exhibition, 1914–1932," trans. James West, in *Art Into Life,* p. 29.

36. K. Malevich, "Sorok piat'. Vvedenie v teoriiu o pribavochnom elemente v zhivopise," 1925, private archive, Moscow, p. 81, quoted in Zhadova, *Malevich,* pp. 81, 130 n. 32.

37. See Zhadova, *Malevich,* pp. 96ff.

38. El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, *Die Kunstismen, 1914–1924* (Zurich–Munich–Leipzig: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, 1925), p. xi. Architectural titles for Lissitzky's prouns abound, e.g., *Proun*

IE. Gorod. Eskiz (*Sketch for Proun IE: Town,* 1919–20, plate no. 206). See Peter Nisbet, "An Introduction to El Lissitzky," in *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Busch–Reisinger Museum, the Sprengel Museum Hanover, and the Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1987), pp. 20–21.

39. El Lissitzky, "New Russian Art: A Lecture," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts,* trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 340.

40. Chashnik's project was published in *UNOVIS. Listok* 1 (November 20, 1920).

41. Zhadova, *Malevich,* pp. 87ff.

42. Il. Chashnik, "Arkhitekturno-tekhnicheskii fakul'tet," *UNOVIS* 2 (January 1921), pp. 12–15.

43. See *Izvestiia VTsIK,* December 25, 1920.

44. Quoted in German Karginov, *Rodchenko,* trans. Elisabeth Hoch (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 60.

45. Of course, artists and writers such as David Burliuk and Vladimir Markov had begun the process of establishing a more scientific basis for artistic analysis before the Revolution. Indeed, it was Burliuk who had introduced the French term for the texture of the painted surface, *facture,* into Russian as *faktura* in 1912. (See his articles "Kubizm" and "Faktura" in *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu,* December 1912 or January 1913, pp. 95–101 and 102–10; the former is translated in Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde,* pp. 70–77). By 1914 Markov had explored in minute detail the practical and philosophical ramifications of the term *faktura* in relation to various arts and crafts (including sculpture, architecture, and icon painting), nature, and the machine. (See Vladimir Markov, *Printsipy tvorchestva v plasticheskikh iskusstvakh. Faktura* [St. Petersburg: Souiz molodezhi, 1914]). The importance of this process of analysis was endorsed by Izo Narkompros in February 1919 in its statement concerning "artistic culture," which emphasized the need to create precise definitions of "the elements of artistic activity" and to establish "objective criteria of artistic value." See "Polozhenie Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv i khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti NKP po voprosu 'o khudozhestvennoi kul'tury,'" *Iskusstvo kommuny* 11 (February 16, 1919), reprinted in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* pp. 63–64.

46. A. M. Rodchenko, "The Line," trans. James West, in *Art Into Life,* p. 73.

47. See V. I. Dal', *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka,* vol. 2 (Moscow and St. Petersburg, 1881), p. 152, where *konstruktsiia* is applied to buildings as well as to the structure of language; and the more detailed later definition in D. N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka,* vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1935), p. 1443.

48. See Vladimir Markov, "Printsipy novogo iskusstva," *Soiuz molodezhi* 1 (April 1912), pp. 5–14, and *Soiuz molodezhi* 2 (June 1912), pp. 5–18, translated in Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde,* pp. 25–38.

49. Ivan Puni, "Tvorchestvo zhizni," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 5 (January 5, 1919), p. 1.

50. See V. Dmitriev, "Pervyi itog," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 15 (March 16, 1919), p. 3.

51. See Anatolii Strigalev, "From Painting to the Construction of Matter," in Zhadova, *Tatlin,* p. 24.

52. Vasily Kandinsky, "Program for the Institute of Artistic Culture," in Kenneth Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 471.

53. See D. N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka,* vol. 3 (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1939), p. 648.

54. See "Liubov' Popova," in *Desiataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka. Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm* (Moscow: Otdel IZO Narkomprosa, 1919), reprinted in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* p. 112. In the same statement, she also used the term *akonstruktivnost'* (nonconstructiveness) to denote the absence of construction and hence the antithesis of *arkhitektonika* (architectonics). The date of the opening of this show is given in Strigalev, "Art of the Constructivists," p. 28. *Zhivopisnoe postroenie* (painterly structure) or *zhivopisnoi stroi* (painterly construct) were also used by other artists to denote pictorial structure. See statements such as those by Aleksandr Shevchenko and Aleksei Grishchenko in the catalogue of the *Dvenadtsataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka. Tsvetodinamos i tektonicheskii primitivizm* (Moscow: Otdel IZO Narkomprosa, 1919), reprinted in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* pp. 117–20. Occasionally *struktura* (structure) was also used.

55. See *Desiataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka,* in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let,* p. 113.

56. Naum Gabo and Noton Pevzner [Antoine Pevsner], "Realisticheskii manifest," August 1920, original and translation reprinted in *Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings* (London: Lund Humphries, 1957), p. 152.

57. *XIX vystavka VTsVB* (Moscow: Otdel IZO Narkomprosa, 1920), nos. 93–107 and 117. According to Rodchenko, this exhibition opened on October 2nd (see his recollections quoted in Karginov, *Rodchenko,* p. 86).

58. *XIX vystavka VTsVB,* pp. 8–9.

59. *XIX vystavka VTsVB,* nos. 125–34.

60. Strigalev, "Art of the Constructivists," p. 31.

61. Nikolai Khardzhiev, *K istorii russkogo avangarda* (Stockholm: Hylaea Prints, 1976), p. 124 n. 2.

Khan-Magomedov stated that Rodchenko exhibited the kiosk and Sovdep (Soviet of Deputies building) designs along with twenty other sketches at this show (Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 54).

62. For more details on the debates, see Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* pp. 83–89 and Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* pp. 83–89.

63. See Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* pp. 83–89 and Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* pp. 83–89.

64. See Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* p. 84 and the transcription of the discussion of Rodchenko's *Dva kruga* (*Two Circles,* ca. 1920), ibid., pp. 87–88 n. 5.

65. Rodchenko, "Line," p. 73.

66. Nikolai Khardzhiev, "Maiakovskii i Tatlin. K 90-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia khudozhnika," reprinted in *Neue russische Literatur. Almanach* (Salzburg, 1978), p. 90.

67. See V. Tatlin, T. Shapiro, I. Meerzon, and P. Vinogradov, "Nasha predstoiashchaia rabota," *VIII s"ezd sovetov. Ezhednevnyi biulleten' s"ezda* 13 (January 1, 1921), p. 11. Translation adapted from "The Work Ahead of Us," in *Vladimir Tatlin* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1968), p. 51.

68. See Tatlin et al., "Nasha predstoiashchaia rabota," p. 11, and Lissitzky, "New Russian Art," p. 337.

69. See Christina Lodder, "Tatlin's Monument to the Third International as a Symbol of Revolution," in Gabriel P. Weisberg and Laurinda S. Dixon, eds., *The Documented Image: Visions in Art History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 275–88.

70. These works were dated 1918 when they were reproduced in 1922 in *Kino-fot* 5 (1922). They were, however, exhibited at the Tenth State Exhibition in 1919 under the title of *White Non-Objective Sculptures.*

71. See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* plate 1.33.

72. See "Report No. 1," March 18, 1921, and the list of slogans in "Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk," in Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko,* pp. 289, 291.

73. Vladimir Stenberg, conversation with author, November 1974.

74. *Worker by the Car,* oil on canvas, 71 x 89 cm, State Architecture and Art Museum, Rostov-Iaroslavskii, reproduced in *Avantgarde, 1910–1930: Russian and Soviet Art* (Turku: Turku Art Museum, 1989), p. 54, details on p. 63.

75. The title is inscribed on the verso with the date 1918 (Giovanni Carandente, ed., *Arte russa e sovietica, 1870–1930* [Milan: Fabbri, 1989], p. 387). The date is more likely to be ca. 1920; the inscription is of questionable value since it could have been made any time before the work was acquired by the Tret'iakov in 1984.

76. Andrei Nakov, however, identifies *Color Construction No. 10* as a *Proekt prostranstvenno-konstruktivnogo sooruzheniia* (*Project for a Spatial-Constructive Structure*). See A. B. Nakov, *2 Stenberg 2,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Annely Juda Gallery, London (London: Annely Juda Gallery, 1975), p. 42. He asserts that works with such titles were "two-dimensional projects for three-dimensional works" (ibid., p. 71). Such a description could be applied to *Color Construction No. 10,* which has a stronger sculptural emphasis than the other paintings given this title (e.g., *Color Construction No. 12*). There is no *Project for a Spatial-Constructive Structure No. 10* listed in the January 1922 exhibition catalogue, the highest number in that series of works shown being no. 6 (see *Konstruktivisty. K. K. Medunetskii, V. A. Stenberg, G. A. Stenberg* [Moscow: Kafe poetov, 1922], no. 41). Nevertheless, it is possible that *Color Construction No. 10* has been mistitled and that Nakov's title is correct.

77. The drawing was probably executed in late 1920 or early 1921, while its *Composition* counterpart is dated 1920. Other drawings in the Inkhuk portfolio of the Costakis Collection are dated 1920 or April 1921, when the debate was concluded. For instance, Ioganson's pair of *Composition* and *Construction* drawings are dated April 7, 1921, Ladovskii's April 15, 1921, while Medunetskii's *Construction* is dated 1920. See Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1981), pp. 110–27.

78. Title taken from *Konstruktivisty,* no. 42. It was identified by the artist in a conversation with the author, April 1974.

79. Law, "Conversation with Vladimir Stenberg," p. 225.

80. State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, Soviet Graphics Inventory no. 13045, reproduced in *Art Into Life,* p. 95.

81. See *Egység* 2 (1922), p. 7. The title for these works employed by the Stenbergs in January 1922 in their exhibition catalogue *Konstruktivisty* was *Konstruktsiia prostranstvennogo sooruzheniia.* Andrei Nakov identified this particular work as *Konstruktsiia prostranstvennogo sooruzheniia IV,* catalogue no. 4 (see Nakov, *2 Stenberg 2,* p. 72).

82. Vladimir Stenberg, conversation with author, November 1974.

83. Aleksei Babichev, untitled notes, private archive, Moscow. The full quotation is cited in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* p. 97. Similar observations were made by Lissitzky in "New Russian Art," p. 337.

84. Konstantin Medunetskii, *Celebration,* undated, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, measurements unknown, Museum of Fine Arts, Syktyvkar. Reproduced in *Avantgarde, 1910–1930,* p. 45, details on p. 62.

85. The signature and date of 1921 on *Color Construction No. 7* suggest that *Color Construction No. 9* was also produced in 1921, although it is dated 1920 in *Art Into Life,* p. 46.

86. It was illustrated in the catalogue of the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition*) under the title *Raumkonstruktion* (*Spatial Construction*). See *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (Berlin: Galerie van Diemen, 1922).

87. L. Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture* (New York: Brener, Warren and Putnam, 1930), p. 109.

88. Karl Ioganson, "From Construction to Technology and Invention," p. 70.

89. K. Medunetskii, V. Stenberg, and G. Stenberg, "Outline of the Report on 'Constructivism,'" trans. James West, in *Art Into Life,* p. 82.

fig. 1
Display of student work from the color discipline, Basic Division, Vkhutemas, 1926.

The Place of Vkhutemas in the Russian Avant-Garde

Natal'ia Adaskina

The Moscow Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops) has traditionally been regarded as one of the most significant centers of the Russian avant-garde. Its prominence was owing not solely to the natural confluence within its walls of many of the avant-garde's leading members but also—and with greater reason—to its having been there, in the workshops, that the principles of avant-garde artistic culture were forcefully revealed.

Even as Vkhutemas was being organized, in order to accommodate a number of changes demanded by the evolution of art, the need to derive teaching methods suited to the new artistic trends was one of the school's reasons for being. Analytical methods of investigating artistic form—methods born of the avant-garde's experimentation—were the cornerstone of Vkhutemas's pedagogical system. At Vkhutemas, the fundamental tendencies of the avant-garde movement were theorized and developed. Here, too, the contradictions that had accumulated within the avant-garde, the conflicts among its various strands, and the crises in its development were in dramatic evidence.

The creation and operation of Vkhutemas were not, of course, joined solely to considerations of the avant-garde; Vkhutemas was an institution with links to the artistic currents in Russian culture of the 1920s as a whole. The spirit of the avant-garde, however, and the tasks of the avant-garde movement shaped what was most essential in its character. The program of study and the teaching methods employed at Vkhutemas embodied in full the chief tenets and contradictions of the avant-garde: an orientation toward artistic experimentation; exploration of form; maximally individual, subjective creation uneasily allied with the search for collective, objective knowledge in the products of artistic experimentation; solution of the dilemma of analysis and synthesis in artistic practice and in the theorization of contemporary art; the variance between the avant-garde's programmatic orientation toward absolute innovation and the historicism that was characteristic of leading vanguard artists; and the search for ways to resolve the conflict between an orientation toward the irreplicably personal, the unique creation of genius, and an interest in industrial production, mechanical reproduction, and the organization of the life of the masses.

Before proceeding to the heart of this essay, a brief review of the history and structure of Vkhutemas is in order.[1] This summary is indispensable, inasmuch as where Vkhutemas has been described by scholars, it has often appeared to be a peculiar chimera, made up of elements which could not possibly have coexisted (but which did, in fact, characterize it at various times). It is essential that the reader have some notion of a structure that underwent continuous, and at times fundamental, change.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century, the system of art education in Russia, centered on the Imperial Academy of Arts, had been in a state of profound crisis. Piecemeal reforms were no solution: the system could not accommodate new artistic phenomena, which existed apart from and even in defiance of academic orientations; nor was it able to meet the demands which industrial development placed on art schools. The first problem was to a certain extent solved—other than by the flight of young people to art schools in Paris and Munich—through an expansion of the number of private schools and workshops in Russia (including "workshops without a supervisor"), where new methods of art education began to evolve. To the second problem there was for the time being no solution. Those artistic-and-industrial schools that existed in Russia were oriented entirely toward manual, artisanal methods in the fabrication of everyday objects, in

fig. 2
Foreground, display of student work from the space discipline, Basic Division, Vkhutemas, 1926.

printing, and so forth, and failed to react at all to progress in industry.

The Moscow Vkhutemas came into being as a consequence of the reform of art education introduced in Russia immediately after the October Revolution. The reform was carried out in two stages. The first, in 1918, entailed the abolition of the academic system: the Academy of Arts and an array of art and artistic-and-industrial schools and academies in various Russian cities were put on an equal footing—all were converted into State Free Art Workshops.[2] It was thus that the First State Free Art Workshops (formerly the Stroganov Artistic and Industrial School) and the Second State Free Art Workshops (formerly the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture) were created in Moscow.

The conversion of the Academy of Arts and other educational establishments into State Free Art Workshops was no mere formality; there were material changes. In the majority of the new institutions priority was given to "pure" art, to painting above all, and individual workshops were introduced, each workshop following one or another artist's own program and methods. The State Free Art Workshops thus endeavored to replicate the Renaissance studio, where the master worked amid apprentices and disciples and passed his experience and artistry on to them. Students were allowed, however, to elect workshop supervisors and to choose freely with whom to enroll. Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) consistently adhered, moreover, to a policy of equal participation in artistic life for all movements, and set a quota for them in the workshops.

The State Free Art Workshops opened for classes in the autumn of 1918; for the first time in its history, art education in Russia was based on the principles of freedom and democracy. That the new institutions had as many definite shortcomings as incontestable virtues—both organizationally and

pedagogically—gradually became apparent in the two years that followed.

It was in the State Free Art Workshops that a number of leading artists, primarily members of left movements, began to create a system of art education derived from the experience of the new art. As can be ascertained from archival materials, the programs of Kazimir Malevich, Georgii Iakulov, and Aleksei Babichev in the First Free State Art Workshops, and of Vasilii Kandinskii in the Second, were highly innovative. Through the efforts of these and other artists, new methods were originated which liberated students from the routine acquisition of professional skills; the new methods developed students' powers of perception and gave them the means to fix their perception in the wealth of artistic forms. Yet, insofar as the pursuit of primacy in formal discovery and invention (in general inherent in the avant-garde) continued inside school walls, there was no broad sharing of educational innovations among the workshops. There was a danger of creating closed circles, which would lead to students' merely duplicating the individual styles of their teachers.

A fair number of instructors, moreover, held to their old tested methods of teaching. And they were supported by a large proportion of students who during their previous years of study in the former schools had become accustomed to a certain logic in the stale programs and modes of instruction, and strove to preserve continuity.

As a whole, however, the State Free Art Workshops in Moscow were, during their two years of operation, a breeding ground for new initiatives. Avant-garde art continued to evolve, both within the educational framework and parallel to it; it assumed new forms. Thus at the exhibitions of Obmokhu (the Society of Young Artists), a group which had been formed in 1919 by students at the First State Free Art Workshops, there were already no Tatlinesque "selections of materials" but experimental constructions not seen heretofore. (The Obmokhu exhibition in May 1921 would be recalled as the crucible of Constructivism.) At the end of 1919, Sinskul'ptarkh (the Synthesis of Sculpture and Architecture Commission), which had been under the auspices of Izo Narkompros, was reorganized into Zhivskul'ptarkh (the Synthesis of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture Commission) by young artists and architects, many of whom were at the time students in the State Free Art Workshops; it was the first group oriented toward forms that, consonant with a new phase of artistic evolution, synthesized the arts. These developments had their direct continuation inside a new educational institution on whose fate they exercised a substantial influence: Vkhutemas, which came into being when the First and Second State Free Art Workshops were merged in 1920.

The creation of Vkhutemas belongs to the second stage of the reform of art education, when educational institutions everywhere underwent consolidation. The reasons for this action were various;[3] two deserve mention. First, students had by this time become dissatisfied with the workshops' lack of clearly delineated programs and with a system that led to the mass production of "little Konchalovskiis" and "little Tatlins."[4] Second, among avant-garde artists, notions of the objectivity of formal laws were gaining more and more ground, leaving it clear that objective methods should be made the general basis of art education.

The Decree of the Council of People's Commissars on the Moscow Higher State Artistic-Technical Workshops was ratified on November 29, 1920, and signed by Lenin on December 18th. It is symptomatic that the decree was silent on the graduation of "pure" artists, traditionally the chief aim of art education; that is, unlike the State Free Art Workshops, Vkhutemas tilted from its inception in favor of an artistic-and-

fig. 3
Workshop in the Woodworking Faculty, Vkhutein, 1928. Photograph Aleksandr Rodchenko.

technical education. The decree also set out the structure of Vkhutemas. It would have eight faculties—Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Graphics, Textiles, Ceramics, Woodworking, and Metalworking—for each of which a preparatory (or basic) division was envisioned.

The history of Vkhutemas/Vkhutein[3] falls rather neatly into three basic periods, each corresponding to the tenure of one of its three rectors. The principal conflicts and many of the personnel changes at Vkhutemas were in one way or another, directly or more often indirectly, linked to the issue of Vkhutemas's orientation. The chief battles were fought over whether that orientation should be toward "pure" or production art.

Insofar as it is possible to characterize each of these periods succinctly and schematically, the sculptor Efim Ravdel''s term as rector (1920–23) can be labeled the period in which Vkhutemas's pedagogical methods (its so-called *distsipliny*, or disciplines) were formulated and its eight faculties, with a preparatory course (offered in the Basic Division) common to all, put in place. Ravdel''s term also witnessed the rise of Productivist tendencies (which, though they had been mentioned in the 1920 decree, had then yet to take root), culminating in the transfer of a number of left artists of a Constructivist orientation from the preparatory-course workshops to the production faculties.

Vladimir Favorskii, who served as rector during 1923–26, presided over the most fruitful and harmonious period in the history of Vkhutemas. In these years, its structure attained its final form. The preparatory Basic Course—where the formal-analytical disciplines had first been employed and which had originally been developed as an introduction to architecture and non-objective painting and later oriented toward production art—was rethought and adapted to encompass all varieties of artistic work, to the point of including the principles of Realist figurative art in its teaching. The Basic Course became, that is, the universal foundation of art education. An effort was likewise made to regulate and systematize the programs of Vkhutemas's faculties. During this period, moreover, "easel art" and production art attained, and maintained, an equal footing. It was not an artificial equilibrium, for Favorskii conceived the various fields of art as a single system, and he endeavored to make this belief the guiding principle of Vkhutemas.

Favorskii was succeeded in 1926 by Pavel Novitskii, and a technical preoccupation again came to the fore, accompanied this time by "sociologizing" tendencies in the fine-arts faculties. The notion of the formal oneness of all varieties of art, which had been so diligently nurtured in previous years, was discarded. The Basic Division, where students of all specializations were taught the same formal and artistic principles, was cut back sharply, the length of its course reduced from two years to six months. The links of each faculty to the others were considerably weakened. Vkhutein was splintered into self-contained faculties, each of whose fates was individually determined—and ceased to exist.

Let us return, however, to the matter of the avant-garde. Vkhutemas gathered together within its walls the most prominent representatives of avant-garde trends of the 1910s. A number of these artists—Aleksandr Shevchenko, Anna Golubkina, Aleksandr Drevin, Kandinskii, Petr Konchalovskii, Boris Korolev, Pavel Kuznetsov, Aristarkh Lentulov, Il'ia Mashkov, and Robert Fal'k, among others—were given their own workshops in the Painting and Sculpture faculties. Others—Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Nadezhda Udal'tsova, Ivan Kliun, Aleksandr Vesnin, Liubov' Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Aleksandra Ekster, and Aleksandr Os'merkin—received workshops in the Basic Division.

fig. 4
Baskov
Student work from the color discipline, Basic Division, Vkhutemas.

Throughout all the organizational changes and fluctuations in policy at Vkhutemas/Vkhutein, the workshops in the Painting Faculty preserved as best they could their character—acquired back in the days of the State Free Art Workshops—as self-sufficient studios centered about one master artist. They were an embodiment of the avant-garde cult of the artist as demiurge, of the absolute creative personality. The influence of these artist-teachers on their students can be discerned in the stylistic tendencies of later Soviet painting; distinct trends can be traced to students of Shevchenko, Fal'k, Kuznetsov, Konstantin Istomin, and others. There was, of course, no hard and fast correlation between such influence and a teacher's originality. David Shterenberg's students, for example, showed no discernible signs of his influence. (It is no coincidence that it was in Shterenberg's workshop that the student Aaron Rzheznikov organized, as was allowed under workshop rules, a "workshop without a supervisor" at the end of the 1920s.)

Not only the subjective and individual but the objective and universal—that is, both halves of the fundamental avant-garde antithesis—came into play at Vkhutemas. Even in its earliest stages, formal experimentation by the avant-garde took on the features of a scientific inquiry. Spontaneous self-expression, both in the work of a single avant-garde artist and in the self-reflexion of a group of artists, was constantly conjoined and intertwined with attempts to formulate objective laws of perception and form. The work of Kandinskii is without question the best example of this conjunction of the subjective and objective.

Kandinskii was at the forefront of the Russian avant-garde's artistic science, having organized Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture) in 1920 precisely for the conduct of objective investigations into the elements of art. Kandinskii drew up a research program for Inkhuk and initiated its implementation; shortly afterward, however, disagreements arose; Kandinskii departed, and Inkhuk followed a somewhat different course from that mapped by him. There is not space here to examine in detail the work and interaction of those affiliated with Inkhuk. Suffice it to emphasize Kandinskii's indisputable influence on an array of artists who would seem to have rejected his conceptions and methods. Certain of those artists were teachers at Vkhutemas. (The research at Inkhuk and the work of Vkhutemas were tightly interwoven.)

The work done at Vkhutemas testifies, above all, to the avant-garde's love of theorizing. The impulse to theorize—which at earlier stages (and in other social and cultural conditions) had found an outlet in manifestos and pamphlets and in oral, colloquial forms—now, at the beginning of the 1920s, was funneled into scientific papers (at Inkhuk) and academic programs (at Vkhutemas; at GVTM [the Higher State Theater Workshops], organized by Vsevolod Meierkhol'd; and elsewhere). Creative work—reflections on artists' individual and group evolution—continued to be the stuff of these new (to artists) genres of theorizing.

By this time, of course, theories had been advanced in some quantity by art critics and historians. Nikolai Tarabukin (also a member of Inkhuk) had already written his *Opyt teorii zhivopisi* (*Toward a Theory of Painting*, 1916), in which he defined the study of the history of art as the "analysis of the elements of artistic creations."[6] During the same period, Nikolai Punin's examination of contemporary tendencies in art had led him to a variant of the formal-analytical theory of art. Punin had also played a crucial role in defining the concept of "artistic culture," the theoretical underpinning of the measures enacted by the Petrograd Izo Narkompros in the immediate postrevolutionary period.[7] "Artistic culture" was a notion derived by theorists of the Russian avant-garde from the actual practice of new artistic trends. The values of "artistic culture"

fig. 5
Petr Galaktionov with his diploma project: furnishings for a movie theater, Vkhutein, 1929.

fig. 6
Students in Lavinskii's workshop building a model of a rural reading room for display at the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, *1925.*

were defined as purely professional ones, the product of the "sustained artistic labor" of various schools.

At the beginning of the 1920s, analysis—isolating among the wide range of professional artistic means and devices those of chief importance to a given movement, and making them absolutes in artistic work—became the chief method of the new art scholarship, as well as the organizing principle of artistic life—of exhibitions, museums, and art education.

Describing his plans for the Museum of Painterly Culture, Kandinskii wrote in 1920: "It will collect experiments in formal construction according to the principle of juxtaposition: color planes and linear planes; the alignment, collision, and resolution of planes; the relation of surface-plane and volume; treatment of surface-plane and volume as self-sufficient elements; the coincidence or disconnection of linear and painterly planes and volumes; experiments in the creation of purely volumetric forms, both unitary and combinational, and so forth."[8] It was certainly under the influence of these conceptions of Kandinskii's—though already in his absence—that Babichev and Popova evolved their research programs in the Monumental Art Section of the Working Group of Objective Analysis at Inkhuk. The same conceptions lay at the heart of the system of disciplines in the Basic Division of Vkhutemas—whose most active creator and coordinator was, again, Popova.

For Kandinskii, analytical work was merely an interim stage in the quest for synthesis, or, in his terminology, "monumental art." For members of the Objective Analysis Section at Inkhuk and for teachers in Vkhutemas's Basic Division in 1921–22, however, analytical work was no mere sideline or auxiliary stage but an artistic and theoretical value in its own right. For them, moreover, the synthesis of formal and analytical experimentation—when they spoke of synthesis—was not Kandinskii's "monumental art" but production art, a specifically Russian offspring of the analytical stage in the evolution of the avant-garde. This bears on the fate of the Basic Division in Vkhutemas's first period and of those production faculties which came under the influence of Rodchenko's group.

At Vkhutemas, it was Favorskii's policy, followed in 1923–26, which, in its conception of the unity of the arts and its support for the work of art as an integrated and finished expression of artistic reality, was kindred with the ideas of Kandinskii. There were, of course, critical discrepancies between Kandinskii's understanding of these matters and their interpretation by Favorskii's adherents. Thus, whereas Kandinskii sought to study the laws of artistry as a whole, embracing both the spatial and the temporal arts, Vkhutemas confined itself strictly to the spatial arts.

In the clash between the Constructivism of the Productivists and Favorskii's synthesizing, two principles of the Russian avant-garde—the mechanical and the organic, respectively—collided. (Although somewhat later, in the latter half of the 1920s, Petr Miturich, in the Printing Trades Faculty [as the Graphics Faculty had been renamed], rebelled against Favorskii's methods as mechanistic from the point of view of free artistic intuition.)[9]

The notion of the oneness of the formal laws of all the spatial

fig. 7
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Design for a signboard for Vkhutemas, 1924.

fig. 8
Cover for Vkhutein prospectus, 1929.

arts was the cornerstone of Vkhutemas's educational system and united proponents of diverse trends. Zhivskul'ptarkh had been the first to experiment in promoting this unity—prior to the establishment of Vkhutemas. Its exhibitions were noteworthy not merely for joining architects, painters, and sculptors in one show but for their astonishing blending of art forms. The painters Rodchenko and Shevchenko, the sculptor Korolev, the architects Nikolai Ladovskii and Vladimir Krinskii, and others exhibited works belonging to one and the same nontraditional genre: fantastic architectural projects for "houses of Soviets," kiosks, communal housing, and so on. These "paper projects," executed in the Cubo-Futurist painting style of the era, were presented more as "easel art" than traditional architectural production. They bore witness to the organic unity of formal conceptions held by representatives of different fields of art; to the significance, at that moment, of formal experimentation in painting for all types of art; and to the importance of space as the material and constructive principle of form—not just for architects and sculptors but also for painters, who had not turned merely by chance to creating architectural projects on paper.

Joining forces in Vkhutemas's Basic Course, Rodchenko, Popova, Anton Lavinskii, Vladimir Khrakovskii, Viktor Kiselev, Korolev, Ladovskii, and Krinskii—painters, sculptors, and architects—fashioned teaching methods based on their shared conceptions. In 1920, Ladovskii independently worked out "psychoanalytical" methods in the Obmas (the United Workshops of the Architecture Faculty). In 1920–21, an effort was made in the Basic Division to assign successive phases in the study of form in painting to separate workshops: "color" would be studied in certain of them, "volume in painting" in others, "construction" in yet others, and so on. At that time, Popova and Vesnin's workshop, for instance, was labeled "Discipline No. 1: Color." These first analytical endeavors were, however, still very imprecise.

During the next stage (1922–23), the artists worked at systematizing programs and student work, having added "volumetric" and "spatial" disciplines to the "painterly." The task of integrating the new disciplines into the training of students of all specializations was taken up by the architects Ladovskii and Krinskii.

As this effort proceeded, the aim of the Basic Course changed. Initially, when they created their introductory program—the analytical or, as they were also called, "objective" disciplines—the teachers of the Painting and Sculpture faculties had seen their goal as the training of "easel artists," of non-objective artists. During 1921–23, the notion of production art—whose forms were typically refutations of "pure" art—came to the fore and gathered momentum in vanguard circles. By late 1922–early 1923, a new preparatory course had been conceived; it was based on the analytical study of form according to a clear-cut logic—from surface-planarity through volume to space—and was intended to foster production artists.

A group composed of Rodchenko, Aleksandr Vesnin, Lavinskii, and Popova presented Vkhutemas's directors with a plan (of Popova's design) to convert the Basic Division into a design faculty with a two-year introductory program and a two-year course in production art—production art at that moment being conceived to include street and interior decoration, industrial graphics, clothing design, and so forth. It was a plan, that is, to prepare students for the very same work that the Constructivists-Productivists were turning to at the time. But the plan was rejected and never put into effect. Rodchenko, Lavinskii, and Kiselev—all now Productivists—moved to the Metalworking and Woodworking faculties and there began instituting changes, replacing old received notions

fig. 9
Students in Rodchenko's workshop, Vkhutemas, 1924.

of applied art with new Constructivist tenets. Popova had started teaching at GVTM under Meierkhol'd in 1921, and in 1923 left Vkhutemas.

Conflicts between the Productivists and the partisans of traditional artistic forms were a hallmark of the years 1923–24. While the Constructivists-Productivists—also known as the "Productivists from Lef [the Left Front of the Arts]"—resolved the "easel versus production" impasse unequivocally in favor of production art, Favorskii and his sympathizers—Nikolai Dokuchaev, Istomin, Pavel Pavlinov, and certain others—saw the matter differently.

Favorskii, whom the "Productivists from Lef" had trouble putting their finger on (was he an "easel painter," "applied artist," or "Productivist mystic"?),[10] by and large erased the distinction between the two areas of creation. According to Favorskii's theory, the evolution of form proceeded from surface-planarity through volume to space—in the same sequence, that is, as was followed in the courses of the Basic Division. Once he became Vkhutemas's rector in 1923, Favorskii aspired not only to shore up advances already made in the Basic Division and to make the preparatory course compulsory and profitable for students in all faculties but to extend the logic of the formal disciplines to Vkhutemas's structure and methods as a whole. Favorskii's theoretical views relied both on the traditions of European Formalism and on direct analysis of avant-garde art and the practices of Russian artists, his Vkhutemas colleagues included. The Productivists, nonetheless, did not view Favorskii as one of their own.

In the middle and late 1920s, Constructivist tendencies were strong in the Metalworking Faculty, where Rodchenko and Tatlin were teachers; in the Woodworking Faculty, where Lissitzky had been teaching since his return from Europe; and in the Textile Faculty—there the result of Varvara Stepanova's influence. In the Architecture Faculty, traditionalists, Formalists (Ladovskii and his colleagues), and Constructivists (the Vesnins and their followers) all battled for influence. The Formalists' theoretical and artistic orientation came closest to Favorskii's conceptions, though Favorskii was not reckoned, as were the Formalists, among the innovators.

More and more painters who had once belonged to the avant-garde—members of Bubnovyi valet (Jack of Diamonds), including Mashkov, Lentulov, and Konchalovskii; and artists of Orientalist and Primitivist allegiances—were flocking to traditionalism by this time. Their evolution led them further and further away from formal and artistic experimentation. As a result, they strove in their teaching practices as well to keep to the model of the turn-of-the-century Parisian studio—and one of a moderate bent at that.

In mid-decade, it was in the Basic Division and the Printing Trades Faculty that the formal and analytical methods created by non-objective artists in 1920–23 were adhered to most closely and consistently. They were employed by, among others, Istomin, Pavlinov, Khrakovskii, the sculptors Nina Niss-Gol'dman and Romual'd Iodko, and the architects (students of Ladovskii's) Viktor Balikhin, Mikhail Turkus, Mikhail Korzhev, and Ivan Lamtsov. Yet, while in the Basic Division attitudes toward these methods remained unchanged over the entire decade, members of the specialized faculties complained more than once that they amounted to an unnecessary academic exercise, a waste of students' time.

Toward the end of the 1920s, as mentioned earlier, Vkhutein witnessed a growing technical preoccupation, a tendency to, as Favorskii put it, "play engineer." The finely adjusted balance between artistic and technical disciplines in the education of designers (graphic artists, furniture designers, textile designers, ceramists, and so forth) and of architects was targeted for change, at the expense of the formal artistic disciplines. In the

fig. 10
Aleksandr Deineka
Vkhutemas, *illustration for* Revolutionary Moscow, *1921. The album was distributed among delegates to the Third Congress of the Comintern.*

training of "pure" artists (painters and sculptors), more and more attention was paid not to professional but to ideological requirements. It was Novitskii—a theorist and member of October, one of the last left groups in Soviet art—who presided over the adoption of technical and "sociologizing" approaches to art. His disposition toward sociologizing was shared by such "right" groups as OMAKhR (the Young People's Section of the Association of Artists of the Revolution), whose ranks included students at Vkhutein.

The pitched battle among artists' groups in the middle and late 1920s drew in a large number of Vkhutemas/Vkhutein's teachers and students. The most influential groups, apart from October and AKhRR (the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia; from 1928 the Association of Artists of the Revolution, or AKhR), were Ost (the Society of Easel Painters)—whose members included both Vkhutemas/Vkhutein teachers (Shterenberg and Nikolai Kupreianov) and graduates (such as Andrei Goncharov, Iurii Pimenov, Aleksandr Deineka, and Petr Vil'iams)—and Four Arts, an association that brought together diverse, chiefly middle-aged artists, many of whom taught at the school (Favorskii, Istomin, Miturich, Kuznetsov, Vera Mukhina, Ivan Zholtovskii, and others).

The October group stood for the avant-garde's movement into production. The members of AKhRR, among whom were many solidly left artists of the 1910s (such as Lentulov and Mashkov), were apostates who renounced the avant-garde entirely. The young artists of Ost adapted the avant-garde legacy to easel painting and figuration (it is here, perhaps, that the legacy of Vkhutemas is most pronounced). And Four Arts sought to preserve artistic culture in conditions of increasing ideological pressure. (Yet, while many artists of this group were at home with the latest innovations, they perceived them solely in the context of the centuries-long evolution of art.)

A tendency to fall back on tradition had existed at Vkhutemas alongside the enthusiasm for innovation inherited from the avant-garde of the 1910s. And although the study of traditions and history (of professional trades, art forms, and artistic trends and schools) was not put forward as the chief method of art education—as it had been, for example, at the former Stroganov School (everything there was based on a thorough study of styles) or in the architecture department of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture—it did, after a certain struggle, find a place in the programs of various faculties. That it did is not solely a measure of the influence of purely traditionalist tendencies having no relation whatsoever to the avant-garde; it is also an index of the avant-garde's own attention to history. For when they turned to the theorization of vanguard trends in art and to the creation of educational systems and teaching methods, Malevich, Moisei Ginzburg, Popova and her colleagues at Inkhuk, and other artists traced the historical evolution of art with great care, uncovering the "additional element" (Malevich's famous term) in each new movement. They sought to organize exhibitions in the new museums of painterly or artistic culture according to the same evolutionary outline.

It should be recalled that in 1923 Moscow's Museum of Painterly Culture moved to one of the Vkhutemas buildings at 11 Rozhdestvenka (previously the site of the Stroganov School). Rodchenko had been the museum's director in 1920–22; Vil'iams and Lazar' Vainer administered it, and Solomon Nikritin headed its Research Board, in later years (all were Vkhutemas graduates). There Nikritin applied the method of formal analysis to the study of masterpieces of the past and endeavored to find exact and reliable mathematical formulas for the older artists' work. In 1925, the museum was the site of the survey exhibition *Levye techeniia v russkoi zhivopisi za 15 let*

fig. 11
The former Vkhutemas building on Kirov Street, 1976. Photograph Aleksandr Lavrent'ev.

fig. 12
Sergei Sen'kin
Tablet for the former Vkhutemas building commemorating Lenin's visit to the school on February 25, 1921; first version, 1960s.

(*Left Trends in Russian Painting over the Past Fifteen Years*).

But, of course, what linked Vkhutemas to the avant-garde above all and made it, for all the twists and turns in its orientation and history, a center of the avant-garde was the spirit of invention and experimentation which prevailed in the majority of its classrooms and workshops. The production faculties, under the guidance of such leading artist-constructors as Rodchenko, Tatlin, Lissitzky, and Stepanova, were a major site of innovation. Two vanguard movements—Constructivism and Rationalism—took shape in the Architecture Faculty. (Graduates of the Architecture Faculty included such major figures as Ivan Leonidov.)

But while unconcealed and programmatic innovation in architecture and design flourished at Vkhutemas, and was difficult to oppose, the situation in the Printing Trades Faculty was not so straightforward. Students in that faculty practiced Constructivist-style innovations, based on exploitation of the possibilities of typographical techniques, yet these innovations occurred outside rather than within the classroom, where formal mastery, achieved via the study of traditional techniques and devices, was wanted. Once students had acquired those skills, however, they incorporated in their work lessons learned from Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Gustav Klutsis, and other artists, who may not have been teachers in the Printing Trades Faculty but were continually at the center of students' attention. The vanguard artists' influence showed itself constantly, in both the students' assigned and their elective work.

By virtue of its concentrated atmosphere of exploration and innovation, Vkhutemas was for many years the site of diverse artistic undertakings. Among them were the Workshop of the Revolution—an attempt to translate the energy of the avant-garde into agitational forms—that Sergei Sen'kin, Klutsis, and others made plans to organize in 1924. A Projectionist Theater, an experiment by Nikolai Triaskin, Sergei Luchishkin, and Nikritin with Abstractionism in the theater, offered performances in 1923 and 1924. And the overwhelming majority of the participants in the *Pervaia diskussionnaia vystavka ob"edinenii aktivnogo revoliutsionnogo iskusstva* (*First Discussional Exhibition of Associations of Active Revolutionary Art*, Moscow, 1924), held in an exhibition space belonging to Vkhutemas, had connections to the school; they were teachers, students, or recent graduates.

What, then, was the role played by Vkhutemas in the history of the Russian avant-garde? Before attempting an answer, one should recall that Vkhutemas came into being when the avant-garde movement was already waning (its peak, of course, came in the mid- to late 1910s). Vkhutemas, by assembling vanguard artists to be its teachers, became a repository of the spirit of the avant-garde. And it met the avant-garde's quest for its own educational institution and teaching methods—methods which the avant-garde was obliged to create, because the values it championed were professional values.

With the adoption of the formal-analytical studies and synthesizing ideas of the avant-garde into art education, these values became an integral part of the artistic consciousness of Vkhutemas's graduates. And of succeeding generations. Because graduates of Vkhutemas became teachers in Moscow's institutions of higher education, the ideas and formal discoveries of the Russian avant-garde—which had become the ideas and practices of Vkhutemas—were part of the consciousness of young artists of the late 1950s and early 1960s. (Nor have these ideas lost their significance for art today.) Vkhutemas's introduction of the values of avant-garde art into artistic culture as a whole was, without question, its greatest achievement.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Jane Bobko

Notes

1. Thus far, research on Vkhutemas has been scattered throughout a large number of articles. The principal studies are those of R. Antonov, A. Lavrent'ev, S. O. Khan-Magomedov, and this author in the journal *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* and the *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* series of the Trudy VNIITE (nos. 28, 34, and 41 are the most pertinent). Khan-Magomedov's *VHUTEMAS. Moscou, 1920–1930*, trans. Joëlle Aubert-Yong, Nikita Krivocheine, and Jean-Claude Marcadé, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du Regard, 1990) has recently appeared, and a volume entitled *Vkhutemas—Vkhutein. 1920–1930* is forthcoming from Sovetskii khudozhnik. There is reason to hope that the gaps in our knowledge of Vkhutemas will soon be filled.

2. The entire conversion was overseen by Narkompros, which at that time counted many leading artists among its members, most of them adherents of the left (Cubo-Futurists, non-objective artists, and Suprematists) or center (Cézannists, Orientalists, and Primitivists).

3. Narkompros's limited resources for the upkeep of educational institutions were one of the reasons. Nonetheless, the creation of Vkhutemas via the consolidation of the State Free Art Workshops is highly reminiscent of the measures adopted in a number of European countries in the 1900s and 1910s, when the demands of industrial development were met by merging academies of fine arts and schools of applied arts into a new type of art school.

4. The unhappy students once hung a placard in the First State Free Art Workshops' entryway, on which they had written: "Down with the titanic Picassos and Gauguins! It's enough to mass-produce Tatlins, Konchalovskiis, Fedorovskiis, Os'merkins, Lentulovs . . ." (the list continued through all the teachers' names).

5. Vkhutemas was renamed Vkhutein (the Higher Artistic-Technical Institute) in 1927.

6. N. Tarabukin, *Opyt teorii zhivopisi* (Moscow: Proletkul't, 1923), p. 6. The book was written in 1916.

7. The statute of the Department of Fine Arts and Artistic Industry on "artistic culture" was published in *Iskusstvo kommuny*, February 16, 1919. For a detailed discussion of this concept, see Svetlana Dzhafarova, "The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture," in this volume.

8. V. Kandinskii, "Muzei zhivopisnoi kul'tury," *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn'* 2 (1920), p. 20.

9. See N. Adaskina, "Iz istorii poligraffaka Vkhutemasa (Ob"ektivno-analiticheskie i tvorcheski-lichnostnye nachala khudozhestvennoi pedagogiki)," in *Sovremennyi dizain i nasledie Vkhutemasa,* Trudy VNIITE, vyp. 34 (Moscow: Vsesoiuznyi naucho-issledovatel'skii institut tekhnicheskoi estetiki, 1982).

10. *Lef* 2 (1923), p. 174.

fig. 1
Page from Rodchenko's notebook with sketch for cover for Linearism, *1920.*
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

What Is Linearism?

Aleksandr Lavrent'ev

The term Linearism (*liniizm*) and the conception of painting it denoted were the invention of Aleksandr Rodchenko, who wrote at the end of 1919:

> *LINEARISM is a new tendency in non-objective creative work.*
> *The surface plane is, logically, being discarded, and so as to express greater constructedness, architecturalness in compositions—and there being no further need for it—that old favorite of painting's,* faktura *{density}, is being discarded, too.*[1]

It is legitimate to wonder to what purpose it behooved him to "discard," "discover," and issue declarations if the sole result was a handful of colored or white lines drawn with a brush over a black or colored ground. Rodchenko's own writings will provide the best answer.

The history of the Russian avant-garde in the 1910s and 1920s witnessed several fundamental discoveries about form in painting: the intersecting non-objective brush strokes, resembling the patterns of frost on glass, of Mikhail Larionov, promulgator of Rayism; the *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square,* 1915) of Kazimir Malevich, inaugurator of Suprematism; the counter-reliefs of Vladimir Tatlin, fashioned from real rather than trompe l'oeil fragments of iron, wood, glass, and wire. One might say that the last links in this chain, in which Liubov' Popova's "painterly architectonics" also figured, were the inventive semi-engineered constructions of Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg and of Karl Ioganson—and two cycles by Rodchenko: the first, his paintings and graphic works composed of lines and points, and the second, three monochromatic canvases in which the surface of the painting had already crossed into the category of object. "Everything is finished. Primary colors. Each plane is a plane and there need be no representations."[2] A red, a yellow, and a blue canvas—these are no longer constructions, not compositions; they are the end stage of the experimentation of an extreme innovator.

> *Who saw a WALL . . .*
> *Who saw JUST A SURFACE PLANE—*
> *EVERYONE . . . AND NO ONE.*
> *One who had truly seen came and simply SHOWED*
> *the* square
> *This means opening eyes to the* surface plane.[3]

Thus is Malevich described in "Kto my?" ("Who Are We?"), the manifesto of the Constructivists written by Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova in 1921–22. With his *Black Square,* Malevich showed the surface plane to be a reality in painting and a category of visual thinking.

> *And when in his laboratory one person set up*
> *the* square,
> *His radio reached all whom it behooved and whom it did not, then soon, on all the "ships of left art" sailing under white, black, and red flags . . . everything utterly, utterly everything was covered with* squares.[4]

Rodchenko's investigations into and analyses of non-objective creation brought him to this necessity: the declaration of the line as the basis for modeling. "A new apprehension of the world," he noted, "has been elucidated in the line."[5]

> *Who saw an ANGLE,*
> *Who saw a FRAMEWORK, a PLAN?*
> *EVERYONE . . . AND NO ONE.*
> *One who had truly seen came and simply SHOWED*
> *the* line

And when yesterday in his laboratory one person set up the
line, *the* grid, *and the* point,
His radio reached all whom it behooved and whom it did not, then soon, and especially on all the "ships of left art" newly christened "Constructivist," sailing under diverse flags . . . everything utterly . . . utterly is being constructed of lines and grids.

OF COURSE, *the square existed even previously, the line and the grid existed previously.*

Which is the crux.

Just this—THEY POINTED THEM OUT
THEY PROCLAIMED THEM.

The square—1915, Malevich's laboratory.

The line, the grid, the point—1919, Rodchenko's laboratory.[6]

No one, it may be, wrote about experimentation and the laboratories of art with as much ardor as Rodchenko. And his attitude toward art always embraced a desire to affirm his pride of place, to "patent" the uniqueness and innovation of his every new series. In a draft "auto-monograph," Rodchenko enumerated the innovatory services he had rendered, among them that "I introduced and proclaimed the line as an element of construction and as an independent form in painting."[7]

As a painter, Rodchenko existed within the philosophical space of "left" painting and was connected to other artists by numerous personal and creative threads. His work is, in addition to all else, a reaction to what had happened and was happening in painting during 1917–21. Yet, as an extreme innovator and inventor, Rodchenko was sui generis, and his work should be appraised according to his own criteria of innovation, originality, technical mastery, and economy of expressive means. He himself was cognizant of the obstacles should his work be viewed from the vantage of different requirements, criteria, or positions. By the very existence of all those lines and circles painted on canvas, he laid down a new criterion of judgment.

It should be recalled that Rodchenko had announced two previous conceptions of painting—"dynamism of the plane" (constructed conjunctions of planes intersecting in space) and "concentration of color and form" (compositions of floating, gleaming colored spheres)—in works he displayed at his first solo exhibition (Moscow, 1918), the Fifth State Exhibition (Moscow, 1919), and the Tenth State Exhibition, *Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm (Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism,* Moscow, 1919). Rodchenko conceived his new series, consisting solely of lines, in August 1919, in advance of the Tenth State Exhibition. Yet, though he had completed a number of the new works, Rodchenko did not exhibit them. In order to proclaim a new movement in non-objective painting, one or two works would not suffice; an entire cycle was needed, whose size and compositional variety would confirm the movement as a new artistic program.

"I revealed the composition and the tying-together of the canvas by means of it," Rodchenko wrote in his working notes.[8] By the "tying-together of the canvas" he meant the filling-up of the surface plane, of space. In each work, lines—on one or another colored ground; wide, with shaded edges, or crisp and narrow—form one or another configuration, representing, as it were, some event in the life of lines. Now they meet and intersect like two streaks of cloud; now, at the point of intersection, one line suddenly shoots upward and blossoms into filaments; now the lines turn on a central pivot and expand into space according to the principle of a hyperbolically contracted surface plane. Straight lines create a stable framework; concentric closed curves recall the trajectory of points. Ordinary lines, it turns out, can be animated just like any other form—and no less than the point.

I am thinking of painting several circles for Linearism and also of making a linear sculpture.

I think I'll exhibit Linearism in June or July, when there'll be no fewer than 30 works in oil, and maybe even 50, for I've got 13. I must also write and print up 500 copies of a booklet on Linearism.[9]

Rodchenko indeed intended to construct a linear sculpture from wire, and had even accumulated a store of small steel rods. But he was forced to abandon the venture, inasmuch as it would have been a technically more demanding undertaking than was his work with cardboard, paper, or oils (which were always close at hand). Welding, or at the very least soldering, would have been entailed. At the time, not only the technical wherewithal but even space in which to work was hard to come by (Rodchenko and Stepanova were then living in the quarters of the Museum of Painterly Culture, where Rodchenko served as director).

A mountain of work, but I'm quite drained by my duties and the exertion it now takes to feed ourselves.

I'm resting my hopes on summer and the warmth of the Sun.[10]

It was only at the Nineteenth State Exhibition (Moscow, 1920) that Rodchenko's "lines" were exhibited. The series included paintings (some twenty of them) and graphic works, as well as the text "Vse–opyty" ("Everything Is Experiment"), whose typewritten pages were mounted on a wall. The text explained why Rodchenko did not repeat his previous experiments, why each time he fashioned an ever newer series from new formal elements. His every cycle constituted a certain new possibility, a certain new world, albeit one consisting of planes, colored spheres, or lines. Rodchenko would later effect the same admixture of means, devices, and formal elements (circles, planes, and lines) in other areas—in architecture, design, graphics, and advertising.

It is useful to view Rodchenko in the company of other avant-garde artists, that is, in the same context in which his works were displayed at the celebrated Tenth State Exhibition, the Nineteenth State Exhibition, and *5 x 5 = 25* (Moscow, 1921), at which last Rodchenko's three monochromatic canvases were shown. When Rodchenko is thus positioned amid his colleagues, the principal elements of his system and his uniqueness are thrown into sharper relief. One can profit anew from the bit of advice offered by Rodchenko in "Everything Is Experiment":

In each work, I conduct a new experiment without the advantage of my past, and in each work I set a different task. If you survey my entire output over all this time, you will find one enormous and completely new work. If you want to tack the past on to it, get yourself to a museum and contemplate that.[11]

—Translated, from the Russian, by Jane Bobko

Notes

1. A. M. Rodchenko, notebook, 1917–20, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

2. A. M. Rodchenko, "Rabota s Maiakovskim," 1939, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow. Published in part in *A. M. Rodchenko. Stat'i, vospominaniia, avtobiograficheskie zapiski, pis'ma* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1982), pp. 53–82.

3. A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova, "Kto my?," 1921–22, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow. Published in *Aleksandr M. Rodchenko–Varvara F. Stepanova: The Future Is Our Only Goal,* ed. Peter Noever, trans. Mathew Frost, Paul Kremmel, and Michael Robinson, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, and the A. S. Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (Munich: Prestel, 1991), pp. 170–72.

4. Rodchenko and Stepanova, "Kto my?"

5. A. M. Rodchenko, "Liniia," 1921, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

6. Rodchenko and Stepanova, "Kto my?"

7. A. M. Rodchenko, "Laboratornoe prokhozhdenie cherez iskusstvo zhivopisi i konstruktivno-prostranstvennye formy k industrial'noi initsiative konstruktivizma," 1921–22, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

8. Rodchenko, notebook, 1917–20.

9. Ibid. The text of "Liniia" ("The Line") was completed in 1921 and reproduced by hectograph at Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture) in a small number of copies. Published in S. O. Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work,* ed. Vieri Quilici, trans. Huw Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 292–94; in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the State Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), pp. 71–73; and in *Aleksandr M. Rodchenko–Varvara F. Stepanova: The Future Is Our Only Goal,* pp. 133–35.

10. Rodchenko, notebook, 1917–20.

11. A. M. Rodchenko, "Vse–opyty," *1921,* A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow. Published in *Aleksandr M. Rodchenko–Varvara F. Stepanova: The Future Is Our Only Goal,* pp. 130–32.

The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization

Hubertus Gassner

"In life, mankind is an experiment for the future," Aleksandr Rodchenko wrote in his "Vse–opyty" ("Everything Is Experiment," 1921).[1] Now that this future is already past and we stand before the shambles of the greatest human experiment in history, we should take a close look at the utopianism of the Soviet-Russian avant-garde. In so doing, we may gain a deeper insight into the channels and links between formal experiments in art and social experiments with human life.

The avant-garde's utopianism began not with an enthusiastic vision of the future but with a rather skeptical question: How can one be an artist in the Soviet Union of the 1920s? This question—albeit in slightly modified form—is still relevant today, as is the answer Constructivism tried to provide. Today the question reads: How can one be an artist within a media culture?

The illusory (Western) world of mediated mass communication produced by the art and entertainment industry was, of course, unknown to the Soviet avant-garde artists of the 1920s. Yet some of the communication strategies devised by the Constructivists anticipated today's agony of reality under the impact of simulation technologies. And for good reason, since what was happening in Russia before their eyes and under their feet—or rather, *in* their eyes and *in* their stride—was no less than a preliminary stage of the ongoing third, mass-media, revolution: it was the second—the industrial—revolution.

It had been preceded by a two-stage political revolution: first the bourgeois, democratic revolution in February 1917, and then the proletarian, Communist revolution in October 1917. While it is widely believed, predominantly in the West, that the artistic revolution locked arms with the political revolution and even operated as its vanguard, this essay will argue—and, I hope, demonstrate—that even the avant-garde artists of the left were entirely unprepared when the second wave of the political revolution hit. Though they were not caught unawares by the quickened pace of history after the first salvo in February, the abrupt change of course in October took them by surprise.

Between the spring and autumn of 1917 there are more ruptures than there are continuities. It would be wrong to perceive the course of the political revolution, after its swerve in direction, as no more than an accelerated continuation of the initial phase. And during the 1920s there were further twists, sometimes in such rapid succession that artists occasionally stumbled in their race to stay abreast of social change. Struggling to keep pace, the initially united left front of art began to dissolve. Groups or individual artists split off and embarked on divergent courses. Others quit the race altogether. Those who stayed the course ran in clusters, often with one or another artist or theorist in the lead. Vladimir Tatlin was perhaps the only solo runner among them.

The following pages will discuss the evolution of both individuals and groups. Our focus will be on the breaks between historical stages and on the crises in art, since only a survey of the uneasy concurrence of developments within art and outside art can reveal, and offer a basis for evaluating, the context in which Constructivism emerged and grew.

The principal stages are:

- The quest for a new artistic identity in the wake of the February Revolution, and artists' attempts at alliance so as to assert their role in the new society
- The silence of artists after the October Revolution, their reluctance to cooperate with the revolutionary government, and their unenthusiastic alignment with the new rulers to secure artistic autonomy (1918–19)

- The gestation and birth of Constructivism at the juncture of political revolution and industrial revolution (1920–21)
- The crisis of Constructivism in 1925–26 and the transformation of the engineer of objects into the "engineer of the psyche"

To understand the profound shift in consciousness the avant-garde underwent in the early 1920s, one need only examine the discussion at Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture), of Varvara Stepanova's lecture "O konstruktivizme" ("On Constructivism"). Stepanova's extremely rationalist discourse on an instrumentalist concept of art survived the discussion uncontested: "Once purged of aesthetic, philosophical and religious excrescences, art leaves us its material foundations, which henceforth will be organized by intellectual production. The organizing principle is expedient Constructivism, in which technology and experimental thinking take the place of aesthetics."[2] What *was* openly and fiercely disputed was the crucial question of "how today's artists justify their existence" (Khrakovskii). Thus pressured, the artists responded with arguments ranging from the circumspect to the virulent: Boris Arvatov proposed the "propagandizing" of Russia's still "utopian" industrialization through Constructivism, in order to establish a basis for a Constructivist design of the living environment; Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg polemically executed artists in general: "They [artists] are good for nothing. They should be treated in the same way as the Cheka [secret police] treats counterrevolutionaries." Konstantin Medunetskii's false confidence ("Art ends with us") was present alongside an acknowledged sense of tragedy as art declared bankruptcy. For Arvatov, the "end of culture" had come because industrial techniques had supplanted cultural techniques. Inasmuch as artists were "useless to industry and unable to be engineers," their position was "tragic."

Given this dire situation, more than twenty artists and theorists within Inkhuk decided on November 24, 1921, to relinquish any self-sufficient pursuit of art and to apply themselves to the production of useful objects. The Constructivist theorist Nikolai Tarabukin celebrated this new development as a historic moment: "For the first time in the annals of art history, painters have become sensitive seismographs of future tendencies by, in a radical reorientation, deliberately rejecting their specific field of work."

This was the moment when Russian Modernism abandoned all opposition to the modernization of life effected by industrialization and mass production, and began to assume the functions of oil and engine in the machinery of progress. The stated goal was no longer just the reconciliation of consciousness and machine but the total alignment of human psychophysical being to machine mechanisms and motions. Yet if the Constructivists gave up the resistance to self-serving or profit-oriented technological progress that had until then characterized Modernism's critical distance from a merely market-driven modernity, the decision was not made with a light heart. Nor was the artists' dropping of their ambivalence about industrial modernization a logical result of developments within art, as some design historians claim. The evolutionary paths of Soviet Constructivism, marked by breaks and historical contingencies, hardly fit the streamlined phylogeny of industrial design.

Indeed, a closer analysis of Constructivist production art can show how its manufacturing methods and products contain a utopian surplus value that transforms even the individual utilitarian object into a *pars pro toto* of a cosmos harmonically structured by rhythmic movements. This utopian surplus lends these objects their aesthetic and ethical value and even bathes them in an aura of artistic autonomy—precisely the quality the Constructivists struggled to nullify on their flight into bare functionalism.

Paradoxes in Organizing Freedom

After the February Revolution

The artistic avant-garde began its limited performance in Russian history with the struggle for the independence of art from government interference. During 1917–18, the politics of "Futurism"—the period's generic term for all new trends from post-Cézannism to Suprematism to Tatlin's "culture of materials"—had been strictly anti-institutional. In the winter of 1918–19, however, more than a year after the October Revolution, the first attempts were made to establish the avant-garde, institutionally and ideologically, as the artistic spearhead of the Soviet state. This set the stage for the turbulent misalliance between "Futurists" and Communists—a story with several chapters that would come to an abrupt end with the government-ordained dissolution of all rival artists' groups in 1932

A preliminary chapter in this difficult marriage of autonomous art with government institutions opened, however, some time before October 1917. As early as February of that year, following the overthrow of the czar by the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the different artists' groups began to struggle for public influence.

The end of czarism not only gave artists the freedom from censorship and institutional tutelage they had long desired—the dictatorial Imperial Academy of Arts was closed, though not yet dissolved for good, on February 23, 1917—but offered them an unrestricted opportunity to form independent unions. The topic most passionately debated among the groups that began to emerge in ever increasing numbers, especially in Petrograd and Moscow, was the freedom of art and the threat posed to it by proposed new government institutions. In the course of artists' debates and meetings, the front separating the "left" avant-garde and the "right wing" was soon clearly delineated. The rightist spectrum ranged from members of the Academy, Realists, and Impressionists to the influential representatives of Mir iskusstva (World of Art). As these groups struggled for public influence, the area of contention gradually shifted from artistic rivalries to politics, and the fight for "true art" degenerated into a quarrel for power that would rage on throughout the 1920s, often spurring on the creativity of the artistic factions yet sometimes paralyzing it.

On the initiative of Maksim Gor'kii, fifty leading artists, writers, actors, and musicians met in his Petrograd apartment on March 4, 1917, to establish a commission for the "conservation and regulation of our art institutions and treasures left unattended after the abolition of the Imperial Ministry." The most active subsection of this self-proclaimed Commission for Artistic Affairs—the Department for the Preservation of Monuments—was headed by Aleksandr Benua (Alexandre Benois), the traditionalist painter and influential art critic from the World of Art circle. With Benua and several other members of his group occupying leading positions, the Commission was firmly in the hands of conservatives. Other commissions for the "future development of art in Russia" were also dominated by World of Art.

At the Commission's March 4th meeting, Benua proposed the establishment of a Ministry of Fine Arts as an independent affiliate of the existing Ministry of Education. With the creation of such an institution, the artistic intelligentsia would have vested themselves with governmental powers to carry out their arrogated function as Russia's cultural standard-bearers. Three days later, on March 7th, during a meeting at the Petrograd Institute of Art History, Count Zubov put Benua in

charge of a commission for the organization of the proposed ministry. The same day, the press announced the Provisional Government's approval of the planned ministry. Benua, Nikolai Rerikh, and Sergei Diaghilev were named as prospective candidates for the ministerial post.

The "Futurists," who regarded the planned ministry and, specifically, the hegemonic claims of the World of Art camp as a threat to their newly gained freedom from government regimentation, focused their criticism on Benua, who for years had been feuding with the Cubo-Futurists and the Suprematists.[3] But it was not only the "Futurists" who fought the ministerial aspirations of their old adversary. To prevent both the establishment of a ministry of fine arts under Benua and the official appointment of Gor'kii's commission for the preservation of monuments, representatives of numerous artists' groups met on March 9 and 10, 1917, at the Academy of Arts in Petrograd to form a Union of Art Workers encompassing all fields of art (painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, theater, and music). The Union's mission was to preserve the independence of art from the state and to put the functions assigned to the ministry in artists' hands.

There were 1403 artists in attendance at the Union's assembly on March 12th in the Mikhailovskii Theater. According to newspaper reports, the entire artistic community of Petrograd was present.

Even though the Union's goal was to combine groups of all artistic directions in one organization so as not only to defend its members' professional interests but to embark on the broadly based cultural renewal of Russia, it immediately broke up into opposing factions. Thus prevented from performing any practical, efficient work, the Union was finally dissolved in the summer of 1918. Among its three factions—the "right bloc," under the informal direction of the poet Fedor Sologub; the nonpartisan center; and the "left bloc"—the last was in the minority. Yet the relatively small left group, representing an equally small vanguard minority in Russian art, managed, as the result of its vigorous commitment, to get four of its own on the twelve-member organizing committee in charge of setting up the Union: the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii (as representative of the Moscow artists), the painter Natan Al'tman (as representative of the groups Bubnovyi valet [Jack of Diamonds] and Soiuz molodezhi [Union of Youth]), the art critic Nikolai Punin, and the director Vsevolod Meierkhol'd.

To strengthen their influence on the assembly, members of the left bloc published a declaration—against the planned ministry and for the freedom of art brought by the February Revolution—in the Menshevik daily *Den'* (*The Day*) and the Bolshevik *Pravda* on the day before the meeting: "The revolution creates freedom. Without freedom there is no art. Democratic art is possible only in a free democratic republic." The proclamation was signed by the Freedom for Art Federation, whose twenty-eight members included Al'tman, Kseniia Boguslavskaia, Lev Bruni, Vera Ermolaeva, Aleksei Grishchenko, Aleksei Karev, Nikolai Lapshin, Ivan Puni, Rodchenko, Eduard Spandikov, Tatlin, Nikolai Tyrsa, Nadezhda Udal'tsova, the critics Sergei Isakov and Punin, the writers Bol'shakov and Il'ia Zdanevich, Meierkhol'd, and the composer Artur Lur'e. Al'tman, Punin, and Zdanevich were the Federation's secretaries.

On the day of the assembly, the Federation published another declaration in *The Day,* this time protesting the "undemocratic attempts by certain groups to seize control of cultural life through the establishment of a Ministry of Fine Arts." The Federation appealed to all artists participating in the Union's constituent assembly to vote for the Federation's own twelve candidates for the organizing committee. This appeal came in response to the proposed nomination of only two left artists, Al'tman and Marc Chagall, to the committee, alongside a majority made up of Realists and representatives of World of Art.

While most speakers at the assembly demanded a strict separation between art and politics, the "Futurists" did not equate that separation with art's complete abstinence from social commitment. Their call for freedom was directed against administrative encroachment on artistic creation and institutional control over artists and students.

With the meeting of the Union of Art Workers adjourned, the left, following Meierkhol'd's suggestion, held its own meeting at the Trotskii Theater in Petrograd on March 21st. After speeches by Maiakovskii, Zdanevich, and numerous others, the art critic Denisov from the left bloc presented fourteen theses "On the Activities of the Freedom for Art Federation." (Denisov's theses were separately published under the title "The Democratization of Art: Theses on the Program for the [Fundamental] Union of Left Artists.") In order to promote their cause, the artists also took to the streets. The meeting at the Trotskii Theater was accompanied by marches with posters and banners. Musicians and speakers appeared in the streets, there were performances in stalls, and from the platform of a truck a pamphlet was distributed that summarized the essential demands of the Federation: "Freedom for art—abolition of government tutelage. Complete decentralization of cultural life and autonomy for all institutions and associations that will be funded by the municipal authorities. Establishment of an All-Russian Artists Congress. Abolition of all academies, which shall be replaced by art schools responsible for the training of art teachers. Replacement of patronage by public support through subsidies and grants."

The demand for the decentralization of art institutions and for the autonomy of artistic creation was endorsed by numerous intellectuals in the Union of Art Workers, among them Sergei Makovskii, the editor in chief of the art magazine *Apollon* (*Apollo*) who was affiliated with World of Art, as well as the right-wingers around Sologub and numerous other left-of-center artists and intellectuals. Yet though they concurred with the left on many points, these latter groups, who felt an obligation to preserve and maintain cultural treasures from the past, considered it impossible to cooperate with the avant-garde "vandals" of the Freedom for Art Federation. The bourgeois-democratic revolution had only just begun, and already deep rifts had opened among the intellectuals. The different factions could not find a common denominator that would have enabled them to take even the first practical steps toward organizing themselves.

Infighting among rival artistic movements and personal animosity such as that between the "Futurists" and Benua were as much an obstacle to the self-organization of the artistic intelligentsia as was the fundamental conflict between the champions of art's unconditional freedom from government institutions and the "collaborators" who wanted to entrust the state with the protection of monuments and artistic treasures and with the organization of artistic education.

The struggle between the proponents of a new ministry of fine arts and the "autonomists" was only marginally about participation in governmental power or iconoclastic destruction of traditional values—these were merely the slogans the hostile camps flung at each other during the Union of Art Workers' tumultuous sessions. What was really at stake was the identity of the artistic intelligentsia and their role in the new society that had emerged out of the confusion and chaos of the February Revolution. The older generation of artists, including the members of World of Art, held especially fast to their traditional self-image as the nation's "upholders of

culture." Accordingly, they considered it their mission to preserve cultural values and to disseminate and anchor them by educating the people. These tasks, they believed, could be accomplished only if the artistic and scientific elite worked closely with the government apparatus. For their opponents from the left, this cooperation of tradition-conscious art specialists and government officials portended the reestablishment of a cultural bureaucracy that would organize artistic culture according to its own conservative tastes and manipulate the people by force-feeding them the obsolete values of an outdated conception of art.

With their sights set firmly forward, the "Futurists" regarded the passing on of traditional values as secondary, if not an outright obstacle to the establishment of new values. This stance was directly opposed to the "upholder of culture" ideal shared by a majority of Russian intellectuals but shattered and buried—with the eager assistance of the left avant-garde—in the fierce quarrels of the Union.

Many intellectuals and artists had placed their high hopes for a "cultural renewal of Russia" in the Union of Art Workers, but with the majority of members maneuvering to maintain their status as "upholders of culture" and to use the organization for their own goals, the Union reached an intellectual and operational deadlock. At a session on May 11, 1917, Osip Brik, the theorist and organizer of Opoiaz (the Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and later founder of the Productivist movement, denounced the Union (which did, after all, have over eight hundred nominal members from almost all artistic groups) for its failure to achieve practical results. Many of those in attendance agreed with him.

After the October Revolution

In the tumultuous months following the February Revolution, the Union of Art Workers debacle revealed that artists and intellectuals were lost in their attempt to determine their position in the new society. While attitudes toward tradition and the new government were markers of an obvious divide, they were merely symptoms of the intelligentsia's quandary without czarism as a unifying counterforce and of their insecurity concerning their function in a rapidly changing society.

With the radicalization of the masses in the summer of 1917, the crisis among artists and intellectuals intensified. They had to learn that the "people" embraced them neither as cultural saviors nor as anything else. In the months between the anti-czarist February Revolution and the anti-bourgeois October Revolution, a growing number of people unceremoniously classified artists and other intellectuals, regardless of their personal property or political stance, as members of the hated bourgeoisie. "Intellectual" and "bourgeois" became synonymous in the minds of the radicalized masses. Artists—and all the members of the intelligentsia—suddenly saw themselves denounced as enemies of the working class and ranked among the "superfluous persons" of the detested past. The break between the insurgent masses and the intelligentsia culminated in the October Revolution. The ousting of the Provisional Government and the Bolshevik takeover gave most intellectuals outside the radical leftist parties such a shock that they remained silent for several months or passively boycotted the new rulers.

Attempts by the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, to establish contacts with the artistic intelligentsia were summarily turned down in the first weeks and months following the October Revolution. Only days after the proclamation of the Soviet state on October 25th, the revolutionary government (the All-Russian Central Executive Committee) extended a widely publicized invitation to Petrograd artists, writers, and actors to come to the Smolnyi Institute, the new seat of government, to discuss prospective cooperation. A mere six persons showed up: Aleksandr Blok, L. Reisner, and David Shterenberg, as well as the most active members of the Freedom for Art Federation, Al'tman, Maiakovskii, and Meierkhol'd. After this failure, Lunacharskii on November 12th asked Punin, Al'tman's co-secretary in Freedom for Art, to mediate between the government and the Union of Art Workers. Via Punin, he proposed the establishment of a Department of Artistic Affairs in which artists and government officials would be equally represented. The proposal was debated in the organizing committee and in the different factions. While the right and moderate groups rejected any cooperation with the Bolsheviks on political grounds, the representatives of the left wing feared for the freedom of art. In a third attempt Lunacharskii sent Brik, another active participant in Freedom for Art and the left bloc, to suggest the formation of a thirty-member Commission for the Preservation of Monuments, to be made up of fifteen delegates from the Union and fifteen representatives of "democratic" organizations. Once again, the membership as well as the organizing committee of the Union categorically refused, even though the committee members Al'tman, Punin, Maiakovskii, and Meierkhol'd had previously not shied away from contact with the Soviet government.

The majority of speakers at the Union meeting objected to the "Bolsheviks' seizing control over art," while the organizing committee blamed the Soviet government for having tolerated and even promoted the destruction of artistic treasures. Lunacharskii himself had offered his resignation to the Party in mid-November, because monuments and works of art had been damaged during the storming of the Winter Palace and the battles in Moscow. The Council of People's Commissars did not accept his resignation and on November 17th, the day of his third offer to the Union, Lunacharskii published his appeal "Protect the Property of the People!"

That all factions of the Union should have rejected even limited cooperation is all the more astonishing in view of Benua's collaboration with the Soviet commissars, only one day after the storming of the Winter Palace, on a plan to protect the Palace and the Hermitage. And as early as November, the Petrograd Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies organized a Council on Museum Affairs and the Preservation of Artistic and Historic Monuments under the direction of Georgii Iatmanov. Benua and other members of World of Art were among the Council's members.

With the establishment of this Council by the revolutionary government, the Commission for Artistic Affairs Gor'kii had formed in March 1917 and dissolved after protests from the Union on April 27th was essentially reinstated. Benua was even appointed director of the Hermitage and, with the help of the authorities, gained considerable influence over the reorganization of artistic life during the first years after the October Revolution. The Union's left faction as well as some right-wing members opposed to the earlier Commission now saw what they had feared come to pass under completely different political circumstances. While the bourgeois Provisional Government had hesitated to undermine the Union's autonomy by forcing an alliance with Gor'kii's Commission, the Bolshevik government acted against many Union members' call for self-determination and subscribed to the preservationist approach by appointing the Council on Museum Affairs.

Anticipating such a move, the members of the left bloc took swift action. At the Union's meeting on November 17th, where Lunacharskii's offer to establish a Commission for the Preservation of Monuments was discussed, they submitted a

resolution calling for the autonomy of artistic creation and sharply criticizing the commissar's plans as an attack on the freedom of art, particularly avant-garde art:

Commissar Lunacharskii's appeal touches only vaguely on the government's attitude toward the autonomy of art; it asks the present left movement to surrender meekly to stale academicism and to the bureaucrats of art. With this appeal to the Union of Art Workers, Lunacharskii openly undermines the beginnings of the only correct and viable attempt to build our future artistic culture, as that culture is propagated by left tendencies in art, and hands over power to the backward and irresponsible "custodians" of art.

When shortly after this resolution the Council on Museum Affairs was established, several members of the left bloc reconsidered the Soviet government's earlier proposal to establish a Department of Artistic Affairs—so that they might gain at least some administrative clout against the academicians and "custodians." When on December 2, 1917, the Petrograd daily *Nash vek* (*Our Age*) reported Lunacharskii's renewed plans for the formation of a Department of Proletarian Art within Narkompros (the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), the Union of Art Workers responded with protests. Once more, the Union stressed that only an independent organization of artists was competent to decide cultural issues. Nonetheless, Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of Narkompros) was officially formed on January 29, 1918, with Shterenberg as its head. Izo Narkompros's Art Board, which was not organized until March, was also chaired by Shterenberg and included two secretaries of the Freedom for Art Federation, Al'tman and Punin. The other members of the board—Karev, Sergei Chekhonin, Aleksandr Matveev, Petr Vaulin, and Iatmanov—represented more or less traditional artistic tendencies.

It was not only the conservatives from the Union of Art Workers who cried out that art had been "betrayed." The left bloc as well took "no responsibility for the actions of the persons in question"—meaning Al'tman, Punin, and the other members of the Art Board.[4]

Accusations and disclaimers were a predictable response. What sense would it have made to defend the freedom of art from government control only to desist unceremoniously once the new regime was in place? The months-long struggle of the Freedom for Art Federation and the left bloc would have been pointless—even if many of the left artists, writers, and critics sympathized politically with the Soviet government.

Reservations about collaborating with government institutions of any kind were not limited to the Petrograd avant-garde. Seeking to extend the reach and effectiveness of the Petrograd Izo Narkompros, Al'tman, Punin, and Lur'e went to Moscow in early April to form an Art Board there. In an appeal worded in typical "Futurist" diction and published in the newspaper *Anarkhiia* (*Anarchy*) on April 9, 1918, they specifically called on "comrades Maiakovskii and Tatlin," their fellow members in the Union's left bloc, to cooperate with Izo Narkompros.

The left bloc had sent Tatlin to Moscow on April 12, 1917, as a representative of the Union. His mission was "to get in touch with the left Moscow artists and establish contact with their organization or [if none existed] organize a left bloc." In Moscow, he was elected chairman of the left federation of the Professional Union of Artists and Painters, which was formed in the summer of 1917 (Rodchenko was appointed secretary). As in the Petrograd Union of Art Workers, three factions emerged in the Moscow Professional Union, though this time each faction or federation had its own chairman and secretary from the outset. The right federation consisted of older painters from the Wanderers movement, the center of members of World of Art, and the left, or young, federation of Cubo-Futurists, Suprematists, and other non-objective artists. Establishment of the Professional Union was accompanied by the first public recognition, from more established quarters, of the avant-garde. In late 1917 the club of the left federation mounted an exhibition of Rodchenko's works; the first comprehensive exhibition of the Professional Union opened in May 1918.

Immediately after the October Revolution, Tatlin, like many other members of the left bloc, left the Union of Art Workers in Petrograd. On November 21st, the Moscow Professional Union elected him its delegate to the Art Department of the Moscow Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. By his own description in later years, Tatlin thus became one of the first artists to cooperate with the Soviet government, and it was only natural that he was appointed chairman of the newly-formed Moscow Art Board in April 1918. Tatlin remained in that position until June 1919 and managed to secure the cooperation of important members of the avant-garde, including Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia, Vasilii Kandinskii, Aleksei Morgunov, Kazimir Malevich, Rodchenko, Władysław Strzemiński, and Udal'tsova. Yet none of these artists spontaneously decided to join Izo Narkompros. It took most of them a long time to examine and clarify their own attitudes toward the government. The anti-institutional stance had not yet disappeared.

The Supreme Ego of the Anarchists

Tatlin, like many other avant-garde artists, was politically closer to the anarchists than to the Communist Bolsheviks. On March 29, 1918, he published an appeal in *Anarchy* urging "all my confederates . . . to enter the breach I made in obsolete values" so that their minds could "embark on the path of anarchism."

The artist wrote this appeal in response to a "Letter to Our Comrades, the Futurists" published four days previously in the same paper by a certain Plamen and calling on the "Futurists" to put their work in the service of the revolution. The "Letter" criticized the nonpolitical wing of the "Futurists" who were supposedly preoccupied with decorating cafés and designing furniture for the bourgeoisie. The writer was referring to the Café Pittoresque, whose "Futurist" interior had been decorated in the winter of 1917–18 by numerous artists including Aleksandr Drevin, Rodchenko, Tatlin, and Udal'tsova under the guidance of the painter and stage designer Georgii Iakulov.

The Café Pittoresque was a milestone on the way to Constructivism. For the first time, the materials and formal vocabulary of the new non-objective art were applied to and synthetically integrated in a public space. Tatlin, in his response to the "Letter," agrees with the anarchist critics that "the 'Futurists' are overly concerned with café society and assorted embroideries for emperors and court ladies" (the latter probably an allusion to Ol'ga Rozanova's Suprematist embroidery designs shown in December 1917 at the *Vtoraia vystavka dekorativnogo iskusstva* [*Second Exhibition of Decorative Art*] in Moscow).

Tatlin conceded, nonetheless, that there were at the time no other public outlets for artists committed to social change: "I am waiting for well-equipped artistic workshops where the artist's psychic machinery can be accordingly overhauled." With the creation of the State Free Art Workshops in October 1918, his wish became a reality—at least in part, since well-equipped these workshops were certainly not.

In his open letter, Plamen differentiated between the bourgeois wing of the "Futurists" and the revolutionary forces in their ranks, namely, Maiakovskii. At the time the poet,

conceptualist, and brilliant mouthpiece of the avant-garde still strongly sympathized with anarchist ideas and groups. His attitude was representative of that of most "Futurists" in the first months after the October Revolution, when the political anarchists were still tolerated by the Bolsheviks and even received limited support from the party's left wing under Nikolai Bukharin. After initial contacts with the Bolsheviks, and in particular with Lunacharskii, Maiakovskii grew disenchanted with their traditionalist cultural program and left Petrograd, soon after the Revolution. He went to Moscow, where he and two old friends from Cubo-Futurist days—the painter David Burliuk and the poet Vasilii Kamenskii—opened the Kafe poetov (Poets' Café) in Nastas'inskii Lane. "I remember the Kafe poetov in Moscow in 1918," Il'ia Erenburg wrote in his memoirs. "It was patronized by a crowd that did not exactly deal in poetry—speculators, women of doubtful reputation, young people who called themselves 'Futurists' . . . It was quite a peculiar place."

The ideology of the Kafe poetov was suffused by antiauthoritarian anarchism. In accordance with the anarchist tilt in the name of the Freedom for Art Federation, the three artists of the café called themselves the Federation of Futurists. With his two comrades, Maiakovskii published the *Gazeta futuristov* (*Futurists' Newspaper*), in whose first and only issue on March 15th he declared, in an "Open Letter to the Workers," that "Futurism" was the aesthetic counterpart of "socialism/anarchism" and that only a "revolution of the psyche" could liberate workers from the shackles of obsolete art. The collective declaration "Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of Art" pronounced spontaneous graffiti the only legitimate revolutionary art:

> *1. In keeping with the liquidation of the czarist regime, the* existence of art *in the depots and sheds of human genius—the palaces, galleries, salons, libraries, and theaters—is* abolished *as of now.*
>
> *2. In the name of progress and the equality of all before culture, the* Free Word *of the creative personality shall be written on the walls, fences, roofs, and streets of our towns and cities; on the backs of automobiles, coaches, and trams; and on the clothes of all citizens.*

The Russian Futurists' painting of their bodies before the war, the graffiti on the walls of the Kafe poetov, the Futurist *parole in libertà*—whatever broke out into the streets and announced the creative freedom of everyone everywhere was proclaimed the Revolution's true artistic form of expression. Art, in Maiakovskii and his friends' minds, was supposed to be politically effective without submitting to the state. According to their credo, only free and spontaneous art could set off the "revolution of the psyche" considered essential to the social and intellectual continuation of the political and economic revolution.

The manifestos in the *Futurists' Newspaper* breathed the old anarchic spirit of the Freedom for Art Federation. Only, the combative tone had become sharper after the October Revolution. The "Manifesto of the Flying Federation of Futurists," published in the same paper, called on the "proletarians" to join the "third, bloodless but nonetheless cruel, revolution, the revolution of the psyche."

The political anarchists accepted the *Futurists' Newspaper* as an organ of anarchism[5] and endorsed the House of Free Art briefly operated by Maiakovskii, Burliuk, and Kamenskii as one of the anarchist clubs in Moscow. The House, a restaurant requisitioned for the purpose by the trio, was dedicated to the "individual anarchism of creation," as their paper put it. But the House of Free Art existed for only a few days and was closed by the end of March. On April 14th, the Kafe poetov was shut down as well. Two days before, the newly-founded Cheka had carried out its first raid in Moscow: in the anarchist clubs some six hundred people had been arrested and forced to hand over their arms. Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the head of the Cheka, announced that the majority of those rounded up were criminals and only one percent were "ideological anarchists."[6] It is not clear whether the closing of the Kafe poetov was a direct consequence of this police action. The coincidence of events, however, signals the end of a distinctly anarchistic phase in both the political revolution and the history of Russian "Futurism" (even though the political anarchists were not quite neutralized until 1920).

The fundamental opposition between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists, who had broad support among the Russian peasants and workers, lay in their attitudes toward the state. The anarchists categorically rejected the state as the ruling classes' instrument of oppression. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, considered it necessary to maintain the state throughout the transition from capitalism to Communism, even though the bourgeois form of the state had to be "broken up" during the revolution. "We need a revolutionary *government,*" Lenin wrote in March 1919 in his "Letter from Afar." "For a certain transitional period we need the *state.* That is what distinguishes us from the anarchists. The difference between revolutionary Marxists and anarchists is not only that the former believe in centralized, Communist production on a large scale and the latter in industrial scatteration. No, the difference vis-à-vis government, vis-à-vis the state, is that we are *for* exploiting the revolutionary forms of the state in the fight for socialism whereas they are *against* it."

Given Maiakovskii's anarchistic stance, it seems logical that he first rejected Al'tman, Punin, and Lur'e's offer to cooperate with the Moscow Art Board of Izo Narkompros. The federalism and "individual anarchism of creation" promoted by him, Burliuk, and Kamenskii and the state socialists' principle of centralism and large-scale production ruled each other out. Only after a long period of hesitancy and under changed political circumstances would he finally decide, in the winter of 1918, to join Brik and collaborate with Izo Narkompros. For the moment, he continued to advocate the separation of state and art as proclaimed by the Freedom for Art Federation and the *Futurists' Newspaper.*

Being closer to anarchism than to Bolshevism or Communism, other members of the Federation also continued to cling to this principle after the October Revolution. Morgunov, Rodchenko, and Tatlin at one time or another all worked in the Activist Group of the Moscow Association of Anarchist Groups. On April 2, 1918, *Anarchy* published the following salute to Rodchenko and others among the future Constructivists: "With pride we look upon your creative rebellion. We congratulate the creator Rozanova on her impressive compositions of lively colors. We congratulate the creator Udal'tsova on her savage non-objective oil paintings. We congratulate the creator Rodchenko on his spirited three-dimensional constructions of colored forms . . ."

The fiercest of all the blasts of anarchist fervor gusted from the articles Malevich regularly wrote for *Anarchy* from March to July 1918. Inspired by revolutionary events, the artist for the first time used the medium of writing to develop and expand his Suprematist conception of art into a conception of the world. The artistic principle of non-objectivity served him as a starting point for a nihilistic ontology which negated material reality as well as any form of state. In a tone of acerbic sarcasm, Malevich tackled the official art policy of the new ruling powers. He rebuffed Al'tman, Punin, and Lur'e on their visit to Moscow with a taunting polemic entitled "On the Arrival of Voltairean Terrorists from Petersburg."[7] While he did not consider them capable of deposing Benua, his objections were

of a more fundamental nature: "The appointment of kings, ministers, or soldiers of art is just as much an act of artistic counterrevolution as the opening of a café of any kind," Malevich wrote with a view to the anarchist criticism of the Café Pittoresque. "Whenever a state is being built, a prison will be erected once the state is there." Therefore the revolution must "destroy all foundations of the old so that states will not rise from the ashes."

In keeping with the anarchist principle of individualism, Malevich declared "our ego" to be "supreme." In his argument, the supremacy of the ego can only be realized by liberating it from the shackles of the state and material objects. The revolution of the psyche through "individual anarchic creation" proclaimed by the *Futurists' Newspaper* was also on Malevich's mind when he promoted anarchism: "The banner of anarchism is the banner of our ego and like a free wind our spirit will billow our creative work through the vast spaces of our soul."[8]

Speaking for the Suprematist group—which at the time included Morgunov, Liubov' Popova, Rodchenko, Rozanova, Udal'tsova, and Aleksandr Vesnin as well as the anarchist radical Aleksei Gan—Malevich used Lenin's dictum of the "breaking up" of the state as an analogy for the withering away of material reality: "Our creative work elevates neither palaces nor hovels, neither velvet gowns nor coarse clothes, neither songs nor words . . . Like a new planet in the blue dome over the sunken sun, we are the frontier to an absolutely new world, and we declare all things nonexistent."[9] Consequently Malevich at that point rejected any practical application of Suprematism for the poor or for the rich. Involvement in a government institution such as Izo Narkompros was anathema to him for the same reason. A year after Al'tman and Punin's appeal, in 1919, Malevich was finally willing to ease his stance toward the state. By that time, the more cooperative "Futurists" in Izo Narkompros had already attained many of their goals. The Freedom for Art Federation's old demand for the abolition of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts had been fulfilled on April 12, 1918. In October of the same year it was replaced by the State Free Art Workshops, established first in Moscow and Petrograd and later throughout the country. The workshops were free not only in terms of free access for all students, regardless of their prior education, but also because the student body was free to elect its own teachers. Malevich taught at the State Free Art Workshops in Moscow until the autumn of 1919, when he joined the Popular Art School in Vitebsk and began to organize Unovis (the Affirmers of the New Art).

The organization of State Exhibitions also lay in the jurisdiction of Izo Narkompros. Al'tman and the other vanguard artists in Izo Narkompros took full advantage of this to introduce their comrades-in-art to the broad public in numerous solo and group exhibitions, thus promoting the notion of their leading role. In addition, Izo Narkompros organized extensive open exhibitions sponsored by the state but, in the absence of a selection committee, virtually beyond its artistic arbitration. Following these principles of funding and selection, the organizers achieved their own earlier demands that art be free but at the same time subsidized by the state.

As early as December 1918, the members of Izo Narkompros began establishing museums of a new type, the so-called museums of artistic culture. Created all over the country, they were endowed with important avant-garde works. Among their most active organizers after 1919 were Kandinskii, Malevich, Rodchenko, and Tatlin. Under its avant-garde leadership, the Museum Department of Izo Narkompros succeeded in establishing thirty-six museums of contemporary art; another twenty-six were in the planning stage when the department was dissolved in 1921. As Rodchenko, the head of the Moscow Museum Department, remarked with some satisfaction, "the department generously supplied the provinces with contemporary art, an achievement unprecedented in the world and an advance over the West the commune can rightly be proud of."[10]

With the formation of Izo Narkompros and the continuous expansion of its staff through the involvement of almost all important avant-garde artists, a rather contradictory situation emerged that would last for a brief two and a half years and prove extremely fruitful for the development of the artistic avant-garde. Artists who were largely hostile to the state, ideologically indebted to anarchism, and committed to the spiritual and organizational freedom of artistic creation had found an institutional vehicle to introduce their art to the masses in art schools, exhibitions, and museums funded by the state. And yet, despite this favorable position, the new tendencies in art were unable to gain broader acceptance either among the public or within the Party and the administration. They were tolerated, however, if only for a short time.

Immediately after the February Revolution, spontaneously formed artists' groups such as Join the Revolution!—with Brik, Bruni, Ermolaeva, Mikhail Le-Dantiu, Lur'e, Maiakovskii, Meierkhol'd, Tatlin, Dymshits-Tolstaia, and Viktor Shklovskii as members—had signaled their willingness to write and design catchy, expressive posters, banners, and manifestos for the "comrades." Publishing appeals and their telephone numbers, the artists' groups offered their services. It is unknown whether the revolutionary political forces took them up on their offer.

After the October Revolution, Malevich won the competition for decorations for the Congress of Committees on Rural Poverty. He created a Suprematist cover design for the delegates' document folder (plate nos. 123–125) and decorated the assembly hall of the Winter Palace with Suprematist shapes. With Mikhail Matiushin, he painted a huge, 900-foot-wide canvas within twenty-four hours. He designed speaker's rostrums (plate no. 130) and, with El Lissitzky, curtains (plate no. 136) for the 1919 meeting in Vitebsk of the Committee to Abolish Unemployment. Lissitzky gave an account of his and Malevich's joint activities in his 1922 lecture on "New Russian Art": "In Vitebsk we painted a 16,000-square-foot canvas for a factory celebration, decorated three buildings, and created the stage decorations for the festive meeting of the factory committee in the city theater." It is safe to assume that neither the representatives of the rural poor nor the delegates of the unemployed were fully aware or appreciative of Malevich's intended color symbolism: the black square stood for the economy, the red square for the Revolution, and the white square for pure action—and together they symbolized the anarchistic "revolution of the psyche." It was Malevich's intention that not only Suprematist painting but also the "new style of Suprematist decoration" would "expel the integrity of the object from consciousness," as he put it in the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition, *Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm* (*Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism,* Moscow, 1919). Suprematist murals and interior decorations were meant to testify to the fall of objective reality and the dawning of purely spiritual action. The delegates, however, probably perceived them as stimulating and lively decorative patterns.

The fight against the material monuments of the past was also at the heart of what was probably the most spectacular decoration of a public space in the years immediately following the October Revolution—Al'tman's huge panels for the Classical and Baroque façades and passages onto Palace Square in Petrograd (plate nos. 103–106) and his cladding of the Aleksandr Column on the same square. The bright red, yellow, and orange flames licking at the column as a symbol of the

overthrow of the czarist regime drove home their message of the destruction of the old world in a far more direct and convincing fashion than the symbolically overcharged Suprematist decorations. A contemporary reviewer pointed out the artistic merits of Al'tman's design:

A nearly exemplary solution of this task was demonstrated on the square with the designs of the artist Al'tman. The juxtaposition of old and new artistic elements is surprising, convincing, and perfectly unified. The artist does not try to outdo the old masters but, with unerring instinct, creates something entirely new and contrasting. The square in front of the Winter Palace is strictly architectonic and Al'tman complements it with purely painterly impressions; the square is symmetrical and harmoniously self-contained—Al'tman aims at mordancy, surprising effects, and peculiarities; the square is beautifully rounded in space—everything about Al'tman's design is planar, angular, and dynamic.[11]

The revolutionary message of Al'tman's Cubo-Futurist construction is not expressed in its formal vocabulary and color symbolism alone, nor is it a mere illustration of a given slogan or idea. The spiritual flame of the Revolution and the appeal for renewal are brought to life only in their visual contrast to the stone monuments to Imperial traditions.

Al'tman's contextually anchored, incendiary work remained an exception among the Suprematist and other non-objective contributions to the revolutionary celebrations. Unlike the more traditionalist and politically conservative artists, the representatives of these vanguard movements took part only sporadically in the extensive programs for the festive decoration of public spaces initiated by the state. In one instance, Gustav Klutsis along with other young artists executed a design by Kliun for the first anniversary of the October Revolution, painting the branches of the bushes on Moscow's Teatral'naia Square and in the Aleksandr Garden along the Kremlin wall a bright blue and wrapping the trees in silvery gauze. In 1920, Il'ia Chashnik, Nikolai Suetin, and Lissitzky helped Malevich paint Suprematist designs on building decorations and curtains in Vitebsk. The same year, posters with Suprematist designs appeared in the streets of Smolensk; and in Kiev, Aleksandr Tyshler, Kozineva-Erenburg, Isaak Rabinovich, and Shifrin—all of them students of Aleksandra Ekster's—covered the sides of agitprop boats with Suprematist compositions. Yet the majority of the Suprematists and future Constructivists probably agreed with Lissitzky when, immediately after his extensive decoration work for the 1920 celebration of May 1st in Vitebsk, he wrote that the artist did not have to earn "authorization to work creatively . . . by painting the prescribed posters and implementing all the other orders"—even though this kind of work numbered among "his duties as a member of the commune."

If avant-garde artists participated in the design of posters, banners, or whole buildings, squares, and bridges, they obviously did so out of a sense of duty rather than inner conviction or desire—and extra rations of food or clothes were certainly a further incentive. On the other hand, their contributions seldom met with much enthusiasm on the part of their patrons in the administration and the Party. In these quarters, figurative representations found much more willing takers, with allegorical figures favored even over realistic ones. As early as 1919, the Moscow Soviet publicly objected to the participation of the "Futurists" in the decoration of the revolutionary celebrations. At the beginning of the same year, Rodchenko and Stepanova wrote their defiant "Manifesto of the Suprematists and Non-Objectivists" against the philistines on the left and on the right:

Emphatically we praise the Revolution as the only motor of life . . . You small-minded materialists—be off with you! We salute all you comrades who are fighting for the new ideas in art . . . We painted our furious canvases amid the jeers and laughter of the bureaucrats and petit bourgeois who have fled. Now we repeat to the so-called proletariat of former servants of the monarchy and intellectuals who have taken their place: We will not give in to you. In twenty years, the Soviet Republic will be proud of these paintings.

It would take several more decades before this prophecy came true. But their dominating position in Izo Narkompros allowed the Suprematists and non-objectivists to circumvent the apparatchiks for a time and to use the financial and organizational means of the state to mount several large-scale exhibitions of their art, to purchase it for the collections of their newly established museums of artistic culture, and to disseminate it over the entire country.

The Work of Art as a "Thing"—A Way out of the Crisis?

During the planning phase of the museums of artistic culture, the concept of the work of art as a *predmet* (object) or *veshch'* (thing) appeared for the first time. The introduction of this concept into the discussion about the form and function of art within the new social framework initiated a radical re-evaluation of the set of ideas traditionally defining "art." Out of this reorientation, Constructivism was born.

On November 24, 1918, Izo Narkompros organized a conference at the Palace of the Arts (as the Winter Palace had been renamed) in Petrograd. The meeting was to debate whether art was "A Temple or a Factory" and its list of speakers included Lunacharskii, Punin, Brik, and Maiakovskii. *Iskusstvo kommuny* (*Art of the Commune*) covered the event in its premiere issue. In his speech, Punin distinguished between the activity of the bourgeois artist, who merely designed ornaments and decorations, and the activity of the worker, who treated "material" to create "things." Punin expected a "new era in art" if the artists followed the lead of the workers and began to produce "things." He strongly objected to the decoration of the streets for the revolutionary celebrations, since art thus employed regressed to bourgeois embellishment instead of rising to the level of industrial production.

According to Punin, the goal of "an autonomous proletarian art . . . is not a matter of decoration but of the creation of new artistic objects. Art for the proletariat is not a sacred temple for lazy contemplation but work, a factory, producing artistic objects for everyone."[12] He was aware that this conception of the artistic creation as a "thing" introduced a new paradigm, which has claimed validity to the present day.

In his speech, Punin did not yet differentiate between the terms "object" and "thing." Familiar with Tatlin's work for years and inspired by his counter-reliefs, Punin in his plea for the object implicitly criticized Malevich, Tatlin's great adversary, for his promotion of *bespredmetnost'* (non-objectivity). It should be noted that the Russian word *predmet* means material entities in general, while *veshch'* denotes a thing produced by human hands. "Thing" in conventional Russian usage hence connotes an artistically made object.

By 1919 the critic had come to regard the non-objectivity of Suprematism as obsolete: the future of modern art was in Tatlin's "culture of materials." Although Punin, reporting in 1919 on a visit to Moscow, could write that "Suprematism has blossomed out in splendid colour . . . Posters, exhibitions, cafés—all is Suprematism,"[13] he maintained that at the peak of its success Suprematism had already lost its creative value. As art it was merely decorative, perfectly suited for the bourgeois function of embellishment "in textile designs, in cafés, in

fashion drawings" and hence hopelessly mired in the past. Seeing Suprematism in such "flagrant opposition to form as the principle of the new artistic era," Punin praised Tatlin's culture of materials as "the only creative force free enough to lead art out of the trenches of the old positions." The day would come when no one but art teachers would find interest in Suprematism, while Tatlin's works would emerge as the sole legitimate "new form."

Others shared Punin's views. Right from the outset, *Art of the Commune* endorsed the concept of the artistic "thing" in its theoretical essays on art and aesthetics. This concept launched a sweeping transformation of the traditional notion of art as an expression of feelings, emotions, moods, or ideas. The magazine's first issue, on December 7, 1918, published on its front page Brik's programmatic article "Drenazh iskusstvu" ("A Drain for Art"). Siding with Punin, Brik defined artistic works as "things" and, by using the word *veshch'*, switched the critical focus from the non-objective art of Suprematism to all artistic efforts that visualized emotions or ideas instead of shaping material "things."

Brik's slogan at the time—"Not idealistic fog but the material thing!"—reflects demands which were in fact prevalent among workers and insurgents after the February Revolution. They expressed the disdain the revolutionary proletarians and peasants felt for the Russian intellectuals and artists. Erenburg's memoirs record the writer Aleksei Tolstoi's summary of the conversations during the summer of 1917: "Will we go to the dogs or won't we? Will Russia be or will it not be? Will they slaughter the intellectuals or will they leave us alive?"

Devastated by war and food shortages, the hungry masses denounced intellectuals and artists as "parasites" who had no right to exist because they produced no material values but only ideas—and therefore did not work at all. As early as June 1917, the intellectual leader of the right bloc within the Union of Art Workers, Sologub, countered these attacks with the argument that the Russian intelligentsia belonged neither to the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat but constituted a third class of its own. Artists and intellectuals produced no material values as did the proletariat, yet unlike the bourgeoisie they did not create "merchandise [*tovar*] but ideas and forms."[14] The prevailing anti-intellectualism increased in the months following the October Revolution. As the situation worsened because of hunger and cold, the verbal attacks escalated into physical assaults. In the winter of 1917, the few liberal publications that still existed reported a regular "crusade" against the intelligentsia, a great majority of whom considered themselves on the side of the people in the fight against czarism. The standard question Russian artists and intellectuals had asked themselves since the nineteenth century—"What is the intelligentsia?"—underwent a dramatic revision as the intelligentsia's very right to exist was cast into doubt. The writers of *Art of the Commune* provided a pragmatic answer: they argued that in the new state artists had a right to exist only if they became specialists in the production of certain "things" and thereby voided the accusation of being parasitic fabricators of immaterial goods.

While Brik and Punin introduced the concept of the "thing" into the discussion of the future of art, the notion had figured first in the debates about the further existence or nonexistence of the intelligentsia. On March 31, 1918, Russian writers organized a large conference in Petrograd that focused on "The Tragedy of the Intelligentsia." Picking up Sologub's distinction between the proletarian "producers of things" and the intellectual "producers of ideas," the speakers agreed that the prerevolutionary intelligentsia had made a fatal mistake by concentrating on the social and educational sector and neglecting the technological and industrial field. The idealization of the "people" and the desire to serve them had caused the intellectuals' uselessness in all practical matters and brought about their present "tragedy."[15] As in the Union of Art Workers after the February Revolution, so now there were demands for autonomous professional organizations and greater public recognition of the value of intellectual and artistic work. In return for their autonomy, the artists and intellectuals were called upon to show greater *professionalism* in dealing with their specific material. Instead of their genuine but often idealistic or romanticizing commitment to the people, an increased discipline in their actual professional work was required.

These arguments essentially reiterated the critique of the populist but often dilettantish intellectuals of the old type and the demand—put forth as early as 1909 in a volume of essays entitled *Vekhi* (*Guideposts*)—for a new, technically qualified intelligentsia. Fiercely debated when it was published, the book attacked the separate course the Russian intelligentsia had taken. Proceeding from an astute analysis and a polemical indictment of their hallowed principles, the authors demanded that Russians follow the example of the scientific, technological, and artistic intelligentsia of the West and adopt their "objective values," specialized knowledge, and professional institutions. "The average intellectual in Russia neither likes nor understands his job," Aleksandr Itsgoev wrote in *Guideposts*. "He considers his profession something accidental and insignificant that does not deserve great respect. If he loves his profession and invests all his energy in it, he can expect some contemptuous sarcasm from his comrades, be they genuine revolutionaries or just worthless phrasemongers. But real influence on the populace, a great specific weight in today's life, can only be reached with sound and solid expertise."

Ten years later, the situation of intellectuals and artists had not changed much. Significantly, it was the fledgling proletarian intelligentsia that provided the first catalyst for a reorientation. By 1918, Gor'kii would write in the journal *Novaia zhizn'* (*New Life*):

> *The cultural vanguard among the working class is beginning to see how important it is for workers to acquire scientific and technical knowledge . . . This appreciation of knowledge and work is new in Russia; it becomes apparent in the facts workers and union members cited in their memoranda urging the establishment of institutes for several industries including the ceramics, glass, and porcelain industries. It is quite characteristic that it was the workers who pointed out the necessity to quickly develop the handicrafts industry.*[16]

The Constructivist theory of "production art" reacted to these stimuli from the proletarian intelligentsia by trying to synthesize artistic creation and crafts on a higher, i.e., industrial, level of productivity. For the implementation of this synthesis, artists and craftsmen alike had to rely on the scientific and technological advancement of their methods, tools, and materials.

To early Productivist theorists such as Brik, Boris Kushner, and Punin, this "reification" of works of art seemed to be the only rescue for art and artists. The strategies they developed to redefine the function of artists after the October Revolution undoubtedly laid the foundations for Constructivism. Yet it took another two years before the new concept of art sketched out in *Art of the Commune* and the developments within avant-garde art began to mesh. When in December 1921 the artists at Inkhuk approved Brik's proposal to end artistic experimentation and take up industrial production, it was the result of a long and complicated process of rapprochement between theoretical concepts and non-objective art. Even if

neither side could claim leadership in this mutual process, the artists' permanent self-examination and the extreme intellectualization of their creative work between 1918 and 1921 point toward the dominance of theorizing in the formation of Constructivism.

"Professionalism," a word chosen no doubt in deference to the technical specialists of the West, became a key term in the budding Constructivists' efforts to redefine the role and function of artists and thereby to overcome their existential crisis. In texts written between 1918 and 1921, first Brik and Kushner and then Rodchenko, Stepanova, Gan, Arvatov, the Stenberg brothers, Medunetskii, and Karl Ioganson persistently stressed the necessity of abolishing artistic instinct in favor of a professional approach—based on appropriate methods of technical manufacture and construction—to the artistic materials of color and form. On the other hand, Tatlin as well as Malevich, Lissitzky, and the members of Unovis categorically rejected this rationalization of the creative process and defended the importance of intuition in the choice and treatment of materials. It was this disagreement about the role of intuition that accounted for the artists' differing attitudes toward technology. Neither Tatlin nor Unovis was generally opposed to the artistic use of technological tools and materials. But unlike the Constructivists at Inkhuk, they rejected the mechanization of creative methods and the reduction of the creative process to rational operations.

The rationalization of the creative process and its subjection to instrumentalist principles were the result of discussions held at Inkhuk between January and April 1921. The discussions dealt with the artistic relationship between composition and construction, the one being defined as unconscious intuition, the other as deliberate methodical calculation during the shaping of an aesthetic product. Before 1921, such methodological and technological terms and ideas had played a minor role, if any. Before the First Working Group of Constructivists of Inkhuk was formed in March 1921, and before the artists around Rodchenko began their close cooperation with the theorist Gan, artistic intuition was appreciated rather than denounced, and if technical issues were discussed, they were issues of painting technique. There is a difference between art historians like Punin or linguists like Brik or Shklovskii analyzing the materials and methods by which a given work of art is made, and artists and theorists translating this analytical approach of the Formalist school into practical instructions for the methodical construction of new works or "objects." For better or for worse, the scientific character and rationality of methods for analyzing art were transformed into rationalist, scientific methods of constructing art. Inkhuk, an association of Formalist academics, cultural theorists, and artists, was ideally suited for plotting this new course, which turned analytical methods into production methods and expanded them into a sociological theory of the artist's role in society.

While the theorists provided the language of Constructivism as early as 1918, Constructivism itself did not emerge until 1921, with artists tentatively probing what was for them uncharted ground. If Rodchenko in his programmatic essay "Liniia ("The Line," 1921) described the development from the figurative "picture" to the *faktura*-determined "objects" of color painting to the colorless, non-*faktura* line construction as a logical and conscious progression, it was due more to the artist's rationalizing hindsight than to the actual process of decision making during that dramatic period. His teleological reconstruction is, however, understandable when one recalls that the essay was commissioned by the Inkhuk director, Brik, and was meant to demonstrate the evolution that led to Constructivism and its creation of "objects."

In what was essentially an account of his own development over the previous three years, Rodchenko concluded that the treatment of paint as an autonomous expressive medium had led to a "painterliness":

> *The painterly approach was created, and the picture ceased to exist as such, becoming either a painting or an object . . .*
>
> *Thus an element that appears arbitrary rose to lasting preeminence because it was the very essence of painting, it was professionalism in painting.*[17]

Professional creation in this sense means the conscious, rationally calculated production of nonsymbolic objects, not the intuitive composition of paintings. By 1921, the time for "arbitrary" discoveries of new materials, methods, or techniques was apparently over. Intuition had been replaced by precise methods of construction and experimentally planned invention.

The *Art of the Commune* writers—particularly Brik, Punin, and Kushner—added a sociological element to these arguments for professionalizing artistic creation. Unlike the old intelligentsia, who had emphasized artists' political, moral, and pedagogical commitment to the uneducated and disenfranchised peasants and workers, the new theorists stressed artists' professional and technical skills, which were needed in the proletarian society—their practical expertise, which essentially put them on one level with the workers.

Brik coined the term "artist-proletarian" to express this new conception of the artist's role. It is interesting to compare Brik's texts with the notes Rodchenko made in April 1918, probably as an outline for an appeal of the left federation of the Professional Union of Artists and Painters. His manifesto "To the Artist-Proletarians" describes the avant-garde artist as a "proletarian of the paintbrush" and an oppressed "creator-martyr": "We, who are in a worse situation than the oppressed workers, are workers for our livelihood as well as creators of art. We, who live in holes, have neither paint nor light nor time for creating. Proletarians of the paintbrush, we must unite, must establish a Free Association of Oppressed Artists, must demand bread and studios and our existential rights."

In contrast to this view of the artist as a subproletarian who is joined with the revolutionary proletariat in poverty but not in his professional work, Brik's definition of the "artist-proletarian," formulated six months later, presents the artist in his positive future incarnation. In the interval between these two definitions, the anarchist phase of the Revolution ended, Lenin declared the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the Bolshevik Party took total control of the state.

These political changes were reflected in the shifting meaning of the term "artist-proletarian." Writing in 1918, Brik asks who will create the "art of the future" or "proletarian art."[18] He rejects the slogan "art for the proletariat" as well as the Proletkul't (Proletarian Culture) motto "art by the proletariat." The first slogan, Brik believes, is still mired in the old "consumerist thinking" since it simply replaces the bourgeois private patron with a proletarian "mass patron," without changing the role of the artist as merely a talented entertainer. Brik also denounces the Proletkul't idea that proletarian art can only be created by proletarians, illustrating his point with a reference to the Proletkul't studios where this approach has generated "not proletarian works but untalented parodies of outworn art forms of the past." He concludes: "proletarian art is neither 'art for the proletariat' nor 'art by the proletariat'. It is art by artist-proletarians. They and they alone will create the art of the future."

But what distinguishes the "artist-proletarian" from the bourgeois artist? Brik names two essential criteria. While the

bourgeois artist considers creation "his own private affair" and produces works of art "to enhance his ego," the proletarian artist creates in order to fulfill "a socially important task" within the "collective." While the bourgeois artist seeks to please the masses, the proletarian artist "fights against their stubbornness and leads them in directions that will steadfastly advance art." Instead of repeating "stereotypes of the past," the artist-proletarian produces "ever new things" like an inventor in a field all his own.

In another article, Brik elaborates on several points of his concept of the proletarian artist.[19] First he gives an in-depth criticism of Proletkul't. The "confusion of the the terms 'workers' culture' and 'proletarian culture'" has led Proletkul't to adopt "long-outdated forms of petit-bourgeois Romanticism with its cheap heroism and vulgar folkishness." The "artist-proletarian," by contrast, will not express the will of the proletariat the way the bourgeois artist used to express his own ego but fulfill the tasks set by society with a high degree of professionalism, because: "You can't 'express' the will of other people, you can only 'execute' it." For all practical purposes that means expressive art, be it collective or subjective, has to give way to the functional execution of the "social task" in the appropriate medium. In addition, Brik stresses that "organization" is an "essential element of the proletarian movement" and must therefore also determine the work of the "artist-proletarian." (Brik's demand for artistic "organization" and his closing sentence—"We . . . demand the unconditional implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in all fields of cultural development"—read like an echo of Lenin's April 1918 article, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," which called for "'harmonious organization' and dictatorship.") [20]

The term "artist-proletarian" underwent several metamorphoses over the next few years. During the formative phase of Constructivism, around 1921, it became "artist-constructor," and in 1922, when the Constructivists shifted from "pure" constructions to the production of utilitarian objects, they settled on "artist-engineer." Whatever the exact expression, the concept behind it is that originally defined by Brik. It can be summarized as follows:

- Professionalism instead of dilettantism
- Material and professional execution of socially important tasks instead of symbolic expression of the subjective ego or the collective will of the proletarian masses
- Production of ever new forms to fight against the taste stereotypes of the unenlightened masses
- Methodical organization of artistic creation

Elaborated during the first year after the October Revolution as a defense of artistic production, these criteria remained valid Constructivist guidelines throughout the 1920s. Yet although they proved fruitful in the beginning, they carried the seeds of their own destruction. The basic contradiction between artistic autonomy through professionalism, innovation, and the rejection of expressive art, on the one hand, and the employment of art as an instrument for implementing social tasks and organizing life, on the other, could be an open and productive one only as long as its dialectic balance was not upset by external political forces. By 1930 at the latest, the scale had tipped.

Brik's line of reasoning managed to combine the Formalist school's demand for the autonomy of artistic creation, the anti-intellectualism of the masses, and the Communist Party's demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat—albeit in a precarious and unstable synthesis.

Throughout the 1920s, the theoretical unity of the two contradictory propositions had to be constantly restored by word and action. The numerous manifestos and programs formulated by the Constructivists during this period as well as the formation of groups such as Komfut (the Communists-Futurists), Lef (the Left Front of the Arts), Novyi Lef (New Lef), or October testify to the attempt to resolve or at least to bridge the intrinsic conflict.

Even if the balance among artistic autonomy, functional design, and Party discipline was frequently threatened in these years, it broke down only after 1930, when autonomy was subordinated to function and function was defined by the Party.

The Museum of Painterly Culture—A Museum of Objects

In the discussion about establishing new museums of artistic culture, the categories "object," "professionalism" of artistic creation, and "perfection" were developed and defined in the sense of an evolution of material treatment and introduced to a wider circle of artists. The original plan for the museums was formulated and proposed in July 1918 by Tatlin. His proposal still breathed the spirit of the Freedom for Art Federation, emphasizing the artists' autonomy in organizing the museums and selecting their collections. The museums were supposed to be institutions of "art and education for the masses." Tatlin described Izo Narkompros as "the only forum competent to . . . create a museum of contemporary, living art" and assigned it the task of independently compiling a list of artists who would be represented in the museums. The selected artists would then determine which of their works should go to the museums.

Malevich commented on the artistic policy for the planned museums in *Art of the Commune.*[21] In his usual anarchistic, "Futurist" tone, he sounded off against tradition and convention, demanding that only the most recent art be exhibited. Sharply attacking Benua and his Council on Museum Affairs, Malevich called on all the "living" to "break off their friendship" with the "conservatives" and be "as ruthless as life itself," since that was the only way "creative life" could grow.

Malevich envisioned the museum as a working research laboratory for artists rather than an exhibition space for passive viewing pleasure: "Instead of collecting all kinds of old trash, it is necessary to create laboratories for a global creative-development machine whose arbors will not turn out dead representations of objects but artists of living forms . . . We will produce I-beams, the electricity and light of colors."

Izo Narkompros's Declaration on Principles of Museum Administration was approved by the Art Board on February 7, 1919. It stressed the expertise of artists and the autonomy of the planned institution, stating: "Artists, as those solely competent in matters of contemporary art and as the forces who create artistic values, alone may oversee acquisitions of contemporary art and guide the artistic education of the country."[22] The declaration ended with an appeal to renew art by professionalizing it: "Artists! Unite in the fight for your professional culture of the future and against the oppressive fetishism of the past." And at the museum conference convened in Petrograd on February 11, 1919, the concept of artistic culture was endorsed. The conference speakers included Punin and Brik (who in "A Drain for Art" had already proclaimed the museum an exhibition and testing site of real "things.")

Punin and Brik's concept of art as "professional culture" for the creation of "real things" did not show its full impact until Rodchenko began endorsing it. As we learn from Stepanova's diary, on March 27, 1919, Brik met with Rodchenko, then the secretary of the left federation of the Professional Union of

Artists and Painters, to discuss the future cooperation of Izo Narkompros and the Professional Union in creating the museums of artistic culture. It was, apparently, the first encounter between the theorist of "production art" and the much younger artist, who one month later would make his spectacular debut at the Tenth State Exhibition and soon after that emerge as the ideological leader of the Moscow avant-garde artists. During their first meeting, Brik asked Rodchenko to present the left federation's ideas to Izo Narkompros in order to clarify the terms for a joint organization of the new museums.

Rodchenko, whose thoughts were written down by Stepanova after Brik's visit, posited a fundamental difference between Russian and Western painting and wanted the new museum to emphasize the independence and peculiarities of Russian painting. According to Rodchenko, Western painting is synthetic, whereas Russian painting, with its origin in the icon, is "decorative and analytical." In icons as well as signboards and the boldly colored *lubok* (illustrated broadside) and, finally, Suprematist and non-objective paintings, the surface plane is an autonomous expressive element: "This great decorative color-resplendent element is the prime mover of Russian painting, which we do not value, do not know."[23] Rodchenko suggested a selection and arrangement of works for the new museum that would present the autonomous evolution of Russian painting—culminating, of course, in the avant-garde.

Rodchenko was probably the first to propose an evolutionary display of art museum exhibits, an idea that was picked up in the 1920s in Western Europe and America and has since determined the way works are selected and arranged in museums of contemporary art all over the world. The notion of a logical development still informs our image of the history of modern art, even if it has long been recognized as an artificial, streamlined reconstruction of the true historical course of events—a myth created by the avant-garde to legitimize its own claim of being the ultimate destination of art history.

Yet the more radical aspects of Rodchenko's program never really caught on. In contrast to the principles of selection and arrangement that have since become common, his plan rejected the separation between "high" and "low" art and called for non-chronological juxtapositions. Quite contrary to the hierarchic classification of art that had been introduced in West European museums around 1900 and became standard policy in the 1920s, Rodchenko had no intention of banishing "inferior" art from the museum in order to elevate the tastes of the visitors. His plan put icons next to coarsely and brightly painted tin signboards, and mass-produced broadsides next to the Cubist or Suprematist works of professional painters. Rodchenko's selection criteria reflected not the stylistic standards of ostensibly objective art historians but a painter's professional interest in the employment and treatment of his material in the history of painting. In this context, considerations of genre or medium were as irrelevant as moral valuations of "high" and "low."

Faktura—The Tangible Things

The name chosen for the new museum in Moscow—the Museum of Painterly Culture—indicates its founders' conceptual position. They conceived of pictures as products of a cultural activity, painting, which in turn was considered a specialized method of treating paint. While outlining his views on the museum, Rodchenko was also preparing the Tenth State Exhibition, which opened on April 27, 1919—the first group exhibition in history dedicated exclusively to non-objective art. In this momentous exhibition, Malevich showed his metaphysical white-on-white paintings for the first time. Rodchenko, on the other hand, exhibited a series of black-on-black paintings (for example, plate nos. 237, 240). Amazement and admiration among his fellow artists ran high. A few days before the opening of the show, Stepanova wrote in her diary:

> *His black paintings are actually the rage of the season. With these works, he has shown what* faktura *is . . . No one else has achieved such variety and depth.*
>
> *The* absorption of painting in itself *as a* professional *element. A new, interesting* faktura, *and exclusively painting, i.e., no 'coloring' but employment of the most unyielding color, black . . . In the 'black' works nothing besides painting exists. That is why their* faktura *is so immensely enhanced . . . Those shining, matte, muddy, uneven, and smooth parts of the surface result in an extraordinarily powerful composition. They are so effectively painted that they are in no way inferior to colors.*

In the black paintings, paint has ceased to figure as color or value; it is solely the treatment of its material substance that counts. Consequently, the finished work represents nothing and expresses nothing. Its artistic value springs solely from the variety of its surface effects and its very novelty. The concept of professionalism is precisely defined in these paintings: professional work means "absorption of painting in itself," i.e., in its specific material and methods—paint and the treatment of paint with the objective of making its physical qualities visible and palpable. The result is a richly diverse surface—a fascinating "object" without any depth of meaning or emotion.

The black *faktura* paintings were a smashing success with the Moscow artists. On April 29, 1919, two days after the exhibition opened, Stepanova wrote in her diary: "Anti [Rodchenko] has scored an amazing success . . . He has stunned everyone with his masterly skills, his *faktura,* and people see him in a completely different light now." In the wake of this success, Rodchenko became the leading figure among the Moscow avant-garde innovators, the chief Constructivist, and the quintessential production artist.

But not only painters embraced Rodchenko's black canvases as a seminal innovation. The works also stirred the interest of Brik. The opening of the Tenth State Exhibition initiated a close interaction between artistic practice and aesthetic theory which helped determine the further development from *faktura* painting to Constructivism and from the Constructivist laboratory experiments to Productivist art and factographic photomontage and photography. In Rodchenko, Brik apparently found the incarnation of his artist-proletarian who professionally produced objects instead of ideas. Stepanova, in any event, noted that at the exhibition Brik was "completely taken with Anti." Rather reserved during his visit with Rodchenko one month earlier, the magisterial Brik was now "quite jovial and said that because of Rodchenko, Malevich was finally passé . . . The black paintings simply astonished him."

What was it that astonished the theorist so much? Despite his limited oeuvre, Brik was valued as a crucial innovative force among the Formalist linguists as well as the Constructivists. The Russian concept of *faktura* had been introduced into aesthetic discourse as early as 1912 by David Burliuk and Vladimir Markov (Waldemars Matvejs) and had since become one of the most important categories in the "Futurist" theories of art and literature. From the beginning, *faktura* had denoted the visible and palpable result of the physical treatment of material. *Faktura,* as the critical element in the progress of art and the professionalization of the artist, was a recurring leitmotif in the manifestos and statements of Russian artists before 1920. In 1919, when Rodchenko was painting his black canvases, *faktura* once again became the center of attention,

while Suprematism, with it temporarily predominant its anti-*faktura* agenda, had been losing some ground since 1915. "*Faktura* is the essence of the painterly surface," Popova wrote in her statement for the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition.

The linguists of the Formalist school, too, made *faktura* the dominant artistic standard. In his 1919 "Futurizm" ("Futurism"), Roman Jakobson defined works of art as objects that were autonomous through their *faktura*: "A clearly perceptible *faktura* needs no further justification; it becomes autonomous and requires new methods of design and new materials; the picture is pasted over with paper or sprinkled with sand. Finally, the use of cardboard, wood, sheet metal, etc., has become common."[24] Concurring with the artists and his fellow Opoiaz members, Shklovskii defined *faktura* as the essential characteristic of art in general in his article "O fakture i kontr-rel'efakh" ("On *Faktura* and Counter-Reliefs"): "*Faktura* is the main distinguishing feature of the particular world of specially constructed things which in their entirety we call art . . . The work of the artist-poet and the artist-painter ultimately aims at creating a permanent object that is tangible in all its details, a *faktura* object."[25] Shklovskii cites Tatlin's and Al'tman's material compositions as the most convincing examples of his definition of art. Suprematism, on the other hand, belongs to the "Symbolist school of painting" and is "essentially 'ideal' painting" since it strives to symbolize ideas through colors and abstract shapes instead of emphasizing the properties of the material and thereby differentiating and intensifying the tangible values of *faktura.*

The non-objective artists including Rodchenko and Stepanova shared this negative attitude toward the ideal, even metaphysical, symbolism of the Suprematists and especially of Malevich. After the opening of the Tenth State Exhibition, Stepanova wrote in her diary on April 29, 1919: "The only compromise admitted there is Suprematism. It would have been better to exclude it and exhibit only non-objective art." Rodchenko sang the same tune in his statement in the exhibition catalogue, where he compared his invention of colorless, black *faktura* with Columbus's discovery of the New World while belittling Malevich as the philosopher of an *ism:* "The death knell has sounded for color painting and now the last *ism* is being laid to eternal rest . . ."[26]

At that point, Shklovskii had not seen Rodchenko's black *faktura* paintings but his definition perfectly applies to their uncompromising gesture. In their radical concentration on *faktura,* their total exclusion of all other painterly values such as color, light, volume, and space, and their reduction of form to the edge of perceptibility, these paintings suddenly revealed the power of negation. The increasing concern with *faktura* as a design element in Russian avant-garde painting since 1912 assumed a completely new quality after Rodchenko's black paintings had demonstrated the practical and aesthetic consequences of the *faktura* concept: The picture lost its symbolic character; it became an object.

This sharp distinction between the artistic object and the symbolic picture led many contemporaries, as well as present-day scholars such as Rainer Grübel or Benjamin Buchloh, to the assumption that the *faktura* object was completely devoid of any outside references. Such interpretations see the reified work stripped of all meaning that transcends the self-referentiality of an index sign pointing to the qualities of its own material and making. It is true that some of Rodchenko's own statements suggest a reduction of his *faktura* paintings to the function of a self-referential sign. After all, he occasionally describes them as signs of his choice of materials, i.e., black paint, and as traces of his painting technique. But this disregard for all further references has a deliberate polemical edge to it. In the historical context of their creation, the meaning of the *faktura* objects was constituted by their very negation of all the emotional expressive qualities and ideal references that had bogged down the painting of the previous decades and distracted it from its essential nature.

This negation of tradition was, however, precisely defined. Traditional values were not simply rejected. They were replaced by new products which introduced new, not yet conventionalized codes of perception. In the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition, Rodchenko assembled—under the heading "Rodchenko's System"—quotations that expounded upon his black paintings. With statements like "That I destroy myself only shows that I exist" (Max Stirner) or "What invigorates life invigorates death" (Walt Whitman) he tried to prove that the rebirth of life relied on death as its necessary prerequisite. In this sense, the literary quotations are metaphors of the black *faktura* objects. Standing on the border between the old, dead art and a new, living art, the real things deal the pictorial illusions the deathblow.

Rodchenko's choice of anarchist writers like Max Stirner was not an accident. There are numerous indications that Rodchenko, nicknamed "Anti" by his friends, conceived of the black paintings as an explicitly anarchist answer to the ruling art. Since Courbet, artists have time and again used the color black to express anarchistic views, even if their works did not explicitly refer to the intended symbolic content. We have already mentioned Rodchenko's active involvement in the Moscow Association of Anarchist Groups. In the April 28, 1918, issue of *Anarchy,* he published his first theoretical text, a brief analysis of his experiments with shapes and colors entitled "The Dynamism of the Plane." In this article as well as in "Everything Is Experiment," he repeatedly used the term "expressive means," although without specifying what a painting "absorbed in itself" (in Stepanova's words) was supposed to express.

There is an astoundingly symbolic self-portrait of Rodchenko, painted in 1920 during the most radical phase of the liberation of his painting from all references. An egg-shaped, bald head rises from a turtleneck sweater. A hexagonal rhombus, overlaid by a large deep-black disc, covers half the wide-open eyes and the entire forehead. Is this strangely stigmatized face an affirmation of the color black as a symbol of anarchism or rather an affirmation of anarchistic individualism as propagated in "Rodchenko's System"? In this case the black paintings could be read as an "expression" of this affirmation. In a review of the Tenth State Exhibition, Lissitzky called Rodchenko an "individualist" who had started "the shift to the new materiality" with his black paintings.[27]

Such an interpretation of the *faktura* paintings leads one to wonder how Rodchenko and the future Constructivists could have abandoned this individualist, anarchistic attitude toward art and life in favor of the collectivist ideology of Constructivism, which negated not only the individual but also the role of intuition in the creative act, feeling, *faktura,* and material. In their stead, Constructivism postulated the system of forms, the nonmaterial line, the logically planned structure, the rational creative method, and the calculated effect.

In "The Line," Rodchenko described the artistic course he had taken after 1918 as a logical sequence of problems in the treatment of paint, and solutions through the invention of new painting techniques. The artist saw these "inventions of new discoveries" as an evolution taking place strictly within art, a kind of expedition into painting's uncharted territories which had previously been barred by tasks alien to art. What he did not mention was the possibility of art's evolutionary course being motivated, much less determined by, external societal

tasks as Brik had outlined them in *Art of the Commune.*

It took a number of developmental factors, both within and outside art, to move the Moscow Constructivists grouped around Rodchenko along the way that led from individually composed *faktura* works to useful Constructivist "objects." It should be emphasized that I regard this development as only *one* possible way among "several theoretically conceivable evolutionary courses" pointed out by Iurii Tynianov and Jakobson in the journal *Lef* (*Left Front of the Arts*) in 1928.[28] The transition from the black *faktura* studies to functionally planned constructions cannot be sufficiently explained by certain "immanent laws" in the evolution of artistic materials and methods, even though the Constructivists liked to give their own genesis this stamp of finality. Nor can the historical circumstances provide a comprehensive answer. Only by "analyzing the correlation between the [artistic] sequence and other historical sequences" can the "question of the concrete choice of course" be clarified. This approach, propounded by Jakobson and Tynianov for art in general, should specifically be applied to the development of Russian Constructivism.

The Universe of the Line

Critical decisions on the road to Constructivism were made between the Tenth State Exhibition in April 1919, where Rodchenko first showed his black paintings, and the opening of the Nineteenth State Exhibition on October 2, 1920, to which he contributed fifty-seven works, most of them from his most recent, Linearist phase. With the introduction of the autonomous line as a new element in painting, Rodchenko took a crucial step toward Constructivism, replacing paint with the line as the essence of painting. Probably inspired by Kandinskii's article "O linii" ("On the Line," 1919),[29] Rodchenko began to explore the qualities of the line in several dozen non-objective pencil drawings (some made using a ruler, some not) in April and March 1919. In August, only a few months after the *faktura* paintings, he executed ten purely linear black-and-white paintings from the pencil sketches. The same month, he wrote in his notebook: "I have begun to paint canvases with linear themes . . . They will be unusual and new . . . Certainly I will draw a lot of criticism for my lines. People will say there is no painting without brushstrokes. But I see my task differently. Color has died in black and become irrelevant. Let the brushstroke die too."

In the exhibition, Rodchenko hung the pages of "Everything Is Experiment" alongside his linear paintings. The text presents the artist's non-objective work of previous years as a development that follows "immanent laws," with the painter solving "tasks" that result from formal experiments with the "line" and "paint." "The composition of the one (the line) and the *faktura* of the other (paint) constitute the value of painting and consequently amount to the discovery of painting itself." Despite the equality of line and paint suggested in this statement, the painter, in the course of his preoccupation with the line, is "confronted" with the question, "Is *faktura* a value in itself or does it only serve to intensify more fundamental tasks of the work? I believe the latter to be the case . . . Otherwise two works are created in one, one with its own intrinsic tasks and the other simply the pleasure of the surface. Together they become blurred in the distance and do not enhance the value of the whole."

Along with color and *faktura,* Rodchenko deliberately banishes the visual and haptic "pleasure" of surface attractions from painting. This amounts to a fundamental decision as to the intended reception of art. Hedonistic enjoyment and contemplative absorption in surface details are summarily rejected in favor of a rational perception of the line construction's economical form and functional implementation of "intrinsic tasks." Straight lines are the most economical means to build constructions; anything that conceals the construction is superfluous, anticonstructive, dysfunctional.

With the drastic turn from *faktura* to the line, a necessary if not quite sufficient step toward merely functionalist painting had been taken. To transform the autonomous linear painting into a functional object, Linearism still had to pass through various stages:

- From the planar linear composition to the spatial line construction
- From the spatial line construction in the picture to the three-dimensional construction in the picture space
- From the economical structure and inner functionality of the plastic but autonomous spatial construction to the fulfillment of an external purpose by the constructed object

The shift from the flat line paintings of the first phase with their unstable picture space of intersecting straight lines and circles to the linear structures within the picture space beginning in late 1919 was certainly inspired by Rodchenko's cooperation with the architects of Zhivskul'ptarkh (the Synthesis of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture Commission). He joined this association of painters, architects, and sculptors, who strove for a fusion of their fields, on November 18, 1919. The architectural tasks of the association soon prompted the painter to develop his flat linear compositions into tectonic constructions built solely of lines. Despite their architectonics, Rodchenko's linear structures—such as the 1919 sketches of kiosks (plate no. 115) or the sketches for the Soviet of Deputies building (plate no. 653)—as well as the projects of the architects Nikolai Ladovskii and Vladimir Krinskii, the sculptor Boris Korolev, and the painter Aleksandr Shevchenko, show the characteristics of an exploded order. The planned instability of the buildings with their hazardously projecting structural parts, leaning pillars, and precariously balanced girders; the dissolution of spatial blocks; the breaking up of the traditional rectangular framework; the displacement and penetration of irregularly shaped walls; and the confusing mixture of Constructivist ornament and tectonically functional form resulted in architectural collages rather than coherent complexes and in a discontinuously enclosed space. It is not without reason that these designs are frequently cited as precursors of Deconstructivist architecture.

Amid the revolutionary fervor of 1919–20, the parts were apparently still emancipated from the organizing structures and strictures of the whole. The designs of Rodchenko and other members of Zhivskul'ptarkh demonstrate an architecture of articulated conflicts and inner clashes that often goes to the limit of structural feasibility. Only at the end of the 1920s would functionalism introduce a new harmonizing unity into the architectural structure and subordinate the parts to a flexible architectonic framework.

Despite their Deconstructivist configuration, the architectural designs with their spatial, linear structures introduced a new phase in the defining of what constituted a work of art that ultimately led to Constructivism. Standing at the forefront of this development, Rodchenko was first as isolated as he had feared when he developed his Linearism. Looking back, in October 1920, at the exhibition of his line paintings, he wrote in his diary: "At the time none of the artists perceived them as paintings, but by the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 the first imitators of my art appeared on the scene. Many said the *line as a system* had opened their eyes to the *essence of construction.*"

It took several more external factors to prompt the

development from line constructions to the methodically structured "system" of Constructivism. The series of discussions among the artists at Inkhuk was one of those factors.

Inkhuk—The Factory of Objectivity

Rodchenko's discoveries in painting gained a broader audience when shortly after the exhibition of his line paintings, in early November 1920, he was appointed head of a "parallel" organizing committee of Inkhuk, which had been formed in opposition to the existing committee under Kandinskii.

After dramatic arguments between Kandinskii's and Rodchenko's followers about the tasks and programs of Inkhuk, Kandinskii and his supporters left the Institute for good on January 21, 1921. This also ended the two-year friendship between him and Rodchenko and Stepanova—the three artists had worked and lived together in Kandinskii's house from September 1919 until the autumn of 1920. But while they had collaborated to prepare the Nineteenth State Exhibition in October 1920, Kandinskii's expressive abstractionism and the objective outlook of Rodchenko's Constructivism had proved irreconcilable. Even peaceful coexistence seemed impossible in those days of struggle for a new art (although Brik had proposed cooperation). On February 4, 1921, the committee under Rodchenko was officially confirmed. The line represented by him and the committee members Brik, Briusova, Aleksei Babichev, Krinskii, Popova, and Stepanova had been victorious.

Not only the committee but also the General Working Group of Objective Analysis at Inkhuk was under Rodchenko's direction. The group counted among its members almost all the future Constructivists in Moscow. Even Malevich and Lissitzky made the long trip from Vitebsk to present Unovis's programs and work at Inkhuk. But the Working Group found little common ground with them or with Tatlin, who in 1919 had moved from Moscow to Petrograd (where he would work at the Museum of Artistic Culture/Ginkhuk [the State Institute of Artistic Culture]). No fruitful cooperation ever developed with either Vitebsk or Petrograd. The ideological differences were too glaring.

Between its formation on November 23, 1920, and May 1921, the General Working Group of Objective Analysis held twenty-eight sessions. In contrast to the analyses of the psychological and physiological effects of artworks of all types planned in Kandinskii's Inkhuk program, the group's program emphasized the "objective analysis of works of art" so as to clarify and define the primary and secondary elements of painting, sculpture, architecture, and so on, as well as their laws of organization, specifically the structural laws of "construction" and "rhythm." These laws were to be analytically "laid bare"—a term obviously borrowed from the Formalists. Characteristically, "emotion" and "representation" were ranked among the secondary elements of art to be analyzed, whereas Kandinskii's program had drawn upon the "analysis of artistic means of expression" and their "effects on the human psyche." In opposition to this subjective understanding of works of art as expressive signs, the group's program perceived them as objects devoid of individual artistic expression, hence not requiring any psychological empathy on the part of the viewer but rather an empirical, behavioristic analysis of his own physiological responses in order to apprehend the objects' effects. To implement their program, the Working Group held numerous sessions between January and April 1921, discussing the "analysis of the terms 'construction' and 'composition' and their respective definition." At the same time, works by Western painters such as Monet, Signac, and Matisse; by older Russian artists like Abram Arkhipov, Konstantin Korovin, Aleksandr Kuprin, Petr Konchalovskii, and Kandinskii; and by Suprematists and non-objectivists (Ekster, Klutsis, Malevich, Medunetskii, Rodchenko, Stepanova, and Tatlin) were analyzed to determine their Constructivist content.

The artists and theorists did not enter into these discussions with a clear, let alone a unanimous, definition of "composition" and "construction" and the difference between them. They began by analyzing individual works and tried to reduce the observations and evaluations of the group members, recorded in countless minutes, to a common denominator. By way of empirical induction, they hoped to find an objective definition of the term "construction."

Despite this effort at an inductive approach, the recorded results with their interim solutions, as well as the drawings made to illustrate the difference between composition and construction (plate nos. 244–253), show the outlines of a preconceived notion of "construction" which was clearly inspired by Rodchenko's line paintings. It is therefore not surprising that at the end of these sessions only Rodchenko's works were deemed "constructive" since they alone had completely replaced composition with construction. Rodchenko was more guarded, describing his black and line paintings as "striving for construction."

In the course of these "objective" analyses and terminological clarifications a general tendency to systematize and rationalize artistic creation became apparent. In Rodchenko's definition of "construction," its systemic character plays an important role: "Every system of construction requires the specific use of its own material, and every such system will be the invention or the perfecting of something, and not a reflection or portrayal."[30]

Constructions

In his hanging spatial constructions, Rodchenko for the first time consistently demonstrated the systemic character of construction in an aesthetically convincing manner. Each of the five—a square, a hexagon (plate no. 296), an oval (plate no. 294), a circle, and a triangle—was constructed of a single sheet of plywood. The artist cut the sheets in concentric bands of equal width and tilted them into space to create three-dimensional bodies that were not constituted of physical mass but of linear, uniform geometric figures. Like paintings, these constructions could not stand on their own and were therefore suspended from the ceiling—which emphasized their autonomy as monadic, nonutilitarian entities.

It would be an understatement of the facts to consider these constructions mere signs of Rodchenko's transition from painting to sculpture. Such an assessment would ignore the origins of construction in painting. Only the negation of painterliness explains the hanging construction's anti-individualist, universal geometric form, reproducibility, and independence from an individual creator or specific material that earlier on would have born the hallmark of the artist's *faktura*. The uniformly smooth silver paint emphasizes the absence of any surface *faktura* and evokes the impression of immateriality and weightlessness. The hanging spatial constructions hold no secrets. Their design is completely transparent and rational. The basic elements of painting—surface and color—have been transformed into movement and light. The metallic sheen of their surface underscores the disembodied effect of the hanging constructions (or "reflecting surfaces," as Rodchenko sometimes described them). Paint and the canvas or wooden surface of painting have been literally dissected and dissolved, and the destruction of matter gives birth to the pure construction as a reconstruction of the objective world according to the artist's plan.

Rodchenko created his series of hanging constructions between late 1920 and early 1921 while also working on a number of other wood constructions based on the principle of repetition of a single form. In these works, identical elements such as wooden rods or boards of equal measurements are assembled into three-dimensional constructions that are symmetrically arranged around a center. Like the hanging constructions, these smaller-scale constructions dispense with *faktura,* individual variations, and so forth. Rather, they are an exercise in combinatory rules to show that even uniform material elements can produce a variety of aesthetically satisfying constructions. The material plays only a minor role in the combinatory method. The construction follows the methods of building elementary structural systems and not the material. Rodchenko remarked: "I experimentally developed these most recent constructions to bind the constructor to the law of functionality of forms and their relationships and to demonstrate the universal principle that all sorts of constructions of different systems, types, and applications can be built from identical shapes."

Built on the principle of identical shapes and axially symmetrical shifts, these constructions are results of an *ars combinatoria* which experimentally explores and demonstrates the methods of the creation of forms. The construction method and the resulting system of forms are paramount while *faktura* and material play an inferior role. At this point, the functionality of the construction is still defined from within the system: a form is functional because it defines the other forms in the system and determines their function, not because it can be used to fulfill tasks outside the system. These constructions are hence functionally structured in themselves but their elements have no other function than to constitute this structure. The structure itself remains without any utilitarian function—while positively asserting its aesthetic function.

One conspicuous hallmark of the most advanced constructions of 1921 is their systemic character: a radically economic structure of uniform elements and homogeneous materials which can be arranged in various combinations that are consistently functional within the system. This systemic conception of construction differs considerably from the meaning given to the term in the discussions about construction versus composition where "construction" had primarily denoted architectural design and stability. This rather literal, easy-to-grasp notion of constructiveness is reflected in most constructions from the so-called "laboratory" phase of Constructivism, including the constructions of Tatlin, Vasilii Ermilov, Medunetskii, Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Naum Gabo, and Katarzyna Kobro, as well as some of Klutsis's and Rodchenko's constructions. None of these works display the systemic character defined by Rodchenko, for their formal elements are neither consistently uniform and homogeneous nor are they organized according to a rational combinatory method. Besides Rodchenko's hanging constructions and small wood constructions, only a few constructions and sketches by Klutsis and a number of Ioganson's constructions conform with the ideal of a systematic structure.

At the exhibition of Obmokhu (the Society of Young Artists) in May-June 1921, Ioganson presented some of the most individual and convincing constructions in the entire show. The six works, which have survived only in photographs, are constructed of pieces of squared timber arranged mostly at square but also at acute and obtuse angles. Three spatial constructions, exhibited side by side to emphasize the principle of variation, each consisted of identical wooden pieces which intersected in the center of the construction at varying angles. The skeletal structures were held together by wire or rope, which braced the ends of the wooden pieces for maximum countertension and overall stability. They were tilted to the side so that they rested on three vertices, which gave the structures a strong dynamic effect and made them appear much more complex than they actually were. Two other spatial constructions on triangular pedestals also had rectangular structures, with the formal elements symmetrically arranged around the center of each construction.

Ioganson's *Study in Balance* (ca. 1920), also shown at the Obmokhu exhibition, was organized according to the same method as the spatial constructions. Three movable rods, connected by rope, were mounted above a triangular base slab. By pulling the rope, the rods could be arranged in different configurations to change the entire structure.

These structures, made of standardized elements and homogeneous materials and rendered transformative through variable central connections or kinetic mounting, were exemplary models of Ioganson's concept of the "mechanical construction." Charts with two lines crossing at right or acute and obtuse angles served Ioganson to illustrate a thesis he presented at Inkhuk on March 9, 1922: "The design of every cold structure in space or any combination of hard material is a cross with right angles (or) with acute and obtuse angles."

With these drawings, Ioganson struck the balance of his previous work. At the end of his lecture, he summarized his own artistic development as a logical and necessary sequence: "From painting to sculpture, from sculpture to construction, from construction to technology and invention—that is the course I have chosen and I am sure it will also be the ultimate direction of every revolutionary artist."

In 1924, Ioganson gave up art in favor of technology and began to work in a rolling mill—not as an ordinary technician but as an "inventor" of design methods which he tried to translate from his sculptures to the construction of utilitarian objects. He contrasted the methods of "mechanical construction" and "invention" developed in his spatial constructions with the "unimaginative" and "stagnating" technology of the period—but also with "the procedures, methods, techniques, materials, and tools of art," which he considered "useless, flawed, primitive, and extremely insufficient" for the design of the future. Championing a rationally calculated design method, he polemically attacked Tatlin's selections of materials as well as the Suprematist compositions by Malevich and his Unovis followers for their intuitive treatment of material and unsystematic design. In their failure to progress beyond the methods of the "old art," these artists—in Ioganson's view—relapsed into a "wrong and noxious form of construction, i.e., into the 'good old art' or into mere playfulness."

In his lecture at Inkhuk, Ioganson stressed that the innovative, transformable "mechanical" construction was nothing but the "thing" itself, "organized according to Constructivist principles." Therefore it had "no existence above, below, or beyond the thing." Ioganson was thus the first to postulate the principle of concrete art and minimal art: that the work of art is a structured thing, i.e., the material implementation of a systematically designed structure that is transformable within the limits of its own system. Accordingly, the spatial construction is merely a self-explication of its methodically organized intrinsic structure.

Ioganson drew the necessary conclusions from this reification of art when he attempted to apply his originally artistic design method to the "invention" of industrial products. This created an entirely new situation as the structure now had to meet utilitarian requirements outside its own system—which basically amounted to a return to the "theme" or "content" of the old art in the new guise of

utilitarian function. Only for one fleeting historic moment did the liberation of art from representational and expressive functions lead to its complete autonomy. The immanent functionality of systematically organized material was soon replaced by the external function of serving a "social task," as Brik put it. With the demand for the practical usefulness of artistic constructions, the spiritual effects of the newborn autonomous structural system were criticized as merely aesthetic. This was not a time for concrete or minimal art to flourish.

When the technological and industrial modernization of the Russian society set in with full force in 1920, the vanguard artists had to live up to their progressive self-image. The most radical ones renounced the principle of autonomy and plunged into the current of modernization, convinced that their "professional" artistic skills would enable them to influence its course. But once they had left the position of critical observers, they soon had to recognize that they were insufficiently equipped and trained to withstand the danger of drowning in the rough waves of progress. At best, the artists, like everyone else, became travelers in the inexorable stream of accumulation and utilization, unable to diagnose and demonstrate its motives and casualties.

The Obmokhu exhibition in 1921 had presented Ioganson's spatial constructions as well as Rodchenko's hanging constructions to the public for the first time. Both artists were members of the First Working Group of Constructivists at Inkhuk, which had been founded only a few weeks before. Ioganson and Rodchenko exhibited as guest artists since, unlike the Stenberg brothers and Medunetskii—who had also contributed works to the show—they did not belong to Obmokhu. In this fascinating, historically momentous exhibition, three types of constructions can be distinguished:

1. Ioganson's and Rodchenko's purely structural combinations or "cold" constructions, as Ioganson described them.

2. The "warm" constructions based on materials and not on a structural system. These include, to a certain extent, the Stenbergs' reliefs, but primarily Medunetskii's sculptures. His constructions focus on the aesthetic and constructive qualities of the material, which are heightened through contrasting forms and *faktura*. His *Spatial Construction* (plate no. 282), in particular, has pronounced "painterly" qualities with the red finish of the curved iron rod and the use of different colored metal parts. Medunetskii's other constructions, displayed on a table-like base at the exhibition, are also combinations of different materials with contrasting surfaces and textures. He predominantly used semifinished forged or industrially processed metal products but also found objects such as a plowshare, the metal handle of a pitcher, or a slat from a piece of furniture. During the reconstruction of these works it became apparent how much the curved or twisted forms were determined by the properties of the material, its strength, flexibility, and thickness. The form and *faktura* of the construction result from a synthesis of the artist's abstract formal and spatial vision, his intuitive, sometimes arbitrary, choice of materials according to "painterly" and "constructive" criteria, and the inherent properties of these materials. Symbolic references are, however, absent from these constructions—unless one is willing to read the parabolas and hyperbolas, which also recur in Medunetskii's paintings, as signs of the curvature of space-time (an interpretation that actually fits the same geometric forms in the works of Malevich, Klutsis, or Lissitzky).

3. The symbolic constructions by Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg. Constructed from the "materials of the new Classicism"—glass and iron—and set on rather unconventionally shaped pedestals, these "constructions of spatial structures" (plate nos. 291–293) represent "ideas" such as modernity, industrial revolution, and technological progress. These abstract structures were so close to their referents that critics gave them the label of "technological naturalism." The artists rejected this symbolic reading of their constructions, which they claimed were merely economically and functionally organized objects. Like Ioganson and Rodchenko, they tried to exclude the subjective effects of *faktura* from their constructions. All planes of their constructions were clear glass, a material that by its very smoothness, hardness, and transparency negates *faktura*.

What unites all these different constructions in the exhibition is the *rhythm of their structures*. In their programmatic and theoretical texts of 1920–22, all Soviet Constructivists unanimously declared rhythm the most important organizing principle and effect of their constructions. Given the three artistic positions toward structure, material, and symbolic function outlined above, it is not surprising that in the following years the Stenberg brothers made a successful career for themselves in the Soviet Union, first in the theater (plate nos. 642–645) and later as the country's most significant and sought-after designers of film posters (plate nos. 426–430). The synthesis of pictorial symbolization and decorative structure required in these media is clearly present in the brothers' constructions. Medunetskii, too, successfully progressed from his "painterly" material constructions to set designs for the avant-garde theater, while Ioganson and Rodchenko continued to experiment and develop their design methods and systems.

The 1921 Obmokhu exhibition was arguably the culmination of the short history of Constructivist object art. Soon after the opening of the show, the theorists of "production art" as well as the artists themselves came to regard the innovative but still autonomous constructions as studies in Productivist aesthetics rather than independent contributions to Constructivist art. The term "laboratory experiment" was coined as early as 1921; it downgraded the constructions in the Obmokhu exhibition and relegated Constructivist works to the status of basic research for future practical applications, thereby robbing them of any significance of their own which might have been worth pursuing.

After the materiological and methodological phases of Constructivism, and at the end of the search for "construction" in the artistic creations of the past and present, technological issues and functional demands increasingly determined the artistic discourse and the definition of Constructivism at Inkhuk. Rodchenko's own concluding definition, delivered in March 1921 toward the end of the discussions of the distinction between composition and construction, reads:

> *Construction is a thing or a task that is approached with a precise working schedule and in which all materials and all their specific components are organized and used according to their correct functions without adding anything superfluous. The correct approach to each space is construction.*
>
> *Construction is: goal—working plan—organization—material—economy.*
>
> *New things can be created only if there is Constructivist organization . . . Composition is always an expression of individualism and everything individualism implies.*

Constructivism arose from the criticism of the individualist compositional art of the past and immediate present and saw itself as its direct negation. Malevich and Tatlin were among those who had to face some heavy attacks. In Rodchenko's critical view, the Suprematist compositions were capable only of "filling empty spaces in an individualist manner," while

Tatlin in his counter-reliefs confined himself to selecting from available materials. "When [an artist] selects such materials as are at hand or fills an empty space with decorations, it is composition."

For Rodchenko, any kind of construction, whether on a surface or in space, in art or technology, requires a precise hierarchy and sequence of functions: after determining the "goal," i.e., the function of the construction, a working schedule is developed, which specifies the procedures and tools for reaching the goal; then the appropriate material is selected and processed and used as economically as possible.

From Individualist Anarchism to Technological Rationalism

This "evolutionary course" of artistic production toward anti-individualist systematization, rationalization, and mechanization was neither predictable before the Constructivist debates at Inkhuk began nor a natural result of these discussions. The decision in favor of collectivism had been preceded by the individualist anarchism of the black *faktura* paintings, which had convincingly embodied the concept of the work of art as an object and were closely connected with Rodchenko's belief in the principles of Stirner and Whitman. Moreover, his definition of construction was in glaring contrast to his affirmation of "abstract spiritual creativity" in January 1919 and his advocacy of Eastern over Western art during the planning of the Museum of Painterly Culture in March 1919: "Asiatic art is spiritual, was regarded with religious awe . . . The West treats art lightly, in material terms; the East worships art, elevates it above everything else, does not make it utilitarian."[31]

Similarly, Stepanova's statements of 1919–20 are diametrically opposed to the definitions and evaluations of composition and construction she gave but a short time later. In the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition she still praised "intuition" and "emotion" as positive values, explicitly calling the work of non-objective artists a "protest of the spirit against the materialism of the present."[32] As late as October 1920, in her manifesto "On the Possibilities of the Cognition of Art," written on the occasion of the Nineteenth State Exhibition, she defended the "miraculous"—in the sense of a transcendent quality—as an essential characteristic of art. At the same time, she strongly objected to the equation of mathematics and art: "The Formalist approach now being pursued in art is a tribute to the materialism of our time. But none of us will ever subordinate art to mathematics." The concept of the "artist-proletarian" as executor of objective "tasks" was still anathema to her. She considered the "starting point," "the creative impulse" to be as yet undiscovered and therefore to constitute something "incomprehensible," a "miracle" that could not be reduced to the calculated execution of a rationally formulated task.

A year later, on December 22, 1921, she delivered her talk "On Constructivism" at Inkhuk:

This revolutionary, destructive activity, which strips art down to its basic elements, has shocked the consciousness of those who work in art: it has confronted them with the problem of construction as an expedient necessity. Based on the further principle of the expedient implementation of work, a new Constructivist ideology has been formulated.

Being aware of this new activity is particularly important. Subconscious inspiration (a fortuitous phenomenon) is transformed into organized activity.

The intellect is our point of departure, taking the place of the "soul" of idealism.

From this it follows that, on the whole, Constructivism is also intellectual production (and not thought alone), incompatible with the spirituality of artistic activity.[33]

How did this conversion from transcendentalism to intellectual rationalism come about? What prompted the abrupt turnabout from the rejection of functional tasks even within art to an organized implementation of practical purposes?

A sudden revelation cannot have been the only cause. So how can we explain this ideological and aesthetic about-face, which was soon followed by a change of paradigms in artistic practice: from the substance of paint to the immaterial structure, from the Deconstructivist jumble of lines to the planned, clear-cut organizing system? The discovery of the line as an independent constructive factor and the transition from *faktura* to Linearism do not suffice in themselves to elucidate the radical change of values from individualism to collectivism, from spiritualism to materialism, from non-utilitarian thinking to the principle of usefulness, from the incomprehensible "miracle" to the cogent intellectual system, and from imagination and intuition to logical calculation and mathematics.

There were a number of critical external developments, beginning in 1919, that contributed to the sharp swerve in the "evolutionary course" of art between 1920 and 1921. The enhanced institutional powers of the Soviet government after the end of the Civil War in the autumn of 1920 intensified the crisis in art which had been smoldering since the February Revolution.

Art of the Commune was forcibly closed in April 1919 and in September *Iskusstvo* (*Art*), the journal of Izo Narkompros, had to cease publication. The largely autonomous Professional Union of Artists and Painters was dissolved in December 1919. Several of its members—including Kandinskii, Rodchenko, and Stepanova—went on to found Inkhuk in order to protect the professional interests of artists. Under these circumstances, the formation of Inkhuk can hardly be considered a success of the avant-garde. On the contrary: after the dissolution and reorganization of Izo Narkompros in December 1920–early 1921, which cost the avant-garde most of its influence on the country's artistic life, Inkhuk became the vanguard artists' last refuge in Moscow.

The administrative autonomy of the artists was effectually stamped out. To make matters worse, on December 1, 1920, *Pravda* published a "Letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on the Proletkul't Organizations" that lumped the "Futurists" together with those "decadent elements" and "followers of an idealistic philosophy hostile to Marxism" who had exerted a "subversive influence" on Izo Narkompros as well as on the Proletkul't organizations. For this reason, both Izo Narkompros and Proletkul't had to be dissolved as autonomous organizations and put under the close control of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment. In January 1921, Lunacharskii found it necessary to caution against a public "witch hunt" that would make the "Futurists" and non-objective artists "martyrs in the name of their ideas." Finally, in early 1921, the avant-garde lost its last institutional stronghold when the Museum Department led by Rodchenko, Kandinskii, and Tatlin was dissolved. Looking back at these hard times, Brik wrote: "The 'Futurists' were seriously committed to destroying the past and tried to use their positions within the administration for this purpose. They did not succeed. The guardians of philistinism proved to be stronger and threw the 'Futurists' out of all the commissariats."

By early 1921, with this chain of defeats, the influence that the anarchist avant-garde had on official art policy was at an end. Politically on the defensive and deprived of their organizational clout, avant-garde artists had to rethink their

role and place in society for the third time, after the first crisis following the February Revolution and the second following October 1917.

A desperately defiant statement Maiakovskii made in the winter of 1920 reveals what this crisis meant for the individual artist: "We declare: to hell with individualism, to hell with words and emotions . . . so that we can even renounce our own personality . . . the poet can't be forced but he can force himself."

It was only now, three years after the Revolution, that the necessity of again redefining their role led the avant-garde to lock arms with technology and industrial production as the political-social revolution mutated into an industrial revolution. The most advanced artists kept up with this change. Artistic Modernism took the way of modernization—with the Constructivists in the lead. They marched along with the first "utopian" endeavors to industrialize the Soviet Union after the Revolution.

In December 1920, the Soviet government tackled the implementation of the Goelro (the State Commission for the Electrification of Russia) plan, which envisioned huge energy projects as the basis of the reconstruction and expansion of Russia's shattered economy and industry. Lenin, the moving force behind this plan, stressed its far-reaching implications for the future of Soviet society. His response to a question from the correspondent of the English *Daily Express* has often been quoted: "Electrification on the basis of the Soviet order will lead to the final victory of the foundations of Communism in our country, the foundations of a civilized life without exploiters, without capitalists, without landowners, without merchants." By the end of 1920, the electrification project was the talk of the day. The electrified utopia not only captured the minds and imaginations of economists and technicians but seduced artists as well, who gave free rein to visions of a fully mechanized and electrified life after the icy, dark winters of the war years. In 1920, for example, Klutsis created his first photomontage: a photograph of Lenin between the dark circle of the "old world" full of prisons, alcohol, and whips and the bright "new world" with the crystal cubes of Suprematist architecture. These buildings of the new world are inscribed with the word "electrification." (See also his study, from the same year, for the poster, *Elektrifikatsiia vsei strany* [*Electrification of the Entire Country*], plate no. 308.)

Two years later, in 1922, when "production art" began to venture out into real life, Klutsis was the first among the Constructivists to design his constructions for practical, everyday purposes. One of his large-scale projects for propaganda kiosks included a banner running around the construction proclaiming, "The development of industry brings salvation." These agitprop stands were successful models of the Constructivist concept of "utilitarian" objects. Their transparent, light framework construction fulfills the principle of economy. The utilization of all forms for set functions, the modular structure, and the multi-functional equipment with a picture screen, loudspeakers, a bookstall, poster holders, a speaker's rostrum, and so on make these structures convincing examples of how the Constructivist notion of aesthetics and function could be put into practice (plate nos. 109, 111–113).

In his summary of the Inkhuk members' joint effort to clarify the term "construction," Babichev wrote on September 5, 1921, that all the Inkhuk artists and theorists had unanimously concluded

that construction in artistic representation does not exist and that everything that was previously called construction or pretended to be construction belonged to an outwardly aesthetic order. Genuine construction appears only in perfect, utilitarian products. This conclusion coincided with a sudden, forceful awareness of the future of industry, which so far has managed without artists and threatened to fill everything with purely utilitarian buildings and objects that were completely unresolved as to their ability to orient perception.

The prospect of participating in the organization of life by organizing objects, buildings, and institutions was inspiring. In the discussion it was generally held that there was no acceptable reason to distinguish between the terms "artistic" and "utilitarian" if the object in question is constructed throughout.

This account neatly sums up the essential characteristics of the Constructivist object in its final utilitarian metamorphosis. The extremely high standards implied in the definition are striking: the object must be "perfect" both in appearance and substance. Mere surface treatment can result in no more than a *faktura* object. Consequently, a Constructivist object is not a designed surface but a three-dimensional, functional structure that is distinguished from common utilitarian objects by its perceptibility, i.e., it keeps stimulating the perception of its user. Furthermore, the Constructivist object must be "constructed throughout," meaning that its structure is systematically designed in all its details and that its body is identical with this structure.

The ideal Constructivist object in the final Inkhuk definition is hence a systematically constructed structure that fulfills a practical purpose and while being used is also consciously perceived by its consumer. The goal is, in short, a thing of perfection.

The Resurgence of the Subject

I would argue that the structure of this entirely constructed object is similar to the structure of human consciousness. If this is the case, the subject which was driven out of Constructivism by "objectification" reappeared in the congruence of object and subject. Its form had changed, of course, since subjectivity was present in the object not as the externalization of an empirical subject but in the form of a transcendental subject.

Ideally, the structure of the Constructivist object is the pure product of a conscious operation with formal elements, implemented according to a systematic design method. Consequently, the finished construction is the materialization of consciousness in a spatial structure that is unadulterated by the properties of the materials used.

Rodchenko's hanging spatial constructions as well as Ioganson's spatial constructions come very close to this Constructivist ideal. The definition proposed by Babichev declared absolute awareness in the production of structures to be the principal criterion of artistic value *and* usefulness, since the methodical design and implementation of a construction made it the product of real work.

This notion of artistic creation as a paradigm of conscious work is in direct opposition to the earlier view—shared by the Suprematists and non-objective artists before 1921—of artistic production as intuitive creation derived from the unconscious. The sudden turn had been prepared by the Formalist school with its conception of art as a method and of artists as professional masters in their field.

During the formative phase of Suprematism, Malevich described the relationship between rational thinking and intuition to Matiushin in a letter of July 3, 1913: "We have come to a point where we can dismiss the sense and logic of the old reason. But we must seek to recognize the sense and logic of a new, already emerging reason which, compared to the old, might even be a 'supra-reason.'" In his review of the *0.10* exhibition (Petrograd, 1915–16), Matiushin adopted this concept of a logic of the unconscious which becomes manifest

in non-objective creation and reveals its logical structure to the viewer; "suprasense" denotes a "new, creative, intuitive reason that has superseded unenlightened intuition."[34]

The Formalist linguists then turned this logic of the unconscious into an operation, perceiving it not as the structure of the language of the unconscious but solely as the procedural logic of the treatment of material. This concept clearly reflects the analyst's, not the producer's, viewpoint.

For the Constructivist producer, on the other hand, there is a homologous relationship between the logical structure of his subconscious and the structure of the construction he creates. If the structure is completely systematic in its inner logic and entirely transparent in its making or functional modes, i.e., if the object is "constructed throughout," it appears as a homologous model of the producer's unconscious of which he has become fully aware. The artistic subject becomes as transparent as his creation. The previously impenetrable dark of his subconscious and body is illuminated and rendered transparent through the exposure of the logic of their functional modes.

When there is nothing remaining unenlightened in the subject and he has become completely aware of himself, he controls the language of his unconscious and the mechanisms of his bodily functions. He is able to organize his unconscious and his body rationally according to set goals, without having to heed and follow the demands of his inner voice. This thought must have struck the Constructivists in 1921 with sudden force, as Rodchenko's remarks in "The Line" show: "Until now, life, this simple thing, has not been properly seen; one did not know that it was so simple and clear, that one merely needed to organize it and free it from all excess. To work for life, not for palaces or temples, cemeteries or museums."[35]

Transparent to himself, the subject leaves all places of memory and fate behind; the light of reason has completely penetrated and exposed them for what they are—the museum as a place of unresolved desires and petrified experiences, as a depository of the collective unconscious and memory; the cemetery as a place of sorrow and surrender of the body and mind to death; the palace as a place of unenlightened and consequently false pleasures; the temple as a place of blind faith, obscure feelings, and nebulous hopes. The self-aware subject enters into life "to work among, for, and with all others," i.e., to organize his own, completely transparent life and the lives of the others through the "constructive technique."

The methodical, rational organization of formal elements in a systematically structured construction amounts to a preparatory model for the organization of life. Since it is nothing but the visualization of its own conscious creation, it is structurally akin to the self-reflection of a person's self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, in the sense of an ego that has become aware of itself, also knows the division into a producing subject and a produced object which in itself is a subject, i.e., the conscious ego. The self, as prior to the conscious ego, can only recognize itself by reflecting itself in the ego and thereby delimiting itself the way a frame delimits a mirror. Only in the delimited form of a conscious and therefore defined object (the conscious ego) can the self experience itself as an unlimited and determining subject. Only by observing itself in the creation of itself can an individual's self-consciousness recognize, and ultimately produce, itself.

By the same token, the entirely constructed and transparent construction observes its own production, or rather its own finished production, since the Constructivist thing is rendered conscious throughout but does not have a consciousness of its own. It thus possesses the structure of self-consciousness without being conscious.

Only in the mediated identity with the conscious ego—the "differential indifference" of Post-Structuralism—does the unconscious or preconscious self produce itself and become aware of itself as producer. In Rodchenko's hanging spatial constructions and Ioganson's spatial constructions, this differential indifference is seen in one object. This object presents itself as a distinct, systematically constructed and unified structure, but at the same time it is clearly recognized as only *one* variant out of an infinite series of structural combinations. From this perspective, the unique construction appears as a contingent unity that would change its structure under altered conditions.

The absoluteness and monadic unity of the formal elements' reference system is vividly emphasized by the uniformity of the construction. Like the structure of pure self-consciousness freed from the gravity-bound body of the empirical ego, the hanging spatial constructions hover in space as allegories of the transcendental ego.

Differential indifference is also strikingly apparent in Lissitzky's and Klutsis's paintings of constructions. Hovering freely in the picture space, the axiometric structures have an effect of differential indifference because each time the viewer focuses on their identical elements they switch into a spatially inverse structure and thereby escape fixation. In the viewer's perception, the opposite spatial constellations thus merge into one indissoluble unity. The flat axiometric constructions integrate two or even more views of the same formal framework into one homogeneous but oscillating structure, provoking a continuous shift of the viewer's perceptual positions—which can be experienced as a perpetual alternation between the self's role as subject and the ego's role as object in the production of self-consciousness.

In works such as Klutsis's collage *Dinamicheskii gorod* (*Dynamic City,* 1919, plate no. 309) or Lissitzky's *Eight-Position Proun* (before 1924), the configuration of the formal elements remains the same while the optical structure changes substantially with each incremental turn. The same structural principle also distinguishes several of Klutsis's drawings of agitprop kiosks, which at first sight look like rationally organized construction plans. But a more detailed look reveals that the spatial relationships are deliberately contradictory: optical illusions result in "impossible figures" which could never be transferred from the drawing into real space.

The ambiguity of the two- and three-dimensional structures was carried over into the designs of multifunctional objects that became a trademark of Constructivist production art. The first issue of *Lef,* the Constructivist house organ from 1923 to 1928, presented works by students of Rodchenko's in the Metalworking Faculty of Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops). One of those pieces was a "bed but also a chair and a desk," since "a thing must perform several different functions," as the accompanying commentary put it. The first exhibition of the Metalworking Faculty in 1923 included a number of such multi-functional objects invented by the students and their teacher. In her account of the exhibition, Stepanova distinguished three types of objects:

- An object that is fit for use in motion, i.e., organized like a means of production (for example, a mobile bookcase or movie theater that can be used anywhere)
- An object that can be dismantled and easily stored after use (such as a kiosk or bed)
- An object for private use that can fill functions in the communal apartment (for example, the bed-chair-desk mentioned above)

The concept of multifunctional furniture emerged from the transformative principle of the hanging spatial constructions and the constructions made of identical elements. Whether Ioganson further developed his spatial constructions in this direction while working in a factory is unknown. Klutsis employed the constructive principle of planes intersecting at right angles, which he had developed in his paintings of "construction," in numerous designs for information stands, shelf systems, and other functional constructions.

The design and production of multifunctional objects constituted a major part of the work done in Rodchenko's workshop in the Metalworking Faculty and to a lesser degree in the Woodworking Faculty at Vkhutemas throughout the 1920s. The furniture for the reading room of a workers' club, presented at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (*International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art*) in Paris is a typical example of this design concept. (In the mid-1920s, Rodchenko also worked in the Moscow Proletkul't workshop on transformable furniture for workers' clubs.) The reading room is equipped with movable bookcases, folding counter tops for multiple use, revolving drums for photo exhibitions, and a collapsible construction that includes a speaker's platform, a bulletin board, and a projection screen for slides and films. Nearly all the furnishings are "built on a principle that makes it possible to unfold the object on an ample space for work and to fold it down into compact proportions after work. Comrade Rodchenko considers this principle a typical quality of the modern object. For five years he has been conducting the work of the Metalworking Faculty at Vkhutemas according to this principle, and over the past few years the dynamically organized object has gained increasing acceptance and thus proved its viability and topical significance."

This enthusiastic commentary by Stepanova appeared in 1926 in *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* (*Contemporary Architecture*), the organ of OSA (the Union of Contemporary Architects).[36] As the magazine's editor in chief, Gan regularly published the most recent works of the Constructivist production artists, including Zakhar Bykov, Miller, Morozov, Shestakov, Stepanova, and Sokolov, most of them students of Rodchenko's at Vkhutemas. Their works followed the same principles of variability and multiple function Rodchenko had developed in the early 1920s.

In the combination furniture with complex functions, the Constructivist ideal of the object that is "constructed throughout" materialized in real life. As prototypes, they embody the idea of a new, objective reality that does not consist of massive objects and monumental buildings made to last and exist independent of people. The Constructivist conception of the object—and also of furniture and architecture—rests on the idea of the infinitely transformable structure made of minimal material elements. The transformation of each structure leads to constantly new functions. This structural metamorphosis enables the object to take a different shape with each reassigned function while its material elements remain the same.

In the Constructivist universe, objects exist solely as organs of human activity. They adjust to people's actions, expand and die with them, while constantly renewing their own shape and function. The Constructivist objects are congruent counterparts of the subject. Therein lies their utopian potential. Ideally, they would have transformed material reality into an unrestricted space in which free people could act. But in reality, they contributed to the total mobilization of the people, whose lives were sucked into the modernization process and restructured to the beat of machines.

The design theorist David Arkin remarked at the end of the 1920s that among the prototypes for workers' apartments developed at the Metalworking Faculty, the most frequent piece of furniture was the "multipurpose model, the divan-table or the chair-bed. But these outwardly efficient models solve in only a superficial manner the task of using the living space with maximum economy. Therefore, the enthusiasm for combination furniture apparent in the works of the young Constructivists is by no means a positive development."[37]

This critical comment by a Constructivist partisan shows that the designers of multifunctional furniture were not exclusively or even primarily concerned with the actual practical use of their creations. They held on to the principle of the "object constructed throughout" postulated by the Inkhuk Constructivists. A case can be made that they were only marginally interested in producing functional, inexpensive, or comfortable furniture for workers' apartments or clubs. For them, what was really at stake was the life or death of art in the painful rebirth of postrevolutionary society.

In a lecture at Inkhuk in March 1922, Kushner declared: "Not only the object is exhausted. Its functions too are dying off. It is thus being transformed into a useless thing while remaining materially intact." Under circumstances where art in its old, "individualist," bourgeois form had lost its function, the Constructivists' survival strategy was to focus on the dying object in order to revive it and thereby revive art. The rebirth of art after the Revolution could only happen as a rebirth of objects, since the individual and his artistic subjectivity were not granted that right. The translation of the object into the subjective form of the transcendental ego, which has neither flesh nor blood, mass nor *faktura* but exists only as the "cold structure" of self-consciousness, constitutes the greatness of this materialized utopia where the subject is identical with material work and the objects it produces. Yet at the same time, this utopian construction inevitably failed as a strategy for the rebirth of art, as it waived the critical distance from life, surrendering to its restraining forces and sometimes even strengthening them.

In 1913, years before the revolutionary changes in society, Shklovskii made an outline for his lecture on "The Resurrection of the Word," a kind of prelude to all Constructivist theories of art: "The word-image and its petrification . . . The death of objects . . . The theory of reversal. The task of 'Futurism'—the revival of objects, to return the experience of the world to the people . . . The resurrection of objects."[38] These preparatory notes read like a history of Constructivism in the 1920s—with the vital difference that Shklovskii referred to the death, revival, and resurrection of objects only in terms of art and perception and warned against mistaking art for life. Later, in an article in *Art of the Commune,* Shklovskii explicitly repeated this warning with regard to the theory of production art, but the Constructivists ignored him. They crossed the aesthetic boundary between art and life in order to resurrect the material and vital things. They gave them new forms. But art died in the process.

Could things have turned out differently in those perturbing times?

It may have been possible to hibernate in the "cold structures" of Constructivism but one couldn't live in them.

—Translated, from the German, by Jürgen Riehle

Notes

This essay is for Arthur Lehning.

1. A. M. Rodchenko, "Vse–opyty," 1921, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

2. Varvara Stepanova, "On Constructivism," in Alexander Lavrentiev, *Stepanova,* trans. Wendy Salmond (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), p. 175.

3. See Jane A. Sharp, "The Critical Reception of the *0.10* Exhibition: Malevich and Benua," in this volume, for an account of their differences.

4. *Novaia zhizn',* March 27 and April 9, 1918.

5. *Revoliutsionnoe tvorchestvo* 1–2 (1918).

6. *Izvestiia,* April 16, 1918.

7. *Anarkhiia,* April 11, 1918.

8. *Anarkhiia,* March 30, 1918.

9. *Anarkhiia,* March 28, 1918.

10. *IZO. Vestnik Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv N.K.P.* 1 (March 10, 1921).

11. *Plamia* 35 (1919), p. 13.

12. Nikolai Punin, quoted in M. L-in, "Miting ob iskusstve," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 1 (December 7, 1918), reprinted as "Miting ob iskusstve (24 XI 1918 g. v Petrograde)," in I. Matsa, ed., *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let. Materialy i dokumentatsiia* (Moscow and Leningrad: Ogiz-Izogiz, 1933), pp. 175–76.

13. Nikolai Punin, "O novykh gruppirovkakh," *Iskusstvo kommuny* 10 (February 9, 1919) as translated in Larissa Zhadova, *Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, 1910–1930,* trans. Alexander Lieven (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 322.

14. *Birzhevye vedomosti,* June 23, 1917.

15. *Vechernie ogni* 2 (April 1918).

16. *Novaia zhizn',* April 18 and May 1, 1918.

17. A. M. Rodchenko, "The Line," trans. James West, in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the State Tret'yakov Gallery, Moscow (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 71.

18. *Iskusstvo kommuny,* December 15, 1918.

19. *Iskusstvo kommuny,* January 12, 1919.

20. V. I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," in *The Lenin Anthology,* ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

21. *Iskusstvo kommuny,* February 23, 1919. See also Svetlana Dzhafarova, "The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture," in this volume.

22. "Deklaratsiia Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv i khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti po voprosu o printsipakh muzeevedeniia, priniataia Kollegiei otdela v zasedanii 7 fevralia 1919 g.," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), p. 85.

23. Varvara Stepanova, diary, March 27, 1919, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

24. *Iskusstvo* 7 (August 2, 1919).

25. *Zhizn' iskusstva,* September 20, 1923. Shklovskii's essay was written in 1920.

26. *Desiataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka. Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm* (Moscow: Otdel IZO Narkomprosa, 1919), pp. 29–30.

27. *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet* 3 (1922).

28. "Problemy izucheniia literatury i iazyka," *Novyi Lef* 12 (1928), pp. 36-37.

29. *Iskusstvo kommuny* 4 (February 22, 1919). On Rodchenko's Linearism, see Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, "What Is Linearism?" in this volume.

30. Rodchenko, "Line," p. 73.

31. Stepanova, diary, March 27, 1919.

32. *Desiataia gosudarstvennaia vystavka.*

33. Stepanova, "On Constructivism," p. 174.

34. M. Matiushin, "O vystavke 'poslednikh futuristov,'" *Ocharovannyi strannik. Al'manakh vesennii,* 1916.

35. A. M. Rodchenko, "Liniia," 1921, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow. This passage is not included in the published English translation cited above.

36. *Sovremennaia arkhitektura* 1 (1926), p. 36.

37. *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura* 11 (1929).

38. V. Shklovskii, *Zhili-byli* (Berlin, 1923), p. 306.

fig. 1
Larionov (center) in the hospital after being wounded in World War I, 1915.

The Third Path to Non-Objectivity

Evgenii Kovtun

Western scholars have sometimes failed to make a distinction between Abstractionism and non-objectivity, and use the terms interchangeably. Yet Vasilii Kandinskii and Kazimir Malevich are linked only by non-figuration—at which they arrive by disparate, quite unshared paths. The nonrepresentational element in their work grows out of different roots; Kandinskii and Malevich stand in as sharp an opposition as Hume and Hegel do in philosophy.

The abstract artist proceeds from the particular to the general, turning away from the tangibility of objects. In Kandinskii one may often observe a "semi-figurative" sketch gradually being translated into a pure abstraction. This is the path "from the bottom up."

Non-objectivity comes about by an opposite process. The artist starts from general structural regularities that are universal in character and makes them tangible in non-objective forms. This is the path "from the top down," from the general to the particular. Hence there are no natural or earthly realia, not even any that are "cleansed" of figuration, concealed behind Malevich's non-objective forms. Non-objectivity "populates" space with a new reality which comes into being according to laws analogous to those of nature.

Contemporary scholars rightly distinguish two currents within the movement toward non-figuration: that of Kandinskii, i.e., what could be called expressive abstraction, and that of Malevich, i.e., geometric abstraction. Artists of the one persuasion—in the words of Lev Iudin, a pupil of Malevich's—prefer to "experience" (thus Kandinskii), the others, to "construct" (thus Malevich and Mondrian). Yet even at the time, a third, middle, path to non-objectivity could be discerned in Russian art; its adherents attempted to reconcile opposing trends, wanting simultaneously to experience and to construct. This was the path first taken by Mikhail Larionov with his Rayism.

Art historians have caused quite a muddle in pinpointing the origin of Rayism, dating it as far back as 1909—a time when Larionov was producing Primitivist works. Iurii Annenkov, writing in 1966, was the first to set out a spurious chronology of Larionov's work: "Nineteen nine was the decisive year in the artistic biography of Larionov and Goncharova, and in the destinies of art in general: in that year both exhibited paintings which laid the foundation of the first abstract movement, dubbed 'Rayism' (Larionov's term) . . . Numbers of 'Rayist' paintings by Larionov and Goncharova appeared, between 1909 and 1912, at the avant-garde exhibitions of Jack of Diamonds, Free Aesthetics, and Donkey's Tail."[1] As it happened, Annenkov listed precisely those exhibitions which did not show Rayist works and managed to keep silent about those which had them in abundance.

Following Annenkov, other writers added their voices to the confusion. Waldemar George, author of a 1966 monograph on Larionov, moved the Rayist work *Steklo* (*Glass*) from the 1912 Mir iskusstva (World of Art) exhibition to 1909. We note the same antedating in the catalogue of the 1969 Larionov show in New York. The author of the catalogue essay, François Daulte, headlined one of its sections "The Rayonniste Period (1909–1912)" and advanced the fiction that Larionov had made his first declaration on Rayism in 1910 in A. Kraft's studio.[2] Camilla Gray, who had access to Russian sources, did not make such gross misstatements, but even she assigned *Glass* to 1909 and had it exhibited in a one-day Larionov show which took place in 1911 at the Society of Free Aesthetics in Moscow. Yet among the 124 canvases listed in the catalogue of that exhibition neither *Glass* nor any other Rayist painting appears.

What was Larionov's reaction to the misdating of his works? As indulgent as could be; he even abetted it. As early as in the catalogue of the *Exposition Natalia Gontcharova et Michel*

Larionov held in June 1914 at the Galerie Paul Guillaume in Paris, he changed the dates of many works, assigning them to earlier times. Larionov was inarguably among the pioneers of non-figurative painting (in the 1940s, which saw a wave of enthusiasm for Abstractionism, researchers sought out "precursors" of the movement; Michel Seuphor's 1949 book about the origins of abstract art recalled the by-then-forgotten Rayism)[3] and was not averse to being ranked as the very first. In Larionov's solo shows in New York (1969) and Brussels (1976), his *Abstraktnaia kartina* (*Abstract Painting*) was assigned to 1907 (!)—to a time, that is, when the artist was interested in signboards and was painting his *Parikmakhery* (*Barbers*). *Abstract Painting,* executed in the spirit of "painterly Purism," is clearly a work of the early 1920s, and entirely out of place with Larionov's Primitivist works.

The earliest "trace" of Rayism can be observed in Larionov's illustrations to a small book by Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Starinnaia liubov'* (*Old-Time Love*), which was published in mid-October 1912. Larionov thereafter showed Rayist canvases simultaneously at two exhibitions: *Glass* and *Etiud luchistyi* (*Rayist Study*) at the World of Art exhibition in November 1912, and *Luchistaia kolbasa i skumbriia* (*Rayist Sausage and Mackerel*) at the Soiuz molodezhi (Union of Youth) exhibition which opened on December 4th. Prior to this there had been no mention of Rayism either in the press or in exhibition catalogues.

The most representative showings of Rayism were at the *Mishen'* (*Target,* Moscow, 1913), *No. 4. Futuristy, luchisty, primitiv* (*No. 4: Futurists, Rayists, Primitives,* Moscow, 1914), and *Moskva. 1915 god* (*Moscow: The Year 1915*, Moscow, 1915) exhibitions. By this time, Natal'ia Goncharova, Aleksandr Shevchenko, and Sergei Romanovich were already working by the canons of Rayism. A special role in the rise of Rayism was played by a remarkable painter of Larionov's group, Mikhail Le-Dantiu. Il'ia Zdanevich implies in an unpublished article of 1918 that Le-Dantiu was the force behind Larionov's Rayism. He writes: "Rayism is taking shape—the unsuccessful realization of a colleague's brilliant discoveries."[4] And indeed, in Le-Dantiu's paintings of 1912 and 1913 one may make out the appearance of Rayist structures.

In 1913 Larionov published a brochure, *Luchizm* (*Rayism*), and an article, "Luchistaia zhivopis'" ("Rayist Painting"), in the *Oslinyi khvost i mishen'* (*Donkey's Tail and Target*) miscellany. The artist laid down the main tenets of his theory most succinctly in a pamphlet entitled *Luchizm Larionova* (*The Rayism of Larionov*), which was distributed to the public at a debate at the *Target* exhibition and from which the following is excerpted:

Doctrine of irradiability. Radiation of reflected light (color dust). Reflectivity. Realist Rayism, depicting existing forms. Rejection of forms in painting as existing apart from their imaging in the eye. Provisional representation of the ray by the line. Erasure of the barriers between nature and what is referred to as the surface of the painting. The rudiments of Rayism in antecedent arts. The doctrine of the creation of new forms. Spatial form. Form—which arises from the intersection of rays from various objects—isolated by the volition of the artist. Conveyance of sensations of the non-finite and the transtemporal. The structuring of paint according to the laws of painting (i.e., of faktura *{density} and color). The natural downfall of all preceding art, which, thanks to Rayist forms, has become, like life, merely an object for the artist's observation.*[5]

Rayism, according to Larionov's thinking, would sever painting from objectivity and turn it into an autonomous and self-sufficient art of color. The painting would cease to be a reflection of the world of objects—it would become itself an object, a part of reality aesthetically organized by the artist.

We do not see objects themselves—they are a kind of Kantian "thing in itself"—but we perceive aggregates of rays emanating from objects, which are depicted in the painting as lines of color. Larionov divides Rayism into a Realist species, which retains traces of objectivity, and a wholly nonrepresentational species, in which external links with the visible world have been sundered.

Larionov's tenet on light and color is of particular interest. Light refracted through particles of matter causes coloration, or "color dust," as the artist calls it. Here he anticipates the view expressed by the philosopher Pavel Florenskii in 1919:

Thus light is continuous. Not so optical media, which become saturated with light and pass it on to us: they are not continuous, they are granular; they constitute a kind of finest dust and themselves contain other dust, so fine as to defy any microscope, yet consisting of separate granules, distinct bits of matter. Those glorious hues which adorn the heavenly sphere are nothing but a means of relating *indivisible light and fractured matter: we may assert that the coloration of sunlight is that aftertaste, that change of aspect, which is imparted to the sunlight by the dust of the earth, and possibly by the even finer dust of the sky.*[6]

The critics looked upon Rayism as one of the varieties of abstract art; but the matter was more complex. Impressionism, preoccupied with color values, relegated plastic construction to the background. Cubism, by contrast, developed the structural element at the expense of the painterly. Velimir Khlebnikov, speaking of the Russian avant-garde, observed quite cogently: "As the chemist splits water into oxygen and hydrogen, so these artists have broken down the art of painting into its constituent forces, now isolating the element of color, now that of line."[7]

Larionov had no wish to sacrifice either. His Rayism was an astonishing attempt to combine the apparently incompatible: the vibrating color of Impressionism and the clarity of construction peculiar to Cubism. Their outward non-objectivity notwithstanding, the Rayist works of Larionov—with their movement toward nature, their luminous and intricately vibrating painting—call up natural sensations and associations. His *Luchistyi peizazh* (*Rayist Landscape,* 1912–13, fig. no. 3) is a case in point. The painterly-spiritual visionariness of Kandinskii and the stark non-objectivity of Malevich's Suprematism alike were alien to Larionov. Always receiving creative impulses from the visible world, he was unable to sever all links with nature. This singularity—Rayism's opposition to both Abstractionism and Suprematism—was noted at the time by Nikolai Punin, who held that the theory of Rayism had been advanced by Larionov "as a barrier against certain rationalistic tendencies of Cubism" and in practice was "the fruit of very subtle realistic juxtapositions."[8]

The Rayist canvases, especially those labeled "Realist Rayism," revealed the nature of Larionov's painterly gift and laid bare the wealth of *faktura* which was vehicle for the "color dust." Without a subject and virtually or entirely without an object, these works left the viewer one-on-one with painterly values. Larionov remarked on this himself: "What is precious to the lover of painting finds its maximum expression in the Rayist painting. The objects we see in life play no role there, while what constitutes the very essence of painting can be shown best of all: the interplay of color, its saturation, the interrelations of color masses, depth, *faktura*—by this persons interested in painting may become totally absorbed."[9] Non-objectivity may instantly expose the poverty of an artist's painterly gift, but it is also capable of announcing the wealth

of another's.

Larionov's Rayism did not appear ex nihilo; the artist himself pointed to the "rudiments of Rayism" in the art preceding it. In the late paintings and drawings of Mikhail Vrubel' (such as *Shestikrylyi serafim* [*Six-Winged Seraph,* 1904] and the *Proroki* [*Prophets,* 1903–4] cycle) one discovers plastic structures which, as it were, presage the Rayist structures of Larionov. Nikolai Tarabukin reports that "in N. A. Prakhov's possession there was a pencil drawing of a male nude done as if in a 'Rayist' manner. Thus even this shortlived movement in painting, 'invented' by M. Larionov, was to a certain extent anticipated by Vrubel'."[10] A fair number of such "Rayist" drawings by Vrubel' are to be found in the collection of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

The artist Pavel Mansurov linked the emergence of Rayism even more specifically with Vrubel' in his account of an episode in Larionov's (and in Vrubel''s) career which had been unknown to scholars. In 1899, Vrubel', working on his ceramic panel for the main façade of the Hotel Metropol' in Moscow, invited a number of students from the School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture to be his assistants. Among these was Larionov, who spent some two weeks working under Vrubel'. We shall not find any direct results of this contact in Larionov's work; but at the end of his account, Mansurov makes a canny observation about the backgrounds in Vrubel''s paintings, which resemble "frost-covered windows."[11] This might seem a superficial hallmark, a chance resemblance, yet latent tendencies in the development of Vrubel''s plastic form, astutely detected by Larionov, are discernible in it.

The art historians without reservation assigned the Russian artist a place among the pioneers of Abstractionism, and Larionov readily accepted this role. But they failed to notice in Larionov's Rayism—outwardly non-objective—values and qualities unknown to abstract art: the readjustment toward "naturalness" and a painterly response to visible reality that was non-objective yet permeated by a vital sense of the values of nature. Rayism is neither lyrical nor expressive abstraction. As for Larionov, he was indeed a "precursor"—but of other painterly-plastic undertakings, which still await detailed investigation.

In 1912, the same year in which Rayism originated, Pavel Filonov, presenting the first fruits of his creative work, wrote an article entitled "Kanon i zakon" ("Canon and Law")—an early outline of the principles of analytical art. This marked a new understanding of the world and a new creative direction taken in opposition to Western Cubism and Russian Cubo-Futurism. Filonov wrote:

I am given to understand that Cubo-Futurism and Picasso could not have failed to influence my theory in one way or another. I am perfectly aware of what Picasso is doing although I haven't seen his paintings; but I must say that he personally hasn't influenced me any more than I have him, and he hasn't ever laid eyes on me, even in his dreams. On the other hand, there's not a thing that is done in our or whatever other line that wouldn't have had an influence on me, positive or negative. His influence was one of the negative ones. What in our thinking could we have borrowed from Cubo-Futurism, whose mechanical and geometrical foundations have led into a blind alley? Here is what Cubo-Futurism comes down to: purely geometrical representation of the volume and movement of things in time, hence also in space; of mechanical tokens of objects in motion, i.e., mechanical tokens of life, rather than of an organically movement-creating life, pervasive, transfiguring, and manifesting itself as such at any given moment of rest or motion.[12]

Cubism, as Filonov understood it, was the logical and willed construction of form abetted by the geometrizing of the

fig. 2
Mikhail Larionov
Portrait of a Man (Rayist Construction), *1913.*
Lithograph with painted additions, 11.2 x 9.2 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

fig. 3
Mikhail Larionov
Rayist Landscape, *1912-13.*
Oil on canvas, 71 x 94.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

depicted object. This is the way of the canon, the way of a framework and rules of construction prepared in advance. The logical, rational element dominated in Cubism, and this did not suit Filonov any more than such an approach to creative work suited Khlebnikov, who wrote:

If the world were caught in a net
Of numbers a hundred score,
Would minds be nobler than before?
No—more pitiful yet.[13]

Filonov set his analytical method in contrast to Cubism. He distinguished two approaches to the creation of a painting—the "preconceived" (by canon) and the "organic" (by law):

In revealing the structure of a form or a painting, I have the option to proceed according to how I envisage the structure of the form, i.e., in a preconceived way; or to proceed after observing and laying bare the law of its organic development. Consequently, my revelation of the structure of the form will be either preconceived, i.e., canonical, or organic, i.e., according to law.[14]

This is Filonov's first use of "organic," a term that occupies an important place in his conception of art.

The primacy of nature, to be sure, was proclaimed by all movements, even the most non-objective ones. But Cubism evolved in a different direction, where the secondary products of the material culture of man determined the forms of art. The geometrizing of Cubism and its mechanization of forms, particularly acute in the work of Fernand Léger, reflect this growing orientation toward the secondary, a process that the French Purists carried to its logical conclusion, likening the painting and its forms to the machine.

In analytical art, the relationship between artist and nature is entirely different. Filonov is consciously oriented toward the primary, that is, toward nature. For him, the evolution of life is the pattern or model which, when followed by the artist, yields a work of art. He strives to imitate not the forms which nature creates but the methods by which it "operates." This is the organic path in artistic creation.

A painting by Filonov grows like a living organism. From the points of contact of a brush or pen—called *edinitsy deistviia* (units of action) by the artist—there emerge complex varieties of *faktura* of differing "timbre." "Draw each atom persistently and accurately," Filonov wrote, "persistently and accurately work the color into each atom, so that it perfuses it as heat does the body or becomes organically joined to the form, as in nature the cell tissue of a flower is fused with its color."[15] Filonov's "units of action" are the indivisible particles, the color-imbued "atoms" which make up the infrastructure of his paintings.

The cardinal difference between Filonov and the artists of the avant-garde surrounding him lies in his aspiration to make visible what is in principle invisible. He wanted to expand the possibilities of representational art by adding the invisible (yet supremely important) elements of nature, society, and man's spiritual world to the ranks of images.

Filonov considered that the artists of his time—both Cubists and Realists—maintained too narrow and one-sided a relationship with nature, capturing only two of its properties—color and form—in their work, whereas any phenomenon has an innumerable quantity of no less valuable properties. He wrote: "Since I know, see, intuit that there are in any object not just two attributes—form and color—but a whole world of visible or invisible phenomena, their emanations, reactions, waxings and wanings, genesis, being, known or secret properties, which in their turn have sometimes incalculable attributes, I unequivocally reject the 'two attributes' dogma of contemporary Realism and all its sects on the right and the left as unscientific and moribund."[16]

This is why Picasso's "reformation" appears to Filonov "scholastically formalistic and bereft of revolutionary significance." Picasso, like Il'ia Repin, paints merely the form and color of the "periphery of objects," plus or minus the "orthography of a school, a nation, a tribe, or a master."[17] From such a vantage point, "even Picasso with his violin is a Realist": "the violin is whole, the pitcher is whole; the violin and pitcher are broken into pieces and artificially placed on the canvas."[18]

"I see, know, intuit"—these are the three modes of creation Filonov describes as at the artists's disposal.

The Realist paints by sight. He operates with color and form. His paintings also render the invisible—a psychological state or the features of man's inner world—but through the visible.

The Cubist paints not only by sight but also by knowledge: Picasso's pitcher is painted simultaneously from various sides and from within. He also paints what is invisible (from a fixed perspective) but in principle visible.

Filonov reproduces *what is in principle invisible* (in such works as *Formula petrogradskogo proletariata* [*Formula of the Petrograd Proletariat,* 1920–21, plate no. 342] and *Pobeda nad vechnost'iu* [*Victory over Eternity,* 1920–21]). He renders the invisible not through the visible, as the Realists and Cubists do, but through novel plastic solutions. This constitutes Filonov's qualitative breakthrough, and this is what makes him unique; no wonder that Kruchenykh called him the "eyewitness of the invisible."

Filonov theorized about the difference between the *glaz vidiashchii* (seeing eye) and the *glaz znaiushchii* (knowing eye). The first comes to know by the transmission of form and color; with the aid of the second, the "knowing eye," the artist, supported by intuition, reproduces processes that are invisible or hidden. Filonov described the process thus:

From a certain angle of vision, from one side, or, to a certain degree, from either the back or the front of an object, everyone always sees only a part of what he is looking at. Further than that even the acutest seeing eye does not reach; but the knowing eye of the investigator and inventor, the master of analytical art, strives for exhaustive seeing, insofar as that is possible for man. He gazes with his analytical faculty and with his brain, and with these he sees into places which the eye of the artist does not begin to reach. Thus, for example, one may, seeing only the trunk, branches, foliage, and blossoms of, let us say, an apple tree, at the same time know, or by analysis strive to know, how the slender fibers of the roots take up and absorb the fluids of the soil, how these fluids ascend by way of the cells of the living wood, how they are disbursed in a continual reaction to light and warmth, made over and transformed into the molecular structure of the trunk and branches, into green leaves, into white and red blossoms, into green and then yellow and then pink apples, and into the coarse bark of the trunk. This is what should interest the master, not the appearance of the apple tree. The trousers, shoes, coat, or face of a man are not so interesting as the emergence of thought and its processes in the man's head.[19]

In depicting these processes, Filonov renders them by invented form, that is, non-objectively. In most of the artist's paintings one may observe a combination of two principles, the figurative and the non-objective, wherein lies the uniqueness of Filonov's structures. When Malevich or Mondrian paint a non-objective canvas, there is nothing figurative in it, whereas a Filonov painting may "begin" as a figurative one and "continue" as a pure abstraction. Or a lengthy non-objective

"overture" may usher in a figurative image, as in Filonov's large canvas *Tsvety mirovogo rastsveta* (*Flowers of Universal Blossoming,* 1915).

Filonov's *Formula kosmosa* (*Formula of the Cosmos,* 1918–19) evidently was his first pure abstraction, whereupon followed the non-objective *Belaia kartina* (*White Painting*, 1919, plate no. 340), *Victory over Eternity, Oktiabr'* (*October,* 1921), and, finally, the brilliant *Formula vesny* (*Formula of Spring,* 1928–29, fig. no. 4). The last is an entirely non-objective painting, but one replete with the life of nature. No flowering trees here or landscape background; instead, the artist produces a powerful sensation of the vernal exultation of nature, of its living "organics," via pure color, breaches of deep blue, an unceasing movement of microstructures, and the capricious rhythm of large forms. This painting is not a state but a process comparable to a biological one. Filonov's *Formula of Spring,* the crowning achievement of his painting, marks, as does Larionov's Rayism, the third path to non-objectivity.

On this path we also encounter the school of Mikhail Matiushin, a broad movement in painting which is only beginning to be studied. It developed from the 1910s to the 1930s in parallel with Suprematism, but was overshadowed by Malevich's school; it is only in our day that the shadow is thinning. Exhibitions of Matiushin's work in Leningrad (1990) and Karlsruhe (1991), held thanks to the initiative of Alla Povelikhina, were the first to document the range and genuine significance of this movement. It reached its culmination in the 1920s, in the Workshop of Spatial Realism at the Petrograd Academy of Arts and in the Section on Organic Culture at Ginkhuk (the State Institute of Artistic Culture) in Leningrad. But it traced its beginnings to the work, ideas, and person of the poet and artist Elena Guro, who died in 1913.

In the annals of the Russian avant-garde one encounters the formula "Larionov–Goncharova"; "Matiushin–Guro" became another such formula, but with a difference: if in the first pair, Larionov played the leading role, in the second the creative initiative and the spirit of experimentation were Guro's. This state of affairs was acknowledged by Matiushin more than once in his diary—for example, in 1934: "Lena sensed the link between color and sound, wanted to express landscape by sound. M[isha] did not grasp this yet."[20]

With the urban focus in poetry and Cubism's geometrizing in painting at their height, Guro's work turns, ahead of the times, to nature. She appeals to the "redeeming earth" and strives to match the creative process to the rhythms of nature. "Try to breathe as firs rustle in the distance, as the wind sweeps and surges, as creation breathes; to emulate the breathing of the earth and the strands of the clouds."[21]

The movement toward nature produced in Guro's work a spirituality of rare elevation and purity. Yet this spirituality is free from any schematic abstraction or Symbolist freight of meaning. The most capacious, cosmically grandiose images of her prose and poetry are always warmed by a sympathetic and spontaneous feeling for nature: "And they tipped the cup of heaven for all; all drank and heaven was not lessened."[22]

Guro's painting no less than her writing gives evidence of a movement toward nature. Guro's palette, unlike that of Cubism, contains no ochre, umber, heavy earth tones, or areas painted in a local color of red, blue, or yellow. If in their contacts with nature the Cubists gravitated toward inorganic forms, to the world of crystal and rock, Guro orients her painting toward the forms and hues of animate nature, toward the organic world. Multiple gradations and shadings of green—the color shunned by the Cubists because of its too "earthy" associations—create a translucent glow in her canvases. Guro's aspirations in painting may also be ascertained from the lines of her diary: "I will build a palace from the

fig. 4
Pavel Filonov
Formula of Spring, *1928-29.*
Oil on canvas, 250 x 285 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

apertures of heaven. All who arrive there will receive bright greenish-with-a-touch-of-pink or watery-blue crystals of sky. And more—there will be fluffy silvery raiments, delicate ones."[23]

Guro achieves a high degree of generalization of color and form, without losing the immediacy of impressions from nature. The objects in her canvases seem to have lost their weight and to exist in an airy state of suspension, while the material substance of her pigments has been transformed without remnant into luminously vibrating, softly shimmering smoke wreaths of color, as if endowed with a spiritual property.

There is yet another singularity to the organization of color in Guro's paintings: the simultaneous deployment, as of voices in a Bach fugue, of several colors which, as they develop and change interdependently, set off and enrich one another. In the 1920s, Matiushin and his pupils theorized about this device of color-interweaving, grounding it in the dynamics of three-color relationships: "primary color," "environment," and the "color coupling" which occurs between them. "Hitherto," Matiushin wrote, "artists have had difficulty placing two interrelated colors, and would lean more heavily on one of them. Rarely did any of them suspect *how* from the joining of two colors a third emerges. This enigmatic 'third color' was what we kept encountering in our work from life."[24]

Guro's ideas on art, as developed by Matiushin, gave rise to a new movement in Russian painting—as contemporaries, too, realized.[25]

Matiushin's creative orientation was the same as Guro's: "Nature tells us: 'do not imitate me while depicting me. Yourselves create as I do. Study My Creation.'"[26] To this axiom—"Yourselves create as I do"—all of Matiushin's school adhered, exploring the "means" and "methods" by which nature "operates." It is only in this sense, and not as a return to figuration, that one must understand Matiushin's words: "I was the first to give the signal for a return to nature."[27]

On April 14, 1923, he wrote in his diary: "At the society yesterday I revealed our motto: Zor-Ved [*Zrenie i Vedanie* (Seeing and Knowing)]."[28] And on May 22nd, the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* (*The Life of Art*) published his manifesto "Ne iskusstvo, a zhizn'" ("Not Art but Life"), which shed light on both halves of this formula. "Knowing" is not "knowledge." "Knowing" means penetration into an inaccessible realm by means of intuition—the faculty upon which the work of Matiushin and his followers, and their investigations into space and color, were broadly based. As early as 1916, appraising what innovation Suprematism had wrought, Matiushin observed: "Objectivity has properties unknown to human reason, whose essence may be grasped not in objects' tangible form but as transformed by a higher intuitive intelligence."[29] Now, seeing interacting with knowing, that is, intuitive reason, formed the basis of *rasshirennoe smotrenie* (expanded viewing), whose theory and practice Matiushin was working out with his colleagues. His students from the Workshop of Spatial Realism—Boris, Georgii, Mariia, and Kseniia Ender, as well as Nikolai Grinberg—joined him at the Section on Organic Culture at Ginkhuk. Gifted artists and musicians, they made up the original core of Matiushin's group. Within their professional spheres, all of them possessed the indispensable faculty of intuition. Matiushin commented of Boris Ender: "Boris is very talented, and much in painting is revealed to him."[30] Not "known" but "revealed"—precisely the point.

Matiushin's school attained its peak in the 1920s. Non-objective principles and properties, distinct from those of Suprematism and even contrary to them, appeared in the works of Matiushin and of the Enders. The curved line rather than the straight was the basis of their plastic structures; color evolved according to the organic laws of nature. This is why we witness

fig. 5
Mikhail Matiushin
On the Death of Elena Guro, *1918.*
Watercolor on paper, 38.1 x 27 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

fig. 6
Matiushin and Ol'ga Gromozova at Guro's grave, Uusikirkko, 1913.

in the work of Boris and Mariia Ender an astonishing regular phenomenon: while distancing itself from the object, entirely forswearing it, their painting nonetheless approaches nature, provides, as it were, a purified concentrate of natural sensations. This quality emerges with particular intensity in Mariia Ender's *Opyt novoi prostranstvennoi mery* (*Experiment in a New Spatial Dimension,* 1920, plate no. 329) and in numerous works of Matiushin's disciples.

"Organic" was the key word in the theories of Filonov and Matiushin. Though Larionov did not use it, the essence of Rayism is kindred with that concept. The movements these artists inaugurated in painting marked the third path to non-objectivity—a path that revealed in non-objectivity new qualities and values.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Walter Arndt

fig. 7
From left, Mariia, Boris, Kseniia, and Georgii Ender, ca. 1905.

fig. 8
Boris Ender, 1914.

Notes

1. Iurii Annenkov, "Mikhail Larionov i Nataliia Goncharova," in his *Dnevnik moikh vstrech* (New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 213–14.

2. François Daulte, "Michel Larionov," in *Michel Larionov,* catalogue for exhibition organized by Acquavella Galleries, New York (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1969), n. pag.

3. Michel Seuphor, *L'Art abstrait, ses origines et ses premiers maîtres* (Paris: Maeght, 1949).

4. I. M. Zdanevich, "Okrest iskusstva M. Le-Dantiu," 1918, Manuscript Division, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, f. 177, d. 37, l. 5.

5. *Luchizm Larionova,* pamphlet distributed at the debate on "The East, National Character, and the West," March 23, 1913.

6. Sviashch. Pavel Florenskii, "Nebesnye znameniia. (Razmyshleniia o simvolike tsvetov)," in his *Stat'i po iskusstvu,* vol. 1 of his *Sobranie sochinenii* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1985), pp. 57–58.

7. Velimir Khlebnikov, "Otkrytie khudozhestvennoi galerei," in his *Tvoreniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), p. 619.

8. N. Punin, "Impressionisticheskii period v tvorchestve M. F. Larionova," in *Materialy po russkomu iskusstvu* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei, 1928), vol. 1, p. 297.

9. Timofei Bogomazov et al., "Luchisty i budushchniki. Manifest," in *Oslinyi khvost i mishen',* July 1913, pp. 9–48.

10. N. M. Tarabukin, *Vrubel'* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. 111.

11. Pavel Mansurov, letter to Evgenii Kovtun, May 28, 1971, private archive of Evgenii Kovtun, St. Petersburg.

12. P. N. Filonov, "Kanon i zakon," 1912, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656.

13. V. Khlebnikov, *Zangezi* (Moscow, 1922), p. 27.

14. Filonov, "Kanon i zakon."

15. P. N. Filonov, "Ideologiia analiticheskogo iskusstva," in *P. Filonov,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the State Russian Museum, Leningrad (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei, 1930), p. 42.

16. See P. N. Filonov, "Deklaratsiia 'Mirovogo rastsveta,'" *Zhizn' iskusstva* 20 (1923), pp. 13–15.

17. Ibid., p. 13.

18. Pavel Filonov, letter to Vera Sholpo, June 1928, in E. F. Kovtun, "Iz istorii russkogo avangarda (P. N. Filonov)," *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1977 god* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), pp. 229–30.

19. P. N. Filonov, "Kratkoe poiasnenie k vystavlennym rabotam," in *Pavel Nikolaevich Filonov. Zhivopis'. Grafika. Iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo russkogo muzeia,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the State Russian Museum, Leningrad (Leningrad: Aurora, 1988), p. 108.

20. M. V. Matiushin, diary, February 9, 1934, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 15. The entry was made by Mariia Ender, who recorded Matiushin's words.

21. E. Guro, "Bednyi rytsar'," Manuscript Division, State Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, St. Petersburg, f. 1116, ed. khr. 3, l. 48.

22. Elena Guro, "Bednyj rycar' (The Poor Knight)," in *Elena Guro: Selected Prose and Poetry,* ed. Anna Ljunggren and Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988), p. 192.

23. Elena Guro, "Elena Guro's Diary," in *Elena Guro,* p. 63. Entry for June 5, 1911.

24. M. V. Matiushin, "Tvorcheskii put' khudozhnika," 1934, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656.

25. After the breakup of the Union of Youth, Matiushin endeavored to organize a new artists' group. In a letter to Matiushin, Filonov noted: "You want to link your group's idea with the ideas of Elena Guro." Pavel Filonov, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, 1914, Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 25, ed. khr. 11, l. 1 oborot.

26. M. V. Matiushin, diary, April 16, 1923, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.

27. M. V. Matiushin, diary, December 1922, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.

28. Ibid.

29. M. Matiushin, "O vystavke 'poslednikh futuristov,'" *Ocharovannyi strannik. Al'manakh vesennii,* 1916, p. 18.

30. M. V. Matiushin, diary, April 14, 1923, Manuscript Division, Pushkin House, St. Petersburg, f. 656, tetrad' no. 2.

319
Mikhail Matiushin
Movement in Space, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 124 × 168 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

320
Mikhail Matiushin
Self-Portrait "Crystal," *1917.*
Oil on canvas, 70 x 37.3 cm.
Private collection, St. Petersburg.

321
Mikhail Matiushin
Untitled (Abstract Composition),
1919.
Oil on canvas, 32 x 42 cm.
Courtesy Martin Muller Inc. and Modernism Inc., San Francisco.

322
Boris Ender
Portrait of Karl Liebknecht, *1919.*
Oil on cardboard, 100 x 69 cm.
State Museum of Fine Arts,
Nizhnii Tagil.

323
Boris Ender
Untitled (Pulsating Color), *1921.*
Watercolor on paper, 22 x 27.3 cm.
State Museum of the History of the City of St. Petersburg.

324
Boris Ender
Colors of Nature, *1925.*
Watercolor on paper, 22 x 24.5 cm.
Private collection, Moscow.

325
Boris Ender
Extended Space, *1922–23.*
Oil on canvas, 69.1 x 97.8 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

326
Boris Ender
Colors of Nature, *1924.*
Watercolor on paper, 22.5 x 27.5 cm.
Collection Zoia Ender-Masetti, Rome.

327
Boris Ender
Cosmos, *1923.*
Watercolor on paper, 18 x 16.6 cm.
Collection Zoia Ender-Masetti, Rome.

328
Boris Ender
In Peace, *1927.*
Oil on canvas, 90.2 x 80 cm.
Collection Zoia Ender-Masetti, Rome.

329
Mariia Ender
Experiment in a New Spatial Dimension, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 65.6 x 65.6 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

330
Mariia Ender
Non-Objective, *1920s.*
Oil on canvas, 95 x 58 cm.
State Lunacharskii Museum of Fine Arts, Krasnodar.

331
Kseniia Ender
Untitled, *1924–26.*
Collage on paper, 32 x 27.9 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

332
Kseniia Ender
Untitled, *1924–26.*
Collage on paper, 31.3 x 27.6 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

333
Kseniia Ender
Untitled, *1924–26.*
Collage on paper, 26.5 x 18.7 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

334
Kseniia Ender
Untitled, *1924–26.*
Collage on paper, 17.4 x 28.7 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

335
Mariia Ender
Decorative design on a dark-red background, 1924–26.
Colored paper, gouache, and collage on cardboard, 35.2 x 41.4 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

336
Kseniia Ender
Untitled, *1924–26.*
Collage on paper, 31.8 x 27.2 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

337
Pavel Mansurov
Non-Objective Composition, *1918.*
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 39 cm.
State Art Museum, Omsk.

338
Pavel Mansurov
Painterly Formula No. 88, *1924.*
Oil on board, 85.5 x 21.5 cm.
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

339
Pavel Mansurov
Painterly Formula, *1927.*
Oil on board, 132.5 x 36 cm.
Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne.

340
Pavel Filonov
White Painting, *1919.*
Oil on canvas, 72 x 89 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

341
Pavel Filonov
Untitled, *1923.*
Oil on canvas, 79 × 99 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

342
Pavel Filonov
Formula of the Petrograd Proletariat,
1920–21.
Oil on canvas, 154 x 117 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

343
Pavel Filonov
Man in the World, *1925.*
Oil on paper mounted on canvas,
107 x 71.5 cm.
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

344
Mikhail Plaksin
Gas Spectrum, *1920.*
Oil on canvas, 81.2 x 81 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.
Gift George Costakis.

345
Mikhail Plaksin
Planetary, *1922.*
Oil on canvas, 71.9 x 61 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.

346
Aleksandr Labas
Abstract Composition: Oval, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 79 x 71 cm.
Collection L. B. Labas, Moscow.

347
Kliment Red'ko
Suprematism, *1921.*
Oil on canvas, 74.5 x 52 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.
Gift George Costakis.

348
Kliment Red'ko
Husband and Wife, *1922.*
Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 32.6 cm.
State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow.

349
Kliment Red'ko
Dynamite, *1922.*
Oil on canvas, 62.8 x 47.5 cm.
Collection George Costakis, Germany.