

lective farm paper. I saw the process with my own eyes. The people we needed were all around me, honest, sprightly, energetic collectivists in the co-operatives, brigades, in the schools and the village soviet.

Where do we get them from? From the growing ranks of the village correspondents.

A man has only to send four or five letters to the paper before he is already put on to social work and is soon up to the neck in it. And for me, the editor, it only remained to go once more into the thick of the masses and encourage these new folks who had kept silence so long, to urge them on to take up the pen.

Even if it were possible to count the printed newspapers including those issued by factories, Soviet-farms, mines, quarries, fisheries, etc, it would be unthinkable to count the hundreds of news sheets turned out on the mimeograph machines and house presses. And the innumerable wall newspapers in houses, workshops, on steamships, trains, air ships, submarines, down mines, on prison walls and in kindergardens.

Union House in Moscow was formerly the exclusive club of the Moscow aristocracy. Pushkin loved this hall. Young Leo Tolstoy went to dances there. After the Revolution the trade unions entered it. It was in this hall that Lenin lay dead. It has seen a great many conferences and meetings in the last 15 years.

Now the hall is a meeting place for books. They have come from everywhere. They speak all languages.

Tsarist Russia knew only 22 printed languages, but she used them mainly for printing bibles.

The Soviet Government has given 51 nations a written language and a press of their own.

Ukrainian literature sails a powerful ship into the middle of the hall. Opposite to it along the wall there are books in the White Russian language, in Yiddish,

Georgian, Uzbek, Tartar—but these are all tongues that we know. There are other books in the Touva, Shora, Nentsk and Yuitsk languages. Touva and Shora are places situated on the upper reaches of the Yenisey. The Nentsi are the folk formerly called Samoyedes, who inhabit the districts between the Northern Dvina and the River Pechora, the Yuiti are the Eskimos from the Tchukotsky coast.

Make haste for the voices of other nations can be heard in the land—they speak in the Itelmen tongue, the Aventskey, the Tungan, the Uigur, Mansi, Nanai, Nymylan tongues and there are more and more of them. The number of languages spoken in the Soviet Union is 73.

From the pre-revolutionary five million copies of Gorky's works we have jumped to twenty-two and a half million. Eight hundred and forty million copies turned out by all the presses in 1931; compare this figure with the hundred million in 1913. And then take the publication of church books—1,800 in 1913 dropping to 100 in 1927 and to zero in 1931.

The table issued by the Institute of Statistics in Pictures shows several groups of four people. They have books in their hands. In 1913 it appears, there were three books to every four persons, in 1927 there were six and in 1931 the figure had mounted to 21.

Whoever has been in Moscow knows how crowded the tramcars are. Yet everyone can remember seeing earnest folk propped up in the weirdest poses, reading books.

A thoughtful writer has said "people read in the train because it is dull, and in the tramcar because it is interesting."

In 1913 we consumed only 87 thousand tons of paper in the whole country. Two thirds of it was imported. And yet it was sufficient not only for us but for Poland and the Baltic provinces as well.

Now we use 675 thousand tons of paper, none of it imported. But it is not enough.

The active reader of the paper becomes a correspondent of it—a worker correspondent.

The active reader of books is drawn to writing.

A few figures. In February 1932 the writers' bureau for beginners from the collective farms began to work. In February 10 manuscripts were sent in, two were printed. In June—105 manuscripts were received and 25 printed. In September 165 of which 35 were accepted.

Some little books stand in a modest pile in the corner of the hall. They were written by shock brigade workers—accounts of their campaign for "honour and glory" on the field of the Five-Year plan.

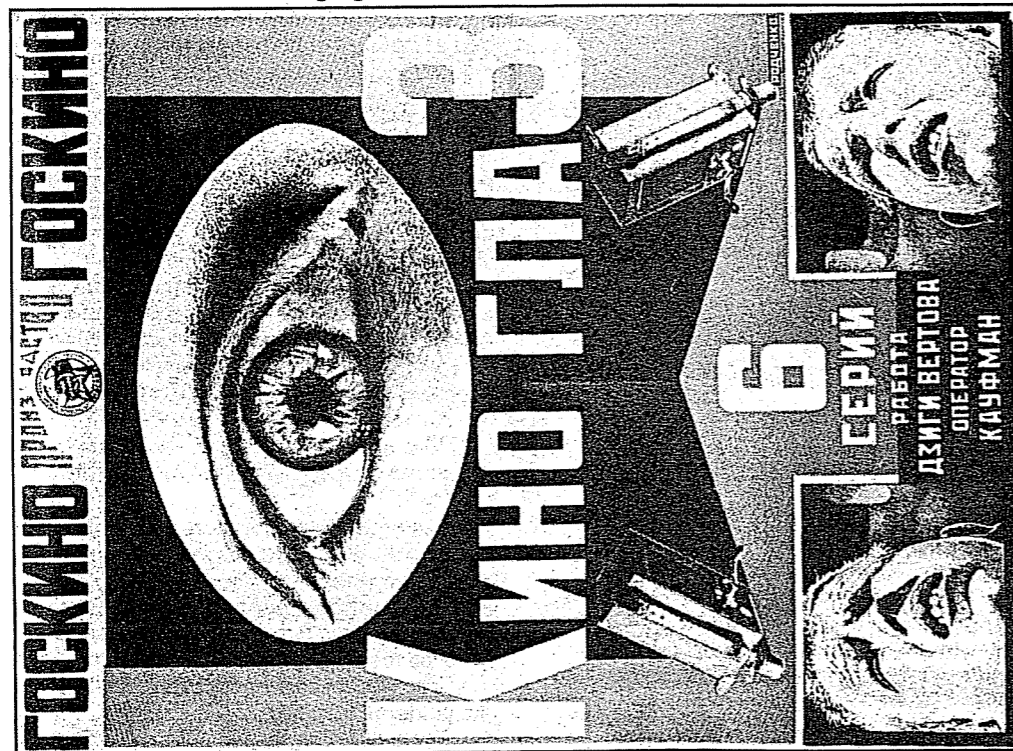
One of the books was written by a whole group of railway workers—200 people. And the echo of their modest words rings out in new editions and a huge circulation of seven million sheets. Here the printed word is a toiler, with his sleeves rolled up. Here the pen is the brother of the tractor and the lathe. Here the only words that are bad are those that have nothing to do with deeds and those are bad which have not been made permanent in words.

EL Lissitsky THE FUTURE OF THE BOOK (USSR, 1926)

Every artistic innovation is unique, it has no development. In time different variations on the same theme grow up around innovation, maybe higher, maybe lower, but they will rarely reach the original power of the first. This goes on until long familiarity has made the effect of the work of art so automatic that the senses no longer react to the worn means and the time is ripe for a further technical innovation. However, the 'technical' and the 'artistic' (so-called) are inseparable, so we must not lightly dispose of a profound relationship by means of a few slogans. At any rate, the first few books printed by Gutenberg with the system of movable type which he invented remain the finest examples of the art of book production.

The next few hundred years saw no basic innovations (until photography) in this field. In typography there are just more or less successful variations accompanying technical improvements in the manufacturing apparatus. The same happened with a second discovery in the visual field—with photography. As soon as we give up assuming a complacent superiority over everything else, we must admit that the first Daguerrotypes are not primitive artifacts needing improvements, but the finest photographic art. It is shortsighted to suppose that machines, i.e. the displacement of manual by mechanical processes, are basic to the development of the form and figure of an artifact. In the first place, the consumer's demand determines the development, i.e. the demand of the social strata that provide the 'commissions'. Today, this is not a narrow circle, a thin cream, but 'everybody', the masses. The idea moving the masses today is called materialism, but dematerialization is the characteristic of the epoch. For example, correspondence grows, so the number of letters, the quantity of writing paper, the mass of material consumed expand, until relieved by the telephone. Again, the network and material of supply grow until they are relieved by the radio. Matter diminishes, we dematerialize, sluggish masses of matter are replaced by liberated energy. This is the mark of our epoch. What conclusions does this imply in our field?

This text was originally published in the *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (Mainz), 1926-1927. It was translated and published in English in the *New Left Review* (London), 41, January-February 1967, where it was prefaced by a short article on the author and his ideas. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.



Poster for Dziga Vertov's film "Cinema Eye", 1924 (by Alexander Rodchenko).

I draw the following analogy

<i>Inventions in the field of verbal traffic</i>	<i>Inventions in the field of general traffic</i>
Articulated language.....	Upright gait
Writing.....	The wheel
Gutenberg's printing-press...	Carts drawn by animal power
?.....	The automobile
?.....	The aeroplane

I have produced this analogy to prove that so long as the book remains a palpable object, i.e. so long as it is not replaced by auto-vocalizing and kinovocalizing representations, we must look to the field of the manufacture of books for new basic innovations in the near future, so that the general level of the epoch can be reached in this field.

There are signs to hand suggesting that this basic innovation is likely to come from the neighbourhood of the collotype. Here we have a machine which captures the subject matter on a film and a press which copies the negative of the material on to sensitive paper. Thus the frightful weight of the subject matter and the bucket of dye is omitted, so that once again we have dematerialization. The most important thing here is that the mode of production of words and pictures is included in the same process: photography. Up till now photography is that mode of expression which is most comprehensible. We have before us the prospect of a book in which exposition has priority over letters.

We know of two kinds of writing: one sign for each concept—hieroglyphic (modern Chinese): and one sign for each sound—alphabetic. The progress of the alphabetic over the hieroglyphic mode is only relative. Hieroglyphics are international. This means that if a Russian, a German or an American fixes the sign (picture) of a concept in his mind he can read Chinese or Egyptian (soundlessly), without learning the language, for language and writing are always one creation as far as he is concerned.

We may conclude that:

1. the hieroglyphic book is international (at least potentially)
2. the alphabetic book is national, and
3. the book of the future will be non-national; for it needs the least education to understand it.

There are today two dimensions to the word. As sound it is a function of time; as exposition, of space. The book of the future must be both. This is how to overcome the automatism of the contemporary book. A world-view which has become automatic ceases to exist in our senses, so we are left drowning in a void. The dynamic achievement of art is to transform the void into space, i.e. into a unity conceivable for our senses.

An alteration in the structure and mode of language implies a change in the usual appearance of the book. Before the War, printed matter in Europe was appropriately enough converging in appearance in every country. A new optimistic mentality laying stress on immediate events and the fleeting moment underlay the origins in America of a new form of printing. They began to modify the relation of word and illustration in

1. The June 1917 number of *Neue Jugend* (Berlin) was described as 'Prospectus for the little Grosz portfolio', published that autumn. The typography was by John Heartfield.

exposition into the direct opposite of the European style. The highly developed technique of facsimile-electrotype (half-tone blocks) was especially important for this development; thus photo-montage was born.

After the War, sceptical and stunned Europe marshalled a screaming, burning language: all means must be used to maintain and assert oneself. The catchwords of the epoch were 'attraction' and 'trick'. The new appearance of the book was characterized by:

1. broken-up setting
2. photomontage and typomontage

These facts, which are the basis for our predictions, were already foreshadowed before the War and our Revolution. Marinetti, the siren of Futurism, also dealt with typography in his masterly manifestos. In 1909 he wrote:

The book will be the futurist expression of our futurist consciousness. I am against what is known as the harmony of a setting. When necessary we will use three or four colours to a page, and 20 different typefaces. E.g. we shall represent a series of uniform, *hasty, perceptions* with *cursive*, a **scream** will be expressed in **bold** type and so on. So a new painterly typographic representation will be born on the printed page.

Many of today's creations do not go beyond this demand. I should like to stress that Marinetti does not call for playing with form as form, but asks rather that the action of a new content should be intensified by the form.

Before the War the notion of the simultaneous book was also proposed and, in a sense, realized. This was in the Poem of Blaise Cendrars, typographically conceived by Sonja Delaunay-Terk. It is a foldable strip of paper 5 feet long—an attempt at a new book-form for poetry. The lines of poetry are printed in colour, with colours always discontinued in the content and changed into others.

In England during the War the Vortex group published their magazine *Blast!* in a crude, elementary style, using almost only unrelieved capitals, a style which has become the token of all modern international printing. In Germany, the 1917 Prospectus of the little *Neue Jugend* Portfolio¹ is an important document of the new typography.

The new movement which began in Russia in 1908 bound painter and poet together from the very first day; hardly a poetry book has appeared since then without the collaboration of a painter. Poems have been written with the lithographic crayon and signed. They have been cut in wood. Poets themselves have set whole pages. Thus the poets Khlebnikov, Kruchenich, Mayakovski, Asseeyev have worked with the painters Rosanova, Goncharova, Malevich, Popova, Burlyuk, etc. They did not produce select, numbered, de luxe editions, but cheap unlimited volumes, which today we must treat as popular art despite their sophistication.

In the Revolutionary period a latent energy has concentrated in the younger generation of our artists, which can only find release in large-scale commissions. The audience has become the masses, the semi-literate masses. With our work the Revolution has achieved a colossal labour of propaganda and enlightenment. We ripped up the traditional book into single pages, magnified these a hundred times, printed them in colour and stuck them up as posters in the

streets. Unlike American posters, ours were not designed for rapid perception from a passing motor-car, but to be read and to enlighten from a short distance. If a series of these posters were today to be set in the size of a manageable book, in an order corresponding to some theme, the result would be most curious. Our lack of printing equipment and the necessity for speed meant that, though the best work was hand-printed, the most rewarding was standardized, lapidary and adapted to the simplest mechanical form of reproduction. Thus State Decrees were printed as rolled-up illustrated leaflets, and Army Orders as illustrated pamphlets.

At the end of the Civil War (1920), we had the opportunity to realize our aims in the field of the creation of new books, in spite of the primitiveness of the mechanical means at our disposal. In Vitebsk, we brought out five issues of a magazine called *Unovis*, printed by typewriter, lithography, etching and linocut.

As I have already written: 'Gutenberg's Bible was only printed with letters. But letters alone will not suffice for the handing down of today's Bible. The book finds its way to the brain through the eyes, not through the ears; light waves travel much faster and more intensely than sound waves. But humans can only speak to each other with their mouths, whereas the possibilities of the book are multi-form.'

With the advent of the period of reconstruction in 1922, the production of books also rose rapidly. Our best artists seized on the problem of book production. At the beginning of 1922 I and the writer Ilya Ehrenburg edited the periodical *Veshch-Gegenstand-Objet* which was printed in Berlin. Access to the most developed German printing techniques enabled us to realize some of our ideas about the book. Thus we printed a picture-book *The Story of Two Squares*, which we had finished in our productive period of 1920, and the *Mayakovski-Book* which made even the form of the book corresponding to the particular edition a functional structure. At the same time our artists were exploring the technical possibilities of printing. The State Publishing House and other printing establishments put out books which were shown, and appreciated, at several international exhibitions in Europe. Comrades Popova, Rodchenko, Klutsis, Stepanova and Gan devoted themselves to book design. Some worked directly in the printshop with the compositors and presses (Gan, *et al.*). The growing esteem in which book design is held is indicated by the practice of listing on a special page the names of all the compositors and finishers concerned with the book. This means that there has grown up in the print-shops a stratum of workers who have developed a conscious relation to their craft.

Most of the artists produce montages, that is, lay out photographs and suitable captions together on a page which is then made into a block for printing. Thus is conceived a form of undeniable power, apparently very simple to handle and therefore easily diverted into banality, but in skilful hands extremely fruitful as a means to visual poetry.

At the outset we said that the expressive power of each artistic innovation is unique and has no development. The innovation of easel-painting made

great works of art possible, but it has now lost this power. The cinema and the illustrated weekly have succeeded it. We rejoice in the new means which technique has put into our hands. We know that a close relation with the actuality of general events, the continuing heightening of the sensitivity of our optic nerves, the record-breaking speed of social development, our command over plastic material, the reconstruction of the plane and its space and the simmering force of innovation have enabled us to give the book new power as a work of art.

Of course, today's book has not found a new overall structure, it is still a single volume with a cover, a back and pages 1,2,3,... The same is true of the theatre. Even our most modern drama plays in a theatre like a peepshow, with the public in the stalls, in boxes and in rows in front of the curtain. But the stage has been cleared of all the paraphernalia of painted scenery, the stage-space as a painted perspective has perished. A three-dimensional physical space has been born in the same peepshow, allowing maximal unfolding of the fourth dimension, living movement. Within the book modernism may not yet have gone so far, but we must learn to see the tendency.

Notwithstanding the crisis which book production, like every other area of production, is undergoing, the avalanche of books grows with every passing year. The book is the most monumental art form today; no longer is it fondled by the delicate hands of a bibliophile, but seized by a hundred thousand hands. This illuminates the hegemony of the illustrated weekly in this transition period. We should add to the number of illustrated weeklies the flood of children's picture-books. Our children's reading teaches them a new plastic language, they grow up with a different relation to the world and space, to image and colour, so they are preparing for a new kind of book. But we shall be satisfied if we can conceptualize the epic and lyric developments of our times in our form of book.

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2. LIBERATION, SOCIALISM

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