

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 Boguslavskaiia, 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 Opoiiaz (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, Vasiliï 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 anarchism⁷ 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."

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 Klutskis 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 "Liniiia ("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 Gröbel 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, Klutskis, 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 borne 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 Klutskis'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 Klutskis 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, Klutskis, 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 Klutskis'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 Klutskis'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 Klutskis'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. Klutis 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 *Sovremennaiia 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, "Liniiia," 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.

The Great Utopia

*The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,
1915–1932*

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

State Tret'iakov Gallery

State Russian Museum

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

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