

BORIS ARVATOV

## STYLE AND STYLIZATION AS SOCIAL ORGANIZERS (THESES)<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Art is the creation of forms perceived spontaneously.
- 2) This kind of creation presupposes a conscious and organized comprehension of material, one that is free and independent.
- 3) By "style" I understand the making of expressive forms as an organic function of social existence.
- 4) The more a theory of style universalizes the forms of reality, the more organic becomes the style.
- 5) Art registers the forms of reality, making them expressive and enabling them to be created consciously.
- 6) The possibility of an *organic* style presupposes a unity of methods and forms of social existence, i.e., ones that organize society (any kind of collectivism – whether authoritarian, corporate, military, collegial or even in its unadulterated state).
- 7) Examples: a) Egypt and tradition; b) Gothic and evolution; c) Rococo and degeneration.
- 8) In its advanced state a barter economy (Capitalism) destroys any chance for style to emerge via social anarchy (the individualistic specialization of methods and forms).
- 9) The organizers of the consciousness of form cannot be extrapolated from living reality, so they must be derived from the past (stylization).
- 10) Stylization is an individual element and functions in opposition to reality.
- 11) The bourgeois consciousness is in need of unity, but in fact lacks this, so stylization has proven to be a useful surrogate for the concrete unity of form.
- 12) Moreover, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the principles of *laissez faire* and *laissez passer* held sway, stylization became an authoritarian plotina bulwark against individualism.
- 13) However, shortly thereafter, when Capitalism began to be aware of its own style, stylization became a weapon of implementation.

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4. Arvatov gave his paper entitled "Stil i stilizatsiia kak sotsialno organizuiushchie yavleniia" to a Plenary Session of RAKhN on November 17, 1921. This translation is made from a typescript in a private collection, Moscow.

14) The new style of today is being created by the collectivization of life, accomplished by corporate Capitalism, thereby introducing an integrative tendency into the field of methods and forms of public life.

15) Examples: a) Futurism and the problem of pure art; b) Americanization.

16) Inasmuch as style is a kind of static registration, so the . . . concept of style falls by the wayside and is replaced by the concept of constant, vital, and essential evolution (one of technological, social, and constructive perfection). This is an evolution of expressive form of concrete reality.

## THE THEORY OF VISUAL COMPOSITION (THESES)<sup>5</sup>

I) Visual composition is the organization of the formal and material elements of the artistic work. This includes the conditional reproduction of the phenomena of reality taken within their spatial and material existence.

II) Any composition falls into two main parts: 1) a system of spatial equilibrium; and 2) a system of concrete forms that implement this equilibrium, i.e., forms that are mutually conditioned and determined (perspectival space, volume, color, plane, surface, line, facture).

III) The system of equilibrium is the visual reproduction of the technical systems of equilibrium which are known to artists from practical experience. The aim of this reproduction is to create a material and spatial harmony according to the type of construction within the reality of technology. In other words, visual composition is an illusory construction that is intended only for our perception and that fills the gap in the corresponding, organized, concrete reality. All studio and applied compositions, including non-objective art, are representational and demonstrate the extent to which so called spatial art is a technical form producing art and to which its figurative manifestation is a private and fleeting fortuity gener-

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5. Arvatov gave his paper entitled "Teoriia izobrazitelnoi kompozitsii" to the Visual Arts Section of RAKhN on December 9, 1925. Present were Alexander Anisimov, Vladimir Blavatsky, Vladimir Domogatsky, Dmitrii Nedovich, Boris Shaposhnikov, David Shterenberg, Alexei Sidorov, Boris Ternovets *et al.* This translation is made from the typescript in RGALI, f. 941 (GAKhN), op. 3, ed. khr. 31. Depending on the context, the word "izobrazitelnyi" has been translated variously as "visual" and "representational."