

Choris tou episkopou meden poieite
ten sarka umon os naon theon tereite
ten enosin agapate,
tous merismous pheugete,
mimetai ginesthe Iesou Christou
os kai aoutos tou Patros autou.⁷⁹

Religious ecstasy has already predicted the appearance of new forms. The history of literature consists in poets canonizing⁸⁰ and introducing into literature new forms which had long been the common property of poetic thinking about language.

D. G. Kononov shows that in recent years there have been increasing manifestations of glossolalia (p. 187). At the same time trans-sense songs have been the rage in Paris. But most characteristic is the enthusiasm of the symbolists for the sound-aspect of the word (the works of Andrei Bely, Vyascheslav Ivanov, the articles of Bal'mont⁸¹), which almost coincided in time with the beginnings of the futurists who posed the problem even more sharply.

And perhaps J. Slowacki's prophecy will some day be fulfilled: "There will come a time in verse when poets will be interested only in sounds."⁸²

79. *Epist. ad Philad.* c. 7, corrected to conform to Kononov, p. 251, where it is cited in the Greek alphabet. Shklovsky used the Roman.

80. "Canonizing," a typical Shklovsky term, is discussed in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, The Hague, Mouton, 1965, pp. 259 ff.

81. Symbolist poets for whom musicality was of particular importance; their key theoretical works are: A. Bely (1880-1934), *Simvolizm*, Moscow, Musaget, 1910, esp. "Magiya slov," pp. 429-453; Vyacheslav Ivanov (1868-1949), *Po zvezdam*, St. Petersburg, Ory, 1909, and *Borozdy i mezhi*, Moscow, Musaget, 1916; Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1943), *Poeziya kak volshebstvo*, Moscow, Skorpion, 1915.

82. Juliusz Slowacki (1809-1849), Polish Romantic poet and dramatist. Professor Fizman of Indiana University provided the following information: The quotation is not strictly a translation; it is rather a paraphrase of a sentence from Juliusz Slowacki's *Raptularz* (partly a diary but mostly a notebook). The text in Polish reads as follows: "Po wielkiej liczbie dziś muzyków, kiedyś wielka liczba będzie harmonistów poetycznych, piszących wiersze tylko dla dźwięku - aż pójdą wyżej . . ." (Juliusz Slowacki, *Dziela*, ed. Juliana Krzyzanowski, vol. X, Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1949, p. 550).

Raptularz as a whole was published from the autograph for the first time by Henryk Biegeleisen under the title "Pamiętnik Juliusza Slowackiego" in *Biblioteka Dzieł Wyborowych*, 1901, and for the second time, more accurately, in Juliusz Slowacki *Dziela*, ed. Bronisław Gubrynowicz and Wiktor Hahn, Vol. X, Lwów, Ossolineum, 1909.

KAZIMIR MALEVICH

translated by ALAN UPCHURCH

The circumstances in which my childhood was spent were the following: my father worked at sugar-beet factories which are usually built out in the sticks, far from any city, large or small. The sugar-beet plantations were large. A lot of manpower, provided by peasants, mostly, was needed to run these plantations.

Peasants, young and old, worked on these plantations almost all summer and fall. As a future artist, I feasted my eyes upon the fields and the "colored" workers who weeded or dug up the beetroot.

Platoons of girls in colorful clothes moved in rows across the whole field. It was a war. The troops in colorful dresses struggled with weeds, liberating the beetroot from unwanted overgrowths. I loved to look at these fields in the morning when the sun was not yet high, and the larks would soar upwards in song, and the storks, trilling, would dive after frogs, and the kites, circling high above, would spy out small birds and mice.

The sugar plantations stretched as far as the eye could see, blending into the distant horizon, sloping down to the small cornfields, or running up the hills, engulfing towns and villages in their fields, covered with the monotonous texture of green plants. In order to supply a single factory with sugar beet, no less than twenty thousand *desyatinas*¹ of beets had to be planted, and a thousand people sent out to work these fields.

It was in villages like these, situated amidst the beauties of nature and landscape, that my childhood was spent.

The other part of the factory recalled some fortress in which people worked day and night, obeying the merciless summons of factory whistles. People stood in the factories, bound by time to some apparatus or machine: twelve hours in the steam, the stench of gas and filth. I remember my father standing in front

* Malevich's autobiography was published in *The Russian Avant-Garde*, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1976.

1. *Desyatina*—a land measure equal to 2.7 acres. (Trans.)

of a large apparatus. It was beautiful with many pieces of glass of various sizes. They formed little windowpanes through which you could look inside and watch the sugar syrup boiling. There were several shiny taps by each windowpane, a thermometer, and on a small desk, many little pieces of glass for testing and measuring the degree of crystallization of the sugar. My father would stand for hours turning the taps, looking in the windowpanes, and from time to time would release the sugary liquid onto a piece of glass and carefully examine it under the light to check the size of the forming crystal.

All the workers there carefully followed the movements of their machine, as though following the movements of a predatory animal. And at the same time, they had to keep a sharp eye on themselves and their own movements. A false move threatened either death or being crippled for life. To a small boy like me, these machines always looked like predatory beasts. I looked at them as one would look at wild, merciless beasts who always seem to be watching to catch a false move by their enslaver so they can knock him down or tear him to pieces. The huge flywheels and belts startled me with their movements and shapes. Several machines were enclosed by iron bars and looked like dogs behind a fence. Others, less dangerous, were not fenced in.

The people who worked at the factory had their own small houses where they lived with their families. These houses were occupied mostly by the people who were highly skilled; the rest lived in barracks.

The factory people made up the second society, the one in which I lived, but I didn't like this society. Their life was one of constant labor, day and night. The peasants would sleep all night and go to the fields in the morning where they worked in the open air, surrounded by the beauties of nature, lit by the morning and afternoon sun, and by the golden evening. Their labor spilled over into songs, and you could hear them, in particular, when large parties of girls and young men were on their way home.

I preferred the peasant children for friends, considering them always free among the fields, the meadows and forests and with the horses, sheep and pigs.

I didn't like the factory children, their clothes or their way of life. They always wore shoes and socks in which they couldn't climb trees or jump into the river after frogs. The country children always wore simple, canvas clothing which was comfortable for doing anything. I also liked peasant clothes because they were colorful and had designs, and because everyone sewed his own clothes however he wanted. One wove them, embroidered and dyed them oneself.

The main thing that separated the factory workers and peasants for me was drawing. The former didn't draw, didn't know how to paint their houses, didn't engage in what I'd now call art. All peasants did.

Even though I was just a small boy, all kinds of contrasts and comparisons came into my head.

I thought: "What makes Father want to get up at night when everyone else is sleeping and go work, or go to bed when everything else is living and breathing the air of the fields, the meadows, the woods, the gardens. . . ."

Peasants aren't afraid of any whistles. The sun gently calls them to work with its rays and the sun calls them to bed, hiding its rays behind the globe. The sun I always considered as something great and more pleasant than whistles. I loved the heat of its rays more than the smelly heat of the factory. . . . I also loved the moon very much, and it always seemed to me to be competing with the sun, making the nights very beautiful, doing this better than lamps and candles could. It kept many young people from sleeping, including me, although I was not yet a young man. I loved the moon. When everyone else in the house had gone to sleep, I would always open the curtains to look at the moon and the reflection of the window on the floor or on the bed. The singing of girls and boys would reach my window. I listened with great pleasure, studying the Ukrainian sky against which stars burned like candles. For the Ukrainian sky is dark, dark like nowhere in Russia.

I liked the peasants' food and often ate at their houses, even though we had the same things at home. Theirs tasted better. In the barracks they ate sauerkraut, cabbage soup and kasha with beef fat (instead of lard), and cracklings mixed with kasha. The smell of cabbage soup filled the barracks and even the streets. The peasants ate pure fat with garlic and Ukrainian borscht made from fresh vegetables (beet stock, beans, potatoes, beets), sour cream and fried cakes, onion knishes, polenta with milk or butter, fermented milk with potatoes, and so on.

In the winter, when the factory people worked day and night, the peasants would weave marvelous materials, sew clothes; the girls would sew and embroider, sing songs, dance, and the boys would play fiddles. In the morning, whoever needed to would go into Kamanets-Podolsk or Yampol to the market.

There was none of this with the factory people. I quite disliked that. Sometimes I would run to the factory with my brother to eat sugared candy, but then I'd become convinced that honey was better, tastier. This comparison gave me the idea that honey could replace sugar and then there wouldn't be any need for factories, for working day and night. Bees would bring the honey, one grandfather to watch over the bees, and that's it!

I wasn't against setting up apiaries in all the fields where the beetroots

grew. Oh, those wonderful grandfathers! They knew everything about bees, and when they talked, you listened.

*

I always envied the peasant boys who lived, it seemed to me, in complete freedom, amidst nature. They tended horses, rode into the night, and shepherded large herds of pigs which they rode home at night, mounted on top and holding onto their ears. The squealing pigs would tear along, faster than horses, raising a huge cloud of dust along the country road.

*

Often I would fall out with the peasant boys. In spite of all my sympathies with them, they still considered me a factory kid. They always seemed on the verge of giving me a good thrashing, but occasionally accepted me into their company. Sometimes I'd find myself in a state of disfavor, left alone, which I didn't like. I didn't like the factory boys. Because of their suits, they couldn't climb trees or run in the swampy meadows. I, on the other hand, could never be found close to home. Bored with being by myself, I'd go to a neighbor boy's house and talk him into going to the woods.

Not a single kite could escape my eye, not a single crow, spying out baby chicks. I always carried a bow and arrows with me, and they were always ready to pierce the body of a kite or crow. I was an inveterate hunter.

Once I became so angry with the factory kids that I declared war on them. I hired myself an army of peasant boys, paying them each a piece of refined sugar. I pinched a whole package, fifty-four pieces, from the cupboard. This pound supplied an army of fifty-four men. If the war were to last two or three days, then I would have to pay each a piece of sugar a day. We prepared for war. We made bows from hoops meant for the sugar barrels, and stockpiled arrows made from bog-rush (river reeds) with tar tips. Each warrior was to have no less than seventy arrows. The factory kids weren't sleeping either, they, too, were making preparations. The evening before the battle, we had already started shooting, one by one, factory boys passing by. The battle lasted all day, till we bumped off the factory boys from behind a fence, sneaking up to their rear from between the woodpiles. It ended with my arrow hitting the leader of the factory boys in the eye, and his flying past me. We shot at each other point-blank.

It was hot work. That evening at home, they took my pants down and papa laid down the law. I suffered this disgrace, although in my heart I remained a hero.

*

The village, as I said earlier, engaged in art (at the time, I hadn't heard of such a word). Or rather, it's more accurate to say that it made things that I liked very much. These things contained the whole mystery of my sympathies with the peasants. I watched with great excitement how the peasants made wall paintings, and would help them smear the floors of their huts with clay and make designs on the stove. The peasant women were excellent at drawing roosters, horses, and flowers. The paints were all prepared on the spot from various clays and dyes. I tried to transport this culture onto the stoves in my own house, but it didn't work. I was told I was just making a mess on the stove. In turn came fences, barn walls, and so forth.

*

The peasants' entire way of life attracted me strongly. I decided that I'd never live and work in factories. And I'd never go to school. I thought that the peasants' life was wonderful, that they had everything they needed, that they had no need of factories or learning how to read. They made everything for themselves, even paint. They also had honey and so there was no need to boil sugar. One grandfather collected a lot of honey, sitting all summer in the apiary of a flower garden and looking after the bees. Any peasant who had a grandfather had bees. Everyone had a garden and pears. Oh, the pears, and apples, and plums, and cherries! I loved cherry dumplings with sour cream and honey.

I imitated the peasants' entire way of life. I smeared garlic on crusts of bread, ate fat with my fingers, ran barefoot and didn't recognize shoes. Peasants always struck me as clean and well dressed. I recall weddings at which the bride and her friends were some colorfully decorated tribe, in costumes of colorful woolen fabrics, ribbons plaited into braids and headdresses, leather boots on copper and iron horseshoes, boot-tops embroidered with designs. The groom and his friends wore gray sheepskin hats, blue pants, or rather, wide trousers which required no less than sixteen arshins of material, a white embroidered shirt and a wide red wool belt.

The bride walked through all the streets of the village with her friends, singing. She made low bows to anyone she passed in the street, bowing three times.

It was against this background that my feelings for art developed.

*

All the sugar factories in those days came into contact once a year with Kiev. A large fair was held yearly in Kiev, to which merchants came from everywhere. The sugar factory managers or their representatives would also go to contract and hire various specialists in sugar refining. Therefore in the

dormitory the fair was called "the contracts." My father also went to these contracts as a highly skilled sugar refiner, and he took me with him. Thus I got to know the city and its life, and also the art which was displayed in the shop windows of the stationery stores.

I wasn't much interested in the fair, although it was splendid. My father would go off on his business and I would run from store to store, looking for hours at pictures. Thus, little by little, Kiev became a new environment influencing my psyche and revealed to me a new existence, that of art.

At that time, I didn't understand anything, didn't debate questions of Kievan art and the art of the village, but perceived them both purely emotionally, with pleasant excitement and a great desire to draw the very same pictures myself. I didn't know that schools existed where they taught drawing and painting, but thought that these pictures, too, were painted the same way peasants painted flowers, horses and roosters, without any kind of formal training or education.

But I sensed that there was a difference between Kievan art and village art. One picture on display made a strong impression on me. In Kievan art, everything depicted was very lifelike and natural. The picture which fascinated me was of a young girl sitting on a bench and peeling a potato. I was struck by the lifelikeness of the potato and the peelings, which lay like ribbons on the bench next to an incomparably drawn pot. This picture was a revelation for me, and I remember it to this day. I was strongly moved by its technique of expression. To be able to draw a picture like that was my desire, but I continued drawing horses in the primitive spirit of the peasant women, who all knew how to draw flowers and paint murals. Art belonged more to them than to men.

*

With each year I improved in this activity and grew more and more strongly drawn to Kiev. The colorful brick houses, the hills, the Dnieper, the distant horizon and steamships. Its whole life affected me more and more. The peasant girls would cross the Dnieper in canoes, carrying butter, milk and sour cream, covering the shores and streets of Kiev, and giving it a special color.

My father wasn't especially pleased with my attraction to art. He knew that there existed such a thing as artists who painted pictures, but he would never talk about this subject. He still intended me to follow the same line that he had. Father told me that the artist's life was bad and that a great many of them wound up in jail, something he didn't want for his son.

My mother also engaged in various kinds of needlework and lacemaking. I learned this art from her and also embroidered and did needlepoint.

*

I was twelve years old. I was already, you could say, a master artist since I prepared my own watercolor paints and made my own brushes. I was already quite good at drawing horses in different ways, with landscapes and people, and painted them, naturally, in arbitrary colors. I wasn't alone; I had already found a colleague, and the two of us drew pictures of every possible subject.

We were living at the time in the small town of Belopolye in the Kharkov province, where I found a drawing partner who was very much devoted to art. My friend was in the know about making paints before I was. He had flat stones on which he ground his paints. The paints were made not only from various kinds of dirt and clay, but also from certain powders, from which we made both watercolors and oil paints. But we didn't give preference to oil paints and settled on watercolors. The work went on. One fine day, my friend came running to my house out of breath, called me to come out and whispered:

—I heard my uncle tell my aunt that they've sent for the most famous artists in Petersburg to come paint icons in the church.

This excited us tremendously, for we had never before seen living artists. We followed every conversation of our elders about the arrival of the artists, and to this end my friend would go secretly every day to his uncle's house.

The time came, and three artists really did arrive! The church parishioners were also a little excited by this event, not so much by the artists as the carrying-out of repairs and the collecting of money. But we were interested only in the artists. To get into the church and watch how these famous artists worked—we very much wanted to do this. And all our thoughts were concentrated in this direction, day and night! We had already examined the church window to see where it was possible to crawl through. As a longtime resident of Belopolye, it was my friend's job to find out where they would be living and working. But he didn't want to ask his uncle; for some reason it was a secret. We went out to the main street in town. We walked secretly—I along one side of the street, glancing at the more or less suspicious looking faces, and he along the other. That's how we hunted for the artists. We figured they were bound to come to the main street to take a stroll, like all the townspeople did. Any out-of-towner was immediately apparent in Belopolye. We walked from morning till evening. We stood outside the main bakery and the butcher's shop, but to our dismay, we kept seeing only familiar faces: going into the bakery, the butcher's, or on the street. There were no outsiders to be seen. For some reason we conducted all these searches in secret, letting on to no one and keeping quiet at home. How much simpler it would have been to go to the church and ask the sexton about the artists!

After our failure on the main street, we started walking along all the town's streets, but at last we started lying in wait around the church itself. We kept watch together, taking turns for lunch. But then we changed this method. Fearing that one might see them before the other, we stocked up on rations and sat

together in front of the church from morning till evening. There was no sign of any artists.

We went to his uncle's. My friend pretended he had come to visit his aunt and introduced me to her. She asked: "Whose is he?" He answered: "He's visiting from Parkhomovka" (the village where the sugar factory was). We hung around his aunt for a long time and couldn't think of how to ask his uncle about the artists. His aunt brought out a piece of fat and bread for each of us. We moved over to some logs and started eating. Then we went home; neither his aunt nor uncle had said anything about the artists. And the artists, meanwhile, were already in Belopolye. A few more days went by the same way. One hot evening when we were coming back from swimming, we suddenly noticed some boys and girls standing around a house on the shortest street in Belopolye and peering into the window. We also went up to it, and what did we see? On the walls of the room, hanging on "rags" (as we called them), were painted heads of boys, girls and cows drinking water. The artists were walking around the room. There were three of them. We stared at them as if they were the most fantastic rarity. We were startled by their long hair and strange shirts.

That night we slept poorly, waiting for morning so we could go to the house where the artists were staying. In the morning, while everyone else was still sleeping, I slipped out of the house and ran straight to the observation post as fast as I could. When I got there, my friend was already waiting. No one came out. We stood at some distance so as not to call attention to ourselves, even though we weren't bothering anyone. Cows were driven past, the sun came up, but the artists didn't appear. At last the window opened and an artist peered out at the street. We walked away, pretending to be interested in the gardens. An hour later, the gate opened and the artists stood before our very eyes. They had boxes on straps slung over their shoulders, umbrellas and other incomprehensible things. They were wearing shirts. Blue pants and boots. The artists walked out of town, and we followed behind them. In the fields stood mills, rye sprang up and there were oak trees in the distance. We walked through the rye where we couldn't be seen, and wherever there was wheat, we crawled.

Upon reaching the mill, the artists settled in, took out their boxes, opened up their umbrellas and started to paint.

We studied everything with the closest possible attention, not allowing a single detail to slip away from us. We wanted to see what they did and how. We crawled as cautiously as possible, on our stomachs, holding our breath. We were able to crawl up very close. We saw colored tubes from which they squeezed paint, which was extremely interesting. On the "rag" appeared the sun, the mill, and so forth.

Our excitement knew no bounds. We crawled around for two hours. The artists stopped working and headed off to the mill to eat breakfast. They talked to each other in Russian and laughed. Taking advantage of the moment, we left, still crawling, came out of the rye and took to our heels with all our might.

The artists were a shock of such magnitude that my friend started to consider running away with them to Petersburg as soon as they had finished their work in the church. But since we were subject to our parents, and our parents were subject to other circumstances of life, at the very most interesting moment in my friend's and my life, these circumstances prevented us from working out our plan for running away to Petersburg. My father moved our family to the Volchok Sugar Factory in the Chernigov district, twenty versts from the city of Konotop. Engineers at this factory would see and praise my work, and suggest to my father that he send me to art school. At that time, I was copying pictures from the magazine *Niva*. I pestered my father and he wrote an application to the Moscow Art School (so the engineers said). But instead of mailing it, he dropped that application into his desk and announced to me three months later that the school had no more room.

Ever since Belopolye, tubes, palettes, brushes, umbrellas, folding chairs had given me no peace of mind. I was sixteen, and it seemed I had already painted everything—cows, horses, people—that the artists in magazines drew. On my sixteenth birthday, my mother took me to Kiev where she bought me everything the storekeeper told her I needed.

I was living at the time in the city of Konotop. Oh, the whole glorious city of Konotop glistened with fat! At the markets and by the train station, behind long rows of tables, sat women who were called *salnitsas*² and smelled of garlic. On the tables there were piles of various kinds of fat, smoked and nonsmoked with nice rinds, rings of Cracow sausage stuffed with big pieces of meat and pork fat, blood sausage, buckwheat puddings with an unusual aroma that gnawed at all the iron in a man; there was ham also with fat around the edges, rolls of round *salniks* and round little sausages with gristle. The *salnitsas* themselves glistened in their greasy clothes in which the sun's rays were reflected, and they smelled of garlic.

I'd buy a ring of sausage for five kopecks, break it into pieces and eat it at the market like everyone did. I didn't even look at the lamb which was one-and-a-half kopecks a pound, or at the beef. Pork was my favorite dish and also fish, especially dried sea roach, two kopecks for a large piece with a red, fatty spine and caviar. I loved to eat pork and fish with white bread. Or to buy from the *salnitsa* a small piglet for forty kopecks, roasted with a red skin drenched in grease. The fried skin would crunch on the teeth, and I'd eat the whole thing without letting my parents know.

I grew up with this Ukrainian fat and garlic in Konotop. But this was the

2. *Salnitsa*—a neologism from the word *salnik*, a thick buckwheat porridge with mutton fat; thus, a *salnitsa* is a *salnik*-vendor. (Trans.)

very pleasant side of Konoton. Its other characteristic features were an impassable swamp when it rained, and unbelievable dust in dry periods. Whenever some old man would ride by in a cart, he would raise such a cloud of dust that you couldn't see either the horses or the houses. It was said that once when Catherine the Second had had the fortune to pass through this glorious town, her horses sank and drowned in the swampy streets. From that time on, supposedly, the town came to be called Konotop.³ As always in these towns, the main street was called Nevsky Prospect. On both sides of this street planks were laid down in case of rain. Whenever the black dirt would dissolve into mud an arshin deep, people would walk along these planks. Sows would lie in the street itself suckling piglets, slopping around in the mud or digging through the garbage which spilled out from the courtyards onto Nevsky Prospect.

I lived far from the Prospect in a very nice little Ukrainian house surrounded by a garden.

I painted my first picture, *Moonlit Night* [*Lunnaya Noch*]. I painted mostly according to my impressions, as I had done in Belopolye. I couldn't paint at all from life, even though when I bought my paints, the far-sighted salesman threw in a book by Professor Iennike, I believe, which explained how to paint portraits and landscapes. According to Iennike, in order to paint a portrait, you needed to put in fifty-four "body" colors, and in a landscape no fewer "grassy" ones. I couldn't make sense of all these colors and just painted however the Lord wanted me to. I painted according to my impressions, and chose whatever colors corresponded to my impressions of what I had seen.

Moonlit Night was my first painting on canvas, measuring three-quarters of an arshin. It was a landscape with a river, rocks, and a moored canoe. I was told that the reflection of the moonbeams in the picture was very lifelike. This picture made a big impression on all my friends. One of my friends possessed a commercial streak and suggested I display this work in a stationery shop on Nevsky, but I was opposed to this and terribly overmodest. My mood was strange: I was ashamed, you could say, to show the work that I had done with such satisfaction. But on one occasion my friend took my *Moonlit Night* without my permission. The storekeeper was struck by this picture. He gladly took it, as my friend related, and immediately displayed it in the store window. I too went to look at my first exhibition, but I was afraid of being recognized as the author. Office workers would stop and look and look. . . . The picture didn't stay there long; it was bought for five roubles. For that I could eat a ring of sausage a day for a whole month. My finances increased strongly and the storekeeper asked me to bring him another *Moonlit Night*, only one with a windmill. But I painted a different picture, twice the size, depicting a small grove with storks. It, too, was sold.

3. Literally, "Horse Swamp." (Trans.)

Time passed, I went to Kiev and met Pimonenko. His pictures made a great impression on me. He showed me his painting *The Hopak* [*Gopak*].⁴ I was staggered by everything I saw in his studio. There were many easels with pictures depicting the life of the Ukraine.

I showed him my work, by this time nature studies. I entered the Kiev Art School. But circumstances forced me to move to the city of Kursk. Kursk, of course, isn't Kiev, but it was still a city. That was in 1896. I was already a bit of an experienced painter. The city of Kursk would occupy a large part of my future biography.

My work in Kursk developed under the influence of the "Itinerants" [*Peredvizhniki*], Shishkin and Repin, whom I knew through reproductions. Nature became for me the reality which had to be captured with complete accuracy in my sketches.

With the transfer of the Moscow-Kursk Railway Administration to Kursk, there came with the workers a certain accountant, a great lover of painting, who had studied with the renowned Ukrainian master, Murashko, in Chernigov, I believe. He was Valentin Loboda. We became friends. Soon there appeared another art lover, Fyodor Yakovlevsky, and also Mamotin. Loboda talked the manager of the railroad into letting us use one of the administration building's rooms for drawing during off hours. We immediately formed a circle of art lovers. We then sent off to the Moscow Art School for various aids, plaster figures, anatomies, busts of Venus, David, and others. We drew with great enthusiasm, and kept drawing till we had achieved the full illusion of the plaster representation. Then we moved on to nature.

Shortly after, our camp was visited by yet another genuine artist who reeked of the Academy of Arts. He was Lev Kvachevsky. He had been a student at the Academy of Arts in the landscape painting class. So how was it that he wound up in Kursk instead of the Academy in Petersburg? It later came to light that he had gone to the Crimea to do some sketches and had met a beautiful young girl there. And, well, he got married! You can't go to the Academy with a wife, there's no money; but the parents, as they say, had hands and set him up as an official in the Excise Duty Administration. And from there he had received a post in Kursk as an Excise Supervisor in the Speransky Alcohol Refinery. The place was suitable and always lively. The apartment, the heating, the lighting were free, all we needed was a little to eat and drink. Kvachevsky's apartment was at that time the gathering place for artists and officials. There were some very interesting characters among them. Art was talked about a lot; we discussed our work, criticized each other severely. The atmosphere was always cheerful and merry, regardless of whether or not there was any money.

4. *Hopak*—a Ukrainian dance. (Trans.)

In expanding our program, we discovered a truly talented artist, a student of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, Vladimir Golikov. His work had a very good effect on me. The freshness of his colors, their pleasant tone, their wide, generalized brushstroke excited my emotions like yeast in dough. I found an enormous difference between the work of Golikov and that of Kvachevsky, the two opposing schools of Moscow and Petersburg. Golikov's work always put me in a special mood; I felt the straight line of his painting, and therefore it was close to me in spirit. But he stood outside our circle and was lazy. I wanted to beat him, he was so impossibly lazy! He would always sit in his workshop like a hermit and think, pace, but work very little. This annoyed me tremendously: how could one be so talented at painting and not work all day?!

Lev Kvachevsky was my very closest friend. We couldn't live without each other. We were united by a great desire to work and by our outdoor sketching sessions (the fact that he lived at an alcohol refinery was of no significance for our friendship). We had much in common in our personalities. One thing we could never agree on was the relationship of painting to life. I kept to a looser manner of drawing, while his was more painstaking. We'd walk thirty versts every day in summer, spring, and winter for our sketch sessions, arguing all the way. The arguments would stop as soon as we sat down to paint. We'd stop arguing when we sat down to eat. He always carried a flask with him: Speransky's nectar, as he called it, or heavenly drops, or Mary's tears. We'd discuss other matters when we ate, or reminisce about the Ukraine. He and I both were Ukrainians. We'd leave the house in the morning, carrying enough rations with us for the day. My daily portion consisted of a pound of fat, several pieces of garlic, a pound of smoked brisket and five or six French rolls. Boiled brisket with ribs and gristle is a pleasant taste. Kvachevsky was more delicate by nature; he'd take more ham, smoked sausage, Swiss cheese, ten eggs, homemade white bread, and, of course, his flask of heavenly drops. It was a pleasure to watch with what an appetite he ate. In the village, we'd also buy, for five kopecks, a pot of cold baked milk with thick cream and a yellow crust, which was more delicious than any pastry.

He and I both loved nature, the fields, the forests, and we listened to the whole music of the fields, the birds and the local color. We cursed the time we had to waste earning money, he in the Excise Office, and I in the Technical

Service Department of the Moscow-Kursk Railway. Like him, I, too, was quite lucky. The supervisor of the Technical Department had nothing against sketching, he too loved art, and I enjoyed privileges (sometimes I postponed work until evening). I was also supported by the brother of the sculptor Beklemishev, the architect of the Technical Department who had designed the railway building, he, too, loved art, and I enjoyed privileges (sometimes I postponed work until evening). I was also supported by the brother of the sculptor Beklemishev, and I on the pretext that I loved art.

We organized a Kursk Society of Art Lovers, began holding yearly exhibitions, invited artists from the capital, worked, developed artistic culture and grew ourselves. An outlook on art was forged in the city of Kursk. Against the dull backdrop of life in Kursk, our circle was a real volcano of artistic life. I adopted the most revolutionary point of view. Kvachevsky also changed his viewpoints not only on art, but on life as well. I took action through painting, but there stood beside me another friend, now known to the entire musical world as the outstanding composer Nikolai Roslavets. He took action through music. He was the only friend I had made in Konotop. Later, I will describe in detail all his activities and my own in Kursk. No matter how good things were in Kursk, no matter how close my friends were, like a wolf to the forest I was drawn to Moscow or Petersburg, where there could be found the true art to which I had been introduced by Golikov and Kvachevsky. Without these cities, no one would ever become an artist and would wind up in the provinces, unless he got married in the Crimea. Thoughts about these cities of art had tormented me for a long time. But these thoughts and longings got smashed on the basis of finances. But all the same, the longing was very strong and it led me to work in the Technical Department of the Administration of the Moscow-Kursk Railway. I saved my money, preparing my financial base. Finally, I was ready.

My friends were troubled by my bold move, but their wives were extremely happy. I have to say that my friends' wives hated me because I was always taking their husbands away during any free time to go out sketching: therefore, they were never home. My friends would talk about all the difficulties and horrors of the city, but that didn't frighten me. I took account of my finances and figured I'd need enough for a full academic year, and so in the spring I went to Kursk to work. Then I went to Moscow; that was in 1904. I went as an impressionist who had taken part in exhibitions. In the spring, I went back to Kursk. In the fall I went again to Moscow where I fell in with a "commune." The commune was in Lefortovo.

The artists' commune occupied a house belonging to the artist V. Kurdyumov. Or rather, not relying on his talent, the artist V. Kurdyumov took for his dowry two houses when he got married. The house where the "communards" gathered was a spacious, two-storeyed, wooden house with twenty nice, bright rooms. Some thirty men made up the commune. Each was to pay seven roubles a month for his room.

It was in this commune that I, too, took up residence. By habit, I started to work immediately. I painted impressionistic pictures and sketches.

The company was merry, but hungry. I felt like a provincial among the communards from the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, promptly paid my money and shared in all the expenses. But the communards didn't fulfill any of their obligations to the owner of the house; no one even thought about paying him according to their agreement. But worst of all, no one even considered working. This demoralization had the opposite effect on me. I strained my every nerve more and more towards work. My whole financial base crumbled within two or three months, and I fell like a chicken into soup, completely unequipped for life in the big city. But I didn't give in to depression and I worked, studied art, went to the studio. In spite of my naturalistic leaning, of my feelings towards nature, I was strongly moved by icons. I felt some kinship and something splendid in them. I saw in them the entire Russian people with all their emotional creativeness. I'd then recall my childhood: the horses, flowers and roosters of the primitive murals and wood carvings. I sensed some bond between peasant art and icons: icon art is a high-cultural form of peasant art. I discovered in them the whole spiritual side of the "Peasant Age"; I came to understand the peasants through icons, saw their faces not as saints, but as ordinary people. And also the coloring and the attitude of the painter. I understood Botticelli and Cimabue. Cimabue was closer to me; he possessed the spirit I had sensed in peasants.

This was the third stage of my artistic transition. The first stage was when I switched over from the primitive representations of peasant art to the naturalist school, to Shishkin and Repin. This path was unexpectedly halted by a great moment, when, through painting, I stumbled upon an extraordinary phenomenon in my perception of nature. There stood before me among the trees a newly whitewashed house. It was a sunny day. The sky was cobalt-blue. One side of the house was in the shade and the other was lit by the sun. For the first time I saw the bright reflections of the blue sky, the pure, transparent tones. From then on I began working in bright, joyful, sunny paints. One of these sketches is in the Tretyakov Gallery (*The Garden [Sadik]*). I painted a great number of these sketches over the next few years. From that time on, I became an impressionist.

Icon Moscow overturned all my theories and led me to the third stage of development. Through icon art, I understood the emotional art of the peasants,

which I had loved earlier, but whose meaning I hadn't fully understood. In what way did this art overturn my striving for lifelikeness and the sciences— anatomy, perspective, the study of nature through the drawing of sketches? All of the Itinerants' convictions regarding nature and naturalism were overturned by the fact that the icon painters, who had achieved a great mastery of technique, conveyed meaning outside of spatial and linear perspective. They employed color and form on the basis of a purely emotional interpretation of theme. They painted without regard to any of the rules established by the classics and especially the academy of V. Makovsky and Repin. I distinctly pictured to myself the whole line from the great icon art to the horses and roosters of the murals, spinning wheels and costumes of peasant art. In precisely the same way, I could also see the other line of art which was called the art of the people of the highest strata, of the aristocrats and palaces. This was the art of antiquity and the Renaissance. "Itinerancy" I attributed to the middle layer of society, to the intelligentsia and to the revolutionary-minded strata. This whole line I also considered to be high, but it seemed to me that the Renaissance and ancient art was an art for the sake of beauty, while in "Itinerancy" I saw an art of propaganda and a denunciation of the authorities and social reality. Later I would proceed neither along the road of antiquity and the Renaissance, nor "Itinerancy." I remained on the side of peasant art and began painting in the primitive spirit. In the first period, I imitated icon painting. The second was purely a "labor" period: I drew peasants at work, harvesting, threshing. In the third period, I drew closer to the "suburban genre" (carpenters, gardeners, vacation spots, swimmers). The fourth period was the "city faces" (floor washers, maids, lackeys, servants).

*

I'm going back a little, to the period of the commune and its way of life.

The commune was a true, hungry Bohemia. With my appetite, I looked like a real country boy. But fat and garlic didn't have to be bought every day. The commune collected money for soup bones which the artist Ivan Bokhan would go for. The butchers would ask him, "For dogs or humans?," which embarrassed him terribly. We made soup often. Sometimes the commune ate in the School's cafeteria. Lunch wasn't expensive, twelve kopecks: buckwheat porridge with butter or beef fat and borscht with meat.

This was the environment I worked in, you couldn't say peacefully, but still I worked. I was already dreaming about holding out until spring when I would go to Kursk and again earn money for the fall, draw sketches in the summer and eat like a human being once more.

*

The Revolution of 1905. There was unrest and anxiety in the commune

as well; we began our own preparation to take to the streets. I remained at my bench (my easel) and continued painting. The tension mounted. Fedosya (the cook) was our main informant. She reported to us on the development of events along the line of the Black Hundred (the yardman was a friend of hers). Next to our commune there was a dormitory for students of some technical engineering college. Fedosya had contacts with the dormitory and the yardmen next door, who told her in confidence about all the horrors being planned by the Black Hundred ("Tonight they're supposed to carve up some students and who knows, they may come after you"). We started taking measures, moved around all the plaster casts, the huge David, all the Venuses, the benches and chairs, and began barricading the doors and windows. We ourselves went up to the top floor and blocked the way up. The owner of the house, the artist Kurdyumov, showed us a secret passage through which it was possible, in the event of an attack, to pass from one house to another and reach the street (the commune's house was in a courtyard).

My behavior started to annoy one of the members of the commune, the artist Antonov. A wonderful fellow, he scolded me for painting at a time when I should be taking to the streets. He was tall and lanky (whenever he picked up an ax, he had no room to swing because of his height). Reproaching me, he would sit on the floor with his legs tucked under him, drink vodka and gnaw on a soup bone with gristle and tendons. Waving his bone, he would appeal to me to come outside.

Tension mounted. Evening fell. We didn't light the fires. A student came to see us. I introduced myself to him. Kirill Shutko informed us of the progress of the Revolution. I headed into town along Tverskaya Street. At the corner of Leontyevsky Pereulok, I was surrounded by the Black Hundred. I was wearing a cap, an overcoat with a collar, a black shirt, and had long hair:

— Hold it, Socialist!

And several Finnish knives flashed. I calmly said:

— Hey! Anyone got a smoke?

And then I stunned them with their own familiar curse words. One of them produced a cigarette, I put it in my mouth, fished for a match, swore again and left (I wasn't a smoker).

I went back to Lefortovo, to the commune. The night was troubled; gunfire was heard. In the morning, the fighting began. Many of the "communards" disappeared. Antonov argued with me, took the ax he had been practicing with for battle, and went out into the street. He caught a cab and told the driver to take him to the Red Gates (to the barricades). Later we learned that he had been seized on the next street by policemen.

I got hold of a "bulldog" revolver and some bullets. It was a real war. I joined up with a group whose pockets were full of bullets and various types of revolvers. This group was also joined by some hunters. We headed for the Red Gates, where the battle was going on. They sent us back to the Sukharev Tower.

We were supposed to secure the Sukharev post, after we had partitioned off Sadovaya at the second Meshchanskaya. We (several men) were posted on Sreten-skaya Street for observation. We started breaking up fences to build a barricade. The work went on towards the evening. We noticed that soldiers had started moving along Sretenka. We headed for the passages to the Sukharev Tower. Soldiers quickly approached, heading towards the square. A command was heard and the soldiers readied their rifles. We let the barricade know. A moment later, we also gave a hushed command. We fired. The soldiers, even though they were in readiness, hadn't expected such impudence. We fired time after time. I quickly emptied the five bullets in my revolver. There was no time to reload: the soldiers, having discovered us, began spraying the passageway with bullets. In spite of their fire, their bullets didn't touch anyone at our post; only plastering fell down. We made it to the barricade, but the soldiers formed a chain and kept shooting. They were answered in kind, bullets whizzing overhead. After each volley from their side, I wanted to jump up for some reason, as though bullets were supposed to fly underfoot. The exchange of fire was short because many ran away. There were wounded and dead. Returning their fire, our group retreated to a courtyard of some house. Having closed the gates and taken the staircase in the courtyard, we began climbing over a fence into a neighboring courtyard. The barricade was taken by the soldiers, but our group almost all made it into the other courtyard and decided to go to Sretenka and sneak up from the rear. The soldiers entered the courtyard. Those who hadn't managed to crawl over scattered in all directions. I ducked into the first stairwell I came upon, intending to climb onto the roof and crawl down the drainpipe to the street.

Sometimes things occur which rescue people from the most desperate situations.

That's what happened to me. Having reached the third floor, I read on a door the nameplate of someone I knew. I was so taken aback that I was seized with terror, mixed with the desire to escape from my situation. What should I do? Knock or look for the attic? I decided to look for the attic, but could find no entrance. I stood on the stairs and listened; was anyone coming? I counted my bullets—there were five or six. No one was coming. I decided to knock. The door opened.

— It's you! How'd you get away? Got a gun?

— Yes.

— This is trouble, they'll come looking. Look, take your things off, hide the gun under the rug in the hall. Take off your coat and shirt and put on a waistcoat.

I obeyed; there was no time to ask questions. He also took off his jacket, leaving only his waistcoat. Then he took out some tobacco and lit it. There was a lot of smoke. It gave the impression that we'd been sitting all day long smoking and drinking. He brought out some vodka, sausage and cucumbers.

— Sit down and drink.

We drank, and it went straight to my head—I was hungry, and in such cases, vodka always goes straight to your head. He started singing “There’s a birch in the field, kalina-malina.” I sang the bass.

— Sing louder!

A knock on the door. He called out loudly from his seat, “Come in!” (he had purposely left the door unlocked). An officer came in with a gun in his hand.

— Any fugitives?

— What fugitives? Would you like a quick glass? It’s my birthday and my friend and I here . . .

The officer’s anger immediately changed to politeness. He had a drink, another, and yet another. I sat down, sprawled out over my chair, sang “Kalina-malina” through my nose and gesticulated freely.

— Look, he’s certainly in fine fettle . . .

The officer was satisfied: everything was in order. He wiped his lips, excused himself and cried out to his soldiers, “Go on back out!”

We kept up this scene of the first act all night, expecting spectators the whole time.

In the morning, we joined the landlady for a trip to the store, borrowing a small basket from her. We walked out of the courtyard as if nothing were wrong. On the street there stood a short, large-headed officer with some soldiers. . . .

*

I went back again to Kursk and continued my impressionism. I loved nature in the spring very much, in April and the beginning of May. I no longer went out on sketching sessions, but worked in the apple orchard next to a small house which I was renting for twelve roubles a month. This orchard was my real studio.

My best friend Kvachevsky would come by to scold me. He couldn’t bear my light blue tones, but in the end, I brought him around. His color scale shifted in the direction of impressionism and he drew fine sketches. His works are collected in the Kursk Museum. *The Clear Glade* [*Yasnaya Polyana*] was his best work; it could have been shown at any major exhibition (he died a long time ago).

I continued working in impressionism in my studio garden. I understood that the essence of impressionism wasn’t to draw phenomena or objects to a “T,” but that the whole point lay in the pure texture of painting, purely in the relationship of all my energy to phenomena, and only to the painterly quality which they carry or contain. My entire work was like that of a weaver who weaves an amazing texture of pure fabric, with the sole difference that I gave a form to this pure fabric of painting, a form which sprang only from the emo-

tional requirements and qualities of painting. I learned that the main stimulus for a painter is always the painterly quality alone. Everything else is inserted into this culture; for example, themes expressing, through means of painting, the psychology of a man sitting for a picture, or illustrating scenes from life, a world outlook, or the heroism of the masses.

I separated these two sides of art and determined that the art of painting generally consists of two parts. One part is pure—the pure unit of painting as such; the other part consists of the objective theme, known as content. Together they comprised an eclectic art, a hybrid of painting and nonpainting. Reality became for me not a phenomenon which should be conveyed with full precision, but a purely painterly phenomenon. Therefore, all the other qualities of an object played no central role, and appeared only to the extent that their contours could not be completely reshaped by the art of painting into an aspect of painting. By working in impressionism, I learned that an objective image never entered into its concerns. If likeness was still maintained, then it was only because the painter hadn’t yet found that form which would portray painting “as such,” without evoking associations with nature and objects, without being an illustration or a story, but as a completely new artistic fact, a new reality, a new truth.

Impressionism led me to look at nature again with new eyes, and it in turn called forth within me new reactions, ignited my spiritual energy towards art, towards working on a completely different side of the phenomenon.

In analyzing my own activity, I noticed that, strictly speaking, I was working on the liberation of the painterly element from the contours of natural phenomena and the liberation of my painting psychology from the power of an object. But there came along another idea and another feeling which frightened, as it were, this form of painting, one which asked: in what form, liberated from the contours of an object, is painting to be embodied, and can such a form be found?

The preceding schools and the “Itinerants” whom I loved, did the following: they picked an appropriate theme (*Christ and the Sinner* by V. Polenov, *The Resurrection of Jairus’s Daughter* by I. Repin) and painted in the form of this theme. That’s also what Rembrandt did (*The Prodigal Son*). But these masters made theme the main content to be expressed through painting. My approach was different. I in no way wanted to make painting a means, but only its own self-content. Gay, in his *Crucifixion*, conveyed the feeling of his painting by clothing it in his theme. Thus in *The Last Supper*, he conveyed the effect of light, for which he used the figure of Judas as a means of achieving a lighting effect. I saw in this picture another relationship; I saw that it was also possible to make the theme a means. Strictly speaking, Gay and several other artists sensed pure painting, but they couldn’t imagine the existence of painting as such, as nonobjective. They sensed the nonobjective, but made representational things. I also found myself in this situation; it still seemed to me that painting in its pure

aspect was lacking something, that it had to be given a content. But on the other hand, the emotional power of painting wouldn't let me see images in their representational nature, especially if the theme had no origin in painting. The naturalism of objects didn't stand up to my criticism, and I began looking for other possibilities not outside, but within the very core of the emotion of painting, expecting that the painting itself would sooner or later provide the form from painterly qualities, and would avoid any electrical connection with an object, with nonpainterly associations. This position led me further and further away from an academic study of nature, from naturalism, from illusionism. My acquaintance with icon art convinced me that the point is not in the study of anatomy and perspective, that it's not in depicting nature in its own truth, but that it's in the sensing of art and artistic reality through emotions. In other words, I saw that reality or theme is something to be transformed into an ideal form arising from the depths of aesthetics. Therefore, in art, anything can become beautiful. Anything not in itself beautiful, but realized on an artistic plane, becomes beautiful.

HAL FOSTER

At once eccentric and crucial, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) is the set piece of the Museum of Modern Art: a bridge between modernist and premodernist painting, a primal scene of modern primitivism. In this painting a step outside the tradition is said to coincide with a leap within it. Yet one wonders if this aesthetic breakthrough is not also a breakdown, psychologically regressive, politically reactionary. The painting presents an encounter in which are inscribed two scenes: the depicted one of the brothel and the projected one of the heralded 1907 visit of Picasso to the collection of tribal artifacts in the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. This double encounter is tellingly situated: the prostitutes in the bordello, the African masks in the Trocadéro, both disposed for recognition, for use.¹ Figured here, to be sure, are both fear and desire of the other,² but is it not desire for mastery and fear of its frustration?

In projecting the primitive onto woman as other, *Femmes* less resolves than is riven by the threat to male subjectivity, displaying its own decentering along with its defense. For in some sense Picasso did intuit one apotropaic function of tribal objects — and adopted them as such, as "weapons":

They were against everything — against unknown threatening spirits.
... I, too, I am against everything. I, too, believe that everything is
unknown, that everything is an enemy! ... women, children ... the

1. As is well known, an early study included two customers of the *demoiselles*, a medical student and a sailor, and was thus distanced as a narrative; with these surrogates removed, the painting becomes a direct address to its masculine subject. As for the Trocadéro, Western man, its source of projection, is absent from it: "What was not displayed in the Musée de l'Homme was the modern West, its art, institutions, and techniques. Thus the orders of the West were everywhere present in the Musée de l'Homme, except on display." (James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 4 [1981], p. 561).

2. See William Rubin, "Picasso," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. Rubin, New York, MOMA, 1984, pp. 252-254. Hilton Kramer, who celebrates the ability of bourgeois culture to negate the primitive "assault," finds this important connection between primitivism and "fear of women" "trivializing" ("The 'Primitive' Conundrum," *The New Criterion* [December 1984], p. 5).

OCTOBER

34

Viktor Shklovsky

*On Poetry and Trans-Sense
Language*

Kazimir Malevich

*Chapters from an Artist's
Autobiography*

Hal Foster

*The "Primitive" Unconscious of
Modern Art*

Homi K. Bhabha

Sly Civility

Christian Metz

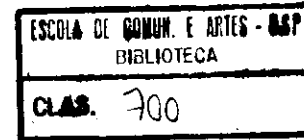
Photography and Fetish

Raymond Bellour

An Interview with Bill Viola

\$6.00/Fall 1985

Published by the MIT Press



OCTOBER

34

editors

Rosalind Krauss
Annette Michelson

executive editor

Douglas Crimp

associate editor

Joan Copjec

editorial associate

Christopher Phillips

OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75184-4) is published quarterly by the MIT Press. Subscriptions: individuals \$20.00; institutions \$49.00; students and retired \$18.00. Foreign subscriptions outside USA and Canada add \$4.00 for surface mail or \$18.00 for air mail. Prices subject to change without notice. Address subscriptions to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 28 Carleton Street, Cambridge, MA 02142. Manuscripts, accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope, should be sent to OCTOBER, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003. No responsibility is assumed for loss or injury. Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 28 Carleton Street, Cambridge, MA 02142. OCTOBER is distributed in the USA by B. DeBoer, Inc. 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, NJ 07110. Copyright © 1985 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The editors of OCTOBER are wholly responsible for its editorial contents.

Viktor Shklovsky

Kazimir Malevich

Hal Foster

Homi K. Bhabha

Christian Metz

Raymond Bellour

*On Poetry and Trans-Sense
Language*

*Chapters from an Artist's
Autobiography*

*The "Primitive" Unconscious of
Modern Art*

Sly Civility

Photography and Fetish

An Interview with Bill Viola

3

25

45

71

81

91

*Cover photo: Guillaume Apollinaire's library, Paris,
with Yombe or Woyo fetish figure.*