

COILED
VERBAL
SPRING

DEVICES OF
LENIN'S
LANGUAGE

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CONTENT

5.

Introduction
Out of Synch with the Thing
SEZGIN BOYNIK

147.

Don't Merchandise Lenin!
VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

149.

Lenin as Decanoniser
VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY

155.

Lenin's Basic Stylistic Tendencies
BORIS EIKHENBAUM

175.

The Deflation of the High Style
in Lenin's Work
LEV YAKUBINSKY

189.

The Lexicon of Lenin as
Polemicist
YURI TYNANOV

225.

Lenin's Discourse:
An Attempt at Rhetorical Analysis
BORIS KAZANSKY

263.

Constructing the Theses
BORIS TOMASHEVSKY

283.

Devices of Lenin's Speech
For the Studies of Lenin's
Language
ALEXEI KRUCHENYKH

345.

Afterword
In the Shadow of Never-Ending
Warfare
DARKO SUVIN

OUT OF SYNCH WITH THE THING

Introduction to
Devices of Lenin's Language

Sezgin Boynik

I

“Lenin is Still Our Contemporary”

“What are we to do now that the LEFs want to join our family?”, was the question Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Culture and Education, asked in the “LEF and Marxism” symposium held in Moscow on 3 July, 1923.¹ The LEF, or the Left Front of the Arts, was established the same year as the symposium, which prior to this public confrontation, had already published two 5,000 copy issues of their LEF Journal. The confrontation had been initiated by Lunacharsky himself in order to draw the balance sheet of Futurists activities in revolutionary Russia. The interest in the questions raised by the LEF was so “great” that 2,000 people showed up to learn to what extent avant-garde art relates to Marxism and Communism.

As Lunacharsky pointed out, the discontent regarding the Marxist elements of LEF was found in the fact that they only approached the Soviets after the revolution. Also, the very form of their Marxism didn’t fit with the Bolshevik character percolating in the underground, which worked in the most unfavourable conditions of the lower depths of clandestine life. Nevertheless, the LEF was not a Futurist minor bohemian art groupuscule akin to a version of *Hylaeans*, *Ego-Futurists*, *Centrifuge*, or *41 Degree*. Gathered around poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, they were an umbrella of many different positions united in the principles of the contemporaneity of Futurism, who already before the October Revolution declared that “*we alone are the face of our Time. Through us, the horn of time blows in the art of the world*”.² After the revolution, they clamoured to declare that the “LEF is the gravedigger of bourgeois art”.³ Furthermore, they “did not simply claim a monopoly on the revolutionary spirit in art, but [claimed to] prove it in open competition”.⁴

A year after the discussion initiated by Lunacharsky, in the summer of 1924, Mayakovsky serving as LEF Journal’s editor wrote an introductory poem to its fifth issue. Protesting against the commercialisation of Lenin, Mayakovsky declared that “Lenin is still our contemporary”. He published six articles in the journal’s theory section by notorious Formalists, who analysed the language of Lenin. We present here the first English

translation of these texts written by Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Lev Yakubinsky, Yuri Tynyanov, Boris Kazansky, and Boris Tomashevsky, leading Russian Formalists, together with Futurist poet Alexei Kruchenykh's companion pamphlet. It is in this episode of the history of the Russian avant-garde when the LEFists—as a conglomerate of radical leftist positions in art—approached the Bolsheviks with most unambiguous terms. This alone deserves some attention. Unfortunately, the episode has remained a black sheep in the history of Russian Formalism, and the Russian avant-garde in general. In her monograph on LEF, Halina Stephan dismissed the act as “opportunistic, and tactical”, while Victor Erlich, the distinguished scholar of Russian Formalism, commented that “seldom has so much intellectual finesse and sophistication been lavished on so essentially bleak a subject”.⁵ For Boris Groys, this collection was the crux of the “sanctification” and “canonisation” of Lenin, paving the way for a “Stalinist art of living”.⁶ Echoing this, Dragan Kujundžić—in the only English language book about Lenin in relation to LEF—finds the collection “excessive and embarrassing”, and in the service of a “mummification” project of the will to power with words.⁷

After almost a century since its initial publication, we are pleased to present these texts in the hope that they will initiate discussions about the politics of the avant-garde, beyond the usual anxious and uneasy discords. There are two principle reasons for the deadlocks that now arise when dealing with the politics of avant-garde in the context of 1920s Russia. One is that students of the Russian avant-garde art are often historians and theoreticians ignorant of the contradictions stemming from contemporary art practices. The immediate consequences of this omission is their neglect of the processes of abstraction, which were crucial to artistic practice, and fundamental to the avant-garde's quest to challenge the normative structures of culture. The result is a soft take that overrides the contradictions inherent within avant-garde art practices. The second error is to view the imperialist war and the October Revolution as dynamics running parallel to, and independent from, these artistic processes. The theoretical consequences of this are the entanglement of art and politics on arbitrary grounds. As a result, art is released from the clamps of determinism, then pulled back to politics by the spontaneous will of

the researcher. In this case, the contradictions and unevenness of the revolution is presented as a catalogue of instances that could be applied arbitrarily to any artistic question. To put it in more technical terms, we can say that the omission is made across two registers: firstly in artistic terms—by avoiding the avant-garde demand for contemporaneity—and secondly, in politics—by discarding the question of conjuncture.

By actualising these texts on Lenin which have been disregarded for almost a century, the aim is to introduce both the contradictions of art and the antagonisms of politics. The very act of actualisation is here reinstated through the theoretical possibilities these works raised a hundred years ago. Thus, the publication of these texts is theoretically justified through the contemporary assumption of the LEF position. The actuality of the question of novel forms in ongoing insurrections in contemporary political conjuncture, and the importance given to language during the political and economic crisis, further supports the publication of these texts. In the background of the current world situation of warmongering, we are determined to look at the most contradictory experiments of the artistic avant-garde.

Parallel to this theoretical impasse is the methodological impatience of art historians anxious to avoid the vertigo of contradictions within revolutionary politics. A good example is Marjorie Perloff, who in her book on the Futurist movement, manages to squeeze the politics of Russian Futurism into two-and-half pages, a *tour de force* of political theory that evolves from Leon Trotsky to Robert Tucker, by way of Walter Benjamin, *Tel Quel* journal, Matei Calinescu, Charles Russell, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, Lenin, and the Hitler-Stalin pact. The result is a correction of Benjamin's thesis on the difference between fascism "aestheticising the political" and communism "politicising the aesthetics", arguing that they might as well be "two sides of the same coin".⁸

In order to avoid these kinds of anxious shortcuts, I will take a big detour through the context of the Russian Revolution via the concepts of avant-garde and Formalist theory, which will enable some discrepancies to be addressed, without having to be embarrassed about their bold and radical positions. What follows is not a systematic theory on the relation between art and politics, but some entry points to the topic that would lead us all the way to the

heart of the question of how to practise avant-garde art in political contexts. When reviewing literature on the Russian avant-garde, Paul Wood wrote in the 1980s that “politics doubtless cannot explain art, but then neither can art explain itself alone”.⁹ Following this, I don’t want to apologise for introducing politics when discussing forms of poetic language, but rather wish to illustrate that the dynamics of revolutionary politics are as experimental and complex as the forms and configurations of artistic practice. The following big political detour includes the theory of conjuncture, or more precisely, the theory of contemporaneity within the revolutionary moment, which allows us to discern the formal compatibility between political hegemony and poetic tropes. I will argue that without considering the radical form of historical novelty introduced by the October Revolution, which shaped the previous “Soviet” century, it will be difficult to understand the logic of avant-garde art suddenly changing its course in the beginning of the twenties. This will require a detailed examination of historical contradictions, especially those related to the New Economy Policy; the discontents of the state apparatuses inside Soviet hegemony; the antagonism towards capitalist everyday life; the limits of representation within revolutionary politics; the delineation of Productivism as the core revolutionary position that coerced bourgeois understandings of culture; and the discussion of Lenin and Trotsky’s logic when addressing the conjuncture of actual and internationalist positions and their strong theoretical repercussions.

II

Surrender of All Positions

The Bolsheviks and Communists had many reasons to be suspicious of the Futurists and Formalists. They wouldn't identify with Leftist politics per se. For example, in 1918, Boris Eikhenbaum commented on Symbolist Alexander Blok's poem about the October Revolution (*The Twelve*): "They say the poem is good. I do not know—I see that Blok is letting himself be crucified on the cross of the revolution, and I can only view this with pious terror".¹⁰ On the other hand, in 1919 Viktor Shklovsky—the formidable Futurist theoretician and the main energy behind Formalists—reacted to the Futurists' decision to accept an arts leadership position under the aegis of the National Commissariat of Education (Narkompros), writing: "And to think that we Futurists have connected our creative work to the Third International! ... Comrades, this is the surrender of all positions!"¹¹

This and other curious texts of Shklovsky were collected under the chapter "Regarding Art and Revolution", and were part of his 1923 book *Knight's Move*, published in Berlin. It was this book that attracted the wrathful reaction of Trotsky, condemning the Formalists and the Futurists. Published in 1923, in the decisive year of Russian communism, *Literature and Revolution* is frequently and understandably invoked in discussions about the politics of the avant-garde.

Trotsky, who had formidably analysed the Futurists' progressive elements—especially their militant anger against the stifling past of bourgeois culture—is especially accurate in disclosing the tactical errors of their combative positions. As a first man of the People's Commissars of Army (Red Army) and the chairman of the Supreme Military Council, Trotsky was able to illustrate the formal shortcomings of avant-garde militancy: "[Mayakovsky] is always shooting at the edge, and, as every artilleryman knows, such gunning gives a minimum of hits and speaks most heavily about the guns".¹²

The Futurists and Formalists were mostly apolitical prior to the February and October Revolutions. Those who were unmoved by the events of February, and thought (as many artists

did) that the October Revolution would not last long, were already by March 1918 hastily establishing the Communist art platform. By December 1918, the first issue of the Futurist journal named *The Art of Commune* [*Iskusstvo Kommuny*] was published. By then, the activists of the political avant-garde—who lacked any political experience, except for the few sympathisers of various Socialist Revolutionary and Constitutional-Democrats (Kadets) factions—did their best to understand the new forms and movements of the revolutionary moment.¹³ In the ninth issue of *Art of Commune*, editor-in-chief Nikolay Punin wrote that “Communism as a theory of culture cannot exist without Futurism”.¹⁴

Despite all their attempts, the Bolsheviks and Communists never ceased to see the Futurists and Formalists as the remnants of the confused intelligentsia of the old regime. Trotsky, with his usual ironic twist, formulated this contradiction in a most figurative way: “It is as difficult to strip Futurism of the robe of the intelligentsia as it is to separate form from content”.¹⁵

III

A Mismatch of Form and Movement

Indeed it was form and movement that attracted the Futurists and Formalists to the revolution. It was a challenge to face the massive outburst of political contradictions through the devices of Futurism and the principles of Formalism. Nevertheless, the ideas that attracted the Futurists to the nexus of the revolutionary uprising did not necessarily correspond to the political and ideological experiences of the revolution's subjects. The basic dilemma was about representation, or precisely the impossibility of representing the revolution within available forms. It was this mismatch between form and movement that troubled not only artists, but revolutionaries and historians alike. In a memorable passage in *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky summarises this problem with a characteristically concise observation:

“If a symbol is a concentrated image, then a revolution is the master-builder of symbols, for it presents all phenomena and all relations in concentrated form. The trouble is that the symbolism of a revolution is too grandiose; it fits in badly with the creative work of individuals. For this reason, artistic reproductions of the greatest mass dramas of humanity are so poor”.¹⁶

The whole question is then directly linked with the presence of a new reality that pushes against the borders of existing concepts.¹⁷ The revolution was a huge movement, a big replacement, an irreversible splintering along the usual course of history. In 1924, long before Trotsky's similar question was put forward, Nikolai Gorlov asked in his book *Futurism and Revolution* how one is “to accommodate the immense soul of the revolution, its mighty dynamism, its elemental upsurge, its frantic and changing tempi, its zig-zags of lighting in the tiny, quietly rocking cradle of the old rhythm?”.¹⁸

Gorlov's answer was Futurism, “which is the same everywhere, and everywhere it is under the red flag”.¹⁹ This argument is contradicted by the historical fact that the most of

the representatives of European Futurism gathered under the black flag of Fascism, obsessed with the imperialist war.²⁰ To oppose this comparative simplicity, Gorlov proposed a complicated (in the frame of art theory) conceptualisation on the role of imperialism in the dynamics of cultural modernisation. By separating and contradicting—as most of the Marxists theoreticians were doing—economic and technological imperialism from national imperialism, he pointed to the formal incompatibility of the theory of European Futurism (especially the Italian and British versions) with Russian Futurism. According to Gorlov, the apparent progressive tendencies of technological/economic imperialism as the source of intensified historical contradictions of global capitalism were not the same as the nationalist demands for imperialist wars. By making a claim for both progressive forms of international expansion through contemporary technology, and the simultaneous defence of nationalist will, the Italian Futurists got stuck in a *cul de sac* of representative modernism. In other words, the device that the Futurists thought useful for smashing rigid bourgeois culture was flung back by the apparatus of national imperialism, kept alive by the same bourgeoisie. The only solution left for Italian Futurists was the dynamics and contradictions unleashed by war.²¹ Similar to the European imperialist wars, the *non plus ultra* of European Futurism were truncated by the revolution. In both European and Russian avant-garde contexts, the elementary upsurge, or the “elemental force”, attracted artists towards an unforeseen future and hatred of bourgeois everyday life. As Gorlov wrote, it is the potentiality of the “slap and the punch” against tottering capitalism that attracted avant-garde artists, but European Futurists were stuck in the very historical conditions they aimed to oppose. Precisely, Western Futurism, as Gorlov named it, was frozen in the midst of the movement by not being able to politically overcome its fundamental contradictions. “[Western futurism] is like a plant which came to bud too early. It remains frozen and withered, caught out by a political frost”.²² As a conclusion, it is possible to schematise the theoretical construction of Gorlov by pointing out that the “elemental force” attracting the Futurists was conditioned by the conjuncture of contemporary and international political demands. It had nothing to do with supra-historical, divine, and unspeakable gestures and drives. The artists who seized the contemporaneity of that dynamic

and movement were able to advance formal elements in their practices. Another principle conclusion of this observation is that the forms in art never develop immanently—they need a kick!²³

Wiktor Woroszyński collected dozen of accounts of Futurists and Formalists enhanced by the dynamics of the revolution. It was Mayakovsky who first went to the streets, running after the battles

Somewhere near the Nevsky, Mayakovsky ran into me,
bareheaded, his overcoat unbuttoned.

I was standing before him like a tree before a storm.
The sound of shooting was heard from the railway
station. Mayakovsky rushed in that direction.

“Where are you going?”

“Why, they’re shooting over there! He called in ecstasy.

“But you’re not armed!”

“I’ve been running all night to where the shooting is”.

“What for?”

“I don’t know! Let’s run!”²⁴

This is how Aleksandr Serebrov-Tikhonov recalled Mayakovsky in the February Revolution.

But it was also the apolitical Formalists who “ascended” through the revolution, like Shklovsky reminiscing in the seventies about being: “uplifted by the wave of the revolution, without really comprehending it, we were immersed in it, and we were in love with it as young people can be in love”.²⁵ Already in 1923, writing from Berlin, Shklovsky had a similar view: “The revolution transformed me, I cannot breathe without it. Here one can only suffocate”.²⁶

Tynyanov allegedly declared that “without revolution I would not be able to understand the literature”.²⁷ After hearing Osip Brik’s lecture on Futurism on 26th August 1917, Boris Eikhenbaum wrote this diary entry about his future plans: “Discuss the literary revolution that preceded the social revolution (futurism). Explain the sense in which futurism is a revolutionary movement”.²⁸ It is possible to multiply these examples, and even to gather examples from the ranks of literary tendencies that were manifestly against the revolution.²⁹

The revolution did not taste good to everyone. The bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia—who were principally against the corrupted tsardom and clerical class—didn't have much to rejoice about after the declaration of the people's government. Counter to these elemental forces and unleashed energies were obscure and confusing fears, coagulating into paranoia.³⁰ The best description of this mood came from the member of this class, stuck in the inertia of its own heritage. Semi-Futurist poet Marina Tsvetaeva wrote: "And so it has remained with me, my first vision of the bourgeoisie in the Revolution: ears hiding in fur hats, souls hiding in fur coats, heads hiding in necks, eyes hiding in glass. A blinding—in the light of striking match—vision of mercenary *hides*".³¹

That Futurism, without the revolution, would be reduced to a mere lapdog of the bourgeoisie was discussed and agreed upon by all members of the Left Front of the Arts. In the first issue of LEF Journal, theoretician of Futurism Sergei Tretyakov wrote that "if there had been no revolution, Futurism could have easily degenerated into a plaything for the consumption of the seated salons. Without the revolution, Futurism, in forging the human personality, would never have gone beyond the anarchic attacks of the loners and the aimless terrorism of word and paint".³² Nikolay Chuzhak, the Futurist from Irkutsk, expressed this idea in the pages of that same issue of LEF Journal in bolder terms: "Futurism would not have developed out of the refined wordplay of Severyanin, just as it would have suffocated in the scholastic trousers of D. Burliuk, if that creator, the crazy riot of enormously developing life, had not inspired it with the spirit of intoxication and fire, and waved it onto a swing, which made heads that were too tender begin to whirl".³³

IV

Translating Elemental Force

From this observation of revolution as an intoxicating fire, some of the most confusing arguments regarding the politics of the avant-garde were made. It is time to address some of them. Before considering Trotsky's systematic Marxist critique of enhancement with the whirling storm of the revolution (the so-called "blizzard"), it is useful to have a second look at Gorlov's aforementioned "elemental upsurge". Gorlov used the same word in other parts of the book too, for example when describing the so-called vertical and horizontal lines of revolutionary force: "On the road to the revolution, we accept it not only as a program but as an *elemental force*".³⁴ In each case, the elemental is translated from the Russian word "stikhiinost", which seems to be the most loaded descriptive word in the Leninist vocabulary, while being pregnant with many misunderstandings. It is important to question the translation of this word, especially because the theoretical consequences of this concept are not apparent from the outset. The usual translation of "stikhiinost" as "spontaneity"—which Lenin made pointy use of in his *What is to be Done*—was responsible for the image of Lenin as a defender of the "centralised professional revolutionary". As meticulously and admirably detailed by Lars T. Lih, these textbook interpretations—which were popular during the Cold War—ideologically presented Lenin as "a pessimist who has rejected the optimistic Marxism of Western Social Democracy, with its deterministic faith in the 'spontaneous' revolutionary inclinations of the workers".³⁵

If I paraphrase Gorlov's sentence and translate "stikhiinost" as spontaneity, then it will sound something like artists softly and harmoniously riding the waves of insurrectional flow: "On the road to the revolution, we accept it not only as a program but as a *spontaneous force*". This would imply that the strongest element of the revolution's attraction for artists is the romantic and poetic metaphor. Consequently, the dynamics and force of a revolutionary movement will be reduced to word games. Besides, *stikhiinost* counters routine—the banal, automatic, and everyday life—associations which are completely opposite to that which

Futurism was aiming to achieve, with its uncompromised attack on the oppression of the *byt* (the everyday).

The conceptual advances of the elemental against spontaneity is best formulated by Grigory Vinokur, in his 1923 text on the linguistics of Futurism:

*“To make a language of the street: thus one could, in the first instance, formulate the linguistic task of Futurism, a task conditioned by a natural reaction against the perfumery of Symbolism and by a historically inevitable aspiration to transform the tongue-tied masses”.*³⁶

Both Symbolists and Futurists have understood that the sound-shape and the forms of words determine the content of a poem, the difference being that the former understood the euphonic currency of the word as a path towards the eternity of the inner world, whereas the latter heard, in the sound of the word, a great, shattering, strong, and elemental noise. The aim was to make audible the language which declared itself through the conditions created by the revolution. Thus, the correlation between perfumery → astral movement → euphonics → spontaneity was replaced with noise → movement in the streets → zaum → the elemental.

One could recall Gramsci's writings on Futurism to grasp the contradictory aspect of the importance of the elemental in the Marxist imagination of revolutionary culture. In a 1921 edition of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, a weekly of Italian Socialist Party, Gramsci published a strange and unsigned text called “Marinetti the Revolutionary”, in support of a proletarian culture that opposed bourgeois culture, which was framed as a “defender of spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and ossified traditions”.³⁷ Workers, who are not afraid of monsters, and “do not believe that the world will collapse if they make grammatical mistakes”, will manage to do “anything more creative than the Futurists have done”.³⁸ Futurists, who were revolutionaries in culture, will be replaced by proletarians who would accomplish both political and cultural revolution. In his letter to Trotsky that was included in the first version of *Literature and Revolution*, Gramsci—then under the influence of Proletkult and completely hostile to Futurist

politics, understanding them as reactionary and passé—tells an interesting anecdote. “Before my departure, the Turin section of Proletkult invited Marinetti to an exhibition of Futurist paintings in order to explain what it meant to the working-class members of the organisation. Marinetti accepted the invitation willingly, and after visiting the exhibition together with the workers, he was satisfied to have been convinced that the workers understood Futurist art better than the bourgeoisie”.³⁹

Trotsky was well aware of the provisional (transitory) character of the revolution (“Life in the revolution is camp life. Personal life, institutions, methods, ideas, sentiments, everything is unusual, temporary, transitional, recognising its temporariness and expressing this everywhere, even in names”⁴⁰) and he also understood “raw” and “elemental” configurations as its main currency. The question was, to what extent the “liquid” nature of the revolution corresponded to the circumstances after the period of insurrection, and during the time of the war communism? It was through the image of the revolution as a “blizzard”—which was praised by poets, especially Boris Pilnyak—that sparked Trotsky to question the shortcomings of these kind of metaphors of insurrection and riots. “Elements, blizzard, flame, maelstrom, whirlpool”, these are the poetic tropes of the revolution. To understand the real nature, the logic—or as Trotsky formulated, “the historical axis of crystallisation” of the revolutionary flow—one must go beyond the metaphor of the blizzard. “Revolution builds trade unions, insurance societies, co-operatives, and self-educational circles. It penetrates into hostile parliaments, creates newspapers, agitates...”⁴¹ This is also revolution, and it is in these dialectical and contradictory instances that its inner dynamics and political geometry manifests, or as Trotsky observed, where “revolution’s greatest poetry lays”.⁴² Once properly understood, this dialectic of the movement is the best answer to all revisionist approaches which discard the “constructivist” principle of the Revolution as an institutional recuperation of an insurrectional ethos. The permanent revolution is not a permanently riotous moment, lived through and through, endlessly joyful in its trespassing of historical objective conditions. It is so only in certain artistic imagination, then and today, that recaptures an everlasting moment of eruption as the main focus of their activities. In these cases, the tropes of poetic

images are situated somewhere between snapshots of orgiastic joy, and the downfall of the hungover fatigue the day after. All dialectics are squeezed between the elevation of the blizzard, and the gravity of everyday life.⁴³

The mismatch between form and movement is especially crucial because the dialectics of the revolution opposes the easy translation of one register to another. Or more precisely, the elemental and raw elements of the insurrection—"the punch and the slap"—are not enough to explain the many invisible circles and energies of revolutionary movement that go beyond 26 of October. It is important to formulate this better, as the question is how avant-garde artists understood their work when lit by revolutionary political forms. Further, it is important to avoid the picture of the revolution as a *coup d'état* of interstellar dimensions, as a storming of the heavens that substitutes the beauty of revolt with already existing poetic tropes. What was crucial for every revolutionary living between 1917 and 1925 in Russia, was to resist the eternal return of the same, and to expand the idea of the revolution—its inner form—to everything else. This also meant complete transformation of subjectivities, just as Trotsky, in describing the effect of October Revolution, wrote that: "happy are those who in their minds and hearts felt the electrical current of our great epoch".⁴⁴

V

The Political Geometry of the Revolution

In his text on Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov, Yuri Tynyanov distilled this argument from a poetic source: “the revolution can be at the same time a new structure”.⁴⁵ This is the topic of this chapter, which contextualises the historical circumstances of these encounters as the dynamics of some sort of structures. That revolution shouldn’t be defended jealousy as a sacrilege of the “eternal moment” is an alibi of liberal writers, who upheld rational understandings of social changes, especially when understanding the October Revolution as nothing else but the malversations of the German Secret Service, and a conspiracy of the Bolshevik *coup d’état*.

The other position, rare nowadays, was to imagine the revolution as a centrifugal force, penetratively transforming all segments of society and culture. This was the reason for the embrace of the revolution by some avant-garde artists. In this breath, in 1928, in the last days of LEF activities, Shklovsky wrote that the revolution will be crushed if it refuses to penetrate everywhere, or to advance. “The revolution is certainly beneficial for electrification, industrialisation, cinematography. If it is not, if it is opposed to those things, it will be crushed”.⁴⁶

The main question was to formulate the existing contradictions differently, so as to find the points of overlap of these two planes of revolution—its insurrection and structures. This required new languages and new forms. A poet’s vocabulary was best equipped to deal with the contingency of uneven registers, but the question at the end of the day was about politics. Everything that happened between 1917 and 1925 was a political question. The definition of politics, too, was going through a transformation.

“So what, in your opinion, is the working class, a Messiah?”. To this we answered, and answer now: Messiah and messianism are not our language, and we do not like such words, but we accept the concept

that is contained in them: yes, the working class is in a certain sense a Messiah and its role is a messianic one, for this is the class that will liberate the whole world. The workers have nothing to lose but their chains; they do not have property, they sell their labour, and this is the only class which has an interest in reconstructing the world along new lines, and is capable of leading the peasantry against the bourgeoisie. We avoid semi-mystical terms like Messiah and messianism, and prefer the scientific one: *the Hegemonic proletariat*".⁴⁷

Zinoviev's emphasis on proletarian hegemony was a direct answer to the political and ideological deadlock of the twenties. Nevertheless, it also had direct repercussions regarding the organisation of proletarian culture and art. In fact, the whole debate around the cultural revolution in Lenin's speeches and texts between 1921 and 1923 has to do with the issue of hegemony. The main problem then—crystallised in a difficult experiment with the NEP (New Economic Policy)—was how to solve the role of the state in a socialist country, and further, how to introduce various forms of socialist (economic) organisations in a country where the majority of the population were peasants alien to organised struggle, who lacked the political consciousness of the proletariat. The workers state—the first in the world—happened in the country of peasants, defying the schemes of social-democracy, the so-called the Second International liberal Marxists. It happened as it happened; the main discussion then was how to prevent it from lapsing back into a bourgeois set up. Following this reasoning, one can imagine the distress of the Bolsheviks, who after disqualifying the whole spectrum of petty-bourgeois elements from the political arena (including the sanctimonious assembly), had to come to terms with the peasants's pre-bourgeois culture. This was one step forward, two steps back.

Ultimately, the social context of the Bolsheviks and Futurists was urban culture. They could meet in this arena. Boris Arvatov wrote that "the LEFists are for contemporary, urban, industrial, 'Americanized' art—to the minutest detail".⁴⁸ Trotsky, on another hand, replied to the poet Pilnyak's observation that

the Bolsheviks were “the pick of the flabby and uncouth Russian people”, with the strong reminder that “Bolshevism is the product of a city culture. Without Petrograd, there would have been no selection from the ‘uncouth people’”.⁴⁹

The LEF years, especially at the time of publishing the issue on Lenin’s language, were years of discontent within the NEP. The flame of the revolution, which animated the elemental forces of the Futurist poetic imagination, had by 1924 changed its form.

The NEP is usually seen as an economist concession to capitalism, in a country which was transforming from pre-bourgeoisie conditions to socialism. It was further seen as a step back into pre-revolutionary economic relations, which reduced communist collectivisation to parallel structures that existed side by side with capitalist formations. It was seen as a “temporary withdrawal” from the “over-rash and over-enthusiastic dash forward into communism”.⁵⁰ E.H. Carr formulated its two practical objectives: firstly, to take into account a backward peasant economy, and secondly, to build up the industry and not further depress the position of the industrial workers who formed the main bulwark of the revolution.⁵¹ The strategy of the NEP was to keep the peasants calm until the industry strengthened nationally, so in the near future, peasants could be automatically disqualified from their status as a legitimate economic class in communist society. In the eyes of technocrats, the programmatic—or economic—representation of the NEP was based on the idea of socialism as another form of modernisation.

Contrary to the ideas within technocratic policy, what Lenin insisted upon was the political question at the core of the NEP being the “attempt to save the socialist revolution in Russia” from etatisation in the hands of the petty-bourgeois apparatus. The political driving force of the NEP was the struggle against the deadlock, stagnation, or coagulation of the revolutionary spirit in Russia. The main task was not to catapult towards socialism via the permissible private market, but to principally oppose the petty-bourgeois elements manifesting as bureaucracy inside socialist structures. On the agenda was a catapult, leap, or jump from socialism to communism, with the help of capitalist forms (allowing the existence of the peasant private market, while putting pressure on the development of industry) while at the same time avoiding the

capricious petty-bourgeois inertia during this transition. Thus the main tools of the NEP were actually the ideological and organisational work of “struggling against a state machine which Lenin described as being the old Tsarist one, ‘anointed with Soviet oil’”.⁵² This also resulted in a call for a cultural revolution that would support the struggle from the perspective of collective learning. From the point of view of Lenin’s ideological and political intervention, the NEP—which in subsequent years was seen as a provisional economic compromise—was an attempt to shake the foundations of the state’s consolidation after the Revolution. In the final balance sheet, it was to continue the revolution by other means.

As Charles Bettelheim showed, the NEP’s initial years from 1921 to 1923 were a field of strong ideological class struggles, which took place inside the socialist political apparatus. Lenin’s texts written in the NEP years urged these steps of ideological struggle to be taken, and were for a few months postponed from being published in *Pravda*.⁵³ The resistance from the party apparatus towards these and other texts written in this period was so strong that Lenin was obliged to use “the difficult, deceptive language of metaphors that required decoding”.⁵⁴ As Bettelheim comments, the reason for Lenin’s introverted language was because the new strategy heralded by this break could only be expressed in the language of old, which could not sufficiently accommodate, with precision, the demands of the struggle against the bourgeois state machine.

The formulation of these difficult political ideas—in a contradictory language through texts, pamphlets, speeches, and treatises—were the focus of the Formalists analysing Lenin’s speech. The LEF issue is not then an academic exercise of art and literature theoreticians scrutinising the dead words of a political leader, but an engagement with the most difficult questions of the contemporary conjuncture of the Soviets. They were engaging with the very core of what constitutes revolutionary politics.

The materials that formed the Formalists’ analyses—political texts written between 1917 and 1923—were the key sources of Lenin’s theory. As Althusser observed, these texts are “incontestable” in advancing Lenin’s “deepest and most fertile theoretical discoveries”. Althusser wrote that Lenin’s political texts (his analyses of the situation and its variations; decisions taken;

and analyses of their effects, etc.) give us “a theoretical concept of capital importance: the concept of the ‘present moment’ or ‘conjuncture’”.⁵⁵ It is this language formed in contradictions that attracted the Formalists to Lenin. As unresolved formulations, his critique of the state-machine under the conditions of socialism articulated their demands for the present. The avant-garde artists and theoreticians understood the conjuncture of the ‘present moment’ of the Bolshevik theoretical formulations as the demands of contemporaneity. Following this, it is possible to draw a line between the LEF position within the “cultural revolution” of the NEP era, not through the level of their professional commitment (as artists giving their service to cultural activism within Soviet hegemony), but through their involvement with the same concrete contradictions stemming from the slippery ground of the cultural conditions of Soviet hegemony.⁵⁶

The majority of avant-garde artists were instinctively against the institutional outcomes of the NEP period, seeing in it the expansion of consumerism and the consolidation of the monetary systems which also affected art production.⁵⁷ As Sergei Tretyakov wrote, there were two NEPs engaged in a deadly battle. The first NEP, “fat and arrogant”, was represented by the “former owners and rentiers, and the amorphous block of the inner-city petty-bourgeois and village stagnant mass”. It was an NEP of inertia, “of the bearers of the bourgeoisie and feudal traditions offended by the revolution”.⁵⁸ The second NEP was sustained by those “who caught on fire from the October flame”, determined to “continue the revolution” and the class war, “now crystallised in every apartment that cut into the living meat of the family”. This NEP got its energy from “the will to commune”. Its antagonism went far beyond the frame of economy-policy, expanding to a clash between fundamental principles; one stood for “individualism, idealism, nationalism”, while the other struggled for “collectivism, materialism, internationalism”.⁵⁹ The LEF group were against this first NEP, using their journal to call for artists to “stop decorating the already comfortable life of the bourgeoisie!”. It was widely understood that this was aimed at the NEP bourgeoisie.⁶⁰

VI

Into the Production

Those unresolved discussions calling for the struggle against the inertia of the state-machine, and the bureaucratisation of society, were understood by artists as a question of organisation. The LEF group went to one extreme with these demands, by placing the principles of productivity and organisation as the primary concern of their activities. Already in 1918, Lunacharsky observed that the Futurists had proven to be good organisers.⁶¹ They advanced these skills through the platform of LEF to such an extent that Osip Brik—one of the main initiators of the front—together with Boris Kushner, demanded the Futurists re-organise as a political party, and tried to pass the resolution that they would be the sole representatives of artistic practitioners in revolutionary Russia.⁶² These demands did not pass without opposition. In his pioneering work on the early history of LEF, Vahan Barooshian wrote at length about an incident in which a young Proletkultist painter wrote a letter to Lenin in which he accused the Futurists of “suppressing other artistic groups, and placing them in a hopeless situation”. Upon receiving information about this, Lunacharsky wrote placatingly to Lenin, stating that “during this time he has come to learn not to believe a single word of artists when they speak of each other”.⁶³ On the contrary, the whole art world was completely coerced into endorsing the extreme demands of the Futurists. Thus, a liberal writers critique of LEF politics being a platform which “introduced dogmatism and intolerance” to the cultural life of Soviet Russia can usually be supported by claims from these statements and manifestoes.⁶⁴ The LEF indeed aspired for leadership within artistic affairs, however this was not an intra-artistic affair of an institutional scale, but a reflection of their determination to get rid of all bourgeois forms in the arts. They were equally impatient when criticising the Bolsheviks’ concessions to bourgeois art. For instance, Christina Lodder noted that Brik accused Lenin of compromising when dealing with the bourgeoisie in the cultural sphere, in ways that a great leader would never allow in politics.⁶⁵

In summary, the struggle against bureaucratic cultural fangs (initiated by NEP) was seen by LEF as an aspirational attempt

to introduce organisation and production as the main agenda of their artistic revolution. This demand contradicted NEP's institutional relapse into consumerist and monetary systems. An art practice reduced to consumerism was the dynamic most hated by the avant-garde. From the aforementioned protests against the privatisation of culture, to Lenin's initial statement that the revolution liberated artists from their dependence upon the philistine rich *maecenas*, there are many examples of protest against business-as-usual.⁶⁶ One of the reasons that Malevich and other avant-garde artists declared their affinity to revolutionary Russia was this possibility to produce art without being subordinate to the arbitrary and philistine tastes of the aristocracy. When visiting Russia in 1928, Alfred Barr Jr wrote that "the LEF is more than a symptom, more than an expression of a fresh culture or of a post-revolutionary man; it is a courageous attempt to give to art an important social function in a world where, from one point of view, it has been prostituted for five centuries".⁶⁷

To end this vassalistic subordination, the LEF group sought to introduce Productivism as a means to reorganise the avant-garde's skills towards "social collectivisation". According to its main theoretician Boris Arvatov, this was to be achieved by the "grandiose programme for the reform of art education".⁶⁸ Or, as the Bolsheviks said, they should "learn how to learn".⁶⁹ John Roberts' comment about Arvatov's decisive focus on the factory as "the result of a deliberate political and philosophical decision" underlines Productivism's position towards the question of hegemony as the core issue of the revolution.⁷⁰ To manifest its own programme is to resist engaging with contemporary art through the structures of the art market and consumerist culture; this saved the avant-garde art from becoming "subordinate to the discrete aesthetic interests of practitioners, patrons, collectors, and art's small bourgeois audience", and to shift interests from institutional representation towards the art practice itself, towards the contradictions of art production.⁷¹

The LEF's Productivism required the redefinition of artistic practice, which also implied a shift of perspective in relation to how artworks were made. Through organising production—or putting "art into production"—the aim was to not only to apply visual art devices within mass production, but also to transform

the status of the art object in the Soviet context. Osip Brik was the most outspoken theoretician of this tendency, and his text “From Picture to Calico-Print”, published in the sixth issue of LEF in 1924, urged artists to delve into the contradictions of the “economic secrets” of the object, and to rethink the ways in which things were done under socialist conditions.⁷² This led Maria Gough to conclude her brilliant study on the history and theory of Productivism by arguing that its main tenets emerged from the Formalists’ understanding of “installation” [*ustanovka*], meaning that the emphasis was on “process driven platforms” instead of “object” oriented production.⁷³ Consequently, the political background of this shift was to be advanced via the possibility of “workers’ control of the production process”, inevitably leading towards the workers self-management against state controlled labour mechanisms.⁷⁴

On a deeper theoretical level, an insistence on Productivism meant the grasping of the Leninist ‘gesture’ and the act of revolution as not just a “symbolic act, the recognition of a ‘utopian spark’, a revolution in identity but as a matter of revolutionising the material process of production”.⁷⁵ This was how the core principle of Soviet conjuncture—of which NEP was instrumentalised within the hegemony of communism—was applied.

The geometry of revolution was a strange animal! The LEF artists understood this as a contemporary call for the complete reconfiguration of the definition of their practice. The situation allowed them to oppose institutional stalemates by first shifting interests from consumption to production, then by minimising the role of the centralised state apparatus in the left artistic platform, and thirdly by actualising revolutionary subjectivity through strongly opposing the bourgeois definition of everyday life.

VII

Everyday Production: Contradictions Multiplied

All these points, especially the last one on the question of everyday life, or *byt* in Russian, was the most challenging task for the main LEF theoreticians to deal with. They considered everyday life as a stuffy, immobile, reactionary force of past structures, which pulled bureaucracy, village life, and petty-bourgeois traditionalism into the inertia of capitalism. Sergei Tretyakov objectively defined it as “a deeply reactionary force”, which even the most powerful revolutionary blows are “not capable of tangibly smashing its inner life routine”⁷⁶; it is a force that ostracized the shift towards a Productivist collective relationship, and insisted on automatic conformity that fetishised all social relations. Tretyakov’s attack on the everyday as facilitating processes of social alienation formed the Marxist justification of Futurism and LEF, which according to him, struck a blow against the “rockfish of everyday life which pressed from the past”.⁷⁷ Boris Arvatov advanced this criticism by systematising the reactionary elements of the everyday. For him, *byt* was not only an “extraordinary conservative force” of traditional structures, but profoundly anti-communist and against the revolution. “The concept of the everyday was formed in opposition to the concept of labour, just as the concept of consumer activity was formed in opposition to that of productive activity, and the concept of social stasis was formed in opposition to the concept of social dynamism”.⁷⁸ The position of LEF in relation to this was very clear: the bourgeois everyday life is not a realm in which the proletariat should struggle for.

This is not how these things are spoken about today. In the academic world, *byt* became a symbol for everyday resistance against the ideologies of state-imposed totalitarian communism. It is seen as a commonality invoked by ordinary people resisting the grand narratives of the Soviet apparatus. For example, in order to balance the division between *byt* and *bytie* (which Futurist theoreticians introduced in order to separate the immobile everyday and the concept of *bytie*, a new being that is molded

through Soviet hegemony), Arvatov translator Christina Kiaer suggested an intermediary term called “the socialist object”. The conceptual operation of this intervention was to shift the ground from production to consumerism, and to situate the work of Arvatov within the “everyday as an arena of human self-realisation in modernity that must be mobilised for the formation of a (technological) socialist culture”, immediately linking this to Michel de Certeau’s interest in the consumer.⁷⁹

LEF’s radical critique of artists acting as the “technical intelligentsia”—which they considered to be the activity of the first NEP artists co-opted into bourgeois forms disguised as Soviet expertise—is recontextualised by Kiaer, who identifies a causal relationship between “industrial forms” and “revolution in consciousness”. These deterministic schemas are symptomatic of many academic and curatorial representations of the Soviet avant-garde—it is seen as a practice happening “parallel” to politics, as a simple technical innovation. The ultimate conclusion of this world view is that “socialism was already coming into being under capitalism”.⁸⁰ To support this conceptualisation, Kiaer posits absurd elaborations, such as presenting the internet as “a proto-socialist object”, which has the potential “to promote a future socialist culture”. Nonetheless, I admit that Kiaer is surprisingly sincere in confessing that her “bourgeois imagination” could only accept Arvatov’s socialist imagination without a dose of “radical collectivism”.⁸¹

In order to advance the theory of LEF as an artistic response to the struggle against consolidating the state apparatus and the culture of petty-bourgeois life, it is necessary to exhaust the political consequences of emphasising Productivism.⁸² Everyday life is the domain in which this emphasis became most evident. Aleksandar Flaker, in his study of *byt*, situates the co-optation of the everyday into artistic discourse as a sign of disclosure in relation to the avant-garde project. In referring to Lunacharsky’s 1923 criticism of the avant-garde—the tendency of an art incapable of incorporating “our, revolutionary, everyday life into its practice”—Flaker identifies it as a position regressing into naturalist and conservative forms that were enshrined institutionally via the formation of AKhRR (The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia), which emerged from the Association for Studying

Contemporary Revolutionary Everyday [*Asocijacija po izuceniju sovremennogo revoljucionnogo byta*] in 1922.⁸³

Regardless of this conceptual stagnation, the theoretical and practical inquiries of the avant-garde resonates further than mere ideological examination. As Paul Wood wrote, the crucible of avant-garde politics was to enhance the Bolshevik revolution, “not as a passive backdrop to art”, nor as an institutional affair of the state.

“Politics is not simply a matter of committees. In a revolutionary situation, or during an attempt to sustain a revolutionary perspective, all social activity contains a political dimension, and this includes areas which bourgeois culture fences off as the province of private taste—as, paradigmatically, areas of freedom in politics”.⁸⁴

By getting rid of bourgeois fences, Wood’s analysis—rare amongst the existing literature on the Russian avant-garde—enters into the core of the contradictions of art-making. By emphasising the inherent logic of art practice, revolutionary politics ceases to be a mere rumour (as in the paranoia of Cold War literature), but can instead be understood as a premise that enriches understandings of the situation. If we are to consider the concrete issues involved in the LEF platform, then Wood’s conceptualisation of politics as a dialectics through which conjuncture had a role in shaping artistic volition is important. Principally, this position implies that the material relations augmented in Productivism “can overthrow the managerial rationalisations of the autonomy thesis”.⁸⁵ This is how the politics of art is conceptualised as contra to the institutions. The “artistic context” in this field is overdetermined by contradictions; a different set of methodological keys is required when conceptualising “the revolution [as] a quicksilver process in which strands merge, echo and separate in an almost boundaryless resonance”.⁸⁶

For Wood, these separate strands of 1920’s avant-garde artists were united via their dissatisfaction with the NEP, and the demands of the Left Opposition lead by Trotsky. Despite the fact that Opposition wasn’t addressing the question of art and culture, Wood insisted that the LEF project was “the cultural correlative

of the predominantly Trotskyist Left Opposition".⁸⁷ Wood then considered most of Trotsky's output from this perspective, drawing lines between the productivist anti-NEP opposition, *Literature and Revolution*, and *The Lesson of October*. It would also be possible to apply the same reasoning to another of Trotsky's outputs, a small book called *The Question of Everyday Life*, published in the same year. This book, which Wood does not mention, is about the question of *byt*. In the opening chapter's telling title "Not by 'Politics' Alone", it considers Lenin's thesis on the primacy of culture over politics as a genuine political thesis. Since, as Trotsky argues, the Communist organisation's politics is not understood as a matter of committees, but as a "philosophical category", then the cultural activism of the twenties—presented as its primary concern—has to be grasped through the lenses of radical political concepts. Trotsky notes that if Productivism is the driving force of the October Revolution, then politically, "the NEP has not changed anything in this respect".⁸⁸ Thus, it can be argued that Trotsky's book on cultural activism refracted culture through strongly defining politics as a radical negation of the bourgeois understanding of the everyday. On these grounds, it seems to me that arguing for a political explanation of the LEF project through the objective conditions of institutional stalemate (the Left Opposition, NEP) does not provide an entry point to the potency of Communist politics. Woods' analysis positions the LEF in terms of the "requirements of industrial democracy", which, while framing its demands under the rationalised labour democracy, in some way does not depart from NEP's technocratic policies.⁸⁹ On the other hand, contemporary literature about workers' opposition in twenties Russia paints a rather uneasy picture of the relationship between Trotsky and the Left Opposition.⁹⁰ This additionally complicates links to an artistic context which already facilitates very complex understandings of politics.

In Wood's analysis, the connection between the avant-garde and Trotsky is established as a secret one; there were no overt references to the Left Opposition in the LEF's ranks. There is a need to question the discourse of obscure Trotskyism that already prevails in ideological narratives of Soviet histories. Instead of strategically linking politics to artistic practice, I think that better results would be obtained if this link was constructed through

the powerful elements found in political concepts. In doing so, we could more easily align with concrete artistic practices, rather than demands that urge for immediate, objective, and economic results from revolutionary politics. If it is true that the politics of this narrow definition cannot explain artistic context, then it is time to look in new ways at how art understood its own position within the terms of a new (revolutionary) politics.

VIII

Poetry as Practical Organisation

The critique of everyday life, and the insistence upon Productivism as opposed to consumerism, were the core ideas of the LEF. To this end, I have contextualised the theory and practice of the LEF by situating their Productivist ideas within the contradictions generated by the NEP. This confrontation enabled me to survey the LEF's revolutionary utopian streams, and understand them as oppositional to the bureaucratisation of Soviet hegemony. Nonetheless, I have identified a correlation between NEP's internal contradictions and LEF's uneven organisation through contextualising their pressing social dynamics. Besides these apparent social processes, the "counter-*byt*" or "Productivist" ideas of the left avant-garde were drawn from other sources too, which I will now detail. The principle idea of LEF's issue with Lenin's language could be viewed through the lenses of the social (and artistic) context of Futurism and Formalism, such as understanding the Productivist aspect of political speech as a social register that runs counter to the oppressive language of the everyday.

The articles by Boris Arvatov and Grigory Vinokur published in LEF departs from this interest, sharpening the contradictions between institutions of language (press, school, literature, etc.) and the collective nature of linguistic change within revolutionary Russia. Vinokur coined the term the "language culture", and his interest in linguistic transformations was instrumental in sharpening the edge of political speech by improving the effect of slogans, abbreviations, and neologisms. Both he and Arvatov were particularly interested in considering Futurism's poetic experiments as a means to further develop this edge.

The start of Vinokur's text, 'The Futurists—Constructors of Language'—published in the first issue of LEF—states that as much as the language of our everyday life is impulsively based on "internalised social norms", there are acts—such as poetic work and oratorical speech—that "overcome linguistic inertia".⁹¹ As mentioned, in this text Vinokur drew heavily on Mayakovsky's poetic operation to unleash the creativity of mass language, or more precisely, to liberate the words of those who were "language-less"

prior to the revolution. What follows from this observation is an insistence on the social and poetic (organisational and creative) aspects of a speech that emanates from the streets, and breaks the stifling immobility of the bourgeois everyday. Since the topic of Vinokur's theory was the Futurists' poetic work, the immediate focus of his text was the Zaum poems (or transrational poetry) and their relationship to everyday speech. Vinokur asserted that poetic language had a collective core, through arguing that the strongest elements in Futurist poems were not their "purely nominative role", but their collective creativity which resonated from the "language-less" of the streets. As Vinokur noted: "[the Futurist words] suddenly loses its individualism and psychologism".⁹² Within the conditions of revolutionary Russia, the Futurists—who were drawn to the theory of the word like a plant to the sunlight—were left with only one option: to abandon their poetic singularity in favour of the collective enunciation of the masses. The language of Futurism was to be collective, or not exist at all. This was exactly what faced most of the Futurist poets in the heyday of *Novyi LEF* and in their turn towards the "literature of the facts".⁹³ For Vinokur, the important issue in all these discussions was to find linguistic ways to oppose inertia and push contradictions towards a linguistic politics that would be the "conscious and organizing influence on language".⁹⁴ To this end, two years later Vinokur supported Zaum's linguistic experiments, stating they could be "purposefully and rationally used".⁹⁵

A less conventional trajectory regarding the question of language policy was one taken by Boris Arvatov, leading theoretician on LEF's Productivism. In the second issue of LEF Journal, Arvatov published an article on Zaum poetry that analysed the social relevance of Futurism within a Socialist re-organisation of society. Arvatov referred to Alexei Kruchenykh and other Zaum poets' statements that transrational forms have an indefinite meaning, but redefined this by putting forward the idea that the Futurists' experiments are indefinite in their "function".⁹⁶ The functional aspect of these poetic experiments have to be taken literally—that as a distinctive form of linguistic organisation, they "do not have a specific communicative function". This is an aspiration of all poetry (not only of Zaum): to introduce non-utilitarian expressions that do not have a straightforward task. This is why Arvatov claimed that "Cheka is not a Zaum word".⁹⁷ Apart from

being an answer to the theses on the social significance of Futurist poetic words, Arvatov wanted to correct Vinokur's argument: instead of delegating the collective nature of the poem to the "language institutions" as Vinokur was proposing, Arvatov advanced the core social function of poetry. This shakes off the "frozen, immutable, permanent crystals" (the skeletal forms) of practical language via the "plasticity" of poetic configurations. Poetry is the "army 'reserve' of language", and every revolutionary group's speeches abound, unconsciously or not, via the plasticity of this verbal play.⁹⁸

Arvatov's argument placed significance on not just form, but on methods of "formation". It meant that the revolutionary ideas marching from an elemental stage (*stikhhinost*) towards consciousness could be propelled by the characteristic of poetic formations. Through this process, poetry was remained as non-utilitarian, and as such carried its plasticity through "intuitive" and "inspirational" methodologies.⁹⁹ Fantastic as it may seem, the Futurist word theory of Arvatov promised concrete effects. This was especially true in the formation of political slogans, which followed Lenin's definition of being condensed theoretical responses to concrete situations, which also required a thorn that would puncture the core of existing language norms.¹⁰⁰ The poets understood the wielding of words the best, and were thus aptly positioned to advance political language.¹⁰¹ Both Vinokur and Arvatov proposed a dialectical model for understanding the division between practical and poetic language. In both positions, linguistic registers were entangled within a play of movements and inertia, plasticity and institutions; in the case of Vinokur, this was understood as the point of practical language from which this movement was happening, whereas Arvatov insisted that it was poetry that had the power to change and unbound practical and utilitarian language. I'm not proposing that these are indicative of "right" and "left" positions within the LEF family's Futurist sociolinguists (although this can be argued, and this will later be mentioned). What I want to emphasise is that the cultural contradictions during the NEP period were not simply hopeless episodes that lapsed back into bourgeois consumerism and its petty-norms of the everyday. I argue that artists opposed the discrepancies of the NEP period within their own means.

Arvatov's text, 'Poetic Language and Practical Language', dealt explicitly with the contradictions of Productivism within the left avant-garde. Arvatov did not belong to Formalist circles, but he wrote about their Opoyaz society, especially making a case for the incompatibility of LEF's Productivism—which aims to merge art and life—with Formalist methodologies, instead separating art and life by introducing a schism between poetic and practical languages. Since the Opoyazists perfected this separation of two different registers of language, and attempted to scientifically systematise the "question of poetics", it was of the utmost importance for Marxist art theoreticians to note this observation on their materialistic balance sheet.¹⁰² According to the Formalists, the poetic form was not an abstract hypothesis, but was instead based on a meticulous analysis of phenomena such as the liquidation of sound, the clustering of sounds in verse, and metric organisations. In light of my earlier argument, we can understand Arvatov as reinforcing the thesis that poetic expressions should be emancipated from being subordinated by prosaic or practical language.

The point was to find cracks in practical language caused by the poetic form. Instead of a simple translation or the adaptation of poetic forms into practical and utilitarian means, the project of LEF was to illuminate the weakest link in the chain. Arvatov wanted to advance the political function of artistic expressions through what he called the "methodology of the science of art" (this was the subtitle of his article). This would mean the reformulation of the dialectic between poetic and practical language. Rather than proposing a reductionist approach to poetic language, Arvatov's project was to expand the conclusions of Opoyazists, and to refute that materialistic-formalist methodology was a mere descriptive practice. What Arvatov had in mind was Osip Brik's argument in the 1920 text, later published in *Novy Lef* in 1927, that Formalists opposed the idea that "the poetic form was only wrapping paper placed around ordinary speech".¹⁰³

The primacy of poetry in the Formalists methodology should not be dismissed as idealistic, considering it was put forward in the twenties, and was further expected to guide Marxist and materialist readings of communist art. Osip Brik made a strong case about this, which usually goes unnoticed in literary theories—at some point he went so far as to declare that "Opoyaz will come to

the aid of proletarian creation not with hazy little chats about the 'proletarian spirit' and 'communist consciousness', but with the exact technical meanings of the devices of contemporary poetic creation. *Opoyaz is the grave-digger of poetic idealism*. It is useless to fight it. And all the more so for Marxists".¹⁰⁴ Despite the fact that Mayakovsky talked about him as a primary "inquirer into the theory of poetic language", and Roman Jakobson hailed him for his paramount position in the "development of scientific poetics", his writings on the theory of verse are overshadowed by his political activities.¹⁰⁵

The Formalists-Opoyazists wanted to release poetry from the pressure of poetic professionalism; poetry was to be liberated. This is what Arvatov, following Brik, wanted to integrate into the LEF's programme. Parallel with this interference—and to challenge the strict boundaries between poetic and practical languages by introducing a third "political" register—Arvatov also scrutinised the concrete sources of poetic excess. The common ground of the poetic form amongst Formalist researchers was based on the idea that poetic language breaches the norms of ordinary speech. As Brik wrote, "the development of poetry may be characterised as a struggle against the prevailing norms of the moment".¹⁰⁶ These divergent tendencies of poetry, Arvatov wrote, are not concretely dealt with in most analyses of the Formalists. He particularly referred to Shklovsky's minimisation of poetry's concrete historical elements, whose insistence on the transcendental singularity of poetic excess foreclosed the analytical possibility to grasp the source of this dialectics. If poetry is understood in contradistinction to language norms, as Arvatov argued, then the transformative potential of the poetic form has to be tested in the cauldron of class struggles. The error of Shklovsky and other right-wing Formalists, wrote Arvatov, is based on the assumption that the 'confrontational' dynamics of poetry materialises as immanent dialectics driving on autopoietic fuel. Arvatov reminded Shklovsky that "forms do not live only in arts, but in every corner of life"¹⁰⁷, and corrected this by first showing that practical language was not as stiff and immobile as imagined. He also argued that poetic excess had a history that did not only belong to its own making. The methodological conclusion Arvatov drew from this contradiction is interesting: "The task of scientific poetics is to develop the 'confrontational aspect of poetic

language' as the special form of practical organisation".¹⁰⁸ It is this radical social dimension that enabled poetry to strive towards politics, granting a Productivist dimension to its organisational (formal) skills that could be utilised in the cultural revolution of the working class.

IX

The Limits of Poetic Praxis: A Leninist Answer to Marxist Theory

The political armour of poetic forms was the fundamental question within LEF's ideology. It was at the core of their Productivist ideas, and in the project which led to their publishing a collection of texts that analysed the language of Lenin. Arvatov later tried to consolidate this position by rearranging their methodologies into a more scientific "formal-sociology", which emphasised the institutional base of artistic production.¹⁰⁹ No matter how radical this conclusion was in the circumstances of revolutionary Russia, it still lacked the conceptual tools to answer "what is poetry?"

It was Roman Jakobson who put forward the theoretical grounds for separating poetic and practical language through incorporating the laws of the former into his general linguistics research project. In his 1921 booklet on Khlebnikov, he famously argued that poetry had a special "aesthetic function" that is opposite to that of "the everyday practical language, which is extremely conservative".¹¹⁰ To the heaviness of conservative language, Jakobson opposed the language of Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, who opened the space for futurity in language in their efforts to revolutionise poetry. Immediately after the suicide of Mayakovsky, Jakobson wrote a text, "The Generation that Squandered its Poets", where he more or less claimed that *byt* should be solely responsible for his death.

"Opposed to the creative urge toward a transformed future is the stabilizing force of an immutable present, overlaid, as this present is, by a stagnating slime, which stifles life in its tight, hard mold. The Russian name for this element is *byt*".¹¹¹

The life project of Jakobson was to use poetry to study and oppose the dominant immobility of linguistic sciences. He persistently researched the futuristic currency of the poem, its language shifters, the markedness of its sounds, and other topics that could easily be

related to his preliminary interest in the transgressive potential of poetic language. His output is well researched.¹¹² In an essay on Mayakovsky, Jakobson makes a curious remark about the specific political and historical conjuncture of the poetic experiments of Russian Futurism. Jakobson did not translate *byt*, because “West European languages have no word that corresponds to it... as there is no concept of such a force as might oppose and break down the established norms of life”.¹¹³ In Russia, where “Marxist theory is answered by Leninist practice”¹¹⁴, there was something equally strong that could confront the stifling gravity of the everyday. It was this strange animal—the strong element of the Bolshevik’s communism—which everyone, including Futurist eccentrics and Formalist scholastics, tried to make sense of.

The antagonism between *byt* as an amorphous conglomerate of disparate phenomena, and poetry as a system of constructing and organising these elements, was the dialectical principle of Peter Steiner’s book on Russian Formalism. Steiner’s attempt to devise a meta-poetics of artistic forms through the scattered bits and pieces of the Formalist doctrine had a strong base in what Jakobson defined as the “system model” of how poetic function brought order to the everyday mess. The outstanding element in Steiner’s metapoetics was its inclusion of temporality into a rigid system of linguistics. “The Futurist principle introduces another facet denied by Saussure into the language system: time”.¹¹⁵ Steiner made good use of this addition. Instead of placing poetic language on the point of intersection of the axis (meeting point) of diachronic and synchronic systems (as Saussure would do), he instead thickened these lines by arguing that language was impregnated with history where “time-marked variants (archaisms, modernisms) of speech always co-occur”.¹¹⁶ This meant that incompatible temporalities co-existed within language through the addition of “profoundly dialectic dynamics” within speech. To put it simply, the reactionary, conservative elements of language were simultaneously in operation with revolutionary (transgressive, novel) dynamics. As Steiner wrote: “at any moment, [the] system is both balanced and imbalanced” (*ibid.*), and it is a “poetic praxis” which was able to exploit these dialectics at their best. The result was a more advanced model than Shklovsky’s (mechanic) and Tynyanov’s (organic) models, the latter of which operated similarly to poetry’s

“immanent need for the constant rejuvenation of language”. External changes (social, political) could penetrate into language “only if they satisfy some of its internal demands, that is, only if they correspond to the developmental tendencies of the system itself”.¹¹⁷ The meta-poetics of the Formalist project—which Steiner correctly described as “anti-philosophical”—claimed to understand the world as an antagonism between poetic and practical languages. The entire simultaneous combinations of uneven contradictions are the result of this system.

What is, to my understanding, disputable in this system, is the immanency that Steiner grants to “poetic praxis” through certain assumed inherent laws of poetic production. Despite the finesse of his model, it is difficult to schematise the simultaneous co-existence of temporalities as a sponsor of “poetic praxis” that also subverts the norms of language. The history in Steiner’s model of metapoetics is prefigured as representational instead of concrete and materialistic processes. The absolutisation of the system ended in a systematic history, where no matter how new or old, everything becomes representable in the same way. The consequence of this systematic position does not allow for a radical break from the system.¹¹⁸

When it comes to explaining the October Revolution, Steiner’s metapoetics collapses into a model of immanence in which unevenness was eternalised as ontological circumstance. In trying, passingly, to situate discussions on historical determinism in early Formalist circles, Steiner refers to Derrida’s concept of the sign as an “instituted trace” of a rulers’ promulgation of their position (consensus)—one trace opposed to another. “Anyone like Jakobson”, wrote Steiner, “who had experienced revolution and civil war, would be well aware of the brutal force by which such a consensus is brought about”.¹¹⁹ The ultimate conclusion was to picture historical struggles as a successive relay of power games, or as a theatre of logocentrism in which the existing system continually reaffirmed itself.¹²⁰

At this point, Arvatov’s argument against Shklovky’s thesis on the immanent process of art’s confrontational aspect is valid if we consider poetic language only as sophisticated word-play. There is one more aspect to poetry—its claim for truth—that we shall investigate in the following pages. This aspect—sometimes

even stronger than a Productivist entry point into poetry—was materialised through the experimental studying of Lenin's language. Before entering the domain of this second aspect of poetic praxis, it is time to deal with Formalist principles, and their contradictions with Marxism.

X

Unruly Bunch: Formalists in the Twenties

Placing the critique of the everyday at the heart of theory was not the only the agenda of leftists artists in the mid-twenties. After a period of “turbulent growth”, as described by Victor Erlich, Formalists wrote about *byt* in a tone no less radical and extreme than the avant-garde Futurists. Tynyanov wrote at the time that “everyday life is made up of rudimentary science, rudimentary art and technology; it differs from developed science, art and technology by the method of dealing with them”.¹²¹

In his text written by the end of the twenties, Eikhenbaum considers *byt* as the epitome of institutional determinants that affect literature. *Byt* was discussed as a social environment that reduces literature production to demand-oriented labour. After describing these new demand-oriented writers as “dilettantes in a professional capacity”, and products of the institutionalisation of NEP, Eikhenbaum presents a detailed conceptualisation of the ways out of this “entangled situation”, in which writers could advance their own specific set of expressions.¹²² The name of this specific expression is *literariness*, and its study can be productive only “in immanent-evolutionary terms”.¹²³

Considering that literary evolution is defined as the “*mutation of systems*”,¹²⁴ the very understanding of the specificity of this system is challenging. What matters is the principle of the Formalists, which runs in contradistinction to system oriented projections—they strive to destroy these systemic models (from the bonds of academic strictures). As an “unruly bunch”,¹²⁵ they were for a literature formed through confrontation. The contempt they had towards art production “fermented in milk and honey” (Mayakovsky) and in the comfort of the salons, is well known. The Formalists’ target was the *byt* of the Soviet literature institutions, which reduced their authors’ demands to editorial activities which mediated state directives, comparable to a pre-revolutionary art “conferred in societies, circles, salons”.¹²⁶

Eikhenbaum wrote that their “stepping out onto the street’ seemed as natural as the stepping out onto the street of the

Futurists".¹²⁷ This correlation with the Futurists was not unimportant, as their aim was to present themselves as combative as those of the avant-garde. The Formalists saw their work as part of the movement. Shklovsky wrote about the movement inside the movement, a sort of propulsion similar to being in a city inside an ice cube that's floating on the sea. In fact, the reason for radical and Futurist-like descriptions of the Formalists was because their struggles with opponents "had value not only as scientific principles but also as slogans—slogans spiked with paradoxes in the interest of propaganda and opposition".¹²⁸ Similarly, Shklovsky remembered how in the twenties, "a civil war between forms was being waged in poetry".¹²⁹

We can now understand the Formalists through a lens of academic credibility—as forerunners of scientific poetics—but in the twenties, they arrived at the scene with principles that were as disturbing as their methodological and analytical outcomes. The title of their works provide an insight into this collective state of mind ("How Gogol's 'Overcoat' is Made"; "Art as Device"; "Literature without a Plot"): a total rebuttal of historicist, personified, biographical, spontaneous, random, religious, philosophical, conformist, canonised inquiries into art.

In a retrospective text written in the sixties, Shklovsky reminisced about a witty anecdote about their social status:

"In the LEF journal there was an anecdote:
The preacher is preaching. Everyone sitting in
the church was sobbing in a dreadful state. One man
remains completely calm. The neighbour asks him:
"Why are you so calm and do not cry?"
"I am not from this parish", the man replies.
Mayakovsky used to say that the answer was correct".¹³⁰

One of the important contributions of the Formalists was their uncompromising attack on psycho-biographical methodologies, identifiable in studies that projected an artist's singular agency. As Brik wrote, even if Pushkin never existed, *Eugene Onegin* would still have been written. Similarly, Tynyanov scrutinised the argument by stating:

“To talk of the personal psychology of the creator, and to find there the uniqueness of the phenomenon and its evolutionary literary significance, is like explaining the origin and significance of the Russian Revolution by saying that it came about as a result of personal characteristics of leaders on opposing sides”.¹³¹

The extreme measures of the Formalists do have equally radical innovations: for example, their analytical solutions regarding the semantic characteristic of sound accumulations, their study of rhythm as a constructive factor, and their use of the device of estrangement, amongst others. Their colliding ideas in the twenties had such energy that Alexander Tseitlin was prompted to write that every small town in Russia had its home-brewed Formalist. On the other hand, Shklovsky claimed that their adversaries were using ideas borrowed from the Formalists, without even being aware of it.¹³²

Initially, it was Opoyaz that introduced some of the most radical ideas associated with the Formalist canon. The publisher of their journal *Poetics* was Osip Brik, who was also publishing Mayakovsky, and later organised the publication of LEF Journal. His cultural activism was an amalgamation of the most heterogeneous traits of the Left Front of the Arts. Unfortunately, the available information about him is very scarce, and usually tinged with the bias of political uneasiness (as he was a member of Cheka, the Soviet secret police); the available texts about him also often prioritise his involvement in the Productivism movement. Brik wrote two key texts on sound repetitions and rhythmic features within poetry, and his previously quoted text on Formalism defines “Opoyaz as the gravedigger of poetic idealism”.¹³³ The programmatic texts he wrote not only plead for a scientific organisation of art theory, but also launched a hardcore offensive against “cosmic”, “planetary”, or “deep” themes in revolutionary poetry. Brik’s intervention was originally published in the first issue of LEF Journal, and can be understood as a political attempt to expose counter-revolutionary currents in poetry and art theory.

Brik scholar Natasha Kurchanova reduces this complex position to a decision “to serve the Bolsheviks”, as if the Bolsheviks in 1918 were in need of Futurist services. In trying to decipher and situate Brik’s militant utopianism within a Bolshevik ideology,

Kurchanova compares it to Lenin's 1918 book *The State and Revolution*, which she analyses as having "insisted on the necessity of the state as a political tool for annihilating the enemies of the proletariat".¹³⁴ Given that the main argument of *The State and Revolution* was an insistence on the "withering away of the state", it may be wise for such academics writing about the politics of avant-garde to at least read one or two key texts by Lenin.¹³⁵

XI

Secret Correspondence

Similar to Bertolt Brecht's approach, the Formalist and Futurist projects aimed to clear the way for poetry (and art) that was not intimidated by vulgar and naturalist schemas of reductionism. The autonomy of poetry was not something that could enshrine a practice immune from everyday life and the rest of the world, but it could attempt to claim a position of independence within the world in which they lived. The radically secular position of an artist is the primary claim of the LEFists. Brik's statement that "the poet is an expert in his own business", also implies that the technical knowledge of the poet (artist) makes sense only when understood from this perspective.¹³⁶ Take for example the idea of estrangement, or defamiliarisation, or *ostranenie* as Shklovsky named it. These were not 'abracadabras' that could help a reader to combat the alienation (and reification) produced by capitalist relations through the alienation-effect produced by the artwork. As Ben Brewster remarked, the alienation-effect in the avant-garde—which could for example be found in the works of Shklovsky and Brecht—was an "autonomous technical device of art, not avatars of the alienation of man under capitalism".¹³⁷ There was no salvation in the world via art. The waves reverberating between art and politics, between poetic and practical languages, were difficult to measure and notice. The striving for immanence within the function of poetry could provide a shortcut through these complex layers, but require more refined concepts to discuss these relations. Thus, instead of immanency, Brewster suggested approaching these dynamics through correspondence, precisely "a *correspondence* between the socialist revolution and technical developments in the arts", but he added, "this correspondence is a secret one".¹³⁸

The dialectical principle that I argue is at the core of Formalist principles is not a theory added after the fact to their study of literariness. It derived from poetry, and extended like a centrifugal force to the rest of their activities. Formalism, to repeat, was a theory of poetic language which gained its strength only from poems. Krystyna Pomorska provided an insight into this position, when arguing that the study of "poetic function" did

not occupy the centre of Russian Formalism, as “the formalisation of the problems of meaning, that is, with semantics”, which would handle the poem as an accomplished fact, or as a “product”.¹³⁹ Their interest was to elaborate on the genesis and the processual aspect of the poetic function—namely, the manner in which it was made and came about.

In response to the question, “what is poetry?”, Jakobson answered that

“[neither] Tynyanov nor Mukařovský nor Shklovsky nor himself ever proclaimed the self-sufficiency of art. What we have been trying to show is that art is an integral part of the social structure, a component that interacts with all others, and is itself mutable, since both the domain of art and its relationship to other constituents of the social structure are in constant dialectical flux”.¹⁴⁰

If we posit poetic language as a dialectical process of the destruction of the norm, which was at the centre of Formalist principles, then it should also be possible to expose the existence of this position in their project’s methodology. The Formalist text, *The Newest Russian Poetry*, explicitly built a comprehensive theory of language (linguistics) based on their arguments around the force of the poem. Especially in his texts written in the fifties that systematised the relationship between linguistics and poetry, Jakobson placed the latter as the highest achievement of expression through language—it was a manner of expression that allowed the whole structure of language to be x-rayed. Nevertheless, within this important intervention, the real changes regarding the conflictual core of poetry in the Formalists’ theses appeared sometime at the beginning of the twenties, after the revolution. Victor Erlich’s description of this moment as a “challenge of Marxism and sociology” was not far from the truth.¹⁴¹ If we accept the argument that it was in 1923 to 1925 when the Marxist influence upon Futurist language theories became apparent, then we can posit that this Marxism did not manifest itself by sociologising art theory, or by finding economic explanations for changes in art forms. It was a different and more combative Marxism.

The Marxist turn was to be understood *vis-a-vis* these political and hegemonic dynamics, not as analytical tools derived from the Marxist canon. A superficial glance at Formalist publications from 1924 is sufficient to prove that this “politics” was not a mere redressing of their previous extreme theses. On the contrary, I claim that it was in the realm of politics rather than philosophy that the LEF and Formalists discovered it was possible to validate their arguments regarding the question of a literature and poetics “considered in itself and for itself”.¹⁴²

Alongside Shklovsky, in 1924 Eikhenbaum and Tynyanov were busy conceptualising (poetic) forms as shortcuts to elucidate the dynamics of these conflicting movements. In *Lermontov*, which Fredric Jameson described as “ahead of Althusser”¹⁴³, Eikhenbaum questioned the difficulty of representing historical dynamics outside its time. According to him, the immediate question was not the reduction of one conceptual field to another (historical to artistic), but to schematise historical dynamics that were characterised “by a struggle between at least two tendencies or schools”.¹⁴⁴ In 1924, Yuri Tynyanov—whom Jakobson and Shklovsky described as the best poetics theoretician—published *The Problems of Verse Language*, a *tour de force* of theories relating to artistic movements and struggles. Tynyanov declared “dynamic form” to be the main hero of Formalist methodologies, which were not “generated by means of combination or merger, but by means of interaction [...] between the subordinating, constructive factor and the subordinated factors”.¹⁴⁵ The pure movement on which poetic form evolved was a “continuous violation of automatism, a continuous pushing forward of the constructive factor and the deformation of the subordinated factors”.¹⁴⁶ This proposed historical projection had similarities to Eikhenbaum’s approach, in that it described the “flow and dynamics as such, outside of time, as pure movement”¹⁴⁷, which inevitably could recapitulate poetic constructive principle into transcendental immanency.

The Formalists’ seeming anti-historicism was a reflection of their allergy to the metaphorical translation of historical context into the content of artistic work. The project they were busy with considered the transformation of poetry from a formal point of view. The methodological conclusion of these positions, in the conjuncture of revolutionary Russia, was the separation of dynamics

between the subordinated and the subordinating factors that constructed poetry—from the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeois. In the philosophy of the Formalists, the two revolutions—artistic and political—are not the same. They have a secret correspondence.

Despite the fact that its economic and political base did not provide the historical materialistic conditions of their existence, certain old poems “still afford us artistic pleasures”.¹⁴⁸ These trans-historical dynamics of art troubled Karl Marx, who argued that the study of art required “specification” in order to grasp its “flowering out of all proportion to the general development, hence also to the material foundation”.¹⁴⁹ Thus, situating artistic forms outside of history was precisely what a Marxist analysis proposes in order to better contextualise its dynamics. Shklovsky again formulated this contradiction in the most concise way, by saying that “Tynyanov was showing the purposefulness of art and the presence of history in the very process of artistic construction, thus asserting the eternity of a literary work”, immediately adding that “this notion of the eternal does not suggest ‘eternal rest’”.¹⁵⁰

Before exploring the ways in which Lenin’s language played a crucial role in articulating how historical projections informed the “dynamic forces” of poetic configurations, it is important to consider the Marxist perspective of the Formalists’ principles, which rested on the dialectics of class struggle.

XII

Who Will Play the First Violin?

There are many discussions that explore the revolutionary impact of the Formalist's discoveries, and some have already been mentioned. In the pages of LEF, Osip Brik stated that "Opoyaz is the best educator for young proletarian writers", while Vinokur and Arvatov planned to devise linguistic policies around revolutionary speech that were based on Futurist/Formalist inventions, and Tseitlin declared that "Formalists are the pioneer battalion of [the] Russian literature-history army". These examples indicate that the question of Marxist use value was on the Formalists' agenda.¹⁵¹

Less can be said about the Marxists, who did not seem to be visibly moved by the opportunity to engage with the Formalists. If one is to discuss the possibilities of merging Formalism with Marxism, then the first step is to clarify the grounds for the emergence of political language. Such language did not occupy an important place in the Formalists' interests. The social aspect of their interest in language was not conditioned by factors that would enter into the academic field as sociolinguistics. It was not in their interest to understand the dynamics of language through representational aspects that reflected on speech's class base. Principally, they were against delegating speech to the perimeters of given objective social norms. The fundamental idea was to find ways to breach these norms. Their aversion to everyday language gained its impetus from this utopian position. Parallel to this, discussions regarding capitalist and ideological exploitation were kept out of their methodological and analytical interests. If, for the sake of comparison, one takes the Marxist linguistic arguments of the sixties regarding the alienation effect of speech acts, and applies these to a Formalist critique of everyday (rudimentary) language, an essential difference between the two can be deciphered. For example, Italian Marxist linguist Ferruccio Rossi-Landi vigorously argued against the recuperation of the "happy historical actions" of revolutionaries, which "society immediately swallows up and wipes out, closing back on itself like a polluted sea".¹⁵² This similarity to Formalist arguments only operates on the level of how linguistic potential is used; on the substantive level, Rossi-Landi interpreted social changes

in language and its relation to politics as a type of language game (borrowing from Wittgenstein) that plays with dialectics, exploring the space between the alienation effect produced by capitalism, and language's horizontal expansion into possible ways to live a non-alienated life. Rossi-Landi applied the most recognisable concepts derived from Marxist studies to linguistics, and the result was the introduction of intermediary terms such as "linguistic alienation", "linguistic worker", "linguistic capital", and "linguistic private property", which all refer to processes that take place in language to solidify capitalist modes of production. For example, the alienated linguistic worker (one who speaks), "does not know what they are doing when they speak ... as they belong to processes of linguistic production that condition them from the outset and compel them to see the world in certain ways".¹⁵³ The result is fixed and constant capital in language (homologous with capitalistic linguistic production), which "swallows up" all revolutionary and "happy" moments of free speech.¹⁵⁴ Here, the contradiction between non-alienated (happy, free) and alienated (constant, everyday) languages is understood from the position of ordinary speech. These Wittgensteinian language games are thus on the horizon of this argumentation, which holds onto the potential for social liberation within language by avoiding the "wrong turnings".¹⁵⁵

The LEF activists and Formalist theoreticians wrote from completely different contexts than the sociolinguists of the academies. For them, it was the revolution which spread like an "electrical current" (Trotsky), and charged dead forms of language. Due to its sensible seismic apparatuses, poetry was able to sense the perturbations present in the flow of language before it entered into institutions. Thus, theoretical investment in poetic praxis worked to formalise the "tentacles" of poetry.

It was not only the LEFists who placed language under the microscope of the revolution. Evgeny Polivanov, the Formalist fellow-traveller, wrote a retrospective history of linguistic thought that claimed that the significant characteristic of the revolution was its shifting interest towards the sociological study of language.¹⁵⁶ Departing from Lenin's idea "to build socialism, not just crush capitalism", Polivanov discussed in which ways the problems of contemporary linguistics were related to very concrete issues regarding the difficulties of multilingualism within the

Soviet Union; the production of new words according to “new revolutionary devices”; and the translation and standardisation of Communist language.¹⁵⁷ In the terminology of sociolinguistics, this meant balancing dialectics between historical fluctuations (diachrony, mostly visible in new words formations) and constant homogeneity (synchrony, as in the deep imperatives of grammar) in a very nuanced way, considering both their repercussions within the everyday social substratum, as well as the linguistic policies projected by institutions. Polivanov confirmed these changes in language with the witty example of a “person who slept through the Revolutionary period and preserved the linguistic consciousness of 1913, to whom the Komsomol speech would be words of a foreign language”.¹⁵⁸ Here, what breaks down the image of the Marxist linguist is the problem of the nation and national languages. As we will see, the problem (which did not seem to bother the LEFists in any way) was heavy and loaded with theoretical issues around Marxism. While the LEFists felt that the question of nationalism was *passé*, it nonetheless played a central role in the work of revolutionary linguists like Polivanov, who was also motivated by activist and political reasons too. He was active in the Petrograd Chinese workers group, which numbered almost 300,000 militants. To help them, Polivanov translated some important new words, such as “Soviet” to Chinese languages.¹⁵⁹

Shklovsky wrote that “both Polivanov and Yakubinsky were Communists”, and that “Polivanov had become a Communist before the October Revolution, Yakubinsky after 1917”.¹⁶⁰

In an attempt to comprehend the difficult relationship between Marxism and linguistics, Polivanov noted that it was never clear who played the “first violin”.¹⁶¹ If combing through existing scholarly publications about Marxist linguistics, it is easy to conclude that this domain is riddled with confusion and contradictions. “Marxist linguistics does not yet exist either in the West or here”, was Polivanov’s conclusion in 1931.¹⁶² All attempts to merge the two ended in some sort of “spontaneous Marxism”, which reduced its revolutionary politics to analytical methodology, or understood Marxism as a chain-based alternative system of signification.

XIII

Marxists on Formalists

Formalism and Marxism—the former claimed to proffer a poetic language grounded in scientific rigour that sourced its strength from the streets, while the latter claimed the proletariats were in a position to advance abstract philosophical systems.¹⁶³ In this regard, as a dialectical understanding of how knowledge advanced through errors and experiments (as a wild practice), the two were kindred spirits, however from a political point of view—the perspective of distrusting the capitalist system—there were fundamental differences. On a general level, Marxists sought to discover useful methodological devices that enabled materialist readings of otherwise idealistically constructed art practices. Using Formalist methodologies could help Marxists avoid being mesmerised by the allure of artistic mysteries. On the one hand, this would reduce Formalism to a practice of extended dialectics, and on the other, would render the potential of poetic study to simply be a methodological examination. Despite the fact that the Formalists were enchanted by the question of “method”, their real motivation was to work on Formalist “principles” that would not only alter the way in which poetry was read, but also how one could intervene into the broader cultural field. Their ambitious demand for new principles was not exactly aligned with the Marxists’ cultural politics.

Some of the most important makers of the Revolution, the hardcore Bolsheviks, have written about the Formalists. These texts are marked with irony, and can be situated within the logic of hegemony during the NEP period that sought to bind the alliances (*smychka*) with non-proletarian elements. By referring to texts on Formalism written by leading Bolsheviks (including Lunacharsky, Bukharin and Trotsky), one can discern some basic assumptions of the Bolshevik cultural coalition.

Lunacharsky—who was an ardent supporter of democracy with artistic tendencies—turned out to unintentionally be the promoter of Futurist cultural struggles. This well documented moment of the post-Revolutionary period saw the Futurists—encouraged by his backing—reclaim their artistic position as the leading Com-

munist artistic movement. The reception of the avant-garde art within the Soviet context changed drastically from day to day, and was dependent upon internal antagonisms within the Communist state. From Lenin's bewildered response to the "Futurist monstrosity", to Lunacharsky's indecision about endorsing LEF, the Bolsheviks expressed unease in the face of the radical demands of the avant-garde, which on one hand could be understood as a radical gesture aligned with hardcore Bolshevik principles, but at the same time was devoid of their political logic.¹⁶⁴

By grounding themselves with strong Futurist principles, the Formalists automatically partook in some of the charges fostered by the Bolshevik/Marxist ranks. Lunacharsky was very critical of the Formalists, and his main target was Eikhenbaum, whom he targeted for both political and cultural reasons. Described as "the most militant exponent of Russian Formalism", Eikhenbaum was—like others in the Formalist group—seen as similar to the intelligentsia who stayed within the frames of parliamentary constitutionalism frequented by "cadet liberals in politics".¹⁶⁵ This was not far from the truth, considering that Eikhenbaum—who was a supporter of Anna Akhmatova and Andrei Bely—did share some basic tenets of bourgeois culture. Eikhenbaum replied to this accusation by reminding Lunacharsky of his past flirtations with the quasi-religious *sabornost*, and his enthusiasm for the idea of art functioning as a "communal" theatrical rite.¹⁶⁶

Erudite and with views that fermented in the underground illegal world, Lunacharsky was a revolutionary of his times who never lost the tact of connoisseurship. He believed in a culture of art that could introduce to people the most subtle, progressive, and distilled forms of human universal knowledge. As a contemporary commentator remarked, he "had the ambition of reaching the peaks of culture".¹⁶⁷ Lunacharsky was a supporter of a transnational and horizontal expansion of art, unlike Lenin, who understood art as manifesting "specific" forms of political struggle, along with other activities worthy of consideration that reflect the historical struggles (of the proletariat). In a rarely quoted 1912 reminiscence from Krakow by Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, it was revealed that "you couldn't get Lenin to go and see the Polish painters [in local museums] for love or money, yet he picked

up an old catalogue of the Tretyakov Gallery at a friend's place and very often buries himself in it".¹⁶⁸ In this regard, Krupskaya's comments imply that Lenin was an "out-and-out nationalist", leaving us to speculate about how his patriotic understanding of art might reflect the deeper spirit of the people's historical sub-conscious, imagination, and will. In other words: art was the secret path to the heart of the people, or yet another thread that can be followed to reach the hearts and the minds of the people. In reflecting on Tolstoy, Lenin commented that "if we have before us a really great artist, he must have reflected in his work at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution", pointing out that a gifted artist would maintain strong links with the people who make the revolutions.¹⁶⁹ Lunacharsky was not like this—he was interested in art that would make this new world happen, and "attended all the intellectual and cultural meetings of the period".¹⁷⁰ Consequently, art with this disposition strived to incorporate the complexities and contradictions of the entirety of human activities, including the world of ideas as well as feelings. It was this resonance Lunacharsky thought was lacking in the Formalists' analytical scientific devices, which reduced art and culture to technique, and prohibited its inherent abstract possibilities. The Formalist analytical methodologies castrated this possibility by reducing art forms to simple quantitative measuring devices. Lunacharsky was not the only one who criticised the Formalists as positivists who prevented art from having the possibility to articulate culture in its fullness of abstract and imaginative operations. Making a joke about Beethoven, his characteristic technocratic view of Formalist methodology framed it as self-inflicted "hocus-pocus" or a "verbal conjuring trick".¹⁷¹

You remember the story of the man, who, when asked at a Beethoven concert, "What is going to be played?", replied: "They're going to scrape a horse's hair on cat gut".¹⁷²

Apart from their hocus-pocus technical arrangements, Lunacharsky saw nothing politically valuable in the work of the Formalists. Disqualified politically as representing remnants of constitutionalism, the Formalists were also useless when attempting to forge

a new proletariat culture. Their threads hung empty in the air. As the commissar of culture, Lunacharsky harshly critiqued researchers of poetic language: “One may merely say that, before October, formalism was simply a vegetable in season, whereas now it is a living vestige of the old, it is a palladium around which the defence of the bourgeoisie is being conducted”.¹⁷³ Being disqualified from political and cultural spheres would not be as dramatic for the Formalists if this was not accompanied by an ideological component, “encapsulating the whole worldview” of a “contentless” art.

These two general tenets of the Formalists—their declaration of principles (worldviews) that go beyond the scope of literary studies, and their arguing for this worldview to be represented through contentless art—were what most provoked the Marxists. Thus, the core of the issue was the ideological credibility of a project that placed contentless art as its principle. Advocating for form as opposed to content was an anathema for the Marxists. It wasn’t that within their philosophy, form-as-concept wasn’t important—it was—but the order of things was different. For Marxists, form condensed the struggles that were firmly attached to content; form followed content, not the other way around. In the Marxist understanding of history, you can’t start from the form, it has to be the end result, the final methodological outcome. This was how Marx wrote in 1871 about the political result of the Paris Commune: “form [was] at last discovered”. The new discovered “commune form” became a new way of proletariat organising.¹⁷⁴

A common understanding is that form appears in Marxist theory in moments of crisis, relating to content as a configuration of something that had not yet taken its recognisable shape. This usually happens in moments of uprisings—it is the positive definition of form. Then there are its negative implications—formal usually alluding to bureaucratised, capitalist rigidity that uses the capacities of institutional structures to apply coercive but deliberately executed power. For example, this was how Marx, in *Capital*, explained the difference between formal and real subsumption, or how Lenin criticised some strategies taken by his comrades during the turmoil of October. The first positive meaning of form in Marxism draws a long and oblique line between art and politics,

and the avant-garde and the revolution. The whole project of LEF sat on the hotbed of these Marxist contradictions.

Nikolai Bukharin, whom Lenin described as “the Party’s favourite son”, was a Bolshevik philosopher.¹⁷⁵ His project was to attempt to organise Marxism as an independent philosophical system. It is not surprising that his strategy was to try and systematise culture and art, and form this into a philosophy. His text on the Formalists’ artistic methods, presented at a public discussion on ‘art and revolution’ in 1925, criticised the Formalists’ principles through referring to the “social-functional aspect” of Socialism—he found these to be useful only when acting as some kind of bookkeeping methodology that catalogued the elements of various artistic languages. Similar to Lunacharsky, Bukharin also envisioned the merits of Formalism to merely be a quantitative device for the scientific sorting of poetic materials. This reduction of the Formalist project to an auxiliary method for historical-materialism was not on the agenda of Eikhenbaum, who was also one of Bukharin’s main targets. Adding to this ideological and political dead end of the Formalists’ inquiry was a theoretical impasse that Bukharin elaborated upon rigorously, providing an art methodology that was only possible to rejuvenate with the guidance of Marxism. Bukharin exhaustingly attacked what he considered to be a metaphysical point of view within the Formalist’s theoretical constructions. In short, his argument was that the Formalists postulated their theories by delineating literariness, or poetics, as the singularity of artistic expression, foreclosing heuristic understandings of other sets of historical (political and ideological) determinants. Bukharin’s main argument was that the Formalists were half dialecticians, due to the fact that the singularity of their artistic expression—which Eikhenbaum and others aimed to research as a specific “literary series”—was fruitless without considering historical changes. Thus, the “constructive principle” was not strongly formulated, but rather presented as an independent series within each dialectical system, foreclosing the conceptualisation of historical contradictions which tend to “continuously develop and increase in the number of new moments they produce”. Bukharin argued that this constructivist principle (which the Marxists discovered earlier than the Formalists), was something they, Communists, used as a research method, but never mistook for a principle.¹⁷⁶

Bukharin argued this in 1925, when he represented right wing politics among the leftist opposition within the Communist Party. By 1934, Bukharin had become the director of the official daily newspaper *Izvestia*. At the Soviet Writers' Congress—whose mission was to question the status of “contemporary” in Soviet art—he read a paper on the problems of poetics in USSR alongside Gorky, Radek and Zhdanov. The paper proposed a complicated philosophical basis for socialist realism's dialectical (thus experimental) tendency of representing the reality of contemporary struggles.¹⁷⁷ Passingly, Bukharin made an interesting remark on the “tendency in Marxists ranks” to disregard the question of form, which he interpreted as the institutionalisation of art production. He then attempted to expose the concrete problems related to avoiding the question of form, which he thought would lead to “the danger of poetic work becoming departmentally alienated from life, and bureaucratised orders being issued by the People's Commissariat of Education, by the People's Commissariat of Communication, by the Transport Workers' Trade Union [...] and so on. This, of course, is not art at all. In any case, there is a very grave danger of this kind of art ceasing to be art. It is not along these lines that the way forward lies”.¹⁷⁸

As Nikolai Gorlov wrote, Trotsky's critique of the avant-garde was “witty, but unjust”.¹⁷⁹ His style of mercilessly attacking his target was reminiscent of Shklovsky's hardcore approach to his opponents in *The Hamburg Score*.¹⁸⁰ Trotsky attempted to settle the score with the Formalists, and particularly with Shklovsky. The short text that provoked Trotsky was written in 1919, and was included in Shklovsky's book *Knight's Move*. In it, Shklovsky systematised five short points about the social engagement practices of the Futurists. By bending the stick over, Shklovsky came up with speculative categories that reiterated Futurism's strength as a movement that resisted outside norms.¹⁸¹ Trotsky's reply lacked the brevity of Shklovsky, but the breadth of the debate was evident in regards to his discussions about the contradictions between nation and art. Shklovsky argued that “plots are homeless”, while Trotsky defended the national importance of artmaking in a reply that invoked Lenin's nationalistic connoisseurship. It seems worthy to linger here, if one is to understand the complex layers within the struggle between Formalism and Marxism. It is difficult to make

sense of the national aspirations of Trotsky and Lenin in regards to culture, when all their activities were dedicated to international revolutionary politics. This discrepancy becomes clear when we expand their antagonist terminology to include nation and art, alongside politics and internationalism. As for the Communists, the contradiction was not between nationalism and art, but between international politics and national culture, and between international culture and national politics. Lenin and Trotsky understood art as a cultural practice of the people in the background of international politics. Without the concrete conditions of international politics (the revolution, war, imperialism), there was no possibility to advance cultural expression. "If the victorious Russian proletariat had not created its own army, the Workers' State would have been dead long ago, and we would not be thinking now about economic problems, and much less about intellectual and cultural ones". This was how Trotsky declared the primacy of politics in the very first page of *Literature and Revolution*.¹⁸² He saw a mimetic internationalism in Shklovsky's aspiration towards an art without national borders. This strategy of internationalism supported by the national bourgeoisie (the Cadets, right-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries, etc.) was, to paraphrase Trotsky, nothing but the "utilisation of a 'second-hand' wardrobe".¹⁸³

Alas, what Shklovsky was aiming for was exactly the opposite of Trotsky's reading. In that minuscule text, he criticised the "tendency to equate the social revolution with the revolution in the arts", that he concretely recognised in "that rustling tail of the newspaper editorials that are now being attached to Futurism".¹⁸⁴ It is possible here to recognise the radical motif of the avant-garde separating art (Futurism) from culture (meaning normative bourgeois forms of culture like "newspaper editorials"), and to draw the conclusion that the Futurists' principled refusal to be at the centre of (bourgeois) culture was Shklovsky's main agenda. Trotsky's views aligned with Shklovsky's when he wrote the following about Mayakovsky: "the Futurists are the worst artists when they end up as Communists". Similar to Lunacharsky and Bukharin, Trotsky understood the Formalist theory of art as useful for "descriptive and semi-statistical" analysis, but more fundamentally, he saw it as a reason for study because of "Futurism itself".¹⁸⁵ Thus, instead of speculating about the historical recons-

truction of Trotsky's evaluation of Formalism, a more interesting approach would be to enter the topic through Trotsky's obsession with Futurism, and his understanding of the question of form, not of Formalism.¹⁸⁶

For one, the Futurist's rough language, or as Lenin called it, "hooligan communism", was not a strange animal to the Bolsheviks.¹⁸⁷ The Bolshevik vituperation was a style unto itself, whose precedents can be drawn all the way back to the malediction of Karl Marx.¹⁸⁸ One can compile a dictionary of idioms and names from Communist literature that were used to refer to the bourgeois caprice—a list of rich, succulent, dirty words. Trotsky in particular was careful not to systematise and devise general rules around Bolshevik speech patterns from this resource. What should be stressed here is the very source of this coarse language radiated from a hatred of petty-bourgeois philistinism parading as culture. It was supposed to be an anti-repressive vituperation, one that Trotsky saw as less dangerous than the lies and conspiracies of British right wing statesman Lord Curzon's speeches against Communism.¹⁸⁹

This is important to mention, as there is a tendency to link the institutionalisation of Bolshevik culture with the cleansing of hooligan language from the Soviet state apparatuses. Subsequent chapters will explore Michael Gorham's arguments around Soviet language that defended the correlation between the purification of language and the consolidation of the State apparatuses. The outcomes of this ideological project were often presented by explicating how, in the thirties, Maxim Gorky insisted on the purification of language from the grotesque and the nonsensical, which he saw as a reflection of class hostility, and an obstacle to spiritual growth.¹⁹⁰ This Gorky, devoid of irony and mockery, a plain writer of "simple and straightforward" ideas, was already a target of Trotsky's in the twenties. He had fun with Gorky's description of Lenin as "one of the righteous", and instead preferred Isaac Babel's picture of Lenin's language as "the complex curve of a straight line".¹⁹¹ Trotsky despised the word "righteous", as he claimed it was "borrowed from the Church", and he was horrified by Gorky's Lenin, who "tore from his breast a flaming heart to lift it like a torch", by simply commenting "Grrrr. How horrid" (p. 159). Gorky wrote about Lenin as "the great child of this sinful world ... who sacrificed himself". Trotsky corrected him by arguing that: "Lenin did not sacri-

face himself. On the contrary, he lived a full life, a wonderfully abundant life, developing, expanding his whole personality, serving a cause which he himself freely chose" (pp. 166-167). Gorky continued: "his labour was [an act of] of love and beauty". Trotsky's response: "No, Lenin's task was that of awakening and uniting the oppressed" (p. 167). Gorky believed: "He was an honest Russian intellectual who believes in justice on earth". Trotsky countered with: "Lenin's genius consisted, first of all, in transcending all confines" (pp. 170-171). Trotsky concluded his attack by reminding Gorky how he bemoaned the acts of sailors during the October Revolution, who "cut up the canvases of Rembrandt to make themselves trousers", causing Gorky to "become a real mourner of culture" (p. 174). To this sanctification of culture, Trotsky replied with a Futurist slogan: "The Bolsheviks are going to break all the historical vases and pots, flower pots, kitchen pots, and chamber pots!" (p. 175).

XIV

The Formalists' Reply

The Formalists were categorically against reconciling with the Marxists on terms that reduced their principles to an appendage of historical materialism. Their principles meant more than methodological guidance—they believed they poetically restructured the whole culture. Most of their conclusions stemmed from the singularity of poetic speech—this includes history as well. Eikhenbaum wrote an introduction to his study on Mikhail Lermontov, and this was one example of how the metaphysics of the poetic principle (specificity) could guide understandings of the historical transformations of artistic expressions. In other words, the idea was to push poetry forward as a language on its own that could assist with writing an artistic history presented in parallel to an economic history. This meant introducing Formalist principles parallel to Marxist principles. In his preface to his 1925 collection of texts, *The Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky wrote that “as a literary critic, I’ve been engaged in the study of the internal laws that govern literature. If I may bring up the analogy of a factory, then I would say that neither the current state of the world cotton market, nor the politics of cotton trusts, interest me. One thing alone concerns me: the number of strands that make up the cotton plant, and the different ways of weaving them”.¹⁹²

The critique of cause and effect—or more precisely, the economic cause of artistic effects—could be claimed as a Formalist injection to the misgivings around the sociology of art. To mock the generic determinism of Marxist sociologists who drew a direct line between Lermontov’s poetry and 1830s grain exports, Eikhenbaum proffered a long quotation from Engels that criticised the amateurs of historical-materialism who violated the complexity of dialectics as arbitrary “empty abstractions”. Historical science reduced to phraseology is proof that “economic history is still in diapers”. The result was, as Engels warned, a mish-mash of methodologies, “forever spying a cause here, an effect there”.¹⁹³ Eikhenbaum uses this to discredit his Marxist opponents’ eclecticism when parading scientific theories of art disguised as dialectics, or historical-materialism.

In that respect, when Eikhenbaum claimed that “within the limits of literary science, formalism is a revolutionary movement”,¹⁹⁴ he did so without the ambition to situate their work within the political institutions of revolutions, but to acknowledge a similarity in principles that opposed the arbitrariness of eclecticism. According to Eikhenbaum, Trotsky’s appropriation of Formalist devices as “simple useful technical tools” within “acceptable limits” resulted in him being understood as “a fellow-thinker of the eclectics and revisionists”.¹⁹⁵ By reducing the Formalists’ work to “something like a microscope”, Trotsky acted as a fellow-thinker of the “peacemakers”. Eikhenbaum’s text “Concerning the Question of the ‘Formalists’” was written for *Pecat’ i revoljucija*, and the editorial board accepted it only on the condition that it would provoke a reply from his opponents. This was written by Lunacharsky, Bobrov, Sakulin, and others, who went so far as to claim that “Eikhenbaum’s ink becomes shaky when writing the name of Trotsky”.¹⁹⁶

The real target of Eikhenbaum’s criticism was not Marxism, but the works of newly brewed Marxist sociologists, such as G. Gorbachev and V. Poliansky’s books on contemporary Russian literature, which rather than analysing artworks, “subject[ed] writers to an ideological test, and strived to see what writers thought about the revolution behind their ‘devices’”.¹⁹⁷ On a philosophical level, the Communists (and especially the Bolsheviks) could be credited as strong opponents of eclecticism. Most of Lenin’s texts were understood as direct rebuttals of bourgeois philistinism, which was known as a practice of a class using any available means to avoid addressing ‘real’ topics. In 1914, Lenin wrote a short review of Rubakin’s large volume, *Among Books*, criticising the eclecticism of the ambitious project of writing a “review of Russian book resources in relation to the history of scientific, philosophical, literary, and social ideas”. Lenin concluded that because of the author’s attempt to “avoid polemics”, he ended up in writing in the style of “disguised polemics”, which was “a form of polemics having all the shortcoming of polemics without any of its great merits, using eclecticism as a defence”.¹⁹⁸

It was this aversion towards eclecticism which aligned the Formalists and Marxists. The Formalists argued that in the hand of the art-sociology-Marxists, historical dynamics were reduced to

mere illustrations. While their resulting position was “typically eclectic, the reconciler of extremes”, on a philosophical level, its principles antagonised both Marxists and Formalists.

“Formalism does not ‘oppose’ itself to Marxism, but simply protests against the simple transfer of socio-economic problems into the sphere of [the] study of art. The material resists this, because it has its own specific sociology. And if it is forced, then evolution is replaced by genesis, and instead of concrete causality we have distant ‘links’”.¹⁹⁹

There are other conjunctions as well. During the same months he replied to the Marxists, Eikhenbaum wrote a text for *Ruski Sovremennik*, edited by Gorky and Zamyatin, where he explained how the question of “contemporaneity” was of interest to both Formalists and Marxists, and how that concern prefigured similar issues raised in *Literature and Revolution*, which he considered to be a “book with a strong character”.²⁰⁰ Instead of looking to the formidable *Literature and Revolution*, Eikhenbaum extracted the question of the contemporaneity of form from two early Trotsky essays on art—one was from 1908, and the other a 1913 review of the Vienna Secession.

On Herrengasse in Vienna’s Café Central during New Year’s Eve 1908, and amidst the “noise, punch and grog”, Trotsky argued with a doctor who claimed the blurry quality of Turner’s paintings was due to his astigmatic vision. Trotsky argued that when looking at Turner’s paintings, he was able to see beyond the painter’s astigmatic viewpoint. He defended the “social-aesthetic bond” which transcended personal anomalies, claiming this was a condition of cultural-historical communication.²⁰¹ In another pre-revolutionary text Eikhenbaum referred to, Trotsky complained that in a year which brought the most militant workers strikes, suffragette struggles, and Balkan Wars that shook Europe, the Secessionists’ exhibition in Vienna in 1913 reduced the whole practice of art to what the eye beheld—a distribution of colours. Trotsky continued the argument, writing that this escape from content was also at the core of Russian intelligentsia, who jealously defended the position that “the content of art is in the form”,

constituting a fundamental contradiction within art, which he considered to be “between modernism of form and archaic, indifferent content”.²⁰² These crucial texts of Trotsky were not included in the English translation of *Literature and Revolution*, reducing the whole publication to something like an intellectual and partly progressive response of a party official on matters of art and culture.²⁰³ When these texts reappeared in 1923, after four years of bloody imperialist war and another three years of cruel Civil War, the question of form had changed its imperatives. Form was not the same anymore. At that time, form had to be political, or not at all. Trotsky then wrote that “squeezed lemons” such as aristocrat poet Zinaida Gippius’ attack on the revolution as the apocalypse of the civilisation, were “archaic and indifferent to contemporaneity”. Their place belonged in the dustbin of history. In fact, this was the main question—the actuality and contemporaneity of the revolution. There were no two ways around this question; the revolution was on the agenda of all contemporary positions.

These Formalist replies addressed Marxist principles, but when it came to their philosophical or theoretical replies, the debate was less fruitful. In his funny text on the jubilee of Opoyaz, titled ‘5 = 100’, Eikhenbaum argued that the monism of a Marxist philosophy based on economy (“as a real German would do”) did not fit with their theories of art, which required more complex understandings of aesthetic dynamics. “Enough of monism! We are pluralists”, cried Eikhenbaum, ending with an expression of gratitude: “luckily, a life is not based on Marx”.²⁰⁴ This was what Eikhenbaum understood as Marxism, as a “philosophical-historical doctrine” which was incommensurable with the scientific principles of Formalism, similar to the absurdity of using a Marxist explanation for the theory of relativity.²⁰⁵ Philosophical monism—which Eikhenbaum ascribed to the Bolsheviks—had to do with his simplified understanding of Marxism. Similar to how Eikhenbaum criticised Marxists art theoreticians as still being in diapers, one could argue that Eikhenbaum’s Marxism was also in diapers. Marxism without class struggle—reduced to a philosophy of history and the science of economics—is what the Bolsheviks opposed with all their might. The monism attributed to Bolsheviks was, in a certain regard, a form of fidelity to the sharp historical turning point of

the events of the October Revolution. As Trotsky wrote, they don't have a doctrinaire position on the contemporaneity of the Soviet revolution, but

“our life, cruel, violent and disturbed to its very bottom, says: ‘I must have an artist of a single love. Whatever way you take hold of me, whatever tools and instruments created by the development of art you choose, I leave to you. To your temperament and to your genius. But you must understand me as I am, you must take me as I will become, and there must be no one else besides me’”.²⁰⁶

The singularity of revolution was not the same as philosophical monism, which reduced the objectives of economic and political conditions into a form of one-stroke-determinism.

The complexity of historical determinants (and their unevenness) was the strongest meeting point between the Marxists and Formalists, which Eikhenbaum retrospectively suggested was in their mutual interests, as in their work on the conceptualisation of the “fact of evolution”. In the terminology of the Formalists, the fact of evolution meant the transformation of forms, something fundamental to their work in the twenties. Change, of course, was triggered by the Marxists’ challenge against the boundaries of the Formalists’ initial autopoietic systems. In what was considered to be the most eloquent retrospection of Formalist work, Eikhenbaum’s 1927 text, ‘The Theory of the Formal Method’, carefully delineated what was understood as singularly Formalist inside the sociological-Marxist turn. Written to avoid early polemics, it was an attempt to show the gradual evolution of Formalism, from a methodology to a “specific scientific discipline concerned with literature as a specific system of facts”, and it concluded by indicating certain fundamental changes that took place in their inquiries.²⁰⁷ The most important changes was that,

“From an initial summary opposition between poetic language and practical language, we arrived at a differentiation within the concept of practical language in terms of its functions (Yakubinsky),

and at the discrimination between the methods of poetic language and the methods of emotive language (Jakobson). Associated with this evolution is our special interest in studying oratory—precisely that kind of speech, from the practical sphere, that is closest to poetic speech but differs with respect to function—and we have begun discussing the necessity of revitalising rhetoric alongside with poetics”. (See the articles on Lenin’s language in LEF, no. 1 (5), 1924, by Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov, Yakubinsky, Kazansky, and Tomashevsky).²⁰⁸

It is this theory that prompted the Formalists to attempt to understand the form of Lenin’s speech via the LEF Journal platform. The balance sheet of this contradictory and difficult encounter was the Formalists’ studies of Lenin’s form. These essays were written in a space in which two conjunctures were juxtaposed: the conjuncture of poetics (distilled into an artistic form, and personified in the work of Mayakovsky), and the conjuncture of politics (as the new language of Soviet hegemony, personified in the work of Lenin). I will now proceed to actualise the study of Lenin’s language as a stuff sandwiched between these two strong articulations. If nothing else, these studies should clarify, in terms of art, what Roman Jakobson described as a “Leninist answer to Marxist theory”.

XV

Poetic Conjuncture

In 1924, Tynyanov wrote, “three years ago, prose firmly ordered poetry to clear out”. By that time, it was obvious that “writing about poems is almost as difficult as writing poems itself. And writing poems is almost as difficult as reading them. Such is the vicious circle of our times”.²⁰⁹ Tynyanov acknowledged the crisis in poetry was a moment where “inertia ceases to operate”, and with new forms of verse, “new visions” were born.²¹⁰ This theory about the historical laws of artistic forms (“the optical laws of history”) departed from the fact that the novelty of this transition period was not available for broader inspection, other than by its practitioners. Tynyanov’s aim was to reverse this perspective—instead of elevating himself to the heights of metaphysical abstraction, he entered into the crisis’ contradictions through the point of view of verses which transformed speech, and language which “gives a new measure to the world”.²¹¹ In the very horizon of this poetic possibility lay the heuristic model. Unlike Jakobson’s psychological expressiveness with regards to poetic language, the work of Tynyanov introduced the idea of poetry as a regime of truth, a form of inquiry, and a practice of “observation”.²¹² The 1920s struggle around poetry evolved around the question of truth. Varlam Shalamov’s memories of this time could be understood as one of the best testimonies to the militancy of poetry.²¹³

Poets were the new theorists, as well as being activists. The pedagogical value of poetry—as introduced by Arvatov and Vinokur—did not make sense without these heuristic possibilities. This was not only manageable by advancement (progress) of poetry qua poetry—there were other historical forces involved, which had to find their own vocations in the “measures of the world”.

“Mayakovsky’s position is a special one”, writes Tynyanov, because “he is sensitive to the underground promptings of history”.²¹⁴ The nature of a poet’s disposition towards Soviet hegemony was Mayakovsky’s core question after the revolution. His organisational work within the LEF movement resulted in the subsequent launch of LEF Journal, which was his direct response

to the 'crisis' of poetry. It was condensed into a questioning of the status of poetry within the conditions of commissioned art, or more precisely, what remained of the specificity of poetry when it was placed under demands to support Communist ideologies?

Mayakovsky encouraged everyone to support LEF, which incidentally turned into an organisation of leftist artists hostile towards poetry. Shklovsky described the situation vividly: "Now, imagine for a moment the position of the poet. He is at the head of the journal, and this journal opposes poetry. There was no place for Mayakovsky".²¹⁵ The articles published in the first issues of LEF not only displayed an impatient and hasty attitude towards the nature of poetry written in revolutionary Russia, but were also mercilessly critical towards Mayakovsky's poems, which was considered to be nonsense verses about love. Nikolay Chuzhak led this assault against poetry—within poetic devices he could only identify organisational skills for innovation in the epoch of the transition to socialism.²¹⁶ After Chuzhak resigned from LEF, Mayakovsky wrote an antagonistic letter reminding him of the core of their project:

"Remember that the purpose for which we have unified our efforts—*communist art* (as part of culture and communism in general)—is still a vague concept, evading exact classifications and theory, a field in which practice and intuition is often still in advance of the most experienced theoreticians..."²¹⁷

Stuck between the poetic concepts of Tynyanov and the productivist programmatic of Chuzhak, Mayakovsky tried to bridge the impossible—he wanted, as Shklovsky correctly observed, "to enter Communism with his entire life, with his love, his friends".²¹⁸ Mayakovsky was compelled by poetry, which Alain Badiou described as a procedure that "guarantees that language preserves the power to name the real/the truth".²¹⁹ Adding to the mission of poetry within the Communist revolutionary utopia, we have the most thrilling contradiction of the twentieth century.

The most urgent of these contradictions was related to issues of commitment, or demand. As Trotsky wrote upon reflecting on Mayakovsky, the Futurists were the worst poets when they

ended up as Communists. This impression required Trotsky to reconfigure how freedom was understood within the conditions of Communism. It was certainly not the bourgeois poets who could break through this deadlock using discourse trapped in the old language of civil society and its privileged understanding of culture. Again it was the Futurists—with their uncompromising hatred towards the forms of the old regime—who were in a position to reproach the fundamental concepts that derived from conservative society. If, as the Bolsheviks often noted, there was not a disputable political Futurist past, then the organisation of revolutionary culture would have been an easy job for the LEF. It would have been a new start—a fresh new language for an unprecedented era. When Mayakovsky wrote “I am cleaning myself under Lenin” (in a poem called ‘Lenin’), he embraced this new start, but still questioned how to remain a poet while doing this.

Shklovsky’s experimental autobiography, *Third Factory*, was the bravest document that attempted to address this question, as it extended its conclusions throughout. He discovered that among the most valuable and useful contribution of the Formalists was their capacity to restrict creativity as a delimitation of literariness. He argued that the work of the Formalists advanced through drawing lines—through demarcations. This particularly implied that the practice of poetry extracted the most valuable materials from ordinary language. Referring to Marx, Shklovsky compared poetic value to the laborious work of extracting diamonds. The implication of this principle was to subtract and delimit a poetic practice that necessitated the reformulation of ethical consequences. As a result, the foundational role of the poet as a guardian of freedom in society was shattered; instead, the work of the poet was to delineate the laws of poetic activity while simultaneously experimenting with different forms of social activism. It was this restricted action—previously discussed in the late nineteenth century among the Symbolists—that defined the practice of a poet squeezed between chance and necessity. Shklovsky’s topic was exactly this, he wanted to write “about unfreedom, about the royalties paid by Smirdin, about the influence of journals to literature, about the third factory—life”.²²⁰ This was an art practice understood as the sum total of all contradictions, both internal and external—it opposes phenomenological inner being waiting there

to be excavated, or to be scratched. The form the Formalists understood as an activist demand was to bring order to this mess, a form of discipline needed for its apt expression.

In times of crisis and during its intervals, the commonly understood poetic independence changed; its contradictions shattered the very foundation of the culture of art. In the time of a “black year for literature”, Shklovsky advised that the “inertia of art—that which makes it autonomous—is not needed”.²²¹ Since the untangling of bourgeois threads are almost impossible, the only methodology that was left for the Formalists was to study “unfreedom”, or contexts that clearly indicated their forms and limits, within their discoveries. Memorably, in his letter to Roman Jakobson which was included in *Third Factory*, Shklovsky asked for “methods ... of studying unfreedoms of a different type.”²²²

Parallel to this philosophical conundrum was the concrete problems involved in poetic conjuncture. After the death of Lenin, Mayakovsky set out to write a commemorative poem, a process which took almost a year.²²³ For Mayakovsky, the question was not only how to find the right words for Lenin (to renew his craft), but also how to “remain a poet while writing the poem on Lenin”.²²⁴ Kornel Zelinsky, who witnessed this anxiety about “not falling into sheer political journalism”, added that ultimately for Mayakovsky, “poetry is poetry”.²²⁵

In his autobiography, Mayakovsky remembered these years as “mulling over a poem, ‘Lenin’”.²²⁶

“Finished the poem *Lenin*. Read it at many workers’ gatherings. I’ve been very much afraid of that poem, since it would have been easy to descend to the level of a simple political tale”.²²⁷

The poem was published in the last issue of LEF Journal, and can be understood as a sort of poetic follow up to the Formalist’s analysis of Lenin. In reality, the texts about Lenin published in LEF Journal’s fifth issue were commissioned by Mayakovsky, and the editorial—which was censored—was also written by him.²²⁸

The articles on Lenin were very important for Mayakovsky, in that they represented the possibility of merging politics with art, and Communism with poetry in a scientific

way. He used it as an alibi to oppose critics of Formalism, claiming it to be a mere “technical tool to study language as such”. He defended the whole political project of LEF by referring to how that special issue included “beautiful articles that are a great contribution to the science of the word and to the study of Lenin’s language”.²²⁹

What follows here is closer analysis of these amazing articles.

XVI

Out of Synch with the Thing: the Formalists on Lenin's Language

Upon reading Yuri Tynyanov, one is amazed by the narrative of his 'Leniniana', which consisted of many obscure and colourful moments. One of the unique literary devices that he ascribed to Lenin was his citation of others'—mostly his opponents—words. He argued that Lenin successfully adapted already existing words into a lexical unity. The most important outcome of Lenin's "linguistic policy" was its attempt to emancipate words from their existing lexical colouring, subsequently subordinating them into everyday usage. By derailing his opponents' linguistic devices, Lenin often introduced "something new and fresh" into the era's political language. Tynyanov did not endorse explicating the historical and political context of Lenin's language, but rather associated it with the existing style of Alexander Herzen's "stark expressions". Nonetheless, through this lack of the genealogy—which was common amongst the Formalists—Tynyanov thoroughly analysed the novelty of Lenin's language politics by defining its main focus as the "discrepancy between word and thing". Tynyanov remarkably observed that Lenin "combats smooth words". Lenin's linguistic project was to unmask all noble words related to bourgeoisie posturing as Leftist exclamations, such as "freedom", "equality", and "revolution". He "dispels [the] aura" from these words, and introduced movement into language. "Just as rhymes in poems", Lenin's language introduced new connections and new constellations in which "new images are fleshed out". Either with swear words, or complicated constructions of lexical devices, Lenin's language, according to Tynyanov, was always "unusually dynamic".

Boris Eikhenbaum situates the genealogy of Lenin's style in a more detailed manner by presenting it as a combination of Chernyshevsky's style of intelligentsia writing, Russian colloquial speech, and Latin oratorical style. The distinctive feature of Lenin's language was how it worked in "violation of these traditions". This aligned him both with Tolstoy's violation of traditional 'poeticalness', and Mayakovsky and the Futurists' confrontational

poetry. This was the main argument within Eikhenbaum's article about Lenin—his political revolutionary speech revealed intermediary linguistic forms that hovered between poetic and practical languages. Despite not being as bedazzling as Trotsky's, Lenin's speech had a certain poetic effect. Eikhenbaum demonstrated this by meticulously studying Lenin's text from 1918, "The Chief Task of Our Day". In that text he discovered "syntactic parallelism", and the innovative organisation of paragraphs as stanzas that "launch[ed] a new movement", which he represented with a formulaic schema. "Lenin is seemingly indifferent to language", Eikhenbaum wrote, before considering political argumentations to be the main focus of his speeches and writings. Still, there were traces of a distinctive style in Lenin's language, particularly in the way in which he handled his opponents' discursive style. Eikhenbaum arrived at conclusions similar to those in Tynyanov's studies of Lenin's citational device. The foundation of this device was an uncompromising war against phrases and excessive rhetoric, which Eikhenbaum, quoting Lenin, specified as "razzle and dazzle of belles-lettres, lofty predicates about truth, the purifying flame, crystalline purity". Lenin opposed these big words with strong words which were not only vituperations—their strength was also in their form. Eikhenbaum argued that these strong words "never digress[ed]", so as to maximise their expressive energy.

Through writing in a dense and punctual style, Viktor Shklovsky saved much energy in his text on Lenin. His Lenin understood the "power of language" quite well, and used it to oppose revolutionary "phrases" that reduced words to "incantations". By dispelling the semantic magic and aura around words, Lenin materialised a specific language that insisted on the 'thingness' of the word. This was Shklovsky's retort to Trotsky's criticism within the chapter on Russian Formalism in *Literature and Revolution*, which accused the Formalists of being "followers of St. John. Believing that 'In the beginning was the Word'. But we [communists] believe that in the beginning was the deed. The word followed, as its phonetic shadow".²³⁰ Contrary to this, Shklovsky argued that when words became a "thing's counterfeit shadow", they then turned into a "phrase", or transformed into an "incantation". In the preface to *Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky was less cryptic in his reply to Trotsky: "The word is not a shadow. The word is

a thing".²³¹ These secular, materialistic, and versatile aspects of Lenin's words would always mark a "totally new beginning". Due to these words' materialist aspects within Lenin's speeches, one can then recognise the linguistic process itself, or as Shklovsky wrote, see how a word was "produced before our eyes". Shklovsky wrote about Lenin on many different occasions, mentioning him as a theoretician of eccentric art in *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, as Hegelian in *Bowstring*, and impressive in *Žili-byli*.²³² Common to all of these was that Lenin's style consisted of "change, not in ascertainment". This anti-dogmatic Lenin decanonised language through using the device of "bring[ing] words down to size and stir[ring] them up".

Lev Yakubinsky—whom Shklovsky described as the Formalists' linguist—was interested in studying Lenin's language as a "serious step towards assembling a technological science of linguistics" that could answer the demands of social and political life. Yakubinsky focussed on only one article that Lenin wrote in 1914, opposing warmongering amongst bourgeois and Leftists circles. "On the National Pride of the Great Russians" was also analysed by other Formalists, but Yakubinsky set out to decipher the ways in which revolutionary phrases about "national pride" were constructed. His aim was to show how Lenin deflated the "elevated, high-style, pretentious, declamatory mode of [that] discourse". By formalising Lenin's text against war, Yakubinsky presented the use of parentheses (which appropriated, détourned, and co-opted his opponents' speeches) as a means to "ruptur[e] the fluidity of discourse". According to Yakubinsky, Lenin disturbed the flow of high-style nationalist discourse by intervening in the patrician smoothness kept running by representatives of nation-state speech. Lenin's genius was to speak outside of the national-state apparatus.

Boris Tomashevsky was also interested in questions around energy in relation to Lenin's language. His point of departure was Lenin's understanding of the "empowering force of words", but this expanded to encompass theories around "slogans", and how "theses" were constructed. Lenin attempted similar studies in his 1917 text, "On Slogans", and the propositions presented there have gone on to influence a range of philosophers and linguists.²³³ Following Lenin's definition, Tomashevsky discussed the construction of theses as forms of speech that crammed tremendous

political content (entire political programmes) into a series of short slogans. Theses contained a maximum energy of expression—they were condensed forms of theoretical and political analyses, which Tomashevsky interestingly illustrated as operating “like a coiled verbal spring”. Compared to Tynyanov, Tomashevsky paid little attention to the “lexical” environment of slogans and theses; he saw the strength of Lenin’s language within the “peculiar expressiveness of his constructions”. Sidelineing the expressiveness of these “constructions”, his main target of analysis within Lenin’s speech was its effect “on the present”, or the actual conjuncture.

Boris Kazansky’s exhaustive text on Lenin’s discourse was the most analytical and systematic of all. For Kazansky, the most outstanding device within Lenin’s economical words was repetition, which was musically analogous to “the fugue”. Apart from this structure, the main characteristic of Lenin’s language was its extraordinary “suspicious treatment of words”, intending “to lull people to sleep with declamations, and exclamations”. Instead, his discourse was extremely “restrained”, cool and sharp, operating outside of the intelligentsia’s milieu. Kazansky wrote that when it was necessary to oppose this normative language of the bourgeoisie, Lenin did not hesitate to use “sensual, poetic forms of expression”. For Kazansky, the most significant feature of Lenin’s discourse was “its analytical nature, its cruel, almost technical character”.

In his portrait of Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Tretyakov wrote that “he studies and quotes Lenin as a great thinker and as a great master of prose”.²³⁴ Unlike Karl Marx, Lenin’s language was not a topic of many sophisticated studies.²³⁵ The Russian Formalists’ analyses are unique not only within the history of literature studies, but also within the field of the political avant-garde. This type of analysis is indispensable to any project dealing with the complex and contradictory relationship between avant-garde and revolutionary conjuncture. Most of the texts, pamphlets, interventions, and speeches of Lenin that were analysed by the Formalists were contemporary outputs of their times. They did not reduce materials extracted from Lenin’s language to a historical inquiry into how abstract and generic political speech was formed. For them, Lenin was not a canonical writer akin to Pushkin, Griboyedov, Gogol, or Tolstoy; his was a language of the living political world, of unresolved contradictions, demands, and burning questions.

Yet, these precious texts remain obscure within Formalist literature, despite the fact that in the last three decades, the movement has enjoyed steady popularity and interest. Fredric Jameson interpreted the Formalists' attempt to conciliate with Marxism to be "a logical consequence of their own thinking", but is silent about their texts analysing Lenin's language.²³⁶ To my knowledge, there exists only a German translation of texts edited by Fritz Mierau, a literature historian who was then based in the GDR. Mierau, influenced by Tretyakov's observation, introduced the collection as proof of the literariness of Lenin's language. He argued that similar to Brecht's understanding of literature as a "mode of struggle", these Formalist studies introduced "Lenin's linguistic 'mode of struggle'".²³⁷ It was precisely this confrontational characteristic of Lenin's language which the Formalists all agreed upon. They splintered when interpreting which devices contributed to this position.

This is not how the issue has been presented in the Western academic world. In the only English language monographs published about LEF, author Halina Stephan reserves two paragraphs for "the Language of Lenin", discussing the project as an "attempt to secure Soviet legitimacy for the avant-garde", which "did not really help the political reputation of the Formalists".²³⁸ Even more common is to understand the Formalists' analysis as technical contributions to Vinokur's "language culture" theories—attempts to scientifically develop political, persuasive, propaganda speech.²³⁹ Arguably, this interpretation of Lenin's language could be situated within a programmatic conception of political effectivity. It mirrored bourgeois understandings of the October Revolution as a well-planned conspiracy, and a successful *coup d'état*. Aage Hansen-Löve, in his monumental history on Russian Formalism, worried that within this constellation, Lenin's language was a form of "persuasive speech" that could be "demagogically abused"; in order for this to be avoided, it needed to be organised into a scientific corpus using the Formalist technical concept of "perception-revolution" (*Wahrnehmungsrevolution*).²⁴⁰

To address this scientific normalisation, Lenin responded with a famous slogan that claimed Communism could only be achieved through merging the electrification of the whole country with Soviet power.

XVII

Soviet Conjuncture

The overall structure of how the Formalists conceptualised poetry was based on this logic: the main constituents of poetry were words, words were made of sounds, and sounds were materialised through movement. Through this schematisation, the whole apparatus of poetic praxis was condensed to questions of movement, line, speed, and density. Following this scheme, the Formalists justified their difference from the Symbolist poets, whose theoreticians adopted the primacy of sounds over words' pictorial constituency. Thus, instead of mimicking the Symbolists' poetic metaphorical pictures, the Formalists and Futurists insisted on the sound-words' concrete effects via the materiality of their rhythms. It was this aspect of movement which granted a strong transitory, historical, and social potential to their understanding of poetic praxis. As Ignazio Ambrogio argued, by abandoning the picture theory of poetic words, the Formalists made a more dynamic abstraction possible (something close to Hegelian dialectics) which became part of contemporary art theory.²⁴¹

This is one of the main reasons why Futurist poetry and Formalist theories aligned with the political understanding of the revolutionary movement. To put it simply, their poetic conjuncture was not outside of Soviet hegemony. In fact, this whole machinery ran on the oil of Soviet conjuncture. By communist conjuncture, I specifically refer to the sum total of political and cultural transformations that took place after the revolution. This was a new context, foreign to most of the poets, mired in contradictions. Despite its discrepancies, this new conjuncture provoked the Formalists to redefine the status of their conceptual apparatus regarding the dialectics between history, contemporaneity, language, and form.

Mayakovsky best understood the linguistic importance of this new context, and it was he who attempted to construct a new mode of poetic production from these fundamental contradictions. For Mayakovsky, the possibility of movement in poetry was "determined by the exigencies of the class struggle".²⁴²

“For example: the Revolution cast the rugged idiom of the millions out on the streets; the slang of the outer suburbs flowed across the avenues in the city centre; the enervated burbling of the intelligentsia with their vocabulary of castrated words like ‘ideal’, ‘principles of justice’, ‘the divine origin’, ‘the transcendental countenance of Christ and Antichrist’—all this kind of talk, once mouthed in the restaurants, has been wiped out. A new element of language has been liberated. How is it to be made poetic?”²⁴³

In Mayakovsky’s text, the crux of the issue is crystallised into a question of how popular speech was to be introduced into poetry, and how poetry was to be extracted from popular speech, and an important section was dedicated to analysing the work of the poet Sergei Yesenin.

In those unresolved years of contradictions and struggles, words played a crucial role. Through this memorable anecdote, Viktor Shklovsky summed up the whole point of class struggle in language.

I saw Yesenin for the first time in the salon of Zinaida Gippius. He was already in disfavour.

“What are those strange gaiters you are wearing?”

Zinaida Gippius asked, examining Yesenin’s feet through her lorgnette.

“These are felt boots,” he replied.

Gippius, of course, knew that felt boots were not gaiters and Yesenin too knew why he was being asked that question. Gippius’s question meant: I can’t seem to recall ... I don’t believe in your felt boots, you are not a peasant.

And Yesenin response: Leave me alone, I don’t need you.

This is how it was done back then.

Meanwhile, the whole argument was about the October Revolution.²⁴⁴

Indeed the whole issue was about the October Revolution. The years 1923 to 1925, in which seven issues of LEF Journal were

published, corresponded with the most tumultuous times of revolutionary Russia. They were, as Moshe Lewin commented, the decisive years for the balance sheet of Communist revolution; questions of peasantry, bureaucracy, cultural revolution, the NEP, the Communist International, nationalism—everything hung in the air. The whole apparatus was unresolved. In his last public appearance, Lenin asked the question, “How can we reorganise?”, and he answered, “We do not yet know”.²⁴⁵ All these unknotted threads were loosely connected to the fundamental question of hegemony. As Alan Shandro argues, at this juncture the Leninist logic of politics was crystallised into the logic of class struggle. The form of this logic—if such a thing is possible when we speak about the uneven dynamics of class struggles—is “the play of a mode of thought that is alive to the movement of political reality”.²⁴⁶ In this constellation, the definition of politics understood through Leninist (revolutionary) logic was “inherently reflexive, moving in response to movements in its context, to the activity of other political actors and to its own initial effects”. It is a process, an activity, or as Shandro beautifully invokes, “a moving target”.²⁴⁷

Everyone living in Russia between 1923 and 1925 understood Communism as a question of hegemony. No discussions about Lenin, or anything related to the revolution, could exist outside of this question of hegemony. Retrospective literature written about the cult of Lenin, the consolidation of his authority under Stalin, and similar Cold War topics—and which can now be understood as post-factual—were not topics addressed in the twenties. The texts in which the identity of Lenin was discussed were approached in a refracted manner through the contradictions of existing Soviet hegemony, or *smychka* (the alliance), which was understood as a coalition between revolutionary worker proletariats, and conservative peasants. It was purely a political question of how to reorganise the apparatus of the workers state—itsself a form without a solid shape—after the exaltation of the October insurrection.

As stated, one important dimension of this political hegemony was its perpetuation of revolution via “cultural activism”. This often referred to questions of cultural revolution as systematic and experimental forms of collective learning that could engage the masses with the logic of Soviet hegemony. Its interest in language

was framed within the rubrics of cultural revolution. Craig Brandist writes that “it was in the realm of linguistic relations that the question of hegemony became particularly important”, concluding that in this field, the contradictions of NEP and Soviet hegemony was felt the most, as language had become extremely fragmented.²⁴⁸ The alliance between proletariat and peasants caused further complexities in the context of NEP-hegemony, because the cultural substratum inherited from the Tsarist times resisted transforming at a pace expected by the Bolsheviks. The immobility, inertia, or lack of self-movement amongst the peasants resulted in an abundance of malapropisms in speech, a fragmented mixture between the new abstract words of international Communist vocabulary, and the raw, “fresh”, living, “succulent” expressions of the vernacular.²⁴⁹ No matter how fragmented Soviet hegemony was, the issue at hand was not a question of identity. This was what makes Brandist’s research stand out from other literature about the cultural-linguistic dimension of Soviet hegemony—it argues for a strong critique of identity-centred politics, and the culturalisation of politics. Even questions of nationhood that were at the fulcrum of discussions about linguistic hegemony could be understood within these terms. “For Lenin, in contradistinction to the Austro-Marxists, and to Stalin, whose 1913 *Marxism and the National Question* is still too often confused with Lenin’s position, the national question is primarily a political question rather than an economic, psychological or cultural one”.²⁵⁰ By rejecting the cultural activism of Proletkult movement as a question of identity, Brandist opposes a suggestion fashionable among theoreticians of cultural studies, “that the shared factory culture is the embryo of a potentially hegemonic culture that can consolidate the movement towards a socialist society”.²⁵¹ Philosophically, Lenin did not care about the systematisation of labour culture that Proletkult theoreticians eagerly defended. For him, understanding the Marxist mode of production as some sort of German Technik of developed labour organisation and production devices was not what Communism and the contemporaneity of revolutionary politics meant. The primacy of politics, as a moving target, was central to the Leninist logic of Soviet hegemony.

To provide a hint of how he understood one aspect of the form the language of Soviet conjuncture took, Brandist refers to Riita Lehtikainen’s research, which described this perspective

as an abstract linguistic movement, “broadening the interest from the small to the large, from the private to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, from the near to far, from facts to theory”.²⁵² How this abstraction advanced was a common topic for discussion within literature about Lenin’s language. Accordingly, in order to understand Lenin’s theory correctly, we must first understand his theory of abstraction. This was the argument of philosopher A. F. Losev, who identified abstraction as the main constituent of Lenin’s language. Losev saw content as the constructive principle that ran through political speech. By that, Losev understood the “struggle of content with form” as a precondition for abstraction, which was a “cast off of form and [a] transformation of content”.²⁵³

This is the logical conclusion of seeing language as a tool for communication that happened solely through ideas and concepts, or as a kind of platform in which clashing conceptions elevated workers to the heights of theory. Following this, Losev argued that the task of the linguist “for whom language is an instrument for human communication, is to study the philosophical theories of Lenin”.²⁵⁴

This demand sounds like Trotsky’s call to “raise workers to the level of Capital”, by which he meant the cultural revolution would enable workers to advance their thinking to the level of Marxist philosophical abstraction. Along the horizon framed by Trotsky and other Bolsheviks, learning was to take place in two parallel layers—in the level of abstraction, and in the street. Their programme did not end at an academic quest, but was a demanding inquiry that was similar to Soviet hegemony constructed from an alliance between proletariat and peasantry. They conceived of a hegemony of language as an alliance between the Communist’s language of theoretical abstraction, and the language of angry workers and peasants in the streets. To put it in Formalist terminology, we could say that Lenin’s language ran along two parallel lines: the line of abstraction and the line of the street.

Much literature about Lenin is abundant with comments on his style of speaking. If Yesenin’s particular retort to the caprice of Gippius was about the October Revolution, the discourse of the Bolsheviks—all that they talked about—was the question of revolution. As Georg Lukács wrote, “the actuality of the revolution

was [at] the core of Lenin's thought".²⁵⁵ The resonance of this revolutionary politics was strong and new to such an extent that the Marxist historian Paul Le Blanc describes it as "Bolshevik mystique", adding that the party which did not resemble anything else was organised as a unique combination of underground, political, scientific, and cultural interests.²⁵⁶ This resonated with the subjectivity of the party's activists. The oft-repeated slogan of the twenties, "Party is Lenin, Lenin is Party", was not an expression of a new dogma of the consolidating hegemony apparatus. It meant that politics encompassed the subjectivity of a position projected onto Lenin, an impossible juxtaposition of abstract concepts and the forcefulness of the street. Krupskaya's reminiscences are still unsurpassable in articulating this subjectivity.²⁵⁷ The force of this subjectivity was recognised also by Lenin's Menshevik opponent, who reportedly said: "there is no-one else who for the whole twenty-four hours of every day is busy with the revolution, who thinks and even dreams only of the revolution". Similar sentiments were levelled at Trotsky—A.G. Ziv recalled that Trotsky's "ego dominated his whole behaviour, but the revolution dominated his ego".²⁵⁸

Not all Bolsheviks were political leaders with oratory gifts, and Lenin especially lacked that virtue. However his character—a strange amalgam of commitment to the revolution, contempt of bourgeois culture, conspiratorial skills to avoid police imprisonment, thirst for learning, unlimited trust in the legitimacy of people's struggles, and genuine internationalism—was ripe for facilitating access to new forms of political language. It was, as anarcho-syndicalist Alfred Rosmer wrote, a "revolutionary [form] of a new type: a surprising mixture of 'dogmatism' (it would be better to say unshakable attachment to certain fundamental principles) and of extreme 'manoeuvring' (a typical Leninist expression) in the battle against the bourgeoisie".²⁵⁹ The form produced by this strange mixture could respond to queries regarding avant-garde artists, and prompted Formalist theoreticians' excitement over Lenin's work and language. Althusser named it "a wild practice (*une pratique sauvage*)" of a particular philosophical style.²⁶⁰

There is an absence of recognisable patterns that could provide a shortcut, or a means of extracting the real form of Lenin. The way in which Lenin spoke, and the way in which he developed his arguments contained "no concern for form or even construction.

Yet it is precisely the absence of the formal constructions we are used to that constitutes Lenin's way of presenting his arguments".²⁶¹ Similar to the Formalists, Rosmer concluded that "with Lenin, all these questions are posed in a new way. The very words take on a different meaning or return to their true meaning".²⁶² Unfortunately, there is not a linguistic passport, or language scan of Lenin, similar to the one that Pier Pasolini beautifully devised for Gramsci.²⁶³ But there are many accounts about Lenin's language that elucidate the manner in which he spoke, from L. Fotieva's remark that he was "linked to the people by a thousand threads... through a use of apt comparisons, proverbs, sayings, and quotations from Russian and world classics", to Clara Zetkin, who said he threw out sentences "like unhewn blocks of granite", or Gorky, to whom Lenin's words invoked "the cold glitter of steel shavings".²⁶⁴ Yet, the most impressive account is Shklovsky's description of Lenin's speech, heard at the Soldiers Section in St Petersburg: "Lenin spoke his piece with elemental force, rolling his thought like an enormous cable stone. When he spoke [about] how simple it was to build a Socialist revolution, he swept all doubts before him like a wild boar trampling through the reeds".²⁶⁵

The brusque language of Lenin is not always a source of political agitation and poetic inspirations—it was also an alibi for paranoid Cold War commentators to confirm their theories of the revolution as a conspiracy of power-driven fanatics. For these commentators, the name of the brusque language is *langue de bois*, or wooden language, better known as Newspeak. According to one of them, this was an idiocy that reduced philosophy to "boss words" and "expression[s] of hatred".²⁶⁶ This wooden language, devoid of abstraction and improvisation, was a characteristic of political language where the sole bearers of its credibility are institutional structures. Alexei Yurchak's argues that post-Bolshevik language—the Bolshevik language put forth after the death of Lenin and Stalin, which maintained a complicated but synthetic web of quotations as a meta-political-language—was a good example of the institutionalisation of *langue de bois*.²⁶⁷

To a certain extent, it was true that already in the twenties, the language of Lenin, and its strange mixture of abstract and street lines, was going through visible institutionalisation and purification processes. As Michael Gorham discussed, this resulted

in a purging of the “hooliganism in language”, and the consolidation of a Stalinist position. What mattered politically was that the “street line” of the new linguistic Soviet hegemony upturned the social respectability of many smooth words. The whole language was now rewritten from the perspective of people who, prior to the revolution, were addressed by the upper classes only with “abusive language and swearing [that] upheld legacies of slavery and humiliation”.²⁶⁸ After the revolution, this changed. Soldiers, like workers and peasants, demanded to be addressed with the respectful “citizen”, a term that spread so widely it was as if it had been “invented just now!”, the poet Michael Kuzmin wrote. The revolution and its language seduced them, as if a “tough sandpaper has polished all their words”.²⁶⁹

XVII

Not by Mustard Alone: Zaum

Articulating the new words of this new conjuncture demanded much from the linguists of the revolution. From Paul Lafargue to Roman Jakobson, everyone interested in the destiny of revolutionary words paid attention to the complex but progressive elements of this dynamic.²⁷⁰ Trotsky, approvingly, justified the gains of the revolution through the linguistic dimension it added to Soviet hegemony, concluding his thousand plus page history of the Russian Revolution with this observation:

“The language of the civilised nations has clearly marked off two epochs in the development of Russia. Where the aristocratic culture introduced into word parlance such barbarisms as *czar*, *pogrom*, *knout*, October has internationalised such words as *Bolshevik*, *soviet*, and *pyatiletka*. This alone justifies the proletarian revolution, if you imagine that it needs justification”.²⁷¹

Word-creation was the main currency of Russian Futurism—it was also known as transrational word-creation, or poetry written in Zaum language. Used by Alexei Kruchenykh for the first time in 1913, the new word-formations of Zaum language was a topic of many disputes and theoretical exploitations. Kruchenykh wrote that

“words die, the world is eternally young. The artists have seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word ‘lily’ has been soiled and ‘raped’. Therefore, I call the lily ‘euy’—the original purity is reestablished”.²⁷²

The newly created “euy” is a Zaum word, it is a “word as such”; in Zaum terminology it is ‘self-valuable’, existing through the sheer forms of its own expression, without needing any proximity to existing languages, both semantically and morphologically:

it is untranslatable, beyond the senses, both timeless and futuristic. All the contradictions the Formalists and LEFists inherited from the Futurists boiled down to this obscure singular poetic form. Zaum language was the mission impossible of the Russian avant-garde; it was an incommensurable and strong current. At the same time, it was the weakest link in the chain of avant-garde theories, as all fantasies regarding poetic praxis and the secrets of words were attached to it. As Vinokur said, “all Futurists are drawn to the theory of the word like the plant to the sunlight”. In this dedication, the Futurists are understood to have come “close to a mastery of the ‘secret’ of the word”.²⁷³ What were these “secrets” of the word that the Futurists discovered, and in which way did the Communists and LEFists understand them as useful tools for their own project?

In 1925, Zaum artist and theoretician Alexei Kruchenykh was so moved by the LEF Journal’s publishing of the Formalists’ analysis of Lenin’s language, that he responded with the booklet *Devices of Lenin’s Speech*.²⁷⁴ Rab Rab is now publishing the first ever English translation of this obscure but interesting booklet to accompany the analysis of the Formalists. This booklet can be summarised as a reminder by way of the Formalists—whose methodologies and principles expanded upon the practice of Futurists, and whose main currency was Zaum words—that analysing the margins of Lenin’s language was initially possible only because of Zaum logic, which unlocked certain secrets of words. Kruchenykh wanted to re-translate this relationship through introducing Zaum logic into the Formalists’ conclusions about Lenin’s language. Thus, the content of revolutionary speech was backed up by the extreme form of the sound shape of its words. As a result, the arcane dimension of the “word-as-such” gave credibility to influence the masses.

This was the point from which many LEFists and Formalists understood Zaum: as a possibility to generate the new revolutionary language of Soviet hegemony. Boris Arvatov, Boris Kushner, Grigory Vinokur, Sergei Tretyakov, Osip Brik and others dealt with this question when addressing the problem of the utilitarian aspect of the Futurist experiments. It was Tretyakov, in his programmatic text “LEF’s Tribune”, who clearly defended Zaum experiments as a “laboratory of sound-languages” that enabled the

presentation of different narratives. According to him, this was technically realisable through the Zaum devices of “phonetic, rhythmic, and figurative expressions”, that would make it possible “for [the] masses to become complete masters of their language”.²⁷⁵

In his book on Futurism, Nikolai Gorlov discussed the phonetic revolution of the avant-garde, and paused at some length to analyse Zaum. His main argument concerned the political use of Zaum as a form of extreme solipsism that concluded with unbounded subjective individualism. When referring to Kruchenykh’s restoration of the corrupted “lily” as “euy”, Gorlov objected to this renaming process, and argued that in revolutionary Russia, name changes were not just the remit of the Futurists, but also part of Bolshevik practices.

“Surely we Communists are looking at the world anew and don’t we have the desire to rechristen, give name to everything that was despoiled by the odious political past? But, in fact, we have long been doing this: all civilian and military establishments and posts, certain towns, many streets, factories and villages have been rechristened. We have rechristened ourselves (Communists instead of Bolsheviks)”.²⁷⁶

Despite its revolutionary potential in exposing the structural dynamics of poetic language’s phonetic organisation, the Zaum experiments are not to be mistaken with language as such. The displacement (the shift, or *sdvig*) of words could be useful for renaming new social entities, but re-nominating revolutionary institutions was not an act of restoring previously existing meanings; the political core of the renaming was not purification, it was a shortcut to the contradictions contained within a transitory period. Gorlov’s fundamental objection was tied to a critique of word experiments that surpassed the historical determinants of language. At the core of this critique was the objection to the independence and autonomy of Zaum words, understood as a restoration of a pure meaning, enabling them to perform a conservative function. Gorlov illustrated how the “substitution of the semantic image for the phonetic” could be the source of very conservative “harmonious” emotions. When reminiscing about being deeply stirred by

Kyriafiarim, the name of a Palestinian town he encountered for the first time, Gorlov speculated on the Zaum quality of this word: "I had a clear picture of sand bathed in sunlight, of a woman's name which someone had spoken, the image of woman, even the glint of the sun and the rustle of yellow, definitely yellow, silk. Reducing the word 'kyriafiarim' to phonetic images we get a whole harmonic series: Kyria (Kyrie Eleison—Syria) Kyr-ria (reminiscent of the name Mariam or Maria) fia-rim (again a feminine image—fia, combining with one of sunlight—Rim (Rome)).²⁷⁷ The trajectory of this particular subjective freeform association was embedded into the most conservative imagination of the East's feminine mystique, paving the way for a reactionary understanding of a 'self-valuable' word. To summarise, Gorlov's critique indicated that Zaum words did not necessarily guarantee subversive potential via neologisms—they could equally fit very well into existing ideological imaginations.

Trotsky was critical of poetic theories about the acronyms of the new Soviet institutions. For him, acronyms such as "Gviu, Glavbum, Gau, Guvuz", which Boris Pilnyak "heard as the wailing of the revolutionary elements", were "purposeful, working words, thought out and consciously put together (just as there are working hypotheses), for a conscious, purposeful, planned construction, such as has never been in the world before".²⁷⁸ These Soviet acronyms were not to be thought of as irrational and beyond-sense keywords that nevertheless provided access to the secrets of the Bolshevik mindset. According to Trotsky, the "insolence of bad manners" contained in Zaum poetry could, at some level, expose the essence of the Russian language's phonetic structures. It was argued that this could foster more local and consciously experimental poetic language than converged from the style cultivated by Pushkin, which was "unconsciously influenced by the French language".²⁷⁹ This was how Trotsky sought to utilise the trans-rational form of Futurist language, and he supported his position with a phonetic interpretation of Kruchenykh's notorious lines from the 1913 Zaum poem *Pomada*: "dir, bul, tschil".

In Nikolai Bukharin's aforementioned 1934 paper on poetic language at the Soviet Writers' Congress, this same line was translated as "Dyr bull shirr". It was put forward as an example of an "extreme contraction", and used as an alibi to attack some Futurist tendencies towards mimicking the word-mysticism of

Symbolists like Andrei Bely. Despite opposing the Marxists' neglect of form as a bureaucratisation of art theory, Bukharin was not an easy supporter of the extreme dimensions of poetic solipsism. Furthermore, he linked the Zaum experiments to reactionary forces that were opposed to the contemporaneity of the revolutionary movement. For Bukharin, "the extreme individualism of these arguments is also indicative of their social roots. They have their origin in [the] abject fear of the flood of new 'content' accompanying the revolution, which overturned the tea-tables in so many drawing-rooms".²⁸⁰

To put it simply, Bukharin claimed that the 'nonsense' of the Zaum experiments escaped the logic of the revolution. They were a nihilistic response to the contemporaneity of the progressive Soviet political hegemony. In fact, this was partly true if the archaic elements that prevailed in Futurist poetry were taken into account. The most recognisable content in Zaum poetry was usually coloured with heavy references to a Russian folkloric past. Apart from some Kruchenykh's word-coinings, Velimir Khlebnikov's poetry was rich with references to old Slavonic tropes, and was constructed via a complex personal theory of history and language. Similarly, Marinetti's characterisation of the Futurists' experiments with neologisms as "plusquamperfectum" is telling—this witty combination of "plusquamperfekt" and "futurism" was designed to emphasise the Futurists' drive toward the archaic.²⁸¹ Zaum poet Benedikt Livshitz's book on the history of early Futurism provided a picture of this Futurist avant-garde as "the one and a half-eyed archer" who galloped in front of a racial theory of art's "atavistic strata, diluvian rhythms, confronting the West and sustained by the East, approached in the relentless cataclysm, flooded by the light of prehistory".²⁸²

Thus, Bukharin's political critique of Zaum as supra-historical and archaic was true when applied to the Futurists' pre-revolutionary experiments. It was true that Zaum poetry had nothing to do with "content", but this did not mean that the Futurist poets' indifference towards content was the result of their resistance to revolutionary content. The opposite was true: content, or precisely social content, entered into Futurist poetry only after the revolution. In reality, the content that accompanied the revolution that Bukharin spoke about was welcomed by most of the Futurist poets and artists.

This resulted in their attempt to find a place for Zaum poetry within the LEF ethos, as articulated by Tretyakov and Arvatov.

Despite this impossible meeting, the Zaum artists and theoreticians combed through all possibilities to ascertain a political use for Zaum experiments. As we shall see, this proved to be fruitful, as a Futurist sound-poem “laboratory” provided artistic devices for a Productivist elaboration of the poem, which was the LEF group’s main focus. Actually, it was the LEF’s productivism that introduced the Futurists’ experimental word-formations to the service of a new political language. Apart from the aforementioned Tretyakov, both Arvatov and Vinokur made contributions to sociological-formalism, and attempted to forge links between Zaum word secrets and the “Bolshevik mystique”. There were philosophical grounds for this link, as Communist, and in particular Bolshevik understandings of politics, argued for a theory of social dynamics based on a multi-linear and uneven combination of contradictions. As stated, this linguistic unevenness could be ascribed to the Bolsheviks’ parallel abstract and street lines of discourse, that were locked in a continuous interplay between coercion and struggle. This same contradiction was at the heart of Zaum—its poetic language was advanced through a laboratory of work preparing for the future, which at the same time insisting on the validity of words’ supra-rational aspects that bordered on being trans-historically archaic.

One of the symptoms of this unevenness was the use of swearwords in Bolshevik speech. When analysing Soviet speech, Michael Gorham questioned the ways in which the heterogeneous traits of new Communist speech (including semantic shifts, the increase of borrowed words, and the militarisation of everyday language, neologisms, abbreviations) contributed to a functional use for political language. In an attempt to distinguish themselves from the intelligentsia, workers used their own “proletarian language”, which was a combination of thieves’ jargon and swear words; this was directly aligned with the “street” elements of Lenin’s linguistic organisation.²⁸³ When asking, “how could the Bolshevik message be transmitted without altering the essential tones or integrity of its perspective?”,²⁸⁴ Gorham argued that the institutional response to this cacophony was to purify language like some sort of reduction of noise.

Nonetheless, the Communist understanding of swear-words was an impulsive reaction against the bureaucratisation of Soviet Productivism—an expression of the anger of the oppressed, which Trotsky and Lenin saw as less dangerous than the cynical philistinism of bourgeois oppressive language. None of the Bolsheviks would imagine proposing a blueprint of linguistic policy based on swear words, whereas this was exactly what the Zaum poets did. Alexei Kruchenykh came up with a complete linguistic theory to explain the roots of this language through a scatological synecdoche. He compiled a book that discussed the history of Russian literature—from Pushkin, Gogol, and the Symbolists, to Ilya Zdanevich, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov and himself—scanning their poetic output for the word “kaka”. His aim was to reduce these poems to their smallest parts (synecdoche), and to discover their concealed subliminal sexual and scatological messages. He did this very successfully by managing to detect the synecdoche “kaka” in almost the whole poetic corpus of Russian literature.²⁸⁵ The non-sense infantile syllables became the main currency of literature, and Zaum was thus portrayed as reigning within every corner of poetic speech.

Despite its utopian demands for the simplification and universalisation of language, the Zaum words “ka and ka” were useful and productive only as a transitory solution. Or more precisely, as a transrational solution for transitional logic. Shklovsky wrote that “one thing is certain: Zaum sound language strives to be language”.²⁸⁶ From this historical perspective, further conclusions could be drawn regarding the transformative procedures of the language itself. This transitional quality was exactly what the Zaum poets considered to be the logic of Futurist experiments.

“When I was writing the zaum words of the dying Akhenaton in “Ka” [1915]—“Manch, Manch”—they almost hurt to look at; I couldn’t read them, I kept seeing lightning bolts between them and myself. But now [1919] they don’t move me at all. And I don’t why that is.”²⁸⁷

Khlebnikov’s observation alone convincingly pointed to the historical dimension of Zaum words. If this was expanded to the limits

of its logical conclusion, the Bolsheviks' dismissal of beyond-sense as something supra-historical would not hold ground. Indisputably, Kruchenykh's Zaum words—"dyr bul shchyl"—are also subject to historical dynamics.

The dialectical core of this observation emphasises the entanglement between formal experimentation and semantic associations, despite the fact that the Zaum poets insisted otherwise. Roman Jakobson also supported this position, writing that "while Zaum language is a powerful constituent of verbal art, it cannot, like mustard, be the sole item of a dish or of a diet".²⁸⁸ Paradoxically, by insisting on the radical autopoietic processes of the poem, Zaum-experiments necessitated including extra-artistic elements. Thus, a historical materialist study of Zaum should aim to be the main dish to Zaum's mustard. Given that the project of Russian Futurism—no matter how it's defined—cannot be complete without articulating the status of Zaum; it is of the utmost importance to examine, through a Formalist lens, its 'extra-artistic' realm.

Arvatov remarked that Zaum's social value could be identified through its capacity to introduce certain words to be collectively used for linguistic creativity, while Tretyakov hoped that Zaum experiments would guide the language of the masses. Scholars who are not openly aligned with such radical utopian positions have also supported these positions. Krystyna Pomorska demarcated the Futurists' sound-words from those of the Symbolists by noting that the latter celebrated poetic language "for a selected audience", whereas the Futurists supported the language of the masses on the streets—from the beginning, this "emphasized the democratic, and even, universal value of Zaum".²⁸⁹ This social aspect was definitely one quality that could ascribe it purpose within Soviet conjuncture. Despite this potential, what continued to make Zaum poetry experiments important today is its form's extreme core. By this I mean the irrational core of Zaum denies the existence of a logical narrative. In this realm of language organisation, the value of production does not correspond to comparable values of economy and planning. It requires something else. Attempts have and will be made to articulate the independent economy of language within Zaum's currency, framing it as oppositional to the programmatic and rational construction of normative language. Post-structuralist theorists like Julia Kristeva and others introduced the

Zaum experiments as a sort of psychoanalytical residue of the sub-consciousness, which resisted language's symbolic order. Zaum was seen as a supra-linguistic transgressive expression of a body's substratum that defied language's discursive plane.

In response to this position, the Zaum poets, with Kruchenykh as their mouthpiece, stated that "Zaum is created and made by the artist, and not just passively adopted as heavy inheritance from ages past; it is the sole constructive language".²⁹⁰ But this claim for constructivism did not discredit its irrationalism, which otherwise would reduce Zaum-experiments to democratic attempts to test and program some kind of new "Esperanto". By including Kruchenykh's booklet into this publication, I attempt to further make visible the historical context of Zaum's irrational core within the specific uneven registers of Soviet hegemony. I think that the strongest source that illustrated this link is Jakobson's "Leninist answer to Marxism", as it attempted to understand the similarities between Bolshevik and Futurist extremes.

XIX

A Short History of the Marxist
Philosophy of Language

“Is language our tragedy?”, asked Maria Janion in her book *Romanticism, Revolution, Marxism*. Her discussion of tragic motifs in Marxism inevitably boiled down to the idea that “capitalism is producing its own gravediggers”.²⁹¹ It is within this frame of the literary imagination that Marxist philosophers queried how the limits of our world was set by language. The tragedy of this dialectic was inherent in a language that had dual characters—while it reproduced ideology (subjectivisation) through speech, it also enabled emancipation from such ideologies. One could optimistically conclude that the oppressive language of capitalism also produced its own gravediggers. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues, the contradictions within Marxist understandings of language created a space for “abstraction that makes [it] possible to think real life and become conscious of it; and it also freezes and veils this same conscious, in the form of *bad abstraction* of fetishism”.²⁹² On a philosophical level, this conceptualisation was tightly connected to Marxist understandings of the dialectics between consciousness, history, language, and thought, finding its symbolic expression in the note Lenin wrote in the margins of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: “the history of thought = the history of language?”²⁹³

Despite all these philosophical conundrums involving the question of linguistic abstractions, the Marxists’ focus was the practical aspect of language, or more precisely, how people used language to communicate. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels described language as “the production of the form of intercourse itself”, evaluating everything through its capacity to socialise human activities. In this respect, language was only valued as a secular activity of social intercourse, meaning that any attempt for language to ascend “into an independent realm”, that could see “thoughts as the forms of words having its own content”, was interpreted as a reactionary position.²⁹⁴ With this disclaimer, Marx and Engels essentially labeled the conceptual questions of formalism as non-Communist and asocial. They did this for the

sake of criticising the specific and professionalised “philosophical language” used by Sancho and Don Quixote (their nicknames for Max Stirner and Franz Szeliga). They believed that this language attempted to explain complex social dynamics and entire contradictions through a “word”, which would “possess the miraculous power of leading from the realm of language and through to actual life”. In this “domination of Holy”, Marx and Engels identify a “domination of phrases” that seems to be motivated by a desire to save the world through proper “names”.²⁹⁵ This “philosophical language” had many varied shortcomings, one of the most evident being Kristeva’s right-wing validation of “poetic language” as an “aristocratic” and “elitist demand” of the speaking animal.²⁹⁶

These elitist demands received the most airtime in seventies post-structuralist theory journal *Tel Quel*, led by Kristeva and others. The essence of the *Tel Quel* project was to support the act of enunciation as an “active mediator of language” that could challenge the structures of capitalist economic laws. One aim of understanding experimental enunciations and poetic and philosophical words in this way was to intervene in how capitalism was inscribed in language, by disturbing the equivalence between speech and money.²⁹⁷ A tragico-comic element of this project was that it imagined it was possible to escape the implications of capitalist subordination by employing different registers within linguistic subjectivities. Put simply, their project opposed capitalist subjectivisation with linguistic subjectivities.

Maria Janion pointed out that the dead-end of this experimental linguistic Marxism was approached via its fundamental de-historicisation of theoretical concepts. She argued that in order to oppose the assumed teleology and linearity of how Marxist concepts progressed, those within the *Tel Quel* group had a tendency to simply eliminate history.²⁹⁸ While the mono-linear determinism of this bourgeois understanding of Marxism was also something some Formalists fell victim to, I argue that a more accurate understanding can be found within the Leninist theories of uneven development and combined struggle. A journal called *Change* seceded from *Tel Quel*, and under the stewardship of Jean-Pierre Faye, sought to revitalise philosophical discussions about political language by introducing some Leninist concepts—revo-

lution and transformation. The second issue of *Change* was dedicated to the question of “Destruction”, and was a wild mixture of Leninist polemics, Nietzsche, Marx, alchemy, Russian Formalism, Futurism, conceptual poetry, experimental writing, Eisenstein, and Noam Chomsky. A small paragraph on the metamorphosis of commodities from Marx’s *Capital* was retitled “The Fire and Change of the Forms”, alluding to a Heraclitean understanding of fire as a source for transformation. A particular emphasis was given to Marx’s elaboration of the “change in form or the metamorphosis of commodities through which the social metabolism is mediated”.²⁹⁹

This fire of change was the latest fever to strike the post-structuralist theorists, who were grappling with ideas around assemblage—they believed this to be more advanced than the *Tel Quel* speculations around rational aristocracy. By introducing Lenin and the revolution to their dialectic theories, they conceptualised form not as the sedimentation of intrinsic structures, but as a process of transformation, metamorphosis and change. Through understanding the forms language could take as being in constant flux—like history on fire—those writings for *Change* united around the claim that every language passes through the Revolution and its dynamics of destruction. One author included an epigram to his text—a quote from Yuri Tynyanov: “I would not understand literature if there had not been the Revolution”.³⁰⁰ Linguistic propositions such as these were based on the idea that revolution transverses language. This aligned with theories that encompassed a Leninist position, which argued against Proletkult theoretician Alexander Bogdanov’s thesis that “truth is an ideological form”. Before becoming an advocate of revisionist totalitarianism theories, Jean-Pierre Faye defended Leninist understandings of the revolutionary capacity of words to act as razor sharp tools that could expose political truths.³⁰¹ This Leninist position was militantly expounded within sixties artistic spheres, in which destruction had the capacity to birth new truths. However, the Leninist language they wielded was undeniably more related to alchemy than to the complex dialectic of Productivism.

From the ashes of this avant-garde Leninism, a more nuanced revisionism emerged in the eighties. Ernesto Laclau was one the leading post-Marxist theoreticians who played a crucial role in this turn—he described Leninism “as the surrealist moment

of Kautskyism".³⁰² He co-authored a highly influential book with Chantal Mouffe that worked through how to construct a non-Leninist hegemonic theory. Their core concept envisioned Leninism as a leftist deviation that misinterpreted the relationship between necessity and contingency (i.e. spontaneity). They argued that Lenin saw a necessary link between "social agents and class", thus foreclosing the possibilities for contingency and articulation.³⁰³ Instead of defending "class identity"—which they claimed Lenin did (!)—Laclau and Mouffe proposed the conceptual operation of deciphering the precise "plot" and "narrative" of capitalist hegemony, which necessitated identifying between agency and class.³⁰⁴ They argued that this hegemony could be opposed by a socialist strategy that called for a linguistic articulation of the "impossible suture between signified and signifier". This also involved a parallel task: "the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition".³⁰⁵ In an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of Leninist identity politics, Laclau and Mouffe proposed a complicated theory combining Wittgensteinian "language-games", Austinian "speech-acts", and Lacanian "suture", resulting in an even more surrealist Marxism.

Laclau and Mouffe's articulation of language as a socialist strategy is just one of the intellectual positions Perry Anderson wittily criticised as the "exorbitation of language", alluding to attempts to create absolute linguistic concepts that could be applied to entire segments of society.³⁰⁶ This shift is especially recognisable within *Tel Quel* discussions of linguistic economic structures, as well as in the writings of Jacques Derrida. This contradicts Saussure's initial claims on the absolutisation of language, which are often put forward as the forerunners of this position.³⁰⁷ Anderson wrote that this absolutist position resulted in "a contraction of language into itself" and the "attenuation of truth", severing any "possibility of truth as a correspondence of propositions to reality".³⁰⁸ The eighties' post-Marxist turn resulted in this linguistic operation "decisively detaching politics from class struggle" by granting full autonomy to "discourse" as a "principal historical determinant".³⁰⁹

Yet another outcome of this linguistic model was the "randomisation of history", which relativised historical struggles as various speech acts. In his brilliant research on class struggles in the twenties within a Moscow Metal Factory, historian Kevin Murphy illustrates the limits of studies influenced by linguistics,

“inspiring a call for close investigation of the ‘language of class’”, ultimately reducing class “to merely [one] of many ‘contested’ identities”.³¹⁰ Instead of explaining the contradictions within the proletariats’ struggle and the bureaucratisation of Communist institutions with the “linguistic turn”, or “Bolshevik speak”, Murphy looks for concrete manifestations of class conflicts and their organisational context.³¹¹ The result is a historical materialist study that separates revolution from representational regimes (identity, language, ethnicity, gender) by asking, “why did the most unruly proletariat of the century come to tolerate the ascendancy of a political and economic system that, by every conceivable measure, proved antagonistic to working-class interests?”.³¹² It is impossible to answer this question via a linguistic postmodernism that situated the workers’ struggles as deconstructivist identity positions.

The Russian proletariat that revolutionised working class struggles did not endure worsening economic conditions because their identities were molded by the regime’s representational models (i.e. “Bolshevik speak”, “Soviet tongue”), but rather as a result of a long history of struggles that shaped their politics via completely different registers from those that compelled bourgeois understanding of economics. Simply put, the workers did speak with their own language that was different from the exploitative discourse of the bourgeoisie, but that was not conditioned by Communist institutions. The language of the proletariat was the sum total of their activism and experiences. As Marx and Engels wrote, a prerequisite of enacting revolutionary politics was to “descend from language to life”, although this could hardly happen through the miraculous power of words.

The reduction of truth to a language-effect—or what Alain Badiou named as linguistic idealism, or “idealinguistry”—was also strongly present within studies of the Russian avant-garde.³¹³ Boris Groys best represents this tendency, arguing that “in the Soviet period, language acquired a new unity, a new linguistic subconscious that had been artificially ‘drummed in’ by the party”.³¹⁴ According to him, that new Soviet-Party language became the natural background for the activities that informed the aesthetic or political avant-gardes. Thus, the real creator in Revolutionary Russia were not avant-garde artists, or Futurists, but Lenin himself, “the demiurge of his age”.³¹⁵ This is how Groys interpreted the Formalists’ analysis of Lenin’s

style: as a canonisation of Lenin, who was the ultimate expression of the subconscious of the state. According to him, the LEFists and Formalists envisioned Lenin as a possible entry point into the government's deep soul. Groys does exactly what Badiou described as an operation of modern sophists (or idealinguists)—he attempted to “replace the idea of truth with the idea of rule”.³¹⁶ In his more recent book *The Communist Postscript*, Groys absolutises language as the tool of state to such an extent that it is granted the “capacity to connect base and superstructure directly and immediately... the capacity which was realized in a socialist, communist society”.³¹⁷ Language, according to Groys, was everything—it has a comprehensive logic, it is contradictory, heterogeneous, infinite, and paradoxical. It emulated the Soviet regime, which was “above all the administration of metanoia, of constant transition, of constant endings and new beginnings, of self-contradiction”. In order to historically validate the “linguistification” of Communism within the realm of the paradoxical state, Groys provided the example of Lenin's 1908 decision to argue for representatives of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) to enter the Duma (parliament), while at the same time advocating for the Duma to be combated underground. It is curious how this Leninist gesture invokes a metaphysical conclusion about the paradoxical form of Bolshevik language, instead supporting Lukács' observation that “at the core of Lenin's thought is the actuality of the revolution”, determined to be achieved with any possible means.³¹⁸

XX

The Phantom of Formalism

The first lines of Boris Groys' book, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, began by arguing that the October Revolution promised the world greater economic security, and that it intended to be beautiful.³¹⁹ This is halfway true—the October Revolution also promised an immediate ceasefire and peace from a bloody and imperialist war. The question of war is nowhere to be found in Groys' study.³²⁰

Since Lenin and the Bolsheviks' main political argument was articulated through statements against the capitalist military machinery that reduced people to raw materials, it is imperative for studies that seek to explicate ideas around their political discourse start from there. I agree with Lukács' observation that Lenin's unparalleled theoretical achievement was his "concrete articulation of the economic theory of imperialism with every political problem of the present epoch".³²¹ Through this theory of conjuncture (which was a theory that related to concrete global issues of the time—in this case, the war), he was able to expose the contradictions of the contemporary moment.

Understanding the question of contemporaneity *vis-a-vis* political conjuncture enables to discuss the context of the avant-garde through concrete and actual social dynamics. I claim that the Russian avant-garde—especially the Futurists and Formalists—made extreme demands for the contemporaneity, calling into question the bourgeoisie's entire referential system as outmoded and philistine in culture. They instead attempted to speak with a different language: impatient, strong, vociferous, technical, modern, and precise. This was how they understood Lenin's speech too—as a form of modern expression which emerged from a deep underground social and cultural strata they were not aware of.

My thesis is that the left front of the avant-garde, particularly the Formalists, were more influenced by Leninism than Marxism. By this, I mean that the Marxist philosophical doctrine that urged the end of alienation amongst human beings was not their main agenda. Their methodologies and principles were not simply informed by the relationship between the economy, politics, and history. Many of their concepts that derived from Marxism—like their

sociologising of form in the second half of the twenties—were futile attempts to inject social dynamics into autonomous art processes. The Formalists had their own radical and autonomous principles based on poetic language, and they were fanatically holding onto them. “The phantom of Formalism”, as Jan Mukařovský retrospectively wrote, was this militant demand of independence, a “one-sidedness” which thinks in extremes.³²² One of the ways this urgency manifested was through their insistence on contemporaneity. Most of the speeches and texts they used to analyse Lenin’s language were post-revolutionary outcomes—they were actual materials. The logic behind the LEF’s special issue was to merge Lenin’s extreme and urgent political theses with the Formalists’ contemporary “one-sided” radical principles. It was, as I’ve already quoted by way of Roman Jakobson, a Leninist answer to Marxism.

On the other hand, Lenin understood that the distinctiveness and singularity of language, like everything else, was a political issue.

“On 27 May 1917, Lenin delivered a public speech in Petrograd on a theme that was then the order of the day: the links between war and revolution. It was a hotly debated subject and one which, in the party meetings, was at the heart of the debates and controversies that Lenin called ‘useless, hopeless, idle’.

‘I have come to the conclusion that the reason why there is so much misunderstanding on the subject is because, all too often, when dealing with the question of war, we speak in entirely different languages’.”³²³

Georges Haupt interpreted Lenin’s wartime writings and speeches to be a condensed manifestation of his language. Pointing to the “linguistic studies” published in LEF Journal in 1924, Haupt presented the Formalists’ analysis of Lenin as a successful attempt to decipher three main characteristic features of Lenin’s style: 1. projective writings that took into account the demands of action in the present; 2. combative writings mixed with revolutionary pedagogy; 3. the practical issues that underpinned every theoretical construction.³²⁴

The Formalists' Leninism might well have been intrigued by stylistic problematics, but its contemporaneous *non plus ultra* was the primacy of politics—a contradictory form of politics that was understood as an uneven combination of class struggles. As Domenico Losurdo convincingly argued, “class struggle almost never presents itself in the pure state, almost never confines itself to involving directly antagonistic subjects”.³²⁵ In July 1916, in the midst of the First World War, Lenin understood this by “mocking those who went in search of the class struggle and revolution in the pure sense”.³²⁶

By discussing the “political outcome as irreducible to [an] economic substrate”, theories around impure class struggles can challenge common understandings of socialist utopias as programs invested in the equal redistribution of social wealth.³²⁷ By arguing for autonomy of politics, John Eric Marot opposes conceptualising workers' struggles as immediate bread-and-butter concerns. Instead, he claims that “every struggle of the working class for economic improvement is a political struggle”.³²⁸ The workers' political involvement in the revolution was also triggered by global and international questions, primarily those related to the “war-induced economic crisis”.³²⁹ During the First World War, every worker, peasant and soldier understood war as nothing but accelerated exploitation for the benefit of those who owned private property. They were well aware that capitalism was fuelled by the machinery of the military-industrial complex. Thus, similar to today, the demand for immediate ceasefire also meant re-questioning the neutrality of the state, the definition of the nation, the mandates of parliamentary parties, and the possibility of revolution. Politics understood this way aimed for emancipation from existing oppressive structures.

The difficult question of retrospective studies of economy-politics in relation to the revolutionary context became particularly problematic in discussions about the contradictions surrounding the New Economy Policy. Interpreting the NEP as a retreat from revolutionary politics is the usual alibi within revisionist literature. Within the art field, this meant that avant-garde tendencies responded to the deadlock within the revolutionary spirit by injecting extreme demands into the cultural field. To put it more simply, within this context, the radical gestures of the

avant-garde aimed to replace a revolution in art with a revolution in politics. I oppose this simplistic interpretation. As I argue when engaging critically with the writings of Paul Wood, the LEF's radical theses do not necessarily correspond with the platform of the Left Opposition, which posited strong critique of the NEP. Rather I claim that the LEF's avant-garde project in the twenties cannot be understood without incorporating their understanding of how politics transfigured during the NEP period. The LEF's name for this new political form was Productivism, which implied a complete reworking of how the status of the object in art theory was defined, and an accompanying strong opposition to consumerist understandings of art practice, which were inherent within bourgeois definitions of artistic culture. This is why I discuss the LEF project's interest in Lenin's language in relation to these strong political and economic contradictions. I argue that the introduction of politics into discussions about avant-garde art forms should be guided by the conflictual aspect of artistic dynamics, not by reclaiming its representational failures, as is often done. This is one way to oppose prevailing populist art theories that claim that the "the emergence of a strong antimodernism, backed by the Party as a result of Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921, required the return to traditional values in art, and laid the foundations for the rise of socialist realism".³³⁰ The Formalist and avant-garde accounts from throughout the long decade of the twenties, which I present here, in no way indicate political recapitulation of such a scale. They rather announce politics as a means to advance formal expressions.³³¹

Within this conclusion, I have to reiterate that the Formalists did not formalise Lenin's language, but instead showed how its peculiar confrontational aspect enabled the established rules of the bourgeoisie to be interrogated and opposed. This alone warrants actualising the Formalist research project, which always runs in contradistinction to canonised representations.

Militant theoretician Daniel Bensaïd wrote about Lenin's understanding of politics as a concentrated "qualitative change" that opposed eclectic economic rationalisations that reduced politics to social management. His definition of politics serves as a guide to the arguments within this publication:

“Politics, on the contrary, has its own language, grammar, and syntax. It has its latencies and its slips. Deriving from a specific register, which is not reducible to its immediate determinations, political discourse is more closely related to algebra than to arithmetic. Its necessity is of a different order, much more complex, than that of social demands directly linked to the relationship of exploitation”.³³²

1. A. V. Kuznetsova, "A. V. Lunacharsky and LEF", *Soviet Studies in Literature*, 12:4, 1977, p. 69.
2. D. Burliuk et al. "Slap in the Face of Public Taste [1912]", *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, edited by A. Lawton and H. Eagle, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 51.
3. "Lef to Battle!" [1923], *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, p. 232.
4. N. Aseev et al., "What Does LEF Fight For? [1923]", *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, p. 195.
5. Halina Stephan, "*Lef*" and the Left Front of the Arts, Verlag Otto Sagner, München, 1981, p. 71. Viktor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition*, Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 220.
6. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetics Dictatorship, and Beyond*, translated by Charles Rougle, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 67.
7. Dragan Kujundžić, *The Returns of History: Russian Nietzscheans After Modernity*, SUNY Press, 1997, pp. 111-116, 123. In the same line is Samuel Eisen's diagnosis on the collection as the "schizophrenic core of the developing Soviet culture". Samuel Eisen, "Whose Lenin is It Anyway? Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum and the Formalist-Marxist Debate in Soviet Cultural Politics (A View from the Twenties)", *The Russian Review* 55: 1, 1996, p. 69.
8. Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 32-35.
9. Paul Wood, "Art and Politics in a Workers State", *Art History Vol. 8, No. 1*, March 1985, p. 109.
10. Wiktor Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, [Boris Eikhenbaum in the Periodical "Kniznyi Ugol", no.1, 1918], translated by Boleslaw

- Taborski, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1972, p. 191. Woroszyński's book is a montage of quotations on Mayakovsky and his life. The book is a must for everyone studying the revolutionary art of Russia.
11. Viktor Shklovsky, "Ully, Ully, Martians", *Knight's Move*, translated by Richard Sheldon, Dalkey Archive Press, London, 2005, pp. 23-24.
 12. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, translated by Rose Strunsky, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1960, p. 150.
 13. During the heyday of Futurism in 1914-5, Shklovsky was especially keen to get support from his teacher, the linguist Bedouin de Courtenay, who was also a public figure and defender of the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets). In 1920, Roman Jakobson, another Russian Formalist, with a recommendation letter from linguist Aleksej Sachmatov (who was at the same time a member of the Central Committee of the Constitutional Democrats), managed to secure a research stipend in the Czech Republic. Jindřich Toman, *The Magic of Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy and the Prague Linguistic Circle*, MIT Press, 1995, p. 39.
 14. Op.cit. Woroszyński, p. 258. The same quote is also reproduced in Natalia Murray, *The Unsung Hero of the Russian Avant-Garde: The Life and Times of Nikolay Punin*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, p. 102. Unfortunately, this long awaited monograph on Punin serves nothing but a bourgeois fantasy of the connoisseur, who using the pretext of the revolution, smuggles in the class inheritance agenda of cultural elitism. The book is almost written to confirm Shklovsky's critique that Punin "tells drawing teachers about Cubism with a snobbish and academic calm". Woroszyński, p. 247.
 15. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 160.
 16. Leon Trotsky, *History of Russian Revolution, Vol. 2*, translated by Max Eastman, Sphere Books, London, 1967, p. 161.
 17. This is also the topic of the exhibition and publication *Uprisings* (Soulèvements) held in Jeu de Paume, Paris last year. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Uprisings*, Jeux de Paume/Gallimard, Paris, 2017. The conceptualisation of exhibition—also accompanied by texts from Judith Butler and Antonio Negri—fits into what Badiou describes as the "democratic materialism" of the theoretical horizon where "there are only bodies and languages" of which also the philosophy of contemporary art belongs. Alain Badiou, "Democratic Materialism and the Materialist Dialectic", *Radical Philosophy* 150, March/April 2005, p. 20.
 18. Nikolai Gorlov, "Futurism and Revolution", *The Futurists, The Formalists & The Marxist Critique*, edited by Chris Pike, Ink Links, London, 1979, p. 211.
 19. Gorlov, "Futurism and Revolution", p. 181.

20. "People who are maliciously inclined toward LEF like to say: What is LEF? Futurists. What are Futurists? Marinetti. Who is Marinetti? An Italian Fascist. Consequently ... the conclusion is clear. All of this is pure rubbish ...". Osip Brik, "We Are the Futurists" [1927], *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, p. 251. This was one of arguments of Lunacharsky in opposing Futurists and LEFists at the meeting in 1923, by pointing at the text published in the second issue of LEF Journal comparing the energies of war and the revolution, thus of Italian and Russian Futurism. "In issue no. 2 of LEF there is an article containing a remarkable sentence: The Italian Futurists are for fascism, and we are for communism, which is because the Futurists are always for strength; and if you say that the revolution is strength, then when there is a revolution in Italy, there, too, we shall be for you". A. V. Kuznetsova, "A. V. Lunacharsky and LEF", p. 69. Lunacharsky is referring to M. Levidov's article "O Futurizme Neobkhodimaia Stat'ia".
21. Gorlov's refusal to credit war with any progressive historical dynamics should be read over and over: "militarism and patriotism is to protect, to preserve, to re-establish, to place everything on its old footing" (ibid., p. 188). A counter-position prevails in the so-called Schmittian turn in recent literature on Shklovsky, attaching particular importance to the "productive elements of imperial history", and insisting on the "embeddedness in the context of World War I", facilitating "a return to the pristine nature of things" under the condition of War. Anne Dwyer, "Revivifying Russia: Literature, Theory, and Empire in Viktor Shklovsky's Civil War Writings", *Slavonica* 15: 1, April 2009, p. 26; Galin Tihanov, "The Politics of Estrangement: The Case of The Early Shklovsky", *Poetics Today* 26:4, 2005, p. 669, 685. To this we can also add the philosophical summary of Peter Steiner, "Poetic Justice: Viktor Shklovsky and Carl Schmitt", *Contradictions*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2017, pp. 119-141. As a counter-image to the "pristine culture of war", one could read Enzo Traverso's portrait of war as the reign of confusion, fear, annihilation and anxiety. Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914-1945*, translated by David Fernbach, Verso, 2016.
22. Gorlov, p. 191.
23. It is Marxist anti-metaphysical militancy enabling Gorlov to arrive at this conclusion. Needless to say, the academic historiography of Russian Formalism went in the opposite direction by insisting on the "immanent laws" of artistic forms. The political dimension of *Rab-Rab's* formalist project is to oppose this tendency.
24. Woroszylski, p. 174. Following Serebrov-Tikhonov's account is by Vassili Desnitsky remembering how Mayakovsky was very agitated during the February Revolution. "The atmosphere in the streets made him drunk". Woroszylski, p. 175.
25. Viktor Shklovsky, *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*, translated by S. Avagyan, Dalkey Archive Press, 2011, p. 12.

26. Viktor Shklovsky, *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*, translated by Richard Sheldon, Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois, 2001, p. 103. This was the “political” appendix to the “love” letters, addressed to the CC of Bolshevik Party. This letter, together with his “Monument to Scientific Error”, triggered interpretations of Shklovsky’s work as an opportunistic “surrender to the power” [of communism]. Richard Sheldon has brilliantly answered this accusation in his text “Viktor Shklovsky and the Device of Ostensible Surrender”, *Slavic Review* 34:1, 1975, pp. 86-108.
27. Change. “La Destruction”, No. 2, 1969. Taken from Maria Janion, *Romantizam, Revolucija, Marksizam, Nolit*, Belgrade, 1976, p. 121.
28. Carol Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist*, Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 32-33.
29. Here is how Zamyatin saw the relationship: “I think that had I not come back to Russia in 1917, had I not lived all these years with Russia, I would not have been able to write”. Yevgeny Zamyatin, “Autobiography [1929]”, *A Soviet Heretic*, translated by Mirra Ginsburg, Quartet Encounters, London, 1991, p. 14.
30. For the overview of these accounts the most authoritative book to advice is S. Fedyukin, *The Great October Revolution and the Intelligentsia*, translated by S. Loutit, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975.
31. Marina Tsvetaeva, *Earthly Signs: Moscow Diaries 1917-1922*, edited and translated by Jamey Gambrell, Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 6-7. Tsvetaeva, the supporter of the White Army during the Civil War, who later—because of her passion for Mayakovsky’s poetry—had to renounce emigre support and travel back to Stalin’s Russia, remembered the Russian Revolution as: “the loss of godliness, the unloose spirits of the elements, blood, blood, blood ...”, *ibid.*, p. 7.
32. Sergei Tretyakov, “From Where to Where (Futurism’s Perspectives) [1923]”, *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos, 1912-1928*, translated and edited by Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 209.
33. N. F. Chuzhak, “Under the Banner of Life-Building (An Attempt to Understand the Art of Today) [1923]”, *Art in Translation, 1:1*, translated by Christina Lodder, 2009, p. 127-128. Igor Severyanin (1887-1941) was a Russian poet, the leader of Ego-Futurists; David Burliuk (1882-1967) was a Russian painter, founder of the Futurist group Hylaeans.
34. N. Gorlov, “Futurism and Revolution”, p. 187.
35. Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to Be Done? In Context*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2008. p. 16. It would be remiss to forget to remark that the mistranslation of “stiikhinost” to “spontaneity” did not only contribute to Cold War paranoia about Lenin and the

- Bolsheviks, but it also supported counter philosophical and political positions. Louis Althusser's theory of the "spontaneous ideology of science and philosophy" has given a pretext to a complicated materialist analysis of the ideology of the artistic formations of Pierre Macherey, who consequently applied the concept to the aesthetic theories of Lenin regarding the writings of Tolstoy. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, and Other Essays*, Verso, London, 1990; Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978; Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
36. G.I. Vinokur, "The Futurists—Constructors of Language", *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. L. Burke et al., translated by Ken Hirschkop, Routledge, 2000, p. 364. Italics in original.
 37. Antonio Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", *Selections from Cultural Writings*, edited by D. Forgacs and G. Nowell-Smith, translated by William Boelhower, Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 51.
 38. Ibid.
 39. Gramsci, "A Letter to Trotsky on Futurism", *Selection from Cultural Writings*, p. 53. This letter, published as an appendix to the chapter on Futurism in *Literature and Revolution* as "Comrade Gramsci's letter on Italian Futurism" was not included in the English translation. It was written on the request of Trotsky in September 1922.
 40. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 77.
 41. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 98. Describing the capitalist rhythm as a play of crystals and liquids, Esther Leslie pictures the difference of capitalist from communist dialectics: "life in capitalism seems restless, dissolving, shifting, and yet it is frozen: its relations are frozen in place. This is the peculiar rhythm of capitalism, as the Marxists perceive it. It oscillates between the fluid and the frozen, crystallizing and flowing, never settling, never not being set or settled". Esther Leslie, *Liquid Crystals: The Science and Art of a Fluid Form*, Reaktion Books, London, 2016, p. 98.
 42. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 101.
 43. The recent enthusiastic interest in Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" [1969] is symptomatic of a prevailing ideological position in contemporary art that gives primacy to consumerism over productivism. An Ukeles' opening remark of the Manifesto states: "The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?". Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, University of California Press, 1997, p. 220.
 44. Trotsky, *Pokolenie Oktyabrya*, quoted by Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed, Trotsky: 1879-1921*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 442.

45. Yuri Tynyanov, "About Khlebnikov", *The Futurists, The Formalists & The Marxist Critique*, edited by Chris Pike, Ink Links, London, 1979, p. 151.
46. Viktor Shklovsky, *The Hamburg Score*, translated by Shushan Avagyan, Dalkey Archive Press, 2017, p. 168.
47. Grigory Zinoviev, *History of the Bolshevik Party*, taken from Lars T. Lih, *Lenin*, Reaktion Books, London, 2011, p. 193.
48. Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production*, translated by Shushan Avagyan, Pluto Press, London, 2017, p. 88.
49. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 84. The episode from the Comintern meeting in Moscow is more dramatically and more internationally telling about the Bolshevik's attitude towards the peasants: "The question had hardly been stated when Renaud Jean [French farm-worker and member of Socialist Party] stood up and strode towards the table where the Bureau were sitting, and launched into a tangled explanation. Trotsky rather harshly interrupted him to say that the Communist International had nothing in common with a marketplace full of sly, haggling peasants". Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow*, translated by Ian Birchall, Pluto Press, 1971, p. 202.
50. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Vol. 2*, Penguin Books, London, 1966, p. 275.
51. Ibid.
52. Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR, 1917-1923*, Translated by Brian Pearce, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1976, p. 491.
53. Especially his texts written in 1923, 'On Co-operation', 'Our Revolution', and 'Better Fewer, But Better'.
54. Bettelheim, p. 501.
55. Louis Althusser, "On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources" [1967], *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso, London, 1990, p. 64.
56. It is not a surprise that in a small book called *Lenin on Culture and Cultural Revolution* (Moscow, Progress, 1970), all the important texts about the NEP's strategy were reproduced.
57. The second volume of Charles Bettelheim's *Class Struggles in the USSR*, covering the years from 1923 to 1930, gave a plethora of examples of this institutional deadlock. The printing of LEF Journal was itself victim to this policy. As Halina Stephan wrote, after a failed attempt to exist in the private market using its own means, those associated with LEF Journal had to ask the Soviet state for centralised financial support.
58. Sergei Tretyakov, "LEF i NEP", *LEF no.2*, 1923, pp. 71-72.
59. Ibid, pp. 72-73.

60. Lef, "Comrades, Organizers of Life!", *LEF* no. 2, 1923, p. 7. Similar criticism can be found in Esther Shub's memoirs on NEP, Dziga Vertov's films, and especially in memorable passages from Walter Benjamin's *Moscow Diary*, describing his visit to Opera in 1926.
61. Christina Lodder, "Art of Commune: Politics and Art in Soviet Journals, 1917-1920", *Art Journal* 52:1, Spring 1993, p. 29.
62. Vahan D. Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, Mouton Publishers, Hague, 1978, p. 38.
63. Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, p. 66. This is similar to what Ad Reinhardt said in a 1966 interview: "The first word of an artist is against artists". *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, edited by Barbara Rose, University of California Press, 1991, p. 16.
64. "The Lef Futurists were one of the first, if not the first, to introduce dogmatism and intolerance into Soviet cultural life. The Lef group consistently supported the militant proletarians in their efforts to exclude 'fellow-traveller' writers and poems from Soviet literature". Halina Stephan, "*Lef*" and the *Left Front of the Arts*, Verlag Otto Sagner, Munich, 1977, p. xi.
65. Christina Lodder, "Art of Commune", p. 31.
66. "Take for example the influence exerted by fashion and the caprices of the Tsarist court, as well as the tastes and whims of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie on the development of painting, sculpture and architecture. In a society based on private property, artists produce for the market, and need a customer. Our revolution freed artists from the yoke of these extremely prosaic conditions". Clara Zetkin, "My Recollections of Lenin", *Lenin on Literature and Art*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1967, pp. 249-250.
67. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "The 'LEF' and Soviet Art", *transition: An International Quarterly for Creative Experiment*, No. 14, February 1928, p. 270.
68. Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production*, translated by Shushan Avagyan, Pluto Press, London, 2017, pp. 86-91.
69. Trotsky said this after Lenin introduced the NEP. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed, Trotsky: 1921-1929*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 170. In one of his NEP texts, and incidentally the very last of his published text, Lenin famously wrote: "In order to renovate our state apparatus we must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter". V. I. Lenin, "Better Fewer, But Better", *Selected Works, Third Volume*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, p. 775.
70. John Roberts, "Art and 'Life-building': The Legacy of Boris Arvatov", in *Art and Production*, p. 9.
71. *Ibid*, p. 6.

72. Osip Brik, "From Picture to Calico-Print", *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by C. Harrison and P. Wood, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 327.
73. "The 'modern product' will take the form not of an integral object, but of an installation—a system or network of interrelated components". Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer, Russian Constructivism in Revolution*, University of California Press, 2005, p. 148.
74. Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, p. 178.
75. Alan Shandro, *Lenin and the Logic of Hegemony: Political Practice and Theory in the Class Struggle*, Historical Materialism Books/Brill, Leiden, 2014, p. 21. This is especially the case with theoreticians like Slavoj Žižek, who reduce Lenin to "the symbol of revolutionary transgression of conventional wisdom and abstract the act of revolution from the objective processes of class struggle". Shandro, pp. 20-21.
76. Sergei Tretyakov, "From Where to Where? (Futurism's Perspectives) [1923]", *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, pp. 212-213.
77. Ibid, p. 206.
78. Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question) [1925]" translated by Christina Kiaer, *October 81*, Summer 1997, p. 121.
79. Christina Kiaer, "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects", *October Vol. 81*, Summer 1997, p. 114.
80. Kiaer, p. 115. This is, unfortunately, only symptomatic evidence of wider reactionary tendencies. It is possible to find other examples of literature that deals with poetry, which does not necessarily requires a detour into the "object" and "technological" aspects of the avant-garde. Here are two examples: "Capital is itself, and always has been, a revolutionary force". Jennifer Bajorek, *Counterfeit Capital: Poetic Labour and Revolutionary Irony*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 10. "If manifesto is what Marx called the poetry of revolution, then advertising is the poetry of capitalism". Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 160.
81. Kiaer, p. 118.
82. Igor Chubarov further draws philosophical conclusions from LEF principles, ascribing to its practice "the decolonisation of the world of things, freeing it from the omnipotence of the consciousness that in history became an instrument—inter alia, of the exploitation of man by man". With this emancipation of consciousness "the Russian avant-garde went further than Marx by expanding the realm of alienation to the limits of the absurd and beyond". Igor Chubarov, "Emancipated Thing Versus Reified Consciousness: Interaction of the Concepts 'Defamiliarization' and 'Alienation' in the Russian Communist Futurist

- and Avant-Garde Movement”, *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 48 : 2, Fall 2009, p. 55, 59.
83. Aleksandar Flaker, “Byt”, *Pojmovnik Ruske Avangarde 2*, edited by A. Flaker and D. Ugrešić, Grafički Zavod Hrvatske/Zavod za Znanost o Književnosti, Zagreb, 1984, p. 15.
 84. Paul Wood, “The Politics of the Avant-Garde”, *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde 1915-1932*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1992, p. 5.
 85. Paul Wood, “Art and Politics in a Workers State”, *Art History* Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1985, p. 110.
 86. Ibid, p. 114.
 87. Paul Wood, “The Politics of the Avant-Garde”, p. 17.
 88. Leon Trotsky, “Not by Politics Alone”, *Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture and Science*, Monad Press, 1973, p. 20.
 89. Wood, “The Politics of the Avant-Garde”, p. 17.
 90. John Eric Marot, “Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Rise of Stalinism: Theory and Practice”, *The October Revolution in Prospect and Retrospect*, Brill/Historical Materialism Books, Leiden, 2012, pp. 87-116.
 91. G.I. Vinokur, “The Futurists—Constructors of Language”, *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. L. Burke et al, translated by Ken Hirschkop, Routledge, 2000, p. 362.
 92. G.I. Vinokur, p. 367.
 93. Novyi Lef, successor of LEF Journal, was edited mostly by Sergei Tretyakov. Between 1927 to 1929, they published twelve issues. Their main interest was to propagate ‘factographic’ works. Yet this shift did not diminish their interest in experimental forms of language. Here is how Tretyakov wrote about the new words in Soviet linguistic hegemony: “[And] at the same time, an entirely new, bold, and economic language is developing alongside art, quite independently of it: ar-es-ef-ar, sovdep, cheka, sorabis”. Sergei Tretyakov, “Art in Revolution and the Revolution in Art (Aesthetic Consumption and Production) [1923]”, *October* 118, Fall 2006, p. 16.
 94. Ken Hirschkop, “Short Cuts through the Long Revolution: the Russian Avant-garde and the Modernization of Language”, *Textual Practice*, 4:3, 1990, p. 435.
 95. G. I. Vinokur, *Kul’tura Yazyka [1925]*, cited in Hirschkop, p. 439. This interest in a utilitarian perspective of poetic language led Vinokur to adopt a conciliatory path that bridged linguistics with philology. Vladislava Reznik argues that the source of Vinokur’s “language culture” was found in the argument that the poetic word is subject to the

- same laws as the word in general, or as Vinokur himself wrote: “it is the same practical word, only served, so to speak, under ‘a different sauce’”. Vladislava Reznik, “The Word as Culture; Grigorii Vinokur’s Applied Language Science”, *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917-193: The Birth of Sociological Linguistics*, edited by C. Brandist and K. Chown, Anthem Press, London, 2010, p. 126.
96. Boris Arvatov, “Language Creation (On ‘Transrational’ Poetry) [1923]”, *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, p. 223.
 97. Cheka is popular abbreviation of VChK, The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, the precursor of Soviet secret police.
 98. Following this line of logic, Arvatov devised a fantastic socio-linguistic thesis on “revolutionary language”, arguing that the “spliced words” which emerged with Revolution (“sovdep”, “Cheka”) could not have appeared without previous Zaum experiments (Arvatov, p. 226). This differs from Tretyakov’s reading of “cheka”, but in regards to the political significance of poetic experiments, it is also different from the slogans of the sixties that aspired for “poetry marching the streets”, or the Situationist viewpoint that “our ideas are in everybody’s mind[s]”. The contemporary version of this may be found in the poetic theories of Amiri Baraka, who identified a correlation between forms of free jazz and the expressive significations of race riots in American suburbs.
 99. Arvatov, “Language Creation”, p. 230.
 100. “Every particular slogan must be deduced from the totality of specific features of a definite political situation”. V. I. Lenin, “On Slogans”, *Selected Works Volume 2*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, p. 174.
 101. Shklovsky, referring to the work of Mayakovsky, discussed the difficulty of measuring the economy of poetic labour. By quoting Karl Marx’s observation from *Capital* on the value of mining the diamond, Shklovsky demonstrates the objectives of compensating hard labour for the true poet: “Diamonds are rarely found in the earth’s crust, and therefore, their discovery requires, on the average, a great deal of working time. Consequently, their small volume represents a great amount of work”. Viktor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, p. 144.
 102. Boris Arvatov, “Poetski i Praktički Jezik”, *Delo*, No. 4, 1975. Opoyaz is short for *Obščestvo izučenija Poëtičeskogo Yazyka*, meaning “Society for the Study of Poetic Language”. It was founded in St. Petersburg before the revolution in 1916, and dissolved by the late twenties. The members of the group were Viktor Shklovsky, Osip Brik, Yuri Tynyanov and Boris Eikhenbaum. What we know as Russian Formalism was a loose network of Opoyaz members, joined by members of the *Moscow Linguistic Circle*, including people like Roman Jakobson, Grigory Vinokur, Boris Tomashevski and others. MLC was founded in 1915 and dissolved in 1924. Their genesis is not as avant-

garde and wild as Opoyaz's, whose members were from the beginning in a close working relationship with the Futurist poets. MLC was founded under the institutional context of studying dialectology, and were thus more linguists than literature theoreticians.

103. Osip Brik, "Contribution to the Study of Verse Language", *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, Dalkey Archive Press, 2002, p. 123.
104. Osip Brik, "The So-called 'Formal Method'", *Art in Theory*, p. 224.
105. Roman Jakobson, "Postscript" to *Two Essays on Poetic Language*, by Osip Brik, Michigan Slavic Materials, No. 5, Ann Arbor, 1964, p. 77, 81.
106. Osip Brik, "Contribution to the Study of Verse Language", p. 119.
107. Arvatov, "Poetski i Praktički Jezik", p. 712.
108. Arvatov, "Poetski i Praktički Jezik", p. 707.
109. "Formal-sociological method inquiries [of] art [can be] a professional-practical system of artistic labour with its own devices, economy and 'superstructure', [that] functions as a part of the general social system". Boris Arvatov, "O Formalno-Socioloskom Metodu [1927]", *Vidici*, No. 8, 1983, p. 105. Arvatov collected his texts on LEF Productivism in a book called *Sociological Poetics* [1926]. In its preface Osip Brik claimed it to be the work of a genuine Marxist: "This, and not endless quoting of Marx, Engels, and Plekhanov, is a genuine work of Marxists" (Quoted in Barooshian, *Brik and Mayakovsky*, p. 87). Because of their instinctive aversion towards the work of Futurists, the "sociological poetics" of Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov falls outside of the scope of this discussion.
110. Roman Jakobson, "The Newest Russian Poetry", *My Futurist Years*, translated by Stephen Rudy, Marsilio Publishers, New York, 1997, p. 195.
111. Roman Jakobson, "On a Generation that Squandered its Poets", *My Futurist Years*, p. 214. This follows with the slanderous catalogue about *byt*: "Motionless *byt*". "Everything stands as it has been for ages. *Byt* is like a horse that can't be spurred and stands still". "Slits of *byt* are filled with fat and coagulate, quiet and wide". "The swamp of *byt* is covered over with slime and weeds". "Old little *byt* is moldy". "The giant *byt* crawls everywhere through the holes". Jakobson, p. 216. One objective in a recent impressive study by Rosy Carrick is to criticise the counter-*byt* readings in relation to Mayakovsky, including this one initiated by Jakobson. Her claim is that *byt* was a multifarious phenomenon in Soviet Russia—a claim that hardly anyone would oppose. In order to support the claim that Mayakovsky was not against *byt*, Carrick writes that "[he] did not hate children, he was not misogynist, and he certainly did not consider the realm of domestic living to be

a static lump of dead nature, impervious to change and antithetical to revolution". Rosy Carrick, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: The Language of Revolution*, PhD, University of Sussex, September 2016, p. 205. Reading this, one is left to wonder in which way Mayakovsky's social attributes can be understood as progressive (and revolutionary) in the context of the colossal class struggles of the Soviet everyday during the twenties. I am grateful to Taneli Viitahuhta who introduced me to Corrick's dissertation.

112. There is a plenty of literature to read on Jakobson's involvement with the avant-garde art. For an overview of historical and theoretical issues, the best sources are *My Futurist Years*, edited by Bengt Jangfeldt (Marsilio Publishers, 1997); and Roman Jakobson and Krystyna Pomorska's *Dialogues* (The MIT Press, 1983). For Jakobson's involvement with the Czech avant-garde, one could read the excellent article by Jindrich Toman, "A Marvellous Chemical Laboratory ... and its Deeper Meaning: Notes on Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-Garde Between the Two World Wars", *Language, Poetry and Poetics: The Generation of the 1890s: Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Mayakovsky*, edited by K. Pomorska at all, Mouton de Gruyter, 1987. This is how Vitezslav Nezval versified the linguistic project of Jakobson: "You have turn the world into rhyme as a rich man turns it into interest"(Quote taken from Toman, p. 330).
113. Jakobson, *My Futurist Years*, p. 214.
114. Jakobson, *My Futurist Years*, p. 243
115. Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1984, p. 218.
116. Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, p. 220.
117. Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, p. 218, 220.
118. This model proves to be especially untenable when trying to conceptualise the difference between *byt* and art through the axis of movement and inertia. Simply, it does not correspond to the complexities of artistic context. The everyday always lags behind the contemporary, which in art practice is seen as disposition struggling against the actuality imposed by the violent presence of capitalist relations vis-a-vis its technological possibilities. At its core is the dilemma of the primacy of practice over theory, similar to how Lenin, in replying to Sukhanov's historisation of the Russian Revolution, paraphrases Napoleon by saying: "First engage in serious battle and then see what happens". Lenin, "Our Revolution (Apropos of N. Sukhanov's Notes)", *On Culture and Cultural Revolution*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, p. 215. This militancy I consider to be far more advanced in its methodological aspect than the centripetal force of metapoetic system that programmatically incorporates any contingency into its model.
119. Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, p. 207.

120. Nonetheless, I would say that due to the propulsive nature of the material he is dealing with, Steiner's conclusion about the principles of Formalism challenges the threshold of this argument. His closing statement is that having been impregnated with heterogeneous traits, Formalism can be understood as an "eristic mode of theorising" that results in a "collective nature of work", and the inclusion of "centrifugal forces that resist integration". Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, pp. 259-263.
121. Yuri Tynyanov, "The Literary Fact", p. 39.
122. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Literary Environment", *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, p. 58.
123. Eikhenbaum, "Literary Environment", p. 62.
124. Yuri Tynyanov, "On Literary Evolution", *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p. 67.
125. Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, p. 43.
126. Eikhenbaum, "Literary Environment", p. 61.
127. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Concerning the Question of the 'Formalists'" [1924], p. 55.
128. Boris Eikhenbaum, "The Theory of Formal Method [1927]", p. 19.
129. Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, p. 27.
130. Viktor Shklovsky, "Gde Se Nalaze Novi Kontinenti?", [Where are the New Continents?], *Delo*, Vol. 9, No. 6, Belgrade, June 1965, p. 793.
131. Yuri Tynyanov, "The Literary Fact", *Modern Genre Theory*, edited by David Duff, translated by Ann Shukman, Longman, Essex, 2000, p. 35.
132. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism, History-Doctrine*, Mouton & Co, 1955, p. 119.
133. Osip Brik, "The So-called 'Formal Method'", *Art in Theory: 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by C. Harrison and P. Wood, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 324.
134. Natasha Kurchanova, "Osip Brik and the Politics of Avant-Garde", *October 134*, Fall 2010, p. 61.
135. Kurchanova ends her article by repeating a narrative of the Communist nightmare: "ultimately Brik advocated his service on behalf of totalitarian state" (p. 73).
136. Brik, "The So-called Formal-Method", p. 323.
137. Ben Brewster, "From Shklovsky to Brecht: A Reply", *Screen*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1974, p. 94. This was especially dealt with by Darko Suvin, who, in his studies, and in a afterword to this publication, opposes the easy conflation between avant-garde art devices and political solutions.

138. Brewster, p. 98.
139. Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambiance*, Mouton, Hague, 1968, p. 21, 27.
140. Roman Jakobson, "What is Poetry?[1934]" , Oleg Gelikman, "Introduction to Boris Tomashevsky's The New School of Literary History in Russia", *PMLA*, 2004, p. 122.
141. Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, pp. 78-95.
142. This is why Boris Tomashevsky, in his essay on the development of Russian literary theories wrote—Formalists aim was to get "back to literature considered in itself and for itself. (Boris Tomashevsky, "The New School of Literary History in Russia" [1928], *PMLA*, Vol. 119, No. 1, 2004, p. 132). Rather than treating poetry through the "criteria of identity" that consolidated ontological or transcendental philosophical references, they instead sought to "determine where and how literature appears" (ibid.).
143. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 96. The introduction to *Lermontov* is the capitulation of the Formalists, and signalled the "ultimate internal limitations of their doctrine and method" (ibid.).
144. Boris Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov: A Study in Literary-Historical Evaluation*, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1981, p. 19.
145. Yuri Tynyanov, *The Problem of Verse Language*, translated by M. Sosa and B. Harvey, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1981, p. 32-33.
146. Tynyanov, p. 47.
147. Tynyanov, p. 33.
148. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, Translated by Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Books, London, 1973, p. 111.
149. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 110.
150. Viktor Shklovsky, *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*, translated by S. Avagyan, Dalkey Archive Press, 2011, p. 210.
151. Osip Brik, "The So-called 'Formal Method'", p. 324. Aleksander Tseitlin, "Markisti i 'Formalni Metod' [Marxists and 'Formal Method']", *Vidici*, No. 8, 1983, p. 35.
152. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Language as Work and Trade: A Semantic Homology for Linguistics and Economics*, translated by Martha Adams, Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., Massachusetts Press, 1983, p. 106.
153. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Language as Work and Trade: A Semantic Homology for Linguistics and Economics*, p. 64.

154. Rossi-Landi, p. 106. Free speech is not same as freedom of speech—to Rossi-Landi, it means the speech of free integrity emancipated from alienation.
155. The Marxian use of Wittgenstein, as Rossi-Landi called for, promises to situate “man as the actor in all meaning and communication”, without letting “philosophical sickness” send language on a holiday. This, presumably, requires an expansion of the borders of ordinary speech. Apart from the Marxists, art theoreticians have also discussed a Wittgensteinian hope for poetic language by insisting that “our actual [ordinary] language may well be connotative, metaphoric, fantastic; the issue being quite simply whether and in what context people use it”. Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 56.
156. Evgeny D. Polivanov, “Specific Features of the Last Decade, 1917–1927, in the History of Our Linguistic Thought”. *Selected Works: Articles on General Linguistics*, Mouton, The Hague, 1974, p. 58.
157. Polivanov, “Revolution and the Literary Languages of the USSR”, *Selected Works*, p. 182.
158. Polivanov, *Selected Works*, p. 195.
159. A.A. Leontev, L.I. Rojzenzon, and A.D. Xajutin, “The Life and Activities of E.D. Polivanov”, *Selected Works*, p. 17. Polivanov was a polyglot. He had an especially noticeable role immediately after the October Revolution in publishing secret agreements within the Tsarist government during the First World War. Due to his opposition to the official linguistic school of Nicholas Marr, Polivanov became a recluse, which meant his political work and ideas were marginalised in the Soviet Union. He was executed, as a spy, in 1938. Also, his political activism was seen as compensation for his addiction to drugs. Jindrich Toman suggests that his involvement in political propaganda among the Chinese Communists “might also be seen against the background of the drug trade”. Jindrich Toman, *The Magic of Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle*, The MIT Press, 1995, p. 68.
160. Shklovsky, *Bowstring*, p. 199.
161. Polivanov, *Selected Works*, p. 200.
162. Polivanov, “Za Marksistkoe iazykoznanie”, op.cit. Vladimir Alpatov, “What is Marxism in Linguistics?”, *Materialising Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, eds. C. Brandist and G. Tihanov, Palgarev, 2000, p. 176. Alpatov correctly argues that even Voloshinov could hardly be considered a Marxist, as his interest corresponds more to a “significance and discursive model” than to a Marxism understood as a revolutionary utopian ideology. This, in a way, explains why so many post-structuralist theoreticians are excited about Voloshinov.

163. As Engels famously wrote: "The German working class movement is the inheritor of German classic philosophy". Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1946.
164. Lunacharsky is famous for his proposal on the status of the intelligentsia: "He/she who is against the bourgeoisie is with us". A. Av. Lunacharsky, *Ob Intelligentsii* [1923], quote taken from S. Fedyukin, *The Great October Revolution and the Intelligentsia*, p. 197.
165. A. V. Lunacharsky, "Formalism in the Science of Art, [1924]", *The Futurists, the Formalists & the Marxist Critique*, p. 79, 81.
166. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problems of Cine-Stylistics", *The Poetics of Cinema*, translated by Richard Taylor, Holden Books, Oxford, 1982, p. 9. Eikhenbaum adds that this ritualistic art is against contemporary art forms, and jots down the footnote that the "sabornost (communality or conciliarism)" position which Lunacharsky, before the revolution, endorsed "is one of the principles of Orthodox church life". Eikhenbaum, "Cine-Stylistics", p. 119, n. 9.
167. "Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky", *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik Leaders*, edited by Georges Haupt and Jean-Jacques Marie, translated by C.I.P. Ferdinand, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1974, p. 309.
168. N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1959, p. 269.
169. V.I. Lenin, "Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of the Russian Revolution", *On Literature and Art*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, p. 28.
170. "Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky", p. 311.
171. Lunacharsky, "Formalism", p. 87.
172. Lunacharsky, "Formalism", p. 86. Lenin, too, who was embarrassed by Beethoven's art, and said once while listening to *Appassionata*, that "it is a hellishly difficult task to enjoy bourgeois art!".
173. Lunacharsky, "Formalism", p. 81. To this Shklovsky answered in his book *Third Factory* with a few absurd motifs over boiled vegetable soups!
174. "The Commune was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour". Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France", *The First International and After, Political Writings Vol. 3*, translated by David Fernbach, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 212.
175. "Nikolay Ivanovich Bukharin", *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik Leaders*, p. 35.

176. Nikolai Bukharin, "O Formalnom Metodu u Umetnosti [On Formal Methodology in Art]", *Vidici*, No. 8, 1983, p. 86
177. Nikolai Bukharin, "Poetry, Poetics and the Problems of Poetry in the USSR", *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977, pp. 250-253.
178. Bukharin, "Poetry, Poetics", p. 247.
179. Nikolai Gorlov, "On Futurisms and Futurism: Concerning Comrade Trotsky's Article [1924]", *The Futurists, the Formalists & the Marxist Critique*, p. 176.
180. "Once a year wrestlers gather at a pub in Hamburg. They wrestle behind closed doors and curtained windows. It is a long, hard, and ugly fight. But this is the only way to determine their true worth—to prevent them from getting corrupted. We need a Hamburg score in literature". Viktor Shklovsky, *The Hamburg Score*, p. 3.
181. "As I was told by R. Jakobson, Shklovsky admitted in a private conversation that he 'was bending the stick over'". Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 77.
182. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 9.
183. Trotsky, *Ibid*, p. 177.
184. Viktor Shklovsky, "Ully, Ully, Martians", *Knight's Move*, translated by Richard Sheldon, Dalkey Archive Press, 2005, p. 21.
185. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 163.
186. Trotsky's Futurism was the topic of many observations. This is the impression Trotsky's speech left on one Arosev in the twenties, who saw him as a Suprematist painting: "If I was a Futurist artist, I would depict Trotsky as two inverted triangles—a small triangle, the face, on top of a big one, the torso. That's the whole Trotsky". Michael Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues*, p. 97.
187. "I recall a very interesting fact. When Mayakovsky's poem '150 Million' was published, the author took a copy, inscribed it, "To Comrade Lenin. With Com-Fut greetings. Vladimir Mayakovsky," and sent it to him. Lenin was a very agile man, interested in everything, bold. He read the poem and said, "You know, this is a most interesting piece of work. A peculiar brand of communism. It is hooligan communism". Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, [Nikolai Meshcheryakov, Chief Editor of Gosizdat] p. 275.
188. Gert Raeithel, "Karl Marx, Maledictor", *Maledicta: The International Journal for Verbal Aggression*, No. 6, 1983. Alain Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* describes this as "the long tradition of anti-repressive vituperation".
189. Leon Trotsky, "Treba se Boriti za Očišćeni Jezik", *Pitanja o Načinu*

- Života*, Mala Edicija Ideja, Belgrade, 1981, p. 94. English translation, published as “The Struggle for Cultured Speech”, omits the reference about Curzon.
190. Craig Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony*, p. 191-192.
 191. Leon Trotsky, *On Lenin: Notes Towards a Biography [1924]*, translated by Tamara Deutscher, Harrap, London, 1971, p. 158. After reading this book in 1925, André Breton, a Surrealist leader, converted to Communism; prior to that he saw the Russian Revolution as “a vague ministerial crisis”. André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, translated by Mark Polizzotti, Marlowe & Company, New York, 1993, p. 92.
 192. Victor Shklovsky, *The Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher, Dalkey Archive Press, 1991, p. vii.
 193. Boris Eikhenbaum, “Literary Environment”, *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, edited by L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, Dalkey Archive Press, 2002, p. 61.
 194. Boris Eikhenbaum, “Concerning the Question of the ‘Formalists’”, *The Futurists, the Formalists & the Marxists Critique*, p. 61.
 195. Ibid.
 196. Valerian Lebedev-Poliansky, “Povodom B. Ejhenbauma”, *Vidici* No. 8, Belgarde, 1983, p. 83. Poliansky was head of Glavlit (the censorship office) whom Eikhenbaum particularly disliked. In his diary he noted about Polinasky’s book *On the Literary Front* as “dreadful intellectual poverty!”. Carol Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of Russian Formalist*, p. 100.
 197. Eikhenbaum, “Čekajući Književnost [Waiting for Literature]”, *Književnost*, Nolit, Belgrade, 1972, p. 135. This echoed Walter Benjamin’s notes from a conversation with Brecht about Lukacs’ criticism in the thirties: “They want to play the apparatchik and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat”. Walter Benjamin, “Conversations with Brecht”, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Verso, London, 2007, p. 97.
 198. Lenin, “Book review of N. A. Rubakin’s ‘Among books’ [1914]”, *Lenin, Krupskaya, and Libraries*, edited by Sima Simsova, Clive Bingley, London, 1968, p. 18.
 199. Eikhenbaum, “Concerning the Question of the ‘Formalists’”, p.60.
 200. Eikhenbaum, “Čekajući Književnost”, p. 129.
 201. Leon Trotsky, “A New Year’s Conversation About Art”, *Culture and Revolution in the Thought of Leon Trotsky, Revolutionary History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1999, p. 69.
 202. Trotsky, “Vienna Secession 1913”, *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 104.

203. In fact, *Literature and Revolution* was an extended introduction, the update to Trotsky's pre-revolutionary writings on art and literature. Apart from the selection published in *Revolutionary History* journal, the available English translations of the book still do not include this section. I am grateful to Esther Leslie, who made me aware of these translations.
204. Boris Eikhenbaum, "5 – 100", *Vidici*, No. 8, 1983, p. 8.
205. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Concerning the Question of 'Formalists'", *The Futurists, The Marxists*, p. 59.
206. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 236.
207. Eikhenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method", *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p. 4.
208. Eikhenbaum, *ibid*, p. 34.
209. Yuri Tynyanov, "Interval", *The Futurists, the Formalists, & the Marxist Critique*, p. 106.
210. Tynyanov, "Interval", p. 108.
211. *Ibid*.
212. "Khlebnikov has no 'poetic economy', he has a 'poetic observatory'. Yuri Tynyanov, "About Khlebnikov", p. 155.
213. "We lived only for poetry. It was the path of truth". Varlam Shalamov, *Krbotine Dvadesetih [Shards of the Twenties]*, Belgrade, 1988, p. 36. Shalamov's memoir was first published as "Oskolki dvadsatykh godov" in *A-YA: Contemporary Russian Literature*, No. 1, Paris, 1985. I am grateful to Ivana Momčilović who let me know about Shalamov's text.
214. Tynyanov, "Interval", p. 118.
215. Viktor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, translated by Lily Feiler, Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1972, p. 170.
216. Further he claimed that "only a skilfull organisation of writers, artists, and pedagogues, set on rational industrial foundations, can provide the necessary production". Nikolay Chuzhak, "More Left than Lef", *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, p. 280.
217. Wiktor Woroszyński, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, translated by Boleslaw Taborski, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1972, p. 315. [Mayakovsky's letter to Chuzhak, after an Editorial Meeting of LEF, January 22, 1923].
218. Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, p. 185.
219. Alain Badiou, *The Century*, translated by Alberto Toscano, Polity Press, 2007, p. 20.

220. Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory*, translated by Richard Sheldon, Ardis, 1979, p. 9. Shklovsky refers to Alexander Smirdin (1795-1857), publisher and editor who commercialised publishing in Russia.
221. Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory*, p. 49.
222. Viktor Shklovsky, *Third Factory*, p. 41.
223. Brysov, Bezimyansky, Tretyakov, Kamensky, Aseyev and others also wrote poems about Lenin after his death. The most interesting is Kazimir Malevich's "Appendix: From the Book on Non-Objectivity", *The World as Non-Objectivity: Unpublished writings, 1922-1925, Vol. 3*, translated by Xenia Glowacki-Prus, Borgen, Copenhagen, 1976, pp. 316-358.
224. Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, p. 347. [Kornel Zelinsky]
225. Ibid.
226. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "I Myself", *Selected Works 1: Selected Verse*, Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1985, p. 41.
227. Mayakovsky, "I Myself", p. 42.
228. Wiktor Woroszylski quotes two short notes on the occasion of preparing the Lenin texts for LEF Journal. "May 21 [1924]. Saw Mayakovsky at the European Hotel, Room 26. Also present were Yakubinsky, Tynyanov, Tikhonov, Punin, Vinokur. We talked about LEF" [From Boris Eikhenbaum's Notebook]. "My dear Foxy! ... Tomorrow at five Rita will be coming to tea, and at seven, all the linguists..." [Letter of Mayakovsky from Leningrad to Lilja Brik, May 20, 1924]. Woroszylski, *The Life of Mayakovsky*, p. 343.
229. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Address to the First Moscow Congress of Workers for the Left Front of Arts, 16 and 17 January, 1925", *Selected Works 3: Plays, Articles, Essays*, Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1987, p. 177.
230. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 183.
231. Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* [1925], p. vii.
232. Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, pp. 117-118; Shklovsky, *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of Similar*, p. 65; Shklovsky, *Žili-byli: : vospominaniâ, memuarnye zapisi, povesti o vremeni* [Once Upon a Time], Sovetski pisatel, Moscow, 1964, pp. 121-122.
233. Lenin, "On Slogans" [1917], *Selected Work Vol. 2*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, pp. 174-180. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Masumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 83. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "Lenin the Just, or Marxism Unrecycled", *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, edited by S. Budgen, S. Kouvelakis, S. Žižek, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 269-282.

234. Sergei Tretyakov, "Bert Brecht [1934]", *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Peter Demetz, Prentice-Hall, 1962, p. 23. In his testimony to the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947, poor Brecht had to defend Tretyakov's allegations. "From the Testimony of Bertolt Brecht", *Brecht*, p. 37.
235. Studies such as Ludovico Silva's book on Marx's literary style use this as a pretext to emphasise the difference between Marx—the man of the progressive culture—and Lenin—a dogmatic and one-dimensional individual. Ludovico Silva, *Marksov Književni Stil*, Zodijsak, Belgrade, 1978 (original title: *El estilo literario de Marx*).
236. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 93.
237. Fritz Mierau, "Sprache Lenins—Sprache der Literatur" [Lenin's Language—Language of Literature], *Sprache und Stil Lenins*, Verlag Volk und Welt, Berlin, 1970, pp. 17-18. While supporting Lenin's confrontational character, Mierau opposed Futurist portraits of Lenin that presented him as something "not resembling anything that had ever been seen". Mierau, p. 18.
238. Halina Stephan, "*LEF*" and the Left Front of the Arts, Verlag Otto Sagner, München, 1981, pp. 74-75.
239. As Michael Gorham wrote, the LEF discussions about Lenin's language "provided solid stylistic models for new directions in public discourse". Michael Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia*, Northern Illinois University Press, 2003, p. 203. Vinokur later concluded his brief history of the Russian language by pointing to the ways in which Lenin's understanding of language as merging a "high level of contemporary culture with native roots" became the "main line of the Soviet government's linguistic policy". G. O. Vinokur, *The Russian Language: A Brief History*, translated by Mary Forsyth, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 137.
240. Aage Hansen-Löve, *Der Russische Formalismus : methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung*, Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978, pp. 498-502.
241. Opposing the dynamic of the rhythm to the stasis of the picture, Ambrogio also targeted Bukharin's definition of art as a "systematisation of feeling with pictures". Ignazio Ambrogio, *Formalizam i Avangarda u Rusiji*, translated by Vera Franges, Stvarnost, Zagreb, 1977. (Original title: *Formalismo e Avanguardia in Russia*)
242. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "How are Verses to be Made?" [1926], *Selected Works* 3, p. 181.
243. Mayakovsky, "How are Verses to be Made?", p. 181-182.

244. Viktor Shklovsky, *The Hamburg Score*, translated by Shushan Avagyan, Dalkey Archive Press, 2017, p. 88.
245. Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, translated by Sheridan Smith, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1968, p. 28.
246. Alan Shandro, *Lenin and the Logic of Hegemony*, p. 24.
247. Shandro, *Lenin and the Logic of Hegemony*, p. 23.
248. Craig Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture, and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2016, p. 120.
249. Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony*, p. 112-113.
250. Brandist, p. 33.
251. Brandist, p. 50.
252. Brandist, p. 117. Brandist refers to Riita Lehtikainen, *Slova' revoliutsii—revoliutsii v slovar*, Neuvolstoliitoinstituutin vuosikirja, Helsinki, 1990.
253. A. F. Losev, "Language as an Instrument of Communication in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Reflection", *Soviet Studies in Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 2-3, 1984, p. 103.
254. Losev, p. 107.
255. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought* [1924], translated by Nicholas Jacobs, New Left Books, London, 1970, p. 11.
256. Paul Le Blanc, *Unfinished Leninism: The Rise and Return of a Revolutionary Doctrine*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2014, pp. 83-84.
257. "In October [1908] Lafargues committed suicide. Their death was a great shock to Ilyich. He said: 'If you can't do any more work for the Party, you must be able to face the truth and die like Lafargues'". N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1959, p. 226.
258. Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin*, translated by Brian Pearce, Merlin Press, London, 1980, p. 35-36; Paul Le Blanc, *Trotsky*, Reaktion Books, London, 2015, p. 34.
259. Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow*, translated by Ian Birchall, Pluto Press, London, 1971, p. 44.
260. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, NLB, London, 1977, p. 65.
261. Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow*, p. 50.
262. Rosmer, p. 53.
263. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "From the Laboratory (Notes en poete for a Marxist Linguistics)", *Heretical Empiricism*, translated by B. Lawton

- and L. Barnett, New Academia Publishing, Washington, 2005, pp. 50-55. Gramsci's linguistic atlas, according to Pasolini, has two levels. On the lower level, it is a mixture of dialects and a higher, Marxist abstraction. Gramsci's spoken language was a mixture of Sardinian and Piedmontese dialects, and the bureaucratic-professional Italian petty-bourgeois languages. These oral elements are immensely inferior to his "written language" (Hegel and Marx, the most advanced French culture, Italian classics, etc.). Pasolini, p. 53.
264. L. Fotieva, *Pages from Lenin's Life*, translated by Olga Shartse, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1960, p. 133-135. Christopher Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, The English University Press, 1957, p. 220.
265. Viktor Shklovsky, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917-1922*, translated by Richard Sheldon, Dalkey Archive Press, 2004, p. 24. To this, Shklovsky contrasted Kerensky's hysteric speech, also heard at Soldier's Section, where he "hurled garbled phrases and, in truth, seemed to flicker with long, dry, crackling sparks". Shklovsky, p. 19. This is not how emigre writer Teffi remembers: "Lenin was not like Kerensky who would make a crowd fall in love with him and shed tears of ecstasy. I myself witnessed such tears in the eyes of soldiers and workers as they showered Kerensky's car with flowers on Mariinsky Square. Lenin simply battered away with a blunt instrument at the darkest corner of people's souls, where greed, spite and cruelty lay hidden". Teffi, *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea*, New York Review Books, 2016.
266. Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language of Soviet Communism*, translated by Ken Connelly, The Claridge Press, London, 1989, p. 191.
267. "The narrative structure of the text was becoming circular, to the point that many formulaic speeches and addresses could be read top to bottom and bottom to top with similar results". Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was Not Anymore: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 49-50.
268. Leon Trotsky, "The Struggle for Cultured Speech [1923]", *Problems of Everyday Life*, p. 53.
269. China Miéville, *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*, Verso, 2017, London, p. 71.
270. Paul Lafargue, "Francuski Jezik Pre i Posle Revolucije" [1894], *Književne Kritike*, translated by Eli Finci, Kultura, Belgrade, 1948. [Original title: *La langue française avant et après la Révolution*]. Roman Jakobson, *Vliv Revoluce na Ruský Jazyk* [Influence of the Revolution on Russian Language], Nové Atheneum, Prague, 1921.
271. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution, Volume Three*, translated by Max Eastman, Sphere Books, London, 1967, p. 323.

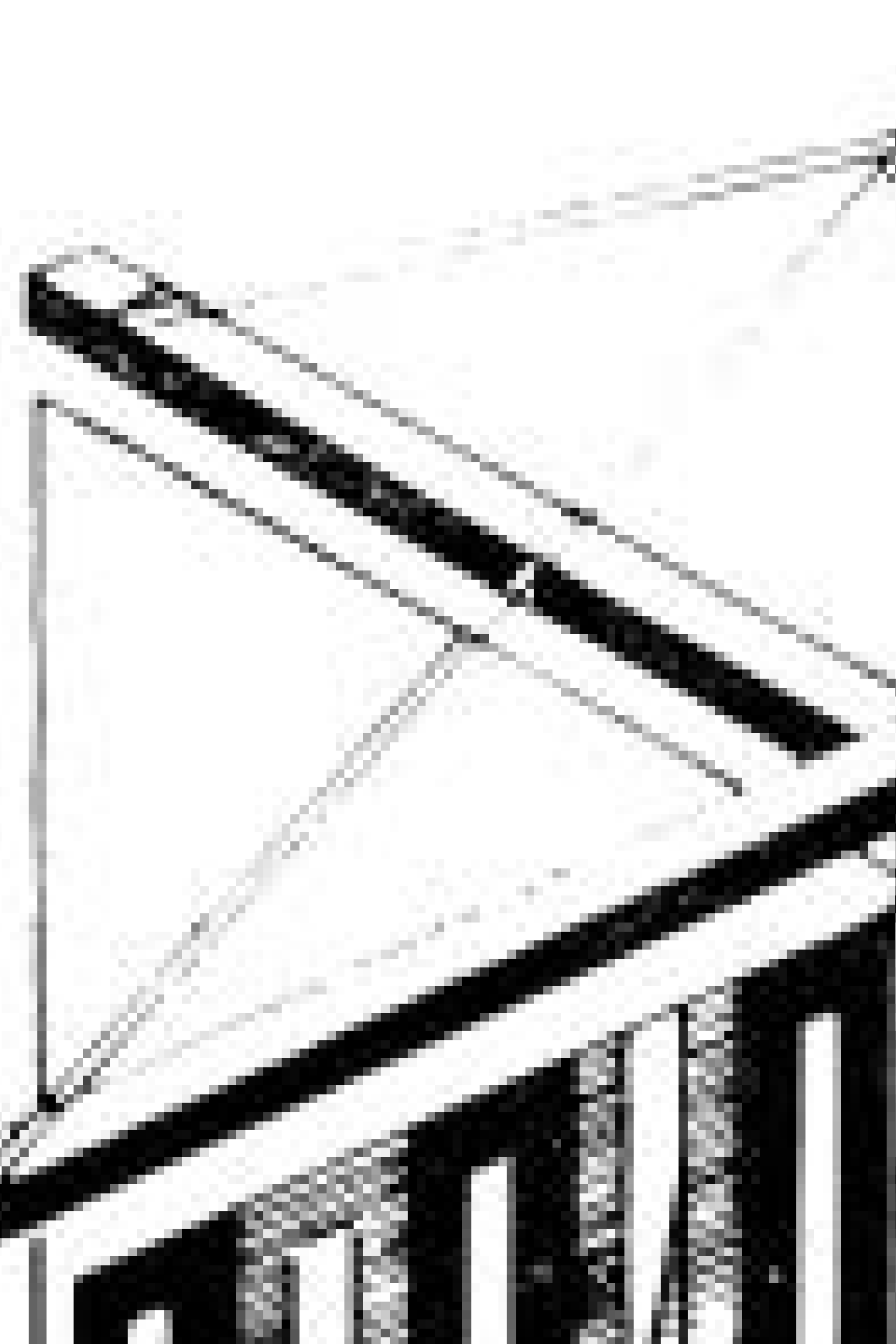
272. Alexei Kruchenykh, "Declaration of the Word as Such [1913]", *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, p. 67.
273. Vinokur, "Futurists – Constructors of Language", p. 368.
274. Kruchenykh published more than a hundred booklets, many of them *samizdats*, under his "euy" publishing company.
275. Sergei Tretyakov, "LEF's Tribune [1923]", *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestos*, p. 245.
276. Nikolai Gorlov, "Futurism and Revolution [1924]", *The Futurists, The Formalists, & The Marxists Critique*, p. 200.
277. Ibid, p. 202.
278. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 78. GVIU is acronym of "Chief Military Engineering Directorate", GLAVBUM: Chief Directorate of State Paper Industry Enterprises, GAU: Chief Artillery Directorate, GUVUZ: Chief Directorate of Military Education Establishment.
279. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 132-133. Lenin made a witty comment about this Russian French: "[This] adoption of Nizhny-Novgorod French is the adoption of the worst from the worst representatives of the Russian landowning class, who learned some French but who, first, did not master the language, and who, secondly, distorted the Russian language". Quote taken from Annette T. Rubinstein, "Lenin on Literature, Language and Censorship", *Science & Society*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 1995, p. 378.
280. Nikolai Bukharin, "Poetry, Politics and the Problems of Poetry in the USSR", p. 206.
281. Galin Tihanov, "The Politics of Estrangement", p. 680.
282. Benedikt Livshitz, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, translated by John Bowl, Oriental Research Partners, Massachusetts, 1977, p. 92.
283. Michael S. Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia*, Northern Illinois University Press, 2003, p. 27.
284. Michael S. Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues*, p. 34.
285. As one contemporary interpreter of Kruchenykh's work noticed: "anyone who studies *Maloxolija v Kapote* can never again read Blok's poem "neznakomka" without seeing "nadrístat" in the first line. Because "po veceram nad restaranami" [sic] by Blok, and "i milyx baryshen' svoix/ vojnu i bal, dvorec i xatu" by Pushkin, are accentuated by handwriting to reveal "nadrest", vaguely resembling the verb nadristat' ("to have the shits"), and "ibal", a phonetic equivalent of the past tense of the verb ebat' ("fuck"), respectively. Walter Comins-Richmond, "Kruchenykh's 'Maloxolija v Kapote': The Anagrammatization of Literature", *The*

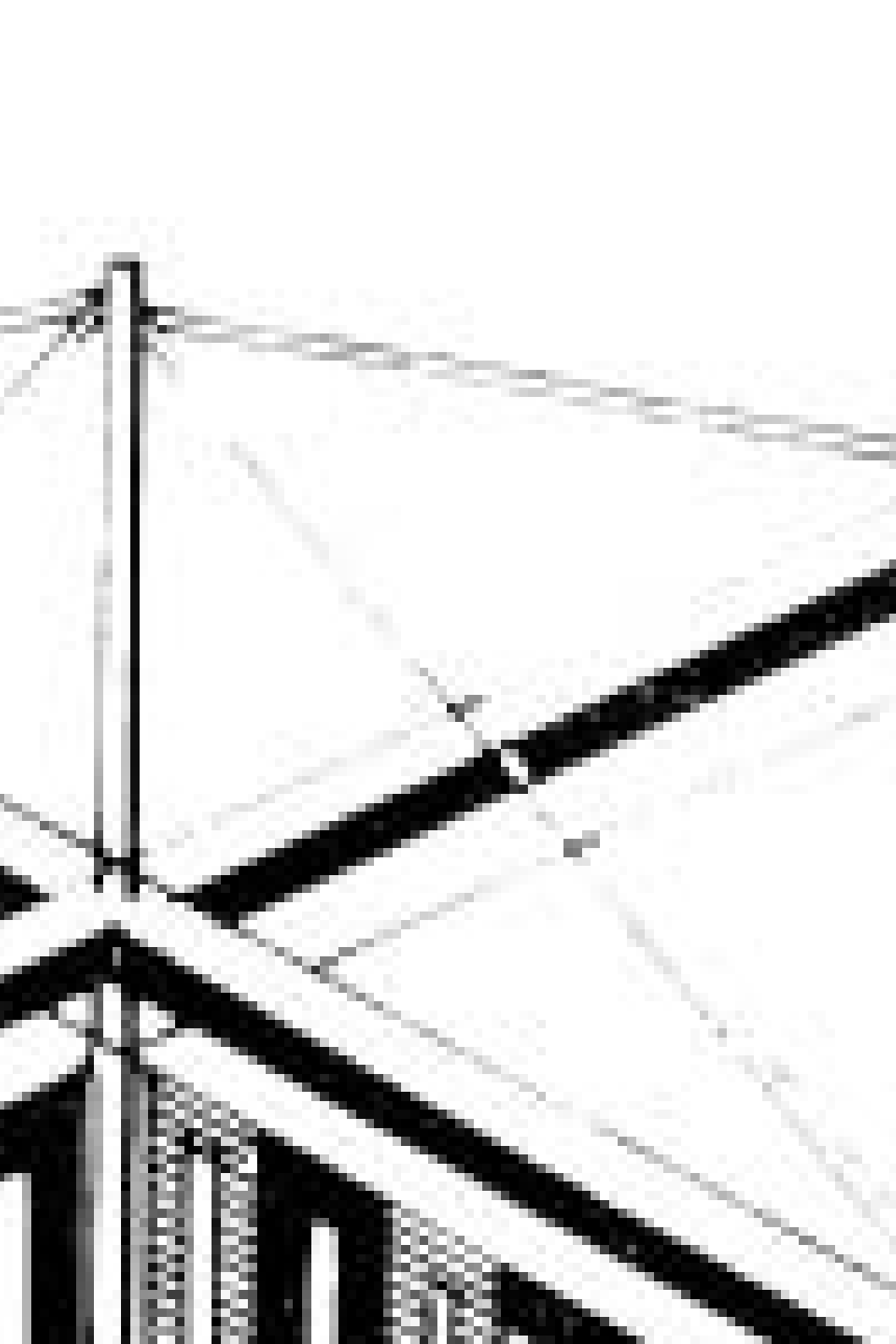
- Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Winter 1994, p. 630.
286. Viktor Shklovsky, "On Poetry and Trans-Sense Language", *October* 34, 1985, p. 22.
 287. Velimir Khlebnikov, "Self-Statement", *Collected Works Volume II: Prose, Plays, and Super Sagas*, translated by Paul Schmidt, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 7.
 288. Roman Jakobson, "From Alyagrov's Letters", *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance. A Festschrift in Honor of Victor Erlich*. Edited by R. Jackson & S. Rudy, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, New Haven, 1985, p. 1.
 289. Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambiance*, p. 88.
 290. Alexei Kruchenykh, *Phonetics of the Theater*. Gerald Janacek, *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*, San Diego State University Press, 1996.
 291. Maria Janion, *Romantizam, Revolucija, Marksizam*, Nolit, Belgrade, 1976, p. 75. The actual quote is from Paul Lafargue's reminiscences on Marx.
 292. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, translated by Gregory Elliott, Brill, Leiden, 2006, p. 96.
 293. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38: Philosophical Notebooks*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, p. 89.
 294. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 503.
 295. Ibid, pp. 504-505.
 296. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1982, p. 33.
 297. Jean-Joseph Goux, "Marx and the Inscription of the Labour", *The Tel Quel Reader*, edited by P. French and R-F Lack, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 50-69.
 298. Maria Janion, p. 120.
 299. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin, 1990, p. 199. Marx, "Le 'Feu' du Changement de Forme", is published in *Change*, no. 2, 1969, pp. 81-83. Now, scans of entire issues of this journal are electronically available through *les presses du reel*.
 300. Léon Robel, "Notes fragmentaires pour une étude des rapports entre Eisenstein et Tynianov", *Change*, no.2, 1969, p. 57. "Je ne comprendrais pas la littérature, s'il n'y avait eu la Révolution".
 301. Jean-Pierre Faye, "Destruction, révolution, langage", *Change*, no. 2, 1969, pp. 125-126.

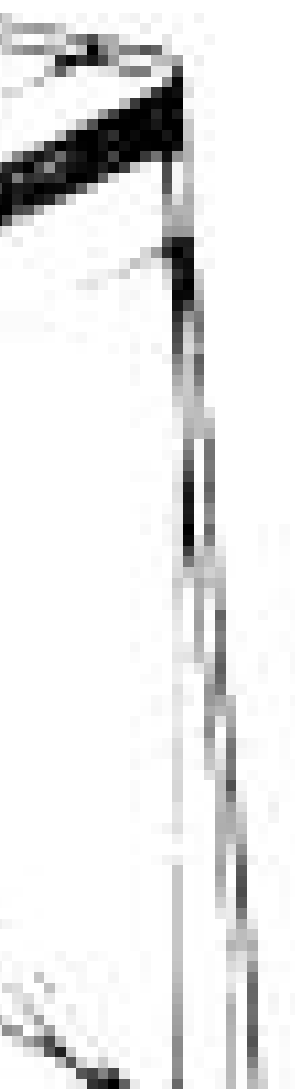
302. Ernesto Laclau, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 252.
303. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics [1985]*, second edition, Verso, London, 2011, p. 42.
304. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 50. They also wrote that Marxism "must abandon its class ghetto", p. 58.
305. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 110, 113.
306. Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, The University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 40.
307. Anderson quotes Saussure to support his criticism: "Language is a human institution of such a kind that all the other human institutions, with the exception of writing, can only deceive us as to its real essence if we trust in their analogy", p. 42.
308. Anderson, p. 46.
309. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* [1986], Verso, London, 1998, p. 47.
310. Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2007, pp. 2-3.
311. The term "speaking Bolshevik" is used by Sovietologist Stephen Kotkin to describe "the obligatory language for self-identification and as such, the barometer of one's political allegiance to the cause". Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism and Civilisation*, University of California Press, 1995, p. 220. Kotkin, on the other hand, takes the clue for this term from Victor Klemperer's "speaking Nazi".
312. Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, p. 2.
313. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, translated by Bruno Bosteels, Continuum, London, 2009, p. 188.
314. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, translated by Charles Rougle, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 45.
315. Groys, p. 68.
316. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, translated by Norman Madarasz, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 117. This is how Groys draws the line between the avant-garde and the state: "There would have been no need to suppress the avant-garde if its black squares and Zaum poetry had confined themselves to artistic space, but the fact that it was persecuted indicated that it was operating on the same territory as the state". Groys, p. 35.

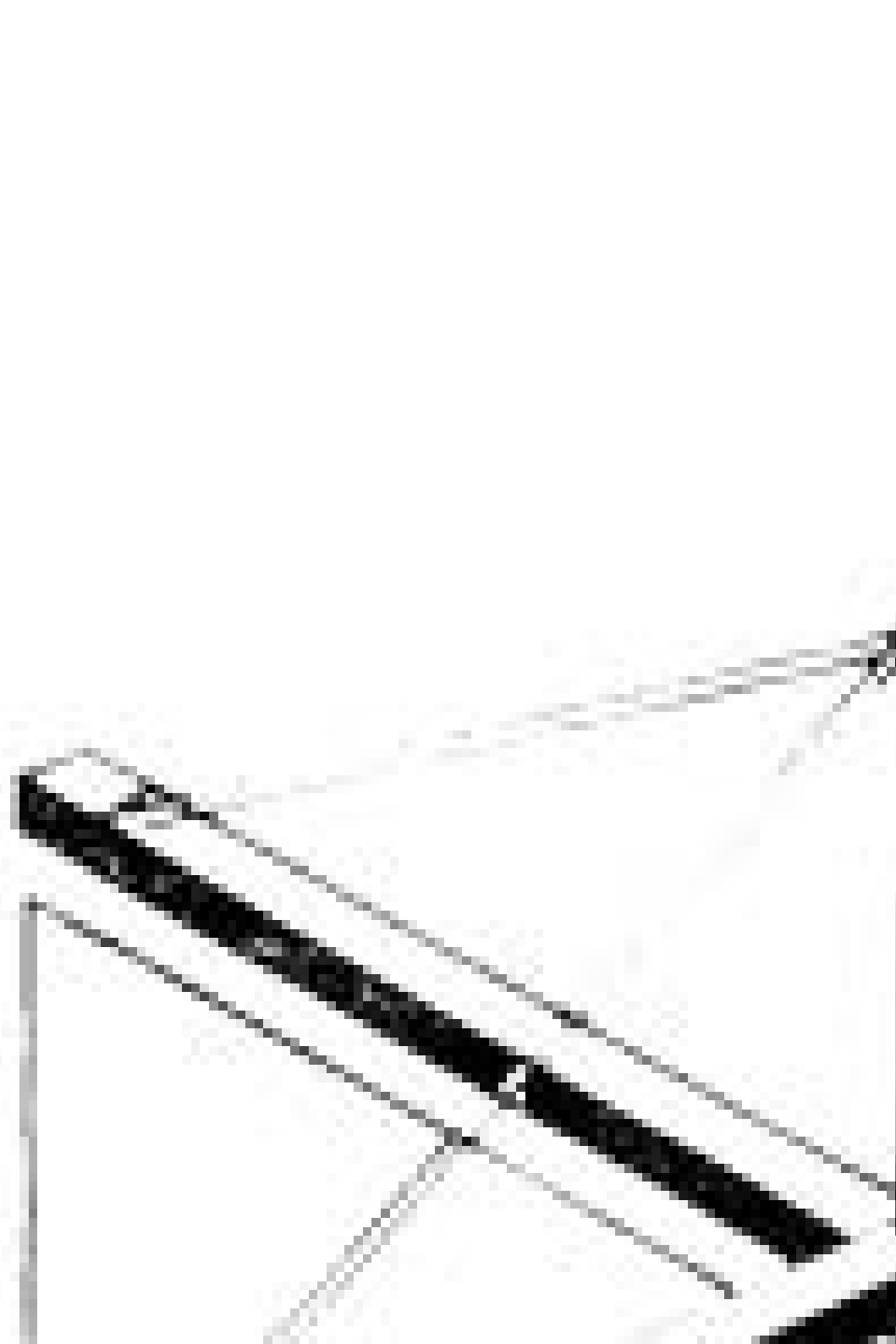
317. Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, translated by Thomas Ford, Verso, London, 2009, p. 61.
318. Georg Lukács, *Lenin*, p. 11.
319. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 3.
320. The absence of war as a historical fact is replaced by a Nietzschean “will to power”. Referring to Groys’ study, Dragan Kujundžić wrote that “Lenin’s usage of the term ‘ideology’ can be considered to be closer to Nietzsche than to Marx”, and situated the LEF Project as a “will to power with words”. Dragan Kujundžić, *The Return of History: Russian Nietzscheans After Modernity*, SUNY Press, 1997, p. 11, 129.
321. Lukács, *Lenin*, p. 41.
322. Jan Mukařovský, “A Note on the Czech Translation of Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* [1934]”, *The Word and Verbal Art*, translated by J. Burbank and P. Steiner, Yale University Press, 1977, p. 136.
323. Georges Haupt, “War and Revolution in Lenin”, *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871-1914*, translated by Peter Fawcett, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 132. Lenin’s cited speech was published as “War and Revolution” in *Pravda* No. 93, April 24, 1929.
324. Haupt, pp. 144-143.
325. Domenico Losurdo, *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 21.
326. Losurdo quotes Lenin saying: “to imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe [...] *is to repudiate social revolution*. Whoever expects ‘pure’ social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is”. Losurdo, *Class Struggle*, pp. 146-147.
327. John Eric Marot, *The October Revolution in Prospect and Retrospect*, Brill/Historical Materialism Series, Leiden, 2012, p. 120.
328. Marot, *The October Revolution*, p. 119.
329. Marot, *The October Revolution*, p. 126.
330. Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography”, *October* No. 30, 1984, p. 107.
331. By separating politics from the practice, the theoretical queries on artistic forms from the mid-1980s to the end of the century and beyond, as Peter Osborne argues, “[has] been by and large exclusively academic and art-institutional practices”. Peter Osborne, “October and the Problem of Formalism”, *The Postconceptual Condition*, Verso, 2018, p. 120.
332. Daniel Bensaïd, “Leaps! Leaps! Leaps!”, *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, p. 153.



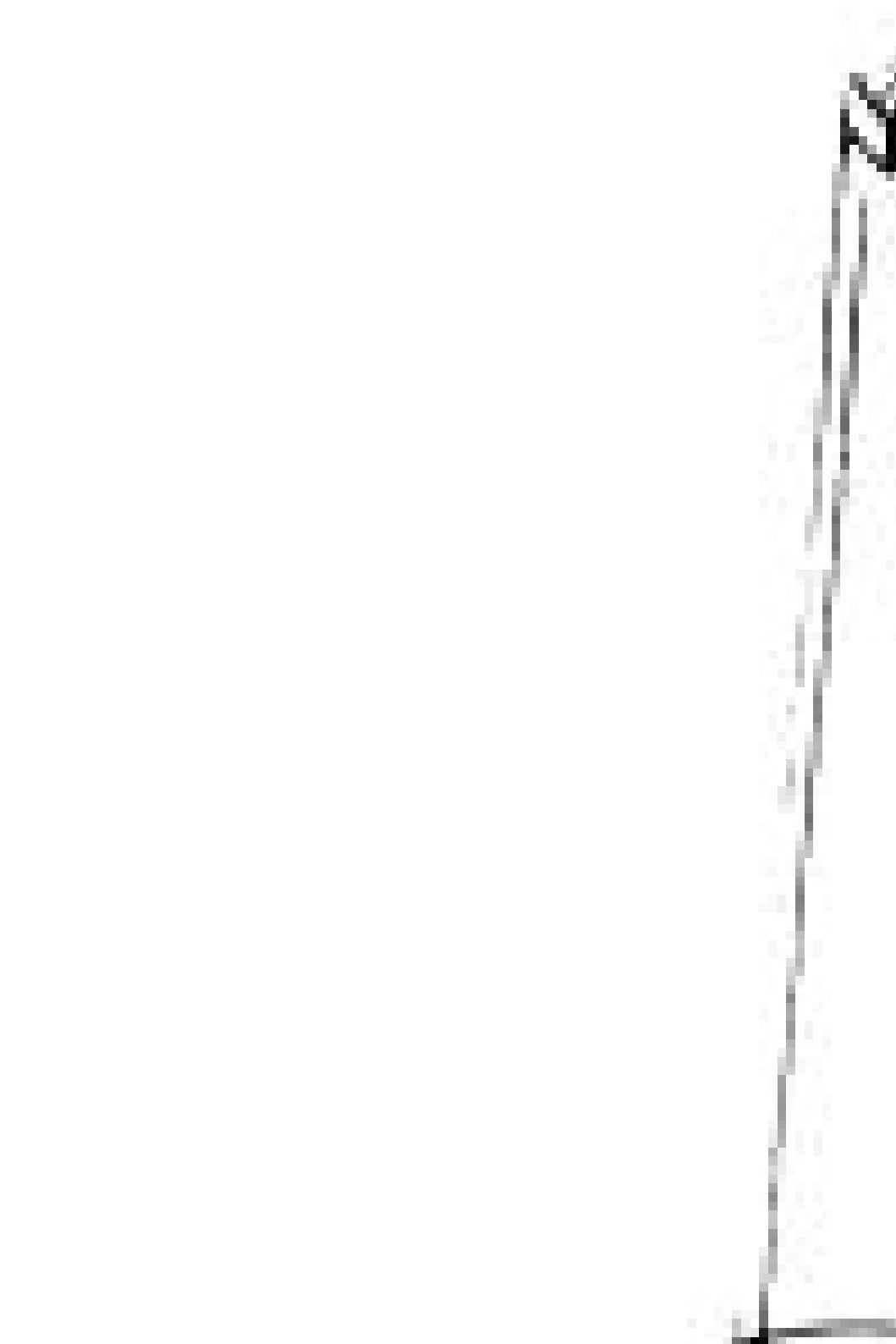














LENIN'S LANGUAGE

Vladimir Mayakovsky
Viktor Shklovsky
Boris Eikhenbaum
Lev Yakubinsky
Yuri Tynyanov
Boris Kazansky
Boris Tomashevsky

Translated by
Thomas Campbell

The translation of a dossier published in LEF Journal No. 5 (II:1), 1924,
as “Язык Ленина” (Yazyk Lenina).

Vladimir Mayakovsky

DON'T MERCHANDISE LENIN!

The following advertisement has been published in Soviet newspapers.

BUSTS OF VLADIMIR LENIN

Plaster, Patinised, Bronze, Marble, and Granite

LIFE-SIZED and DOUBLE-SIZED

Reproduced from the original work by

SCULPTOR S.D. MERKULOV,

authorised for reproduction and distribution by

the Commission for the Perpetuation of

VLADIMIR LENIN'S Memory

FOR SALE BY THE STATE PUBLISHING HOUSE

To state institutions, Party and professional organisations, cooperatives, etc.

EACH COPY IS AUTHORISED.

Showroom and Orders

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Rozhdestvenka, 4, Moscow.

Illustrated prospectuses sent free on demand.

UNAUTHORISED REPRODUCTION AND COPYING

PUNISHABLE BY LAW

We oppose this.

We agree with the workers of the Kazan Railroad, who asked an artist to equip their club with a Lenin Room that had no busts and portraits of Lenin, saying "We don't want icons".

We insist:

Don't crank out Lenins.

*Don't print his likenesses on posters, oilcloths, plates, mugs,
and cigarette case.*

Don't embronze Lenin.

*Don't take away his living gait and human traits,
which he was able to preserve as he guided history.*

Lenin is still our contemporary.

He is among the living.

We need him alive, not dead.

So:

Learn from Lenin, but don't canonise him.

Don't create a cult around a man who fought cults his whole life.

Don't sell the objects of this cult.

Don't merchandise Lenin!

LEF

Viktor Shklovsky

LENIN AS DECANONISER

The weeks since Lenin's death have been weeks of renaming.

All the factories and institutions of higher learning have wanted to attach Lenin's name to the moniker of their collectives.

The Russian Central Executive Committee has been handling the renamings.

Let us try and understand the effects of renaming.

A renaming can be separative. It happens when a previously single phenomenon disintegrates into two or more parts, for example, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Lenin was labelled a splitter, and indeed he was willing to split phenomena, to differentiate them.

Russia's political lexicon has featured not only the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks but also the Trotskyists, the Recallers [*otzovisty*], and so on.

Renaming the Bolsheviks the Communists also has a separative objective. Essentially, the word Bolshevik has not been replaced by the word Communist, but the word Social Democrat has been replaced by the word Communist. The word Bolshevik has been retained, so to speak, in parentheses, e.g., RCP(B), Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

It was the "SD" (Social Democratic) aspect of the name that was rejected.

A separative renaming is thus a means of separating a concept from an old word that no longer corresponds to it.

Lenin could convey a separative character, a connotation of newness even to adverbs and conjunctions by underscoring them.

"We are full of national pride because the Great-Russian nation, *too*, has created a revolutionary class, because it, *too*, has proved capable of providing mankind with great models of the

struggle for freedom and socialism".¹ The italics are also in the original.

When Lenin italicises words, he singles them out completely, investing them with a peculiar, local meaning, making them isolate a concept.

There can be another renaming, the renaming of an object that is unchanged and never appears again.

A renaming of this kind makes sense if it is not spontaneous, because if we rename all things identically, for example, if they are all named October this and October that, they would cease to be distinguishable, i.e., the name would become meaningless.

With a single renaming, we should keep in mind that one word has been displaced by another. This aspect and it alone is agitational. The renaming is most palpable in the aspect of displacement.

Perhaps this partly explains the practice of the church, which has definite know-how in techniques of language, of using two names for the same person, with the new name not entirely displacing the first. For example, not only was Yaroslav not a Christian name, but Ivan the Terrible's contemporary Morozov used a name that was not canonical, Druzhina.

Everyday life is palpable in the moment of its emergence.

Leningrad's street names were a sign of change in 1919. Now they are means of notation.

In the words August, June, July, tsar, and king there are or, rather, were aspects of immortalizing a name, but these words took root and forfeited this element. The more a renaming catches on, the less useful it is. As soon as a word has attached itself to a thing, it ceases to be palpable and loses its emotional colouring. When more complicated renamings are at work, when new words are coined, not only does the displacement of one set of words by another occur, but the new words enter the realm of the old words.

Take the name *oktyabriny* ("Octobering"), formed from *oktyabr* ("October") and *krestiny* ("christening").

There is no doubt the word inveigles the concept into the realm of religious ritual. It not only displaces the ritual but also bears traces of it.

The opposition that emerged among certain collectives against “Octobering” was likely caused by the *-ing* ending, since it has a sudden, intrusive connotation.

Language technique sometimes uses the same semantic halo obtained by the old word.

For example, the Extraordinary Commission for Eliminating Illiteracy does not use the word “extraordinary” in the sense of “unusual”, but as a complement of the second word, “commission”. The name should not be read as “extraordinary + commission + for eliminating illiteracy”, but “extraordinary commission + for eliminating illiteracy”, i.e., as a specific instance of an extraordinary commission which provides the background for the entire construction.

Such is the significance of the new name’s generation and consolidation.

But next, we come to a phenomenon that is best explored in the “language of revolution”.

Words and entire expressions become incantations.

A habitual connection is established between a term, usually encapsulated in several words, and a thing. Moreover, the expression denotes not the thing, but the place it occupies in space, so to speak.

The frontiers of the phenomenon, corresponding to the expression, expand rapidly: transitional phenomena seek to fuse with the canonised phenomenon. They seemingly pledge for it, as for a wealthy lord.

The expression becomes the thing’s counterfeit shadow. In particular cases, we confront what is known as a “revolutionary phrase”.

The assumption is that once a concept has been encapsulated, it comes to a halt.

This keeps on until disengagement occurs.

Lenin’s style is distinguished by the absence of spells and incantations.

Each speech and article seemingly marks a totally new beginning. There are no terms. They emerge amid the given piece as the specific outcome of the work of separating things.

Lenin’s arguments with his opponents, whether foes or Party comrades, usually start as arguments about words, with claims

that the words have been altered.

Lenin had a peculiar attitude, an ironic revulsion, to the “power of language”, which he understood quite well.

“I would really like to take, for example, a few state trusts [*gostrestov*], to invoke that splendid Russian language that Turgenev praises so highly, and show how we are able to manage them”.² In this case, it would seem Lenin has focused his irony on the phrase “state trust”.

Here is another example.

“We are not aware of this. Here we are left with communist conceit, with *comconceit* (*komchvanstvo*), to put it in the mighty Russian language”.³ In this case, it is curious that a word is produced before our very eyes and simultaneously Lenin emphasises its contradiction with the “power of language”, which indeed exists to be contradicted.

When it appears in Lenin’s agitprop, the pithy phrase is structured in such a way so as not to take root.

Lenin despises people who have memorised books. His style consists in downplaying the revolutionary phrase, in replacing its traditional words with workaday synonyms.

In this sense, Lenin’s style closely resembles, in terms of its basic technique, Leo Tolstoy’s style. Lenin is opposed to naming. Each time, he outlines a new relationship between word and thing without naming the thing and reinforcing the new name.

It is curious to skim through the ways Lenin uses everyday matter in his articles and speeches. He often makes use of incredible matter, things that should not be mentioned.

A professor in Voronezh wrote Lenin a letter in which he listed all the misfortunes he had experienced in the provinces. The commander of a detachment who was quartered in his apartment had interfered in the professor’s private life by demanding, for example, that the professor sleeps in the same bed as his wife.

Lenin replied to the letter.

In his reply, he focused on the most ticklish aspect, arguing that “first, the desire of the intelligentsia to have two beds, one for the husband, and one for the wife, is a legitimate desire (a truly legitimate desire), since to make it come true one needs a higher than average income. The letter writer could not be unaware that, ‘on average’, Russians had never had a single bed to themselves”.⁴

To understand this excerpt, we must know that, in the previous piece of correspondence (M. Dukelsky's letter and Lenin's reply), the discussion had revolved around special rates. Moreover, Lenin attempted to defend special rates.

The attempt to win an argument about a complex issue using such a harsh, offensive example seems extraordinarily queer and bold.

But there is a connection between Lenin's harsh examples and his stylistic techniques.

Lenin inserts ordinary life as an antidote to phrases. Sometimes, he takes on a deliberately narrow topic to this end: cleaning residential house courtyards and means of posting ads.

People wishing to get to the bottom of Lenin's style must first realise the style consists in change, not in ascertainment. When Lenin inserts a fact of life into his work, he does not standardise this piece of the mundane, but uses it to alter the comparison's scale.

He compares the large and the small. He makes use of small-scale examples to bring words down to size and stir them up.

1. Lenin, "On the National Pride of the Great Russians", *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 35, December 12, 1914.
2. Lenin, "Speech in the Opening of the Eleventh Congress Of The R.C.P.(B.), March 27-April 2, 1922".
3. Ibid.
4. Lenin, "Reply to an Open Letter By a Bourgeois Specialist", *Pravda* No. 67, March 28, 1919.

LENIN'S BASIC STYLISTIC TENDENCIES

1.

When studying poetic language, we have usually assumed it is opposed to "practical" language. This was vital and fruitful when we were initially establishing the peculiarities of poetic discourse. But, as has been argued many times since then (e.g., by Lev Yakubinsky), the realm of so-called practical language is extremely broad and varied. There is scarcely a discursive realm in which the attitude to words would ultimately be so mechanised, in which words would be mere signs. As for such forms as oration, despite its seemingly practical character, it is quite like poetic speech. Poetic speech is typified only by a particular attitude to discrete discursive elements and their specific use, especially in poetry.

Articles and speeches are not bare encapsulations of thought, its simple expression in terms, but a discursive process emerging from a stimulus. Independently of the thought that spurred it, this process has its own discursive flow, its own consistency, and its own emotional and stylistic nuances. The person writing an article or giving a speech chooses words, links phrases, constructs sentences and passages, alters their intonations, and so on. Discourse obtains a stylistic tendency and is organised into a consistent flow, thus distancing itself from workaday, colloquial word usage and syntax.

We can speak of the basic stylistic trends evinced by the author of an article or speech depending on his focus on one or another discursive form. Moreover, we can speak of the stylistic traditions and trends that typified the articles and speeches of periods and groups. This is especially the case with articles and speeches written and delivered to convince others, with articles and speeches whose purpose is, to some extent, activism and agitation. Naturally, the intensified discursive feeling in these cases colours

speech with the desired emotional tone and shapes it in terms of a stylistic trend. By focusing on this side of discourse, we come to have a sense of a writer's stylistic tendencies.

Lenin's speech and articles are exceptionally curious matter for studying oratorical style if only because words were not Lenin's profession and career, but his real deed. Yet his discourse is directed neither towards experts nor the so-called public, but to the entire Russian people and all the earth's nations.

Most of Lenin's articles and speeches belong to the genre of political agitation. The titles of his articles themselves often smack of exposés and slogans: "A Maximum of Shamelessness and a Minimum of Logic", "The Quasi-Populist Bourgeoisie and Dismayed Populists", "One Step at a Time", "Hesitation Above, Resolution Below", or the renowned "Better Fewer, But Better". He nearly always confronts, on the one hand, opponents and foes; on the other, a mass of people who must be moved, who must be persuaded. In this connection, his discourse is always coloured, on the one hand, by a tone of irony and ridicule; on the other, by a tone of categorical, energetic argumentation. This general emotional tone, however, does not resolve the issue of stylistic tendencies.

A first reading of Lenin's articles might lead us to imagine he has no stylistic tendencies, that the aspect of the style does not concern him. There are no obvious oratorical techniques: no grand passages, no similes and metaphors, and no literary quotations—nothing of the sort that bedazzles us in Leon Trotsky's articles, for example. Lenin occasionally cites a proverb and even more rarely does he quote literature. He quotes Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit* most often, as well as Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gogol, and Turgenev. Lenin is seemingly indifferent to language. His attitude to language is not that of a writer or orator, but of a businessman who resorts to the established shape of late-nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia discourse.

This impression, however, is countered by the fact that Lenin evinces a quite definite reaction to the style of others. When polemicalising with opponents and enemies, he often pays attention to their stylistic peculiarities. He imagines every political party not only as a worldview, but also as a discursive style. He occasionally plays the role of judge and, sometimes, passionate prosecutor of speechifying, seeing it as a telltale sign of intellectual impotence and

moral emptiness. It is amidst other people's styles, to which Lenin often devotes lines and sometimes whole articles of mocking description, that his own stylistic tendencies clearly emerge.

In the articles of 1901–1902, as published in *Iskra*, Lenin deals with the tsarist government and the parties opposed to the Bolsheviks. It is a primarily a period of polemics and exposé. Lenin often has occasion to expose or mock someone else's style by describing it.

The language of government memoranda particularly outrages him.

We said: if one has the patience to read Mr. Sipyagin's memorandum all the way through. One needs no small amount of patience, for three fourths [*of the memorandum*] is such [*drivel*]! Nine tenths of the memorandum is chockablock with bureaucratese. Things are mulled over that have long been known and repeated hundreds of times even in the *Compendium of Laws*. There is much hemming and hawing, and detailed accounts of the ceremonious relations between Chinese mandarins. [*The memorandum is executed in*] a magnificent official style featuring thirty-six-line sentences and "pronouncements" that make one feel pain for one's native Russian language, etc.¹

What is most striking here is a seemingly unusual expression, coming as it does from Lenin: "one's native Russian language". It is no accident, however. As we shall see, unlike many other political writers and orators, Lenin appreciates not bookish speech, but simple colloquial speech, and he inserts the most common, even rude words and expressions into his articles and speeches. It is telling he translates the French saying *les beaux esprits se rencontrent* ("great minds think alike") as "birds of a feather flock together", seemingly emphasising the stylistic contrast. (In another passage, he translates the same saying yet another way: "It takes one to know one".)

In this regard, it is also telling how he spoke out against the word *Sovnarkhoz* ("National Economic Council") at the Russian Communist Party's Seventh Congress. "It would be as if we stuck a Word Sovnarkhoz into the programme. Yet we have not got used

to the ugly word *Sovnarkhoz* ourselves. They say there have been cases in which foreigners have inquired as to whether it is a rail-road station".² I should mention, by the way, that, in the passage cited above, the bookish "for" (which Lenin uses constantly) sits cheek by jowl with the phrase-interrupting "such!". It is a typical combination in his style.

Lenin subjects the elevated clerical style of Socialist Revolutionary articles and proclamations to systematic mockery.

In the article "Revolutionary Adventurism" Lenin ironises on the artfulness of the SRs in concealing their theoretical lack of integrity with a "flood of words", quoting the phrase, "[The working people] will smash the iron gates like a powerful wave".³

Lenin's battle against "revolutionary phrases" is a leitmotif in all his articles and speeches. It is a constant object of his irony and mockery, and, sometimes, a topic of serious discussion.

He pays it a good deal of attention in the period 1917–1923, due to the growth of political literature, the emergence of posters and slogans, and so on. In 1917, *Pravda* published an article of his, tellingly headlined "On the Harm of Phrase-Mongering". In the articles, Lenin sends up the style of the SR newspaper *Delo naroda* (*The People's Cause*). "A threatening tone, flashy revolutionary exclamations [...] we know quite a [...] faith in the victoriousness of our Revolution (the capital R is obligatory) [...] The fate of Russian revolutionary democracy depends on one step or another [...] the Uprising of the working people arises so happily, so victoriously (the capital U is obligatory), etc. Of course, if the words Revolution and Uprising are written with capital letters, they produce a 'terrifying' impression, just like the Jacobins. It's down and dirty. [...] Heroes of the phrase! Knights of grandiloquence!"⁴

During a campaign against the Kadet Duma faction (1906), Lenin mocks their "appeal to the people", exclaiming, "Is it not funny, on the contrary, to write 'appeals to the people' in the wooden language of a crusty Russian solicitor, as the Kadets and (to their shame) the Trudoviks do?"⁵

2.

Lenin keeps up his battle with phrase-mongering and empty talk to the end, often addressing allies and Party comrades, not enemies.

In the 1919 brochure "A Great Beginning", Lenin writes,

In *Capital*, Karl Marx ridicules the pompous and grandiloquent bourgeois-democratic great charter of liberty and the rights of man, ridicules all this phrase-mongering about liberty, equality, and fraternity in general, which dazzles the petty bourgeois and philistines of all countries, including the present despicable heroes of the despicable Berne International. Marx contrasts these pompous declarations of rights to the plain, modest, practical, simple way the question is presented by the proletariat. [...] The “formulas” of genuine communism differ from the pompous, intricate, and solemn phraseology of the Kautskys, the Mensheviks, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their beloved “brethren” of Berne in that they reduce everything to the conditions of labour. Less chatter about “labour democracy”, about “liberty, equality, and fraternity”, about “government by the people”, and all such stuff. [...] Fewer pompous phrases, more plain, everyday work, concern for the pood of grain and the pood of coal! [...] We must all admit that vestiges of the bourgeois-intellectual phrase-mongering approach to questions of the revolution are in evidence at every step, everywhere, even in our own ranks.⁶

Lenin is concerned not only with phrase-mongering and pompous words but also with the transformation of words that are dear to him and imbued with profound content into stock phrases, with the transmogrification of these words into everyday signs and the resulting devastation and impoverishment suffered by these words.

In the same pamphlet, Lenin argues, “[T]he word ‘commune’ is being handled too freely”, welcoming the Central Executive Committee’s decision to repeal a decree of the Council of People’s Commissars pertaining to “consumers’ communes”: “Let the title be simpler”. He suggests “eliminat[ing] the word ‘commune’ from common use, to prohibit every Tom, Dick and Harry from grabbing at it”.⁷ During a speech at the 1921 Russian Congress of Transportation Workers, he criticised the popular poster “The Kingdom of Workers and Peasants Will Know No End”.

Now, as I passed through your hall, I came upon a poster whose inscription read, 'The Kingdom of Workers and Peasants Will Know No End.' When I read that odd poster—which, it is true, was hung not in the usual place, but stood in the corner; maybe somebody had divined the poster was inept and had moved it to one side—when I read this odd poster, I thought, "What misunderstandings and incorrect understandings we have of such elementary and basic things". Indeed, if the kingdom of workers and peasants knew no end, it would mean there would never be socialism, for socialism means the elimination of the classes, but if the workers and peasants remained, there would still be different classes and, hence, there could not be full socialism.

Lenin's attention is arrested by every exaggeration, by everything that smacks of the automatic use of words, thus depriving them of their real meaning.

In the same speech, Lenin discusses another slogan.

[T]hinking how such strange posters, albeit shoved into the background a bit, exist three and a half years after the October takeover, I reflected likewise on the fact that, perhaps, in relation to the most widespread and commonly used slogans there are still extremely huge misunderstandings. We all sing that we are now waging the last, decisive battle. It is one of the most widespread slogans, which we repeat every which way. But I feared that if I asked most Communists against whom it was we were now waging—not the last battle, of course (that is a bit superfluous), but one of our last, decisive battles—few would answer the question correctly and show a clear understanding against what or whom we were now waging one of the last, decisive battles".⁸

The examples I have cited, whose numbers I could have increased considerably, show that Lenin related to words with a caution and sensitivity that is rare among politicians. He reacted not only to

high-flown phrase-mongering but also to all instances of falsehood, to every verbal cliché, to every rash cry. A revolutionary emphasis provokes an angry rebuff from Lenin; a demagogic gesture elicits harsh criticism and ridicule. Even in welcoming speeches, not standing on ceremony, he does not greet and encourage so much as he denounces and warns his audience from getting carried away with phrases and chatter. Concerning the term “political education” [*politprosvet*], he says at the Congress, “You have adopted the name ‘political education.’ Whatever name you took, you were constantly warned not to bite off too big a chunk with the name, but to adopt a simpler name”.⁹

So, Lenin uses every opportunity to expose phrase-mongering, to keep readers and listeners from handling words carelessly, and to underscore an excessive enthusiasm for slogans and labels.

“If we succeed in recruiting new words to the work of cultural and political education, it will no longer be a matter of only a new name, and then we will be able to make peace with the ‘Soviet’ weakness for pasting new labels on each new cause and institution”.¹⁰

3.

Lenin’s main stylistic tendency is, thus, his war on phrases, excessive rhetoric, and “big” words. It is one of his touchstones, expressed as early as 1903: “[T]o expose phrase-mongering and mystification, wherever they rear their heads, whether in the ‘programmes’ of revolutionary adventurers, in the razzle and dazzle of their belles-lettres or in lofty predicates about truth, the purifying flame, crystalline purity, and much else”.¹¹ Everything that bears the imprint of the poetical or the philosophical sublime provokes anger and ridicule in Lenin. In this sense, he is as ascetic and rigorous as Tolstoy. If we contrast his style with the lofty philosophical and journalistic style that dominated among the early twentieth-century Russian intelligentsia (e.g., Vladimir Solovyov, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, and Nikolai Berdyaev et al.)¹², the difference is quite clear. Lenin avoids all abstractions, classifying them as chatter. He carefully avoids dragging in big words, from turning them into names. “Dictatorship is a big word. And big words should not be thrown to the wind”.¹³

In this regard, naturally, there are no big words in Lenin's speech, no high-flown vocabulary. The main source of his speech is a business-like, sometimes deliberately dry, scientific language. When, on the contrary, he must object or persuade, i.e., when feeling rather than argument takes the foreground, he resorts to special techniques corresponding to the basic tendency.

First, he inserts colloquial, everyday words and expressions, including so-called strong words. Lenin's sister Anna Elizarova recounts how she tracked down his report on Mikhailovsky, which he had read in 1894 in Samara and which had then been distributed anonymously.

I remember that when I looked for the report among Moscow acquaintances, I encountered the difficulty that not one but several anonymous reports on Mikhailovsky were circulating in Moscow. A certain Miss Yurkovskaya asked me which one I needed. Hard-pressed to reply more precisely, I asked her opinion about the three she had read. She singled out one as the most interesting, but she said "the expressions [in it] were quite unacceptable". For example? I asked innocently. "For example: 'Mikhailovsky has come a cropper'". Get me that one, please, I said, foregoing all further inquiries, for I had decided quite definitely it was the one I was looking for. Later, my brother and I laughed over the way I had identified his work.¹⁴

These "unacceptable" expressions are, indeed, one of the most striking stylistic traits of Lenin's discourse.

What is their stylistic function? Lenin obviously does not need them as simple "cursing", but as a lexical layer he inserts into his business-like, bookish vocabulary, thus generating a striking contrast and deviating from the rules of written intelligentsia discourse. By inserting these colloquial, everyday expressions and sayings, he shifts into the realm of oral discourse, oral argument. "Only Allah knows whence", "A situation worse than the governor's" [i.e., *a stalemate, an insuperable difficulty*], "Soft-boiled boots" [i.e., *utter nonsense*], "This is utter rubbish", etc., are all expressions

that operate as quotations from colloquial speech and take on significance and force in this regard.

Especially typical are instances when this kind of quotation is employed not only lexically, as a colloquial cliché, but also semantically. It turns into a pun of sorts, testifying to Lenin's linguistic attentiveness. "You tried by fair means and foul (particularly by foul!) to get away from answering the questions", Lenin writes to the Kadets. We can compare it with another instance, for example: "Oh yes, it is *not for nothing* that the Cadets [*sic*] are now smothering Plekhanov in their embraces! And the price of these embraces is obvious. *Do ut des*, as the Latin saying has it: give and take".¹⁵ Lenin employs Latin proverbs quite often, apparently valuing them for their compactness and expressive force. In this case, we should note the proverb is accompanied by a whole commentary, which continues the Latin construction with its second-person singular reference. I will adduce one more example of an acoustic pun. "We must digest this political coup, make it accessible to the popular masses, so the political coup becomes a matter of deeds and not just words".¹⁶

Lenin's main tendency—using colloquial, everyday language in written and verbal speech—is not restricted to the realm of vocabulary, but also embraces the realms of syntax and intonation. We encounter the usual oratorical syntactical repetitions that constitute long phrases quote often in Lenin, but joined with his typical vocabulary, these phrases do not have a bombastic, high-flown character, but merely deploy the intonation of a strong, categorical statement, acting like periodic hammer blows. "When a party is solidly organised, an individual strike can be turned into a political demonstration, into a political victory over the government. When a party is solidly organised, an uprising in a locale can balloon into a victorious revolution. We must remember [...] We must take [...]".¹⁷ "They speak of excessively high redemption payments, of the beneficent measure of reducing and lowering them, as taken by the government. To this we say that [...] We shall demand [...] They speak of the peasants' lack of land [...] To this we say that [...] We shall demand [...] We demand [...] We will attempt [...]"¹⁸

The function of these repetitions is, sometimes, a bit different, less stylistic (intonational) than structural. There are

instances of their use in which Lenin's discourse forms into "stanzas" of a sort, with full syntactic parallelism, although they remain ordinary in the lexical sense. I will give an example of this in full.

You can see that they are poor; they can only put out a small leaflet, issued in a worse form than the leaflets of the workers and students. We are rich. We shall publish it in printed form. We shall give publicity to this new slap in the face to the Obmanov tsars. This slap in the face is the more remarkable, the more "respectable" the people are who deal it. You can see that they are weak; they have so little contact with the people that their letter passes from hand to hand as if it were a copy of a private letter. We are strong. We can and must circulate this letter "among the people", and primarily among the proletariat, which is prepared for and has already commenced the struggle for the freedom of the whole people. You can see that they are timid; they are only just beginning to extend the scope of their pure Zemstvo agitation. We are bolder than they are; our workers have already gone through the "stage" (a stage that was forced on them) of economic agitation alone. Let us set them an example of how to fight.¹⁹

Here the focus on structure, a structure resembling the classic speeches of the Roman orators, is brought into especially sharp relief.

4.

There is another interesting example of a particular stylistic and structural focus. It is the article "The Chief Task of Our Day", written during the difficult moment after the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. The article differs from many of Lenin's other articles, if not all of them, in terms of its great oratorical zeal, including the use of "big" words. In this article, Lenin neither ironises nor attacks, as usual, but defends himself—not from his foes, but from his closest comrades. In this regard, his speech

attains a high oratorical tension. In this sense, the article is nearly exceptional, but no less typical for all that. On the contrary, it is especially telling. Usually scattered and emerging seemingly at random, the oratorical techniques here are condensed and systematised.

The first striking thing about the article is its poetic epigraph, seemingly, the only such instance in Lenin's works. Moreover, it sounds somewhat unexpected coming from Lenin, returning us to the passage, cited above, about the "pain for one's native Russian language" he felt.

*Thou art wretched, thou art abundant,
Thou art mighty, thou art impotent
—Mother Russia!*

The epigraph does not merely stand above the text like a motto, but is also reflected in the text itself, transformed into a leitmotif. In the middle of the article, we read, "[T]o ensure that at any price Russia ceases to be wretched and impotent and becomes mighty and abundant in the full meaning of these words". And in the next paragraph, we read, "Our natural wealth, our manpower and the splendid impetus which the great revolution has given to the creative powers of the people are ample material to build a truly mighty and abundant Russia". The article's final sentence reads, "That is just what the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic requires in order to cease being wretched and impotent and become mighty and abundant for all time".²⁰

Syntactic parallelism pervades the entire article, forming repetitions not only in the major passages but also in the minor ones, in fragments of phrases, thus generating rhythmic and international divisions and correspondences. The article is divided into paragraphs, whose obvious parallels dynamise the discourse.

In the centre of the first paragraph, based on extended word repetitions and phrasal structures, we read, "No wonder that at the sharpest points of this sharp turn", etc. Hence, the opening of the second paragraph: "It has been Russia's lot to see most clearly, and experience most keenly and painfully the sharpest of sharp turning-points in history as it swings round from imperialism towards the communist revolution". The paragraph's subsequent

dynamic is formed by repetitions and parallelisms. "In the space of a few days we destroyed [...] In the space of a few months we passed [...] In the course of a few weeks, having overthrown the bourgeoisie [...] We passed in a victorious triumphal march [...] We raised to liberty [...] We established and consolidated a Soviet Republic [...] We established the dictatorship of the proletariat [...] We awakened the faith of the millions upon millions of workers of all countries in their own strength [...] Everywhere we issued the call [...] We flung a challenge to the imperialist plunderers of all countries". The next paragraph picks up on the initial structure of its predecessor: "Then in a few days we were thrown to the ground by an imperialist plunderer, who fell upon the unarmed". The word "plunderer", which is repeated further on, returns us to the first paragraph: "A turn from war to peace; a turn from a war between plunderers".²¹

The third paragraph thus plays the role of code to the first two paragraphs, forming the first oratorical "stanza" along with them.

The fourth paragraph begins a new "stanza": "We were compelled to sign a 'Tilsit' peace". Its conclusion, quoted above ("[T]o ensure that at any price Russia ceases to be wretched and impotent and becomes mighty and abundant in the full meaning of these words"), segues into the opening of the next, fifth paragraph: "And mighty and abundant she can become". At the same time, as I have already indicated, it is repeated in the paragraph's conclusion: "to build a truly mighty and abundant Russia". Opening with words harking back to the end of the fourth and beginning of fifth paragraphs, it also captures the concluding words of the fifth paragraph, which are a kind of code to the previous two paragraphs. The conclusion of paragraph IV: "to ensure that at any price Russia ceases to be wretched and impotent and becomes mighty and abundant in the full meaning of these words". Opening of paragraph V: "And mighty and abundant she can become". The conclusion of paragraph V: "to build a truly mighty and abundant Russia". The opening of paragraph VI: "Russia will become mighty and abundant", etc.

The text reaches its midpoint with these oratorical stanzas (I-II-III and IV-V-VI), which is marked by a special milestone, a return to the epigraph. Forward movement is temporarily halted:

“such is the way to build up military might and socialist might”. We see before us a complex, valuable structure that reveals Lenin’s oratorical technique.

The seventh paragraph launches a new movement: “It would be unworthy of a genuine socialist who has suffered grave defeat either to bluster or to give way to despair”. We will pay special attention here to the appearance of the word “bluster”, taken from the colloquial vocabulary. It is a typical instance of Lenin’s takedown technique, especially harsh here. It is followed by a new set of repetitions. “It is not true that our position is hopeless [...] It is not true that by signing a ‘Tilsit’ peace we have betrayed our ideals or our friends. We have betrayed nothing and nobody, we have not sanctified or covered up any lie, we have not refused to help a single friend or comrade in misfortune in every way we could and with everything at our disposal”. The paragraph continues by venturing a comparison with a “general who withdraws the remnants of his army into the heart of the country when it has been beaten or is in panic-stricken flight”.²² It should be highlighted as a special, eighth paragraph, that is, as a digression. The two paragraphs form a special middle stanza, a running start, as it were, for a new movement.

The opening phrase of the ninth paragraph—“We have signed a ‘Tilsit’ peace”—links up with the previous paragraph (“by signing a ‘Tilsit’ peace”) and with the opening of the fourth paragraph (“We were compelled to sign a ‘Tilsit’ peace”): the chain has become ever more complicated. Continuing the topic of the “Tilsit peace”, the ninth paragraph introduces a new parallelism: “At that time historical conditions were such [...] At that time, more than a hundred years ago [...] history at that time could only crawl along at a terribly slow pace”. The stalemate is resolved by the eleventh paragraph, which completes the movement of the two previous paragraphs: “But now capitalism has raised culture in general [...] War has given history momentum and it is now flying[.] [...] History is now being independently made [...] Capitalism has now matured for socialism”.²³

The next three paragraphs are obviously combined into a new (fifth) stanza, following by a concluding coda, the fifteenth paragraph, which is chockablock with repetitions: “And that is just what we are lacking. That is just what we must learn. That is just

what our great revolution needs in order to pass from a triumphant beginning, through a succession of severe trials, to its triumphant goal. That is just what the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic requires in order to cease being wretched and impotent and become mighty and abundant for all time".²⁴

For clarity, I have notated the article's structural schema: "a" stands for the epigraph, while the Roman numerals denote the paragraphs.

$$a \{ [(I+II+III) + (IVa+Va+VIa)] + (VII+VIII) + [(IX+X+XI) + (XII+XIII+XIV)] + XVa \}$$

Here is the same schema in a simpler form, in which the stanzas are denoted by capital letters.

$$a [(A+Ba)+C+(D+E)-Fa]$$

5.

The clear division into paragraphs is a typical trait of Lenin's discourse, motivated by his general desire for articulation and consistency. Hence, the frequent movement from one point to the next (e.g., "the ground has been prepared for this sad state of affairs by three circumstances. First, [...]" and so on).²⁵ On average, his paragraphs are fifteen to twenty lines long. These are not the paragraphs typical of an impressionistic or expressionistic style, in which paragraphs are short and emphatically divided from one other. On the contrary, in Lenin, they are usually connected by expressions, such as "as if that weren't enough" and "but that's the trouble".

Never digressing, Lenin ordinarily starts his articles by directly stating the main topic or occasion: "Russian has ended its war with China", "Forty years have passed since the peasants were emancipated", "Recent unrest among workers has forced people everywhere to pay notice to it", "One more set of 'temporary' rules!" and so on.

Sometimes, the article's title functions as its opening line and is thus drawn into the text. The article "Why I Have Left *Iskra's* Editorial Board" (published as a separate broadsheet in 1903)

opens with a continuation of the title: "It is not a personal matter at all". The article "Don't Look Up, Look Down" (*Vperyod* No. 7, 1906), opens as follows, "As Mr. I. Zhilkin says today in *Nasha Zhizn*, the newspaper of the Left Kadets". The article "The Kadet Duma Gives Money to a Government of Pogromists" (*Proletarii* No. 10, 1906), leads off, "It was bound to happen and it has happened". The article "The Proletariat and Its Ally in the Russian Revolution" (*Proletarii* No. 10, 1906), begins, "This is the title Karl Kautsky gives to the last chapter of his article".

This conveys the stylistic conciseness and energy which Lenin always sought. It is no wonder that in the article "On the Character of Our Newspapers" he reproaches journalists for political blather.

Why, instead of 200 – 400 lines, not talk in 20 – 40 lines about such simple, well-known, clear, popularly grasped phenomena as [...] We need to talk about it. Each new fact in this realm must be noted. But we need not write an article, repeating the arguments, but in several lines, in "telegraphese", lash out at new manifestations of the old politics, which is known and has been judged. [...] We need political blather. Less intellectualising. We need to be closer to life.²⁶

It remains to point out some other features of Lenin's polemical style. Quite often in these cases, Lenin employs not so much lexical means as he does intonational ones. When attacking an opponent, he constructs an entire system of angry and ironic exclamations, mocking his words, or he turns the argument into a dialogue of sorts. His argumentative zeal is thus encapsulated. Mocking the tsarist government's policy towards China, Lenin exclaims, "The poor imperial government! It is so Christian in its unselfishness, and so unfairly insulted!". ("The Chinese War", *Iskra* No. 1, 1900). And passages like the following are a constant. "Miserable actors! They are too cold-blooded and mean to perform the play instinctively". Or: "Excellent, delightful, my dear gentleman writers from *Rech!* [...] It's time to give up haberdashery-like naïveté, gentleman! [...] It's no good playing hide-and-seek, gentlemen! It's neither clever nor dignified. [...] Keep it up, gentlemen! [...]"

Very good, gentlemen! [...] Enough, gentlemen! [...] Magnificent, incomparable, Kadets!"²⁷

A classic exemplar of a polemical attack, again reminiscent of Roman *contra* speeches, is supplied by a single paragraph from the pamphlet *The Victory of the Cadets [sic] and the Tasks of the Workers' Party* (1906).

You call yourselves the party of people's freedom? Don't give us that! You are a party of philistine betrayers of people's freedom, a party of philistine illusions about people's freedom. You are a party of freedom—in that you want to subject freedom to a monarch and a landlord Upper Chamber. You are a party of the people—in that you dread the victory of the people, that is, the complete victory of a peasant revolt, of the workers' struggle for the cause of labour. You are a party of the struggle—in that every time a real, direct, immediate revolutionary struggle against the autocracy flares up, you take refuge behind unctuous, professorial excuses. You are a party of words, not of deeds; a party of promises, not of fulfilment; a party of constitutional illusions, not a party for an earnest struggle for a real (not merely a paper) constitution.²⁸

Lenin's style should be the topic of special research, in connection with the history of Russian oratorical and journalistic style.

In this article, I have focused only on its most striking features, which prove the presence of definite structural techniques, stylistic tendencies, and a stylistic system.

Generally, Lenin's style is a unique combination of three stylistic layers: the bookish discourse of the Russian intelligentsia, harking back to Chernyshevsky; Russian colloquial, everyday speech and the speech of grassroots quarrelers ("catchphrases"); and Latin oratorical style (e.g., Cicero). The final element is, obviously, the consequence of Lenin's classical education (cf. his frequent use of Latin proverbs), perhaps employed unconsciously to structure certain speeches and articles. By inserting the second element, Lenin violates the traditions of intelligentsia discourse and devalues

it. The spirit of everyday words and sayings (“quite unacceptable”) is his style’s distinctive feature. Here he historically comes into contact with the violation of traditional “poeticalness” that marked Tolstoy and reared its head again among the Futurists, in particular, in Mayakovsky’s work. The traditions of the “high” style of oratory have been displaced, despite the maintenance of a number of traditional classical techniques, which attain a new functional significance in such combinations.

1. Lenin, "Fighting the Hunger Strikers", *Iskra* No. 9, 1901.
2. Lenin, "Seventh All-Russia Congress Of Soviets", *Pravda* Nos. 275, 276, 277, December 7, 9, 10, 1919.
3. Lenin, "Revolutionary Adventurism", *Iskra* No. 23, 1902.
4. Lenin, "On the Harm of Phrase-Mongering", *Pravda* No. 69, June 13, 1917.
5. Lenin, "A Bold Assault and Timid Defence", *Ekho* No. 12, July 5, 1906.
6. Lenin, *A Great Beginning: Heroism of the Workers in the Rear 'Communist Subbotniks', July, 1919.*
7. Ibid.
8. Lenin, *The Party's Basic Tasks under NEP*, Krasnaya Nov', Moscow, 1924. Lenin discusses the same issue at the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Educational Departments on October 17, 1921. "If we sing 'this is our last, decisive battle' in the song, unfortunately, this is a tiny untruth. Unfortunately, this is not the last, decisive battle. (Lenin, *The Socialist Revolution and the Tasks of Education: Articles and Speeches*, Krasnaya Nov', Moscow, 1923.)
9. Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and The Tasks of the Political

Education Departments", *Report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments*, October 17, 1921

10. Ibid.
11. Lenin, "Foiled!", *Iskra*, No. 48, September 15, 1903.
12. Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), was a Russian philosopher, theologian, and poet. Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1866-1941), was a Russian religious thinker, novelist and literary critic. Founder of Symbolist movement in Russia. Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) was a Russian religious philosopher, reactionary and mystic. (Ed. note)
13. Lenin, *Izvestia of the Russian Central Executive Committee* No. 85, 1918.
14. Anna Ulyana-Elizarova, "A Page of Memories", *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* No. 2; quoted in *Na postu* No. 4, 1923.
15. Vladimir Lenin, *The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party*, Nasha Mysl, April 1906.
16. Lenin, "On the New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments", *Report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments*, October, 1921.
17. Lenin, "The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement", *Iskra* No.1, 1901.
18. Lenin, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", *Iskra* No. 3, 1901.
19. Vladimir Lenin, "A Letter to the Zemstvoists", *Iskra* No. 18, March 10, 1902.
20. Lenin, "The Chief Task of Our Day", *Izvestia of the Russian Central Executive Committee* No. 46, March 12, 1918.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Lenin, "The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement", *Iskra* No.1, December 1900.
26. Lenin, "On the Character of Our Newspapers", *Pravda* No. 220, September 20, 1918.
27. *Rech* (*Speech*) was a Russian daily newspaper and the central organ of the Constitutional Democratic Party (i.e., the so-called Kadets). *Rech* was published in Petersburg from February 1906 to October 1917. Its editors were Iosif Gessen and Pavel Milyukov.
28. Lenin, "What is the Party of People's Freedom?", *The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party*, March 1906.

Lev Yakubinsky

THE DEFLATION OF THE HIGH STYLE IN LENIN'S WORK

1.

Taking up a study of the language of non-fiction prose—in particular, journalistic prose—you feel helpless. Indeed, for we have no scholarly tradition in this field.

Even an initial observation of the facts provokes a series of questions, each of which requires a special study. Especially palpable is the crude state of syntax, which since it has not been functionally distinguished from different forms of speech, is incapable of offering us the help we require. And yet, research of the language of journalistic prose is urgently needed not only because we find, in this instance, matter nearly untouched by scholarship, but especially because this matter can provide the science of language with a tendency to which it has undoubtedly been aspiring in our time, alongside other sciences—an applied tendency, a technological tendency. Science has been tasked not only with researching reality but also with being involved in its transfiguration. Linguistics has partly done this job, since it has provided the theoretical basis for developing practices of teaching speech in school. But its value—its practical value—will grow immeasurably if it focuses on such different forms of organised human discursive behaviour, forms that exist objectively in everyday life and are technically conditioned by it, as public oral (so-called oratorical) speech and public written speech—in particular, journalistic discourse. Since these varieties of discourse (and their sub-varieties), extremely important to society, each possesses its own special technical specificity, since they imply their own special equipment, the handling of linguistic matter implies training and education for those who want to do practical work in these fields in society. Hence, the necessity of organising technical education in the field of discourse and speech, which

will be pathetic craftsmanship if it is not based on science. The technique of speech implies a technology of speech. A technology of speech is what should generate a modern scientific linguistics, which will cause it to generate reality. You must have the right skills to cobble shoes, you must know the craft. You also must have the skills to build a house, just as you also need to have skills to agitate people by means of speech. This ability does not fall out of the sky but is achieved by training. Organising this training is a problem of the modern era, which generally strives to organise human life. Arguments to the effect that there are already good speakers, agitators, and journalists who never took any classes in the relevant technical schools are as absurd as the claim there is no need for actors to have a technical education, since there are actors—so-and-so and so-and-so—who never graduated any theatre school, or we do not need architects, because in the past buildings were built “just like that”. The rejection of technical education in the field of speech is a typical belch from the idealist worldview, which, while it might be willing to admit that people must be trained to build houses, relies wholly on talent, inspiration, natural inclinations, gut feelings, and other such things in the field of speech. These might be quite important qualities, even for cobblers, but they only confuse the argument. It is unacceptable for a materialist and a Marxist to trump training with talent and inspiration.

Regarding the foregoing, we must note the lively interest in Vladimir Lenin's oratorical and journalistic prose that has surfaced in our country's academic circles. The establishment of the relevant commission at the Research Institute of Leningrad University, the contribution to this work made by the verbal unit at the Art History Institute, and the relevant work in the public speech department at the Living Word Institute inclines us to think that linguistics has finally taken up such an important topic as oral and written public discourse. The study of language—for example, public discourse—is a serious step towards assembling a technological science of linguistics. The study of matter such as Vladimir Lenin's language is especially valuable, because here we are dealing with discursive behaviour that firmly and surely achieved its goal. What has arisen in this case, as a natural reaction to Lenin's death on the part of philologists, is, at the same time, an important advance of science on its way to rapprochement with the demands of life.

2.

We can find matter in many of Lenin's articles that leads us to discover his stylistic credo. Speaking out on the phenomenon of the "revolutionary phrase", Lenin is especially aggressive towards certain of its linguistic attributes. In this respect, as is understandable, he uses terms that, while not altogether defined, leave no doubt he was essentially waging a war on the emotionally elevated, high-style, pretentious, declamatory mode of discourse. His attacks on "loud phrases", on "proud phrases", on "splendid, exciting, intoxicating slogans", on "juggling with spectacular phrases", on every species of "declamation", on "intoxication with the sounds of words" seemingly allow us to reach this conclusion.

Future researchers of Lenin's language will have to project these and many other of his statements on the language of his own works. In this brief article, I make no claims to fulfilling this task. Instead, I will try and examine one article by Lenin from this perspective, namely, the article "On the National Pride of the Great Russians" (1914).¹

The article I have selected is curious in its own way, especially in a certain part, namely, paragraphs III–VI. (The article has only nine paragraphs. In what follows, the Roman numerals I–IX designate the corresponding paragraphs in the edition I have referenced, below.) It is especially gratifying in its deployment of pretentious, high-style, declamatory devices of presentation. Those devices are present there as well (I do not touch on the issue of the historical causes of these devices in Lenin's work), but they are combined with lexical and syntactical facts that objectively deflate the declamatory character. In the article, Lenin, who initially speaks negatively of the chauvinism that had blossomed so magnificently in different European countries in 1914, contrasts it with the "national pride" that is "not alien to us, Great-Russian class-conscious proletarians". Paragraphs III–VI of the article are mainly devoted to explaining what constitutes this "national pride".

3.

The above-mentioned paragraphs III–VI, as well as, in part, paragraph II, are based on a typical high-style syntactic deployment of a pretentious connotation. I will give some examples.

In paragraph II, after a question-and-answer lead-in ("Is a sense of national pride alien to us, Great-Russian class-conscious proletarians? Certainly not!"), we read, "We love our language and our country, and we are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses [...] to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness. To us, it is most painful to see and feel the outrages, the oppression and the humiliation our fair country suffers at the hands of the tsar's butchers, the nobles and the capitalists. We take pride in the resistance to these outrages put up from our midst". This same "we" construction, with the same function, continues further: at the beginning of paragraph IV ("We remember that Chernyshevsky, the Great-Russian democrat, who dedicated his life to the cause of revolution, said half a century ago"; in the middle of paragraph IV ("We are full of national pride because the Great-Russian nation, *too*, has created a revolutionary class"); at the beginning of paragraph V ("We are full of a sense of national pride, and for that very reason we particularly hate our slavish past"); and paragraph VI ("And, full of a sense of national pride, we Great-Russian workers want, come what may"; and "Just because we want that, we say: it is impossible, in the twentieth century").

In paragraph III, its separate parts, beginning with "we", "us" and corresponding to each other, are constructed in ascending order, i.e., the first part is less than a line long, the second, more than two lines, the third, two and a half lines, and the fourth almost six lines. The fourth part is phrased in the same declamatory fashion: "We take pride in the resistance", "our midst, from the Great Russians", "the revolutionary commoners of the seventies", "the Great-Russian peasantry". We find a similar phrasing in further elements of the general construction: "We are full of national pride because the Great-Russian nation, *too*, has created a revolutionary class, because it, *too*, has proved capable" (IV; the cursive is Lenin's); "loading us into a war in order to throttle Poland and the Ukraine, crush the democratic movement in Persia and China, and strengthen the gang of Romanovs, Bobrinskys and Purishkeviches, who are a disgrace to our Great-Russian national dignity" (V); and "we say: it is impossible, in the twentieth century and in Europe (even in the far east of Europe), to "defend the fatherland" otherwise" (VI).²

In the second paragraph, we read: “It would be unseemly for us [...] to forget the immense significance of the national question, especially in a country which has”; “and particularly at a time when [...] at a moment when [...]”. An ascending phrasing is also supplied here: the first part is one line long, the second, around two and a half lines, and the third, over four.

In accordance with the marked syntactic structure, there is also some “lofty” lexical and phraseological matter. See “We love our language and our country” (country is adduced without quotation marks, as in the first paragraph); “national pride” (III); “our fair country” (III); “We take pride” (III); “We are full of a sense of national pride” (V); “a mighty revolutionary party of the masses” (III); “Chernyshevsky [...] who dedicated his life to the cause of revolution” (IV); “these were words of genuine love for our country, a love distressed” (IV); “it [the Great-Russian nation], *too*, has proved capable of providing mankind with great models of the struggle for freedom and socialism” (IV); “And, full of a sense of national pride, we Great-Russian workers want, come what may, a free and independent, a democratic, republican and proud Great Russia” (VI), etc.

Regarding these facts, we should note a phenomenon of the lexical and syntactic order that can be called “lexical discharge” (I don’t insist on this term, by the way). The “lexical discharge” can be illustrated by the following examples from our article: “the Great-Russian nation, *too*, [Lenin’s cursive] has created a revolutionary class, because it, *too*, has proved capable of providing mankind with great models of the struggle for freedom and socialism, and not only with great pogroms, rows of gallows, dungeons, great famines and great servility to priests, tsars, landowners and capitalists” (IV); “we [...] want [...] a free and independent”, etc., and see below (VI). “For tsarism not only oppresses [...] but also demoralises, degrades, dishonours and prostitutes them” (VI); “for the entire history of capital is one of violence and plunder, blood and corruption” (VII); “such a slave is a lickspittle and a boor, who arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt, and loathing” (V), etc.

From a formal point of view, lexical discharge is an enumeration, but the logical, objective meaning of this enumeration stands entirely in the background, and the enumeration is an

instance of emotional utterance (and thus can be used as a device for emotional suggestion), when high emotional tension is resolved by mobilising a sequence of similar parts of speech. Moreover, these similar parts either follow each other directly or the sequence is organised by using the conjunction "and" (as in some of the examples).

Ordinary colloquial speech is familiar with elementary instances of lexical discharge in which similar parts of a sequence are similar not only morphologically but also semantically, i.e., they are essentially synonymous, for example, when the speaker is angry: "scoundrel, scum, and a blackguard". There are other examples: "It's terrible, unheard of, and outrageous", or "I could not care less about any Tom, Dick, and Harry". Sometimes, I should repeat, the verbal discharge has a logical enumerative function, but its emotional significance remains. This is how things stand at the end of our article's first paragraph: "to chauvinists for reason of opportunism or spinelessness such as Plekhanov and Maslov, Rubanovich and Smirnov, Kropotkin and Burtsev".³ The phenomenon of lexical discharge does not necessarily link up with the declamatory-emotional mode of discourse. So, when we speak of its deflation, we sometimes speak of deflating not the declamatory mode, but emotionally charged speech in general.

4.

The emotionally tense mode of speech evident in the article under consideration is combined, as I have noted, with syntactic and lexical phenomena that objectively deflate it.

First about syntactic deflation. Here, however, I need to make a digression and deal first with the rupture and deformation of the so-called smoothness of discourse in Lenin, a question that is indubitably closely bound up with our discussion. The point is that continuously unfolding speech is a constant feature in emotional declamatory speech, although the reverse is not always true. On the other hand, smooth speech is an independent device for affecting readers and listeners, a device we find in many journalists and orators. It is one of the so-called dialectical devices of inspirational speech and propaganda. Discontinuous, rough speech is a feature of the linguistic mode of other journalists and orators. Moreover, it can also have an independent function and figure

simply as a negation of smooth speech as a dialectical device, to testify to the lack of a focus on smooth speech in the journalist or orator. (Mutatis mutandis, what we have said here about the smoothness and discontinuousness of speech as dialectical devices can also be repeated about the declamatory mode and its deflation.)

The expression “smooth, fluid speech” is essentially a layman’s linguistic term: although it is not a bad term, it is difficult to decipher scientifically. The actual linguistic background of the impression that the layman dubs “smoothness” and “fluidity” is quite diverse. Phonetic relations are important here (e.g., rhythm, intonation and, perhaps, verbal orchestration), as are lexical phenomena and, finally, syntactic relations, which are, perhaps, dominant, defining all the rest. From the syntactic perspective, in this case there is a telltale absence (all other things being equal) of digressions, parenthetical expressions, and syntagmas that distract from the outlined syntactic course. There is a continuity in how the syntactic mood is elaborated.

I shall give an example: “What a lot of talk, argument and vociferation there is nowadays about nationality and the fatherland! Liberal and radical cabinet ministers in Britain, a host of ‘forward-looking’ journalists in France [...], and a swarm of [...] progressive scribblers in Russia [...]—all have effusive praise for the liberty and independence of their respective countries, the grandeur of the principle of national independence” (I).

Let us compare the above passage, as edited, with the same passage, edited slightly differently (I omit the excerpt’s exclamatory introduction): “Liberal and radical cabinet ministers in Britain, a host of ‘forward-looking’ journalists in France (who have proved in full agreement with their reactionary colleagues), and a swarm of [...] progressive scribblers in Russia (including several Narodniks and ‘Marxists’)”. The continuity of the excerpt’s syntactic structure in the second version has been broken by parentheses; discursive smoothness and fluidity have suffered considerably. Both of the above excerpts are the opening lines of the article by Lenin we have been analysing, as altered by me. Lenin’s redaction will be reproduced a bit later, but I would emphasise that the parenthetical break is present in Lenin’s original, too. Parentheses, functioning in a similar way, are present in other parts of the article, e.g., “We love our language and our country, and we

are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses (i.e., nine-tenths of her population) to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness. To us it is most painful to see [...] We take pride [...]” (III), or “We are full of a sense of national pride, and for that very reason we particularly hate our slavish past (when the landed nobility led the peasants into war to stifle [...]), and our slavish present” (V), or “We take pride in the resistance to these outrages put up from our midst, from the Great Russians; in that midst [...] the Great-Russian working class [...] the Great-Russian peasantry” (III). In this last case, we are dealing not with parentheses per se, but with a parenthetical expression, analogous to parentheses, a syntagma that diverges from the main discursive stream.

The parenthetical rupture is especially palpable vis-à-vis the syntactic whole, definitely and complexly constructed along the lines of smoothness, which uses similar syntagmas or is generally based on syntactic parallelism. Look at the structure in our first example: “ministers [...] journalists [...] scribblers [...] all”. And in our second example: “we love [...] we are doing our utmost [...]”. We find the same parallelism in the third and fourth examples. But even beyond this continuous, complex construction, which causes the impression of fluid discourse without the parenthetical rupture, we also find this rupture inside the simply constructed phrase, e.g., “The overt and covert Great-Russian slaves (slaves with regard to the tsarist monarchy)” (IV); “it is impossible, in the twentieth century and in Europe (even in the far east of Europe), to ‘defend the fatherland’ otherwise than by using every revolutionary means to combat” (VI); and “it is, firstly, not our business, or that of democrats (let alone of socialists), to help Romanov-Bobrinsky-Purishkevich throttle Ukraine, etc”. (VII). The last example contains a double rupture: a) it is not the business of democrats; b) let alone of socialists. Another example: “The interests of the Great Russians’ national pride (understood, not in the slavish sense) coincide with the *socialist* interests of the Great-Russian (and all other) proletarians” (VIII). This example is especially interesting, because the parentheses here are non-obligatory: both phrases could have been used not as parenthetical insertions into this syntactic deployment, but as full-fledged “modifiers”, the second, as a modifier of the word “proletarians”, the first, as a modifier of the phrase “national pride”. However,

the phrase's entire syntactic structure proves different in this case, as do the intonation and distribution of pauses.

The phenomenon of parentheses is quite complicated, both in terms of its cause and its functions. For example, we could say parenthetical syntax is caused by the peculiar conditions of the harried work of journalists, which does not allow them to resort to redo what they have already written, minimises drafts and refining the language of the article, and thus provokes the natural appearance of explanatory parentheses, which are nothing more than a correction added to what has been written. Their conditions of work can train journalists to use parentheses as a compositional habit and extend it to instances to which it does not belong "by right". We can speak of parentheses as a phenomenon caused by the very peculiarity of expressing and communicating thoughts, as a kind of emphasis on certain utterances, enclosed in parentheses and therefore perceived with greater clarity in their peculiarity and separateness from the common whole. As for some writers, italics are typical in this sense, so for others, parentheses, word order, emphatic epithets, etc., are typical.

I do not want to touch on the various functions of parentheses in this article.⁴ Above, I noted the value of parentheses as a means of rupturing the fluidity of discourse and even then, mainly because the fluidity of discourse is bound up with the declamatory structure of speech and, therefore parentheses function to disrupt the declamatory syntactic structure and its intonation, function to deflate the so-called high style. I refer to the examples, given above, and I shall give another instance. It is quite telling since the excerpt's extremely tense emotional tone supplies us with a palpable sense of the destructive, deflating function of parentheses. "Nobody is to be blamed for being born a slave; but a slave who not only eschews a striving for freedom but justifies and eulogises his slavery (e.g., calls the throttling of Poland and the Ukraine, etc., a 'defence of the fatherland' of the Great Russians)—such a slave is a lickspittle and a boor, who arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt, and loathing" (V).

Returning to the first redaction of the article's opening ("What a lot of talk [...])", I should say that, in this form, the excerpt makes more of a high-style impression than in the second redaction. In Lenin, nothing remains of this high style and

pretentiousness, because the destructive influence of the parentheses is complemented by the deflationary significance of the lexical matter. I now turn to this last topic.

5.

I will cite the beginning of the article as Lenin published it. "What a lot of talk, argument and vociferation there is nowadays about nationality and the fatherland! Liberal and radical cabinet ministers in Britain, a host of 'forward-looking' journalists in France (who have proved in full agreement with their reactionary colleagues), and a swarm of official, Cadet and progressive scribblers in Russia (including several Narodniks and 'Marxists')—all have effusive praise for the liberty and independence of their respective countries, the grandeur of the principle of national independence" (I).

Whereas in the first redaction, the excerpt, in its syntactic and lexical structure, could have performed an emotionally elevated function, Lenin's authentic redaction, given its lexical, phraseological, and syntactic content (compare the emphasised words and expressions), excludes this altogether.

The lexical and phraseological matter is one of the aspects capable of paralysing the emotionally elevated, declamatory potential of syntax. In this instance, this function is performed by ironic (cf. "forward-looking", "Marxist", "fatherland", "praise", and, in part, "host" and "swarm"), familiar ("effusive"), and coarse ("official scribblers") vocabulary. This lexical matter not only contributes an emotional semantic tone that is alien to bombastic discourse but also an intonation that destroys the bombastic intonation as such. Lexical and phraseological deflation, alongside syntactic deflation (parentheses) and often in concert with it, can be noted on more than one occasion in the article under consideration.

We read the following in paragraph II: "It would be unseemly for us, *representatives of a dominant nation in the far east of Europe and a goodly part of Asia*, to forget the immense significance of the national question". The words I have italicised are a paraphrase (i.e., representative of the Great Russians). The high-style significance of this paraphrase is indubitable, but it has been deflated by the familiar expression "a goodly part" (imagine if, instead, it had read "a considerable part"). In the latter part of the same paragraph (which features the ascending construction

“in a country which [...] at a time when [...] at a moment when”) the deflationary role is played by such ironic vocabulary as “prison of the peoples”, “a number of ‘new’ nations, large and small”, “millions of Great Russians and non-Russians”, and “‘solve’ a number of national problems”. The enumeration at the paragraph’s end also has a deflationary effect here: “‘solve’ a number of national problems in accordance with the interests of the Council of the United Nobility and of the Guchkovs, Krestovnikovs, Dolgorukovs, Kutlers and Rodichevs”.⁵ In this case, the enumeration has a different function than, for example, at the end of the paragraph I (see above). Its meaning would have been the same as in the first paragraph if it had been written as follows: “the Council of the United Nobility, the Guchkovs and Krestovnikovs, the Dolgorukovs and Kutlers, the Rodichevs (and Yefremovs)”. The whole meaning here lies [*in Russian*] in the phrase beginning with the preposition “with” [*s*] and the subsequent construction depending on it.

We have already noted the deflationary effect of the parentheses in paragraph III: “(i.e., nine-tenths of *her* population)”. We should note the deflationary effect of the lexical matter contained by these parentheses: the explanatory “i.e.”, and the fraction “nine-tenths”. The deflationary effect of numbers as lexical elements is manifested, for example, in paragraph VI, where those selfsame “nine-tenths” of the population are encountered twice in the second element of a construction focused on the phrase “it is impossible” and “cannot”, and right before a vigorous verbal discharge: “demoralises, degrades, dishonours and prostitutes” (see above). Numbers have similar significance in the final part of paragraph III vis-à-vis a construction focused on repetition of the participle “having” (see above): “the revolutionary commoners of the seventies”, “having created, in 1905”. (Compare, in this respect, the beginning of paragraph IV: “We remember that Chernyshevsky, the Great-Russian democrat, who dedicated his life to the cause of revolution, said half a century ago [...]”. Lenin uses the phrase “a half-century”, rather than “fifty years”.) In the sharply emotional passage at the end of paragraph V (“Nobody is to be blamed”; see above), deflation of the emotional tone is achieved not only via parentheses but also by its lexical matter (“defence of the fatherland”, in quotation marks, and so on).

At the end of paragraph VI, immediately after the verbal discharge of “demoralises, degrades”, and against the backdrop of the construction “by teaching them to oppress other nations and to cover up this shame”, we have a deflationary “quasi-” (“to cover up this shame with hypocritical and quasi-patriotic phrases”).

1. Lenin, "On the National Pride of the Great Russians", *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 35, December 12, 1914.
2. Romanovs were the second dynasty to rule Russia; Bobrinskys were Russian noble family; Vladimir Purishkevich (1870-1920) was Russian extreme-right politician, known with his anti-semite, anti-communist and fascist ideas. (Ed. note)
3. Georgy Plekhanov (1856-1918), Pyotr Maslov (1867-1946), Ilya Rubanovich (1859-1920), Emmanuil Smirnov (1865-1952), Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921); at a certain period of their life all active in Russian Social-Democrat movement but took defensive and chauvinistic position during the First World War. (Ed. note)
4. I am devoting a separated, detailed work to Lenin's syntax and the phenomenon of parentheses.
5. Alexander Guchkov (1862-1936) was a representative of the big commercial and industrial bourgeoisie of Russia, head of the Octobrists, the party of the monarchists bourgeoisie. Grigory Krestovnikov (1855-1918) was a big Russian industrialists; one of the leaders of the Octobrists. Pavel Dolgorukov (1866-1927) was a big landowner, one of the founders of the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets). Nikolai Kutler (1859-1924) was a Russian statesman and member of the Duma. Fyodor Rodichev (1856-1923) was a big landowner and Zemstvo member. (Ed. note)

Yuri Tynyanov

THE LEXICON OF LENIN AS POLEMICIST

One must be able to adapt schemes to life,
and not repeat words that have become meaningless.

—Lenin, "Letters on Tactics: Letter 1"

Preliminary Remarks

1.

First, about the word "lexicon". In ordinary life, we usually use the word "dictionary", meaning a "collection of the words and expressions of a language" (Vladimir Dal).¹ "Dictionary" is thus indifferent in terms of the functions of the static mass of words, divided in various ways: a dictionary of a language, a dictionary of parlances and dialects, a dictionary of a social class, a technical dictionary, an individual dictionary (vocabulary or lexicon). That is one series.

Another series involves using one's lexicons. Elements of vocabulary are used in constructions and perform functions. The same lexical element will have different functions and objectives in different discursive structures.

Each structure has its own laws, so a word that is indifferent in and of itself will reveal a new constructive aspect within the structure. A workaday word in a newspaper, a word we hardly notice, a word that performs functions in newspaper language, could come across as extraordinarily fresh in a poem; it could perform another function. An ordinary colloquial word, which passes unnoticed in ordinary speech, reveals a special aspect in oratorical speech, and vice versa. This is also the basis for the evolution of lexical matter within these structural series. The "dictionary", in the

sense of “collection of words”, has evolved within each structural series, selected for its purpose in these series, in terms of its proper function, for example, the literary language or poetic language.

In the early nineteenth century, Katenin used the words “scum” and “bald” in serious poetry. It set off a storm, although the word “bald” was used in prose. The word “prostitute”, a word used in literature per se, stuck out just as sorely in Nekrasov’s poems.² Mayakovsky’s lexicon is just as unusual, but it is unusual only structurally. Beyond its structure and within other structures, it would come across differently; it would be functionally different. The present article examines the lexicon of Lenin as an orator and political writer, not as an individual. From the viewpoint of a lexicon’s functional use, a word has four fundamentally interesting aspects:

- 1) the attitude to the main feature of the word’s meaning;
- 2) the attitude to the secondary characteristics of the word’s meaning;
- 3) the attitude to the word’s lexical colouring;
- 4) relationships between the word and things.

2.

If we analyse a series of examples of how a word is used, we encounter the same phenomenon: lexical unity. Let’s look at the uses of the word “head” [*golova*].

1. The head is part of the body.
2. I’d stake my head on it.
3. Do you raise many heads of cattle?
4. “Give your head rein, Cossack”. (Gogol)
5. He’s got a fine head on his shoulders.
6. Get something into one’s head.
7. Get something out of one’s head.
8. The first thing that came into my head.
9. The head of a business.
10. “Village head”, “head of the town”, “headman”. (Gogol)

We see different meanings of the same word in different usages. Such uses of “head” as “head of the town” and “village head” are separate from the series, as it were, which is underscored by the shift in grammatical gender [in Russian]. This is demonstrated by the possibility of punning.

Have you not heard, boys?
 Our heads are not strong!
 The rivets have cracked
 In the crooked head's head.
 Fix the head, cooper,
 With your steel hoops!
 Inject the head, cooper,
 With your rods, with your rods.
 (Gogol, "May Night")

The cooper is invited to attach a hoop to head in the first sense and inject a head in the tenth sense with rods.

And yet, even in this sense, unity with the entire series has not been effaced altogether. See Kalenik's remark in the same story, "May Night", about the same thing—the head: "Well, headman, headman. I have a head of my own".

Here the word "head", in the sense of the village headman, underscores a connotation that clearly applies to the entire series. In this case, the word is reunited with other usages, and the category of lexical unity is revealed in it.

Let's take the phrase, "What a wonderful head to cut off!".

The word "head" is used here simultaneously in the first and fifth senses. Thus, a characteristic of lexical unity is that it facilitates the combination of different and seemingly incompatible meanings in a single usage of the word: the head as part of the head, and the head as mind. The same combination, in fact, is found in the sixth and seventh senses of the words: "get something into one's head" and "get something out of one's head", implying both meanings at once: the head as body part and the head as mind.³

The combination is possible because lexical unity is present, which we will call the meaning's main feature.

In the second and eighth senses ("I'd stake my head on it", and "The first thing that came into my head"), the word's meaning has been heavily effaced. Here, the word has been subjugated by a group, a phrase, understood as a unity, as a whole. The main feature has become extremely vague, the lexical unity blurred by the phrase's unity. And yet, conditions are possible in which lexical unity can be discovered in these instances as well.

If we start, for example with the first sense, if its meaning is given to us as a certain tone, in such colourless senses as the second and eighth sense, we will discover their link with the first sense and, hence, with the entire lexical series. Thus, in the group “stake my head”, in military language or a historical novella where a chopping block is present, the first meaning of the word “head” will be evoked. We start from it because it is the principal meaning, and because we are moving within a lexical plane.

The meaning of the lexical plane is clearly seen in the following example. The word “ground” [*zemlya*] in combinations such as “black, rich ground”, on the one hand, and “run on the ground, fall on the ground”, on the other, will have different meanings, of course. You can run on sand, clay, and any soil, and yet you run “on the ground”.

On the other hand, it is clear that a pairing such as “Earth and Mars” [*Zemlya i Mars*] is neither one nor the other; it is something else. In this pairing, Earth is spelt with a capital “E”, and it denotes our planet, not the soil or the ground beneath our feet.

And yet, if it comes to pass that people fly to Mars, we cannot speak of the Martian soil or ground as “earth” or of “coming down to earth” (i.e., landing, in this case, on Mars) without taking the risk of sounding comical. So, when Alexey Tolstoy, whose novel *Aelita* takes place on Mars, writes, “Here it [*a Martian’s aeronautic apparatus—Yu. T.*] dived and flew right above the earth [*i.e., Mars*]”, or, “When Los and Gusev headed towards [the Martian], he jumped quickly into the saddle—and immediately fell on the earth again” (*Krasnaia Nov’*, No. 6, 1922), it makes an unintentionally comic impression.

3.

Thus, the main feature of a word’s meaning allows the word to be dispersed over the lexical plane. We have seen that the lexical plane is not indifferent in term of a word’s meaning: it conveys the meaning in which the word is used in the given instance, the characteristics derived from its other meanings. We shall provisionally call them secondary.

Now we shall analyse why Alexey Tolstoy’s usages were so infelicitous. They were the outcome of two series: 1) phraseological unity, and 2) the lexical plane.

In the phrase “flew right above the earth”, the word “earth” has the approximate meaning (or, rather, should have the approximate meaning) “right above the ground”. The phrase dominates a single word; it predetermines the meaning. We can sometimes omit the right word, and yet everyone will guess it anyway. It is thus suggested by the phrase, by phraseological unity.

This is the basis of a phenomenon that Wilhelm Wundt calls the “thickening of a concept through syntactic association” (*Begriffs verdichtung durch syntaktische Assoziation*): a single word takes on the meaning of the group. E.g., “They got the knack of spearing with cubes of sausage, so redolent that the only saving grace was a lilac that had crept into the gazebo, with single-tined figures” (Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Life and Death of Nikolai Kurbov*, 1923). Here the group “redolent” is so closely bound up with both members, that one instance of “redolent” stands for the entire group.

This is also the basis for a similar phenomenon known as “contagion”, as coined by Michel Bréal. A word is “infected” by a phrase’s overall sense and, instead of its own meaning, it acquires the overall meaning of the phrase. Bréal’s examples are “Je n’avance pas (*passum*)” and “Je ne vois point (*punctum*)”. The words *pas* and *point* have taken on the meaning of words of negation from the general negative sense of the phrase, by association and connection with the word *ne*. This is also the base for transformation of the phrasal group into a group with a fused meaning for all its members, in which the individual meaning of each member has been forfeited. Such groups, such fused utterances, sometimes become words (e.g., some + thing = something).

A curious example of the “infection” of a discrete word by a phrase’s overall meaning is the word “obsessive” [*oglashyonnyi*]. It is a term of abuse and is used in the sense of “rabid” and “irrepressible”.

Yet, in Old Church Slavonic (as well as in literary Russian), the word means “mentioned”, “announced”, and “named”, deriving from the ecclesiastical term “proclaim” [*oglasit*], “announce”.

The word’s pejorative meaning derived from a phrase that was intended for the uninitiated, for those who had not accepted Christianity, ordering them to leave a church: *Oglashyonnye, izyдите!* [“Get out, those named!”].

The phrase's general meaning, albeit not pejorative, is nevertheless reproachful, indicating that the uninitiated have no right to be in the presence of things that concern only the initiated. In the absence of this living practise, the phrase was no longer reproachful, but pejorative and abusive. The phrase's overall sense coloured the individual word so greatly that it obscured its main feature. The word is not even associated with the meaning of the word "divulge" [*oglasit'sia*], as in "His foul deed was divulged". (This loss of the main feature was facilitated, among other things, by a sense of foreignness, present in the formal part of word—*oglashyonnyi*—which separated it even more from related words.) The word was ejected from the lexical unity, forfeited its main feature, and instead took on the phrase's general meaning.

In the examples cited, this power of the phrase over the individual word's meaning utterly obscures its main feature and disrupts its link with the lexical unity, i.e., it obscures the word as a lexical whole.

On the contrary, in the example from Alexey Tolstoy we have cited, the lexical plane was so definite that, when the phraseological sense clashed with it, the phrase failed.

The lexical plane are the points at which other meanings from the range of lexical unity penetrate a given meaning. These strong points and starting points can colour a word, turn it around, and remap its main feature. The lexical plane is the lever that uncovers in the word different links with the lexical unity's range.

Thus, to discover the specific range of the lexical unity in a word, we must always 1) adduce the presence of a main feature that binds the word's specific meanings into a mono-lexical unity; 2) adduce the phrase's power to obscure the main feature; and 3) adduce the lexical plane's divergent, deforming effect.

4.

Another extremely important feature of the word is lexical colouring.

Every nation, every class, and every environ in the broadest sense colours its typical words. Every milieu has its peculiar conditions and endeavours, and depending on them, different words are typical or atypical within that milieu.

Each word, therefore, has its own lexical colouring, but it is recognised as such only outside the milieu in which it is typical.

Such is the linguistic sense we have of foreign languages, dialects, etc. Gogol uses it to comic effect.

ANUCHKIN. And, if I might make so bold as to ask, what language would it be that they use in Sicily?

ZHEVAKIN. Why, French, of course.

ANUCHKIN. And do all the young ladies really speak French?

ZHEVAKIN. They do indeed. You may find this hard to believe, but we stayed there for thirty-four days and in all that time I never heard them utter a single word in Russian.

ANUCHKIN. Not a single word?

ZHEVAKIN. Not a single word. And I'm not even talking about the nobles and the Signori, about all those officers of theirs, but you can take a simple peasant, a country fellow, hauling a load of rubbish along on his back, and if you ask him: 'I say my man, give me some bread,' he won't understand, but say it in French: 'Dateci del pane!' or 'Portate vino!'—he understands right away, and he'll bring it in just as you asked.

(Nikolai Gogol, *Marriage*, Act 1, Scene 16)

The comedy here is based on fact that the lexical colouring that "French" has in Russian, i.e., outside its own milieu, has been transferred by Zhevakin into a milieu where this colouring cannot exist.⁴

Great is the power of a word's lexical colouring in any discursive structure. Eighteenth-century literature was aware of dialecticisms as comic elements, ancient names played a role in Pushkin's poems, "Frenchifying" was a big part of Eugene Onegin, and so on.

Thanks to lexical colouring, any topic is removed from an indifferent discursive environment and coloured in the lexical milieu that most typifies it. Calling England or France a “firm” would mean not only likening its endeavours to the essential features of a firm, such as commerce, etc., not only scaling it down and making it more specific, but also painting it in a special colour. The word “firm” is thoroughly class-based and bourgeois, and it entangles the image in a whole strong network of associations of this sort. Speaking figuratively about the “levers” of revolution means not only using a well-known image (which has become quite threadbare), but imperceptibly colouring the phrase in the colour of a lexical milieu, the production process.

In this respect, the images and comparisons in each discursive structure can be the motivations and justifications for inserting the necessary lexical colouring.

But aside from images and comparisons, lexical colouring is also sometimes generated by the most unimportant, secondary words. These words can sometimes give the impression of something meaningless or secondary in the semantic sense, and yet they are quite important lexical levers, translating an entire discourse into a lexical milieu.

When village orators use foreign words neither they nor their listeners understand, their focus is the city and the city’s revolutionary discourse. Such incomprehensible words are not only the weakness but also the strength and sense of the meaningless speeches delivered by village speakers.

5.

In view of the foregoing, the relationship between things and words is not straightforward. The thing does not cover the word, and the word does not cover the thing. The most specific denomination of a thing—pointing at it—is the least specific in the linguistic sense. Each word is connected by threads to a lexical unity’s scope. Each word is governed by the general phraseological meaning. It is coloured by the broad lexical milieu that typifies it.

In this sense, each specific word, a word bound up with a multitude of associations, will be less specific when it denotes a completely concrete thing.

First, the wide scope of the lexical unity distracts us from the thing. The wider the scope of a word's linguistic unity, the stronger its main feature, the more associations the word has with different meanings, the greater the possibility of "multi-meaningfulness" (cf. the examples cited above: "What a wonderful head to cut off!" and "Heart, my gold"), the more saturated the word and the poorer the denotation.

Second, there is the effect produced by the phrase. The phrase subordinates the single word's meaning. The phrase itself can be a unit with meaning shared by all its members. Special techniques are needed to peel the single word's meaning away from the group that has absorbed its individual meaning. Finally, there is lexical colouring, which, like a powerful lever, translates the entire discourse into a certain lexical milieu. A lexical milieu's "authority" can also render any word authoritative. On the contrary, an unexpected outcome can emerge when we do not count on it: the most precise denotation can be tinted in an inappropriate colouring—and fall flat.

I shall give a single example of how the narrowness of a lexical unity's scope and inappropriate lexical colouring utterly paralyse the meaning of words, stripping them of dynamism.

There is seemingly a means of escaping the associations generated by the wide range of a lexical unity—and thus making the word a denotation and concretising the thing. The exact word is a term that, in this case, is linked with a given concept. It is a word whose lexical unity is restricted to one link, a word whose main feature is attached to a thing.

Let us imagine a speaker addressing a crowd of a thousand people. The speaker calls on the crowd to undertake immediate vigorous action by telling them, "Expropriate the expropriators!" [*Ekspropriiruite eksproprietorov!*]. Let us then assume that the entire crowd, to the last man, precisely understands the meaning of these words.

The words "expropriator" and "expropriate" have a limited amount of lexical unity. They are unambiguous. In this sense, they must have been specific.⁵ And yet these very words shall prove not to be specific in terms of language, and therefore are neither dynamic nor imperative.

The main feature, which complicates the word's meaning, connects the word to multiple meanings, through its strong

associative connections—through a multitude of associative threads, it leads to the lexical unity's many strong points. In the lexical plane, it makes the word itself an everyday thing.

The word *qua* term, even when everyone understands it, when it is unambiguous and, in this sense, exact, i.e., has a low amount of lexical unity, is deprived of such associative threads. It, therefore, has a fragile grip on the mind. It is detached, neither invoking nor leading to everyday life. The entire crowd might understand the slogan and yet do nothing.

In addition, the slogan cited, above, has a strong lexical colouring. The focus here is on "science", "books", "newspapers", and, finally, "foreignness", and this lexical colouring likewise tears the word away from everyday life, from the conditions of a real time and place, removing them from a specific series and rendering them abstract. This lever translates the entire appeal into the most inappropriate lexical milieu. All of this deprives it of strength and dynamism.

Let us imagine that, instead, the speaker says the following phrase: "Rob what was robbed (the robbers)".

The dominant feature of "to rob" [*grabit'*] leads to several meanings: shovelling something into a heap, taking something away by force, and grabbing something with one's hands.

We are not faced with a word *qua* term. The social aspect of its meaning is not underscored, as it is in the special word "expropriation". And yet, the word is more dynamic, imperative, and vigorous. The lexical scope is broader: the main feature connects the meaning in which the word is used (taking something by force) with other, more specific meanings (grabbing with one's hands). The main feature grounds the words with associative connections; colouring is everyday life, and everyday life is the life of the masses. Hence the imperative of the lexicon, its dynamism.⁶

Another powerful means of clarifying, in fact, the uniformity of a single thing's denotation is a name, produced in such a way that the word's main feature, its lexical unity, is precisely limited to a given material use. Such is the precision of abbreviations like Sovnarkhoz [*Council of the National Economy*], Sovnarkom [*Council of People's Commissars*], and Gosizdat [*State Publishing House*]. In this sense, abbreviations have a great power for specifying things. Thus, the word Gosizdat, a word in the masculine gram-

matical gender, is definitely advanced from the series *izdatel'stvo* ["publishing house":]. Thus, *gosizdatel'* (*nomen agentis*) ["state publisher"] is possible only as a parody; the relationship between *izdatel'stvo* and *izdatel'* is discontinuous. Gosizdat is a completely precise denotation of the unique establishment in question. In such cases, we encounter a means of unifying a word, of subsuming it under the given thing. But this means proves to be applicable only when unique things are named. If we abbreviate something that is not unique and belongs to a single series, but a thing belongs to many series, the abbreviation will be no more or less specific than an ordinary word. This is what has happened with the word NEP ["New Economic Policy"]. Initially, the abbreviation was NEPO, meaning "new economic policy". Subsequently, the word was changed to NEP, i.e., it took on a formal attribute (the masculine grammatical gender). Now we read such words and phrases as "spiritual NEP", "the struggle against NEP", "Nepman", "Nepach" [*a synonym of Nepman*], etc. We, of course, do not substitute the words "new economic policy" in the abbreviation. We are not even thinking of politics and policies. The word NEP, which stood for politics, was immediately translated into a contiguous series—the specific outcomes of politics, specific phenomena, phenomena that are multilateral, not unique.

Such has been the change suffered by the meaning of the word NEP. (Besides, it has accumulated a specific emotional aura.) If we now look at all the shades of meaning of the word NEP, in its second, altered definition, we shall see that it has a broad lexical capacity, that the word NEP in this sense is no more or less specific than any non-abbreviated word in Russian. It has already become inaccurate, i.e., out of synch with the thing.

The word is out of synch with the thing not only because the meaning has been evolving, but because the thing has been evolving, while the word has failed to keep up with it. It is thus with names for the processes of revolution, for example, a word used with reference to all phases of a revolution and simultaneously attached to one or several of them.

In addition, a word can combine things in terms of a characteristic that, in this case, in a specific application, is atypical of the things, and yet the word's significance can hypnotise us, combining specifically different, non-combinable things into one.

Lenin's Lexicon

1.

Each discursive structure has its own internal laws, defined by its purpose. Depending on what it has been assigned to do, one aspect or another is highlighted.

Oratorical discourse's objective, to convince, emphasises a word's influential, emotional aspect. In this case, a role is played by the moment of utterance and the huge significance of intonation. Words can be dislodged from their meanings by different intonations.⁷ Here, aside from single words, the phrase's general meaning is important. This common meaning can ultimately so deform the meaning of individual words that it provides only the appearance of meaning, while, nevertheless, influencing listeners and readers, because it remains a purely verbal plane, a plane disconnected from things. (We have seen how much that means, if only in terms of lexical colouring.) The phrase can turn into a cluster that is valuable by itself in terms of its verbal and emotional strength.

Further, words must be flattened and smoothed over to convince. Such words possess huge emotional persuasiveness. For when a word is smoothed over, it means it has such a broad lexical capacity that in each specific case it no longer has its own, specific meaning, but is seemingly the name of a whole lexical range, its own name. It completely disengages from specificity, but it maintains a tangle of associations, which is quite emotional, albeit confused. The more hackneyed and handled a word has been, the more emotional shadings it has, aside from its specific meaning. A discourse based on phrases is thus generated: "words, words, words".

As a means of persuasion, this discourse can be powerful. It has generated a strong tradition. It is the main type of oratorical discourse. It coincides in many ways with newspaper articles, whose objective is persuasion or covering an incident. The newspaper article has its own traditions. Here, feuilletons and chronicles should be considered. They have had a great impact on the style of all reportage. But the main task aligns this type of article with persuasive oratory, for what matters in this case is not stating the facts (the task of the informative article), but highlighting the facts. Therefore, the name, the specific peeling of facts and things from

words, is not needed here. In this case, we must compare facts with other facts and slide them into the right series. The key to the series might be a word. Hence, the art of the evasive phrase, which supplies meaning in the verbal plane that cannot be translated into the objective planes. Hence, the abundant quotations, the readymade verbal matter that has its own colouring. In an article, a quotation usually acts as a shaded springboard for shifting to the present moment, to the facts under analysis, and the springboard's verbal effect is also maintained after the shift itself. The opposite type is the dissuasive speech, which casts a new light. In this case, the strongest polemical weapon is, first, using your opponent's devices, and second, contrasting his evocation of a historically established tradition with something new and fresh.

A huge portion of Lenin's significance as a political speaker and stylist consists in this. Born during a time of revolutionary struggle, his polemical devices were a revolution both in the realms of oratorical and newspaper style.

Dissuasive speech is, at the same, persuasive speech, but the devices of persuasion and the very structure will be different, depending on the different purposes of both types. But devices elaborated in a dissuasive speech can then be used in a persuasive speech, of course. This is a new evolutionary stage of persuasive speech.

Dissuasive speech has also discovered new devices for a persuasive speech. The emergent tradition, opposed to the old tradition, and in this sense powerful and effective, is powerful not only due to this opposition, but because it has itself become a new phase of style.

2.

First, I shall focus on one apparently trivial but, in fact, typical device of Lenin's—his use of quotation marks.

A word is snatched from an opponent's phrase and put in quotation marks or italicised. Look through Lenin's articles and speeches, and you shall see they are chockablock with these quotation marks. Lenin enjoys speaking in the words of his opponents, but he makes them suspicious, deprives them of their power, and reduces them to husks.

I shall provide one example. “The imperialist war, which required an incredible exertion of effort, so accelerated the course of backward Russia’s development that we have ‘at one blow’ (*seemingly* at one blow) *caught up* with Italy, England, and almost with France. We have obtained a ‘coalition’, a ‘national’ (i.e., adapted for carrying on the imperialist slaughter and for fooling the people) ‘parliamentary’ government”.⁸

The words coalition, national, and parliamentary have been placed in quotation marks. The words have been knocked out of their positions. Suspicion has been cast on their specific meanings. The words national, coalition, and parliamentary are words with dubious specific meanings. It is emphasised they have no real lexical volume. They are the well-worn names of a lexical volume itself and nothing more, “names of names”. Words as names, words whose lexical volume has become weathered. This is what the ironic quotation marks emphasise.

Besides, they ironically emphasise the lexical colouring. All three words are from the realm of “big-time” politics, and aside from their meanings, are phonetically expressive. (This is further emphasised by the ironic interpretation provided by the deliberately deflated lexical colouring, e.g., “slaughter” and “chicanery”).

This is a curious case. A phrase such as “at one blow”, which is neutral in the sentence and used in its literal meaning, heightens the phrase “have caught up”, as it were. In persuasive speeches, these words are secondary in terms of meaning, but at the same time, as words that heighten and emphasise, we come across them quite often. Amid the general mass of words, they play the role of a weight, nearly imperceptible but highly effective.

It is telling that Lenin exhausts this device as well in the passage cited. The emotional “in one blow”, apparently of secondary importance, he puts in quotation marks—and makes a correction: *seemingly* at one blow.

Thus, in this case, it is not the word’s emptiness that is emphasised nor its verbal aspect, but its discrepancy with what is the matter, its discrepancy with the objective plane.

A thing at odds with the word has been pulled from it. The word has been shaken in its connection with the thing, and a correction has been made.⁹

In this case, it is clear that whereas persuasive speech follows an emotional channel, seeks to use the purely verbal plan (the unresolved “integral” meanings of words, with all the impurities the lexical plane gives them, with all their emotional colourings), and regards the phrase as integral cluster, a synthetic whole, often inherently valuable, dissuasive speech proceeds by decomposing these clusters by analysing them, by peeling the word from the phrase, and the thing from the word.

A smoothed-over word can be underscored in the verbal plane. The ultimate degree of smoothing over a word is the total break with specific meanings, when the word is used as the “name of a name”, to denote a lexical unity itself.

Such are the words spelt with a capital letter in the press.

Motherland, Revolution, and Insurrection: their graphic appearance itself underscores that what is at issue here are not specific meanings, encountered in the space of a lexical unity. No, in this case, the name of a lexical unity itself has been supplied: these are verbal denotations of the words themselves. We have seen that smoothed-over words have an emotional impact. It is the absence of specific meaning in them that leaves room for the emotional shading that surrounds a word beyond concrete meanings.¹⁰

In his polemics with “rampant revolutionary phrases”, Lenin opposes his quotation marks to these capital letters. “*Delo Naroda (The People’s Cause)*”, he writes, “monger phrases ‘like Jacobins’. A threatening tone, flashy revolutionary exclamations. ‘We know quite a lot’, ‘faith in the victoriousness of our Revolution’ (the capital R is obligatory), ‘The fate of Russian revolutionary democracy depends on one step or another [...] the Uprising of the working people arises so happily, so victoriously’ (the capital U is obligatory), etc. Of course, if the words Revolution and Uprising are written with capital letters, they produce a ‘terrifying’ impression, just like the Jacobins. It’s down and dirty”.¹¹

Thus, whereas in the case of the phrase “at one blow”, Lenin focuses on the discrepancy between word and thing, in the case of “Insurrection, just like “national”, “coalition”, etc., the word itself is exposed in its meaning. Indeed, Lenin’s polemical “language policy” hews to these two channels.

3.

Lenin combats smooth words, words in which specific meanings are imagined only hazily. The specific branches of a lexical unity, maintain their own purely verbal power only as names of a lexical unity itself, the names of a name rendered quite vague by the strong effect of the lexical plane in which speech moves.

As I have said, the more hackneyed and handled word is, the more powerful its emotional aura. Lenin writes of such words: "Less chatter about 'labour democracy', about 'liberty, equality and fraternity', about 'government by the people', and all such stuff; the class-conscious workers and peasants of our day see through these pompous phrases of the bourgeois intellectual and discern the trickery as easily as a person of ordinary common sense and experience, when glancing at the irreproachably 'polished' features and immaculate appearance of the 'fain fellow, dontcher know', immediately and unerringly puts him down as 'in all probability, a scoundrel'".¹²

Lenin the polemicist consistently catches out noble words that are "in all probability, scoundrel[s]".

"A gem, is it not? According to the resolution proposed by this pundit (Hugo Haase), before the advent of socialism, the colonies will be administered not by the bourgeoisie, but by some sort of benevolent, just, sentimental 'alliance of nations!'"¹³

To expose the word as scoundrel, you must shake up its self-enclosed, smooth lexical unity; you must expose its lexical plane. Lenin speaks of "freedom in general", "democracy in general", "revolution in general", and "equality in general".

He analyses the specific meaning of a word, the lexical unity of a word. Polemicising and exposing slogans, he supplies his lexical analysis and points out the obscuring effect of phrases and the lexical plane.

Ask [*the workers and the peasants*]:

"Equality between what sex and what other sex?

"Between what nation and what other nation?

"Between what class and what other class?

"Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?"

Whoever speaks of politics, of democracy, of liberty, of equality, of socialism, and does not at the same time ask these questions, does not put them in the foreground, does not fight against concealing, hushing up and glossing over these questions, is one of the worst enemies of the toilers.¹⁴

A lexical unity is loose and friable. As the name of a lexical unity, the word ceases to exist. The emotional aura of the word, in general, has vanished, and individual, specific branches of the lexical unity come to the fore. The word, in general, is opposed to the analytical branches it unites.

"Equality is an empty phrase, if by equality we do not mean the abolition of the classes. We want to destroy the classes. In this sense, we support equality. But to claim that we would make all people equal is a supremely empty phrase and a concoction of the intellectual, who sometimes puts on airs of being conscientious and screws around with words, but the content is absent, albeit he calls himself a writer, sometimes a scholar, and whatever else he likes".¹⁵

Lenin has made the same analysis with respect to the slogan of freedom.

"There is no way getting around it: freedom is a quite essential slogan for all revolutions, whether socialist or democratic. But our program states that freedom, if it contradicts the emancipation of labour from the oppression of capital, is a deception" (Ibid., p. 202).

"Unless it is subordinated to the interests of emancipating labour from the oppression of capital, all freedom is a deception" (Ibid., p. 205).

Instead of the word "freedom", the name of a lexical unity, Lenin talks about "all freedom", i.e., he supplies a specific lexical plane.

And when analysing lexical unity, it emerges that its congealed name, its symbol, does not include all its specific branches, thus revealing its poverty in terms of specific associations. Despite the wealth of emotional associations, the lexical plane's clouding effect is exposed. There are contradictory, specific branches of meaning in the makeup of the lexical unity, branches

that have not been historically included as components in the word's traditional name, in its symbol.

"The word 'freedom' is a good word. There is 'freedom' at every step: the freedom to trade, the freedom to sell, the freedom to be sold, etc."¹⁶

"[Soviet power] suppresses the 'freedom' of exploiters and their accomplices. It confiscates their 'freedom' to exploit, their 'freedom' to profit from hunger, their 'freedom' to struggle for the reestablishment of capital's rule, the 'freedom' to make deals with the foreign bourgeoisie against Russian working peasants"¹⁷

And finally, there are Lenin's plays on words (puns), which expose different branches of a lexical unity, contrasting them with the slogan, with the lexical unity's name.

"Free trade in grain means freedom of profit for the rich, and freedom to die for the poor"¹⁸

The words "democracy" and "revolutionary" are subjected to a similar unmasking.

"Gentlemen, heroes of the phrase, knights of revolutionary grandiloquence! Socialism requires that we distinguish the democracy of the capitalists from the democracy of the proletarians, the revolution of the bourgeoisie from the revolution of the proletariat, the insurrection of rich men against the tsar and the insurrection of labourers against rich men"¹⁹

"It is only necessary that the phrase does not cloud the mind, does not clog up consciousness. When 'revolution', a 'revolutionary people', revolutionary democracy, etc., are spoken of, it is lying or self-deception nine times out of ten. We must ask the speaker the revolution of what class he has in mind, the revolution against whom"²⁰

Just as the prefix of the differentiating epithets "all" and "which", when attached to the general slogan "freedom" transplant it, the frozen "name of a name", the shadow of a lexical unity, into a specific plane, so too does "revolution"—"revolution in general"—a word without the specific branches of lexical unity, a word that names itself, obtain the differentiating prefix "against whom".

This prefix is unexpected, precisely because the word "revolution" is varnished and seemingly does not require differentiation. That is the peculiarity of smoothed-over words. The question

“against whom” shifts the word into a specific lexical plane. In this instance, it is so clear that we sense, as it were, a partial shift in meaning.

1) Revolution.

2) Revolution against whom?

The same shift to a specific lexical plane occurs in Lenin’s analysis of the word “the people” [*narod*].

“Land to all the people’. That is right. But the people are divided into classes. Every worker knows, sees, feels, and experiences this truth, deliberately effaced by the bourgeoisie and constantly forgotten by the petty bourgeoisie.²¹

Here, too, the smoothed-over word *qua* slogan, which had become its own name, seemingly alters its meaning as it shifts into a specific lexical plane.

This is because “the people” [*narod*] has been used as a slogan in a specific meaning since the days of the Populist (Narodniki) movement: the people were the common people (optionally, the peasantry). Its use as a slogan quickly flattens its specificity, turning the word into a name of a word with a special emotional aura. The specific meaning is erased, and the flattened word *qua* slogan extends to the entire lexical unity. It goes without saying that the lexical unity’s volume is thought of vaguely, since the word has been affected by the lexical plane’s blurring effect. The aura of the old definition lingers, even though the word has already been applied to the entire volume of the lexical unity.

The lexical unity was thus covered by the slogan with its emotional aura. Therefore, comparing “the people” with the slogan “the people” rearranges the lexical unity’s strong point, opens it with a different key, and alters the lexical plane. When using the slogan, one cannot say, “‘The people’ are divided into classes”. One can say it only after removing the aura of a slogan from the phrase: “The people are divided into classes”.

In Lenin’s phrase, therefore, “the people” has seemingly changed its meaning. The word has been translated into a different lexical plane, which facilitates the analysis of the lexical unity, the word’s volume.

This shift is a powerful lever: bereft of its aura, the words return into the sequence of all words. The old slogan “the people” was opposed to the words “the government” and “the authorities”. Without

its aura, the word forfeits its connection with them by opposition: "The government, whatever form of government it may be, expresses the interests of certain classes, so opposing the government and the people [...] is the greatest theoretical confusion".²²

Encircled by its aura, the word kept itself aloof. It was not amenable to analysis. It remained effective, impacting the verbal plane. Without an aura, it is part of the series of all words, and it is amenable to this analysis.

The shift of the lexical plane, which had obscured the main feature and, at the same time, the lexical unity's specific volume facilitates their restoration.

This includes the struggle with unpleasant denotations, with frozen images. In language, every image becomes threadbare and frozen. When it is alive and effective, it means the word has been pushed aside somehow, that there is a discrepancy in the word, dynamising the meaning. The discrepancy might arise because two meanings, two lexical unities, two dominant features have collided in the word, and the two lexical unities crowd each other (metaphor). It might happen due to a discrepancy between the phraseological meaning, i.e., the word's meaning as defined by a phrase, with the word's main feature (its lexical unity).

In any case, the discrepancy is obligatory for an effective living image.

When, on the contrary, an image is effaced, it means the discrepancy has ceased. The word's main feature has faded, and the word conveniently fits the phrase without sticking out. It has become homogeneous with other words. A word like this, whose effaced main feature has erased the image, is paler than a simple, unimaginative word, precisely because its main feature has been effaced. Awareness of it as a lexical unity has been erased. If we wished to analyse the word's specific meanings, we could not do it: the key has been lost.

For example, "country" in the meaning of "nation". This image could have been alive once upon a time, i.e., the word could have come across as advanced, as non-homogeneous with other words. Its advanced status was based on the fact that the word's phraseological sense did not match the word's main feature, its lexical unity. This becomes clear if we take as our example an image that has not yet become threadbare: "the land" as the nation.

We have before us the phrase, “The whole land responded”.

In this case, the word’s phraseological sense, its sense as defined by the phrase, does not match the main feature, which is alive in the word “land”. The phraseological sense is not obscured by the main feature; the main feature stands apart and colours the entire phrase. Semantically, it is sharper than “The whole nation responded”.

Now we have before us the word “country” in the meaning of “nation”. This image is threadbare. What does it mean? It means the phraseological sense has obscured the main feature, the word used often in just in this way. The word “country” lacks prominence as much as the word “nation”. The main feature and lexical unity of the word “country” has disappeared. Consequently, the possibility of applying the word “country” to specific meanings and specific branches of the lexical unity has vanished. A smooth word like this might be a “fraud”, because the smoothness renders it invulnerable. The main feature has been lost. Consequently, the key to specific meanings has been lost. What remains is the word as mask, a word that sounds in the phrase, but does not allow us beyond its limits, a word that is indirect, someone else’s, and alien. Due to the foreignness, however, awareness of the discrepancy has been effaced.

The polemicist Lenin moves these frozen images from a standstill and finds the key to them. He quotes, for example, a speech by Nikolai Maklakov: “The authorities will move farther and farther to the left until the country moves farther and farther to the right”.²³ He analyses the quotation as follows. “Maklakov calls capitalists the country”. In this sense, he is right. But I assure you that the ‘country’ of workers and the poorest peasants is a thousand times farther to the left than the Chernovs and Tseretelis, and a hundred times further to the left than we are. Mark my words”.²⁴

Here, the frozen image is shifted by its being directly compared with concrete meanings, not its own meanings, but of the word suggested by the phraseological sense. One cannot say that the country of workers and poorest peasants is moving to the left, although we can say that the country is moving to the left.

Concretisation has ripped the mask from the word. It is frozen, concealing a specific meaning of the contiguous word “nation”, whereas precisely because of its smoothness and stiffness it

was easily and inconspicuously substituted for many meanings of the word “nation” [*narod*].

4.

Above, I discussed the “objective” concreteness and verbal non-concreteness of foreign terms. They are concrete only because they relate to things. If this connection is unknown—if they have no associative threads leading to other words—their lexical volume will be scant. At the same time, even if the link between these terms and things is unknown or obscured (and, consequently, due to the foreign term’s distinctive, isolated nature, its associative threads have been severed in general), such terms, which, like smooth words, have a “noble” lexical colouring, can go unnoticed.

This is the most common type of verbal fraud.

I shall give an example of Lenin unmasking such words, in the article “How the Capitalists Conceal Their Profits”.

“Indeed, the amount of 5,500,000 rubles is given as reserve capital. Profits are quite often entered for concealment as so-called reserves, or reserve capital. If I am a millionaire who has made a profit of 17,000,000 rubles and wants to reserve [that is, in Russian, ‘set aside’] 5,000,000, I only have to enter this 5,000,000 as ‘reserve capital’ to do the trick!”²⁵

“Equally, an amount of 224,000 rubles—an ‘unpaid dividend to shareholders’—is likewise not recorded among the total amount of profits, although everyone knows that dividends are paid from net profits”.

It’s a classic case. A fraudulent word is implicated in real fraud, and exposing the fraudulent word is tantamount to charging someone with genuine fraud.

5.

Words *qua* names are effaced quite quickly. They denote specific things and therefore sparkle with the colours of those things and acquire their colouring.

In this sense, the word “SR” is as specific as “Socialist-Revolutionary”; “SDeK” is as specific as “Social Democrats”. These words (“SR”, etc.) have their own colouring, which derives from the denoted thing, not from the name.

It turns out, however, that words *qua* names are not

erased altogether: the meaning persists even beyond the designation.

This is the basis of the polemic use of names of hostile political parties.

Communist newspapers would not deign to write "Constitutional Democrat". They write "Kadet" straightaway, not even "CD", for "CD" 1) denotes a thing; 2) denotes a meaning, whereas "Kadet" has broken completely with meaning and is only a denotation, only a name. Moreover, it is an independent word that has completely supplanted all traces of the meaning of the word "Constitutional Democrat". The name "SR" is also only the designation of a thing, an independent word that has broken completely with its meaning ("Socialist-Revolutionary"). In this sense, of course, it has withdrawn even further from the verbal meaning than the ordinary Russian abbreviation "s.-r.", which simultaneously denotes the thing and the meaning.²⁶ It was thus, for example, a very strong move to christen the "Allies", the Entente, etc. It is not difficult to see that, as a denotation, the word "Allies" is an effaced word, and yet it still contained a certain potential for reanimating its meaning under certain phraseological conditions. The word "Entente" was bereft of this potential. (Besides, the phonic structure of the word was itself slight comic—"an-tan"—and it evoked associations with the Egyptian city Tanta.)

When a thing is only denoted, and its name is stripped of its meaning, the thing is perceptibly reduced.

So, any revitalisation of the name's meaning lifts the thing itself.

Switching the name of the Social Democrats (Bolsheviks) to the Communists not only meant terminologically disengaging with social democracy but also revitalising meaning.²⁷

Lenin conceived of the name change as a shift, as a way of combating linguistic routine. The old name's habitualness was not an argument for preserving it, but an argument for changing it: "The masses were used to it; the workers 'had come to love' their Social Democratic Party'. [...] This is the argument of routine, the argument of hibernation, the argument of stagnation. And we want to rebuild the world. [...] And we are afraid of ourselves. We are holding on to a 'dear', dirty shirt, a shirt to which we are used. It's time to toss the dirty shirt. It's time to put on clean clothes".

The new name's dynamism is emphasised. Fearing one's own name means fearing oneself, because the new name, by revitalising the meaning, shifts the thing itself, elevates it in an unusual way, and separates it from others.

The name change was effected not only because the thing no longer corresponded to it, but primarily because the old, habitual name was worn like dirty clothes.

Words can be alive, not flattened or threadbare, and yet be out of synch with things. They can be out of synch with things because they touch on only one aspect of things, while not covering others. Then words unite things around uncharacteristic traits and incorrectly identify them by uniting them. They can also be out of synch with things if the things are flowing, in process. Then each new phase of the process differs in the objective plane from the old phase, but does not withdraw in the verbal plane.

Here is an example of the former.

Lenin imagines the arguments made by the SRs: "We are accused of being in a bloc, of being in cahoots with the Entente and the imperialists. But you Bolsheviks, were you not in cahoots with the German imperialists? What was Brest about? Was Brest not an agreement with imperialists? You compromised with the imperialism of the Germans in Brest. We compromised with French imperialism. We are even. We have no reason to repent."

Lenin analyses their arguments: "To clarify the issue, I will permit myself a comparison with an ordinary individual. Imagine that your car has been surrounded by brigands who have put a pistol to your head. Imagine that, therefore, you hand over your money and arms to the brigands, letting them make an escape in your car. What is the matter? You gave your arms and money to the brigands. That is a fact. Imagine that another fellow has given the brigands money and arm to participate in the brigands' campaign against civilians. There is consent in both instances. It is unimportant whether the consent has been recorded or verbalised. We can imagine a man silently handing over his pistol, his arms, and his money. The import of his consent is clear. He is telling the brigands, 'I give you my arms, pistol, and money, and in return, you will let me withdraw from this pleasant tête-à-tête with you'. The consent is apparent. Just as possible is a tacit agreement with a man who gives arms and money to the brigands so they can rob others in

return for a share of their booty. This is also a tacit consent. I ask you to find me a literate man who would not be able to distinguish between the two forms of consent, between the two agreements".²⁸

The word "agreement" ("consent") is living, concrete, and specific. And yet, in this case, it covers different things because the particulars of the things united by the word are atypical of the things themselves.

This absence of synch between words and things comes to light in the device of simplification. Not only are the most specific things chosen but also the most acutely opposed (a man who is robbed versus a man involved in a robbery), and a common particular is discovered in these acutely opposed things: the word under analysis, "agreement" ("consent"). Since such different things have the word in common, it means the word is not characteristic of them. It does not cover them.

The other case is when the word covers a current process.

We see the word "revolution", but not in its flattened, non-slogan meaning, but in its specific meaning. Since the word denotes a process, it should cover its different phases, but in fact it easily attaches to one of its phases.

Lenin polemicises with this phenomenon.

"Usually, reference is made to the 'ultimate' argument: we are having a revolution. But this argument is utterly mendacious, for our revolution has so far given power only to the bourgeoisie. What our revolution will bring tomorrow—the return of the monarchy, the strengthening of the bourgeoisie, the transfer of power to the more progressive classes—we do not know, and no one knows. So, referring to the 'revolution' is a gross deception of the people and a deception of oneself".²⁹

The same thing can be said with respect to war.

"When we take power, we will rein in the capitalists, and this will not be the war that is currently underway, because war is defined by the class waging it, and not what is written on a piece of paper".³⁰

Therefore, formulas and definitions should not be "monotone", lest "reality, which is extremely complex and at least two-coloured" evades them.³¹

Therefore, Lenin protests the inclusion of the words "World Soviet Republic" in the Party's program.

“It would be a great mistake to aspire now to include an encapsulation of a finished process in the program. It would be like our putting a World Sovnarkhoz [Council of People’s Commissars] in the program now. Yet, we have not got used to the ugly word ‘Sovnarkhoz’ ourselves. They say there have been cases in which foreigners have inquired as to whether it is a railroad station. [Laughter.] We cannot decree these things to the whole world”.³²

Each word fortifies a process and therefore either rushes ahead, preempting the process itself, or it is belated, attaching itself to one phase of the process. To keep the process from congealing in the mind and reality from becoming monochromatic via the word’s prism, we must verify words and reveal their connection with things.

“One must be able to adapt schemes to life, and not repeat words about the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and the peasantry in general, which have become meaningless”, writes Lenin in his “Letters on Tactics” (“Letter 1”).

6.

Thus, Lenin’s polemical language policy is encapsulated in:

1) a principally cautious attitude to vocabulary (cf. the example of “catching up in one blow”), in suspecting the word itself (cf. Lenin’s term “fraudulent word”);

2) peeling the word’s specific meaning from the power of the phrase (cf. the same example);

3) combating smooth words *qua* slogans, the vague volume of a lexical unity, and the power of the lexical plane (“Freedom”, “Equality”, “The People”), deposing their aura, and translating them in another lexical plane, facilitating an analysis of the lexical unity’s volume;

4) combating terms with a vague volume of lexical unity, which is obscured and replaced by “lofty” lexical colouring (unmasking words like “reserve capital”);

5) combating old, threadbare words that dissociated words and revitalising meanings (Communists instead of Social Democrats (Bolsheviks);

6) combating words that unite different things against uncharacteristic words (e.g., the “agreement” of the SRs with French imperialism versus the “agreement” of the Communists with German imperialism);

7) combating “monochromatic” words that encapsulate “two-coloured” processual reality with a specific analysis of the thing in each case (the motionless word is ejected from the process, as in the analysis of the word “revolution”).

7.

This polemic use by Lenin of his opponents’ lexicon was not only purely negative. In the polemic itself, the lexical devices of his opponents were opposed by counter-devices. In this sense, Lenin’s polemic itself was a significant shift in the tradition and realm of Russian oratory and Russian journalism.

In his analysis of his opponent’s lexicon, Lenin supplies all the typical traits of his own lexicon. I shall highlight only two more traits of his lexicon: devices for deflating the high style, and devices for inserting lexical colouring and concretisation.

The most abrupt device for deflating a text is using words meant to be vulgar: pejorative words.

Using a pejorative or abusive word in a speech or newspaper article immediately reduces the high tone, bringing the discourse down to an everyday level.

Yet, the abusiveness of words does not matter as much as the fact they are new in the given structure. There is literary “swearing” and swearing that is even typical of literature. Such abusive words, of course, will not play the same role as abusive words usually not used in a structure, whether a speech or newspaper article.

At the outset, I mentioned the impression the use of workaday words, words forbidden for their vulgarity, made in closed literary structures. These lexical devices raise the discourse’s impact and shift it (until they become worn out themselves). Such, too, is the role of deliberately vulgar words in oration (and, to a lesser extent, in newspapers). They attract attention. They “strike” and “wound”. e.g., “You are clowns, for your starry-eyed words charm away and obscure the issue of hunger”.³³

“There are, after all, such scoundrels, who, after a year of the Soviet Union’s existence, when, by the way, the food workers proved that we supplied the countryside with 42,000 thousand carloads of produce, while getting only 39,000 carloads of grain in return, still cry, ‘Peasants, the Soviet regime is robbing you’”.³⁴

The same applies to abusive words with a comic tinge. Deflated discourse is not afraid of comic colouring, whereas the lofty style recognises only 'wit,' i.e., primarily plays on words and puns: "I very well recall the scene when I had to give Svinhufvud (whose name translates as 'pig's head' in Russian), a representative of the Finnish bourgeoisie, the letter [*recognising Finland's independence*] at the Smolny".³⁵

In this case, the lexical comic effect is supported by the fact that it is motivated: it is presented as a "translation".

In the following passage, we find words with nearly the same powerful impact. Although the words are not abusive, they have a negative, pejorative colouring. Most important, they are workaday words, i.e., they are deflated in the literary sense: "The English newspaper—and the English ministers, too—have openly boasted of giving aid to Denikin".³⁶ We should also pay attention to the syntax in this phrase: "and the English ministers, too" syntactically distances the phrase from literature and approximates it to workaday speech).

See also: "He (Bullitt) [*sic*] assured us—these gentlemen like to boast—that America was everything: who would take France into account given America's power? When we signed the treaty, however, both the Frenchman Clemenceau and the American minister made a gesture like this. (Lenin makes a telltale gesture with his foot.) [...] With his meaningless piece of paper, Bullitt was petrified, and he was told that no one could have believed he would be so naïve, so stupid, and believe in the democratism of England and France".³⁷

Here, in fact, the words "boast" and "meaningless piece of paper" are epithets: they are as telltale as the gesture performed with the foot. This is a use of words, having an "abusive" colouring verging on the mundane, in oratorical discourse. They are just as unusual in the lexicon of oratorical discourse, as a "telltale gesture with the foot" is in the repertoire of oratorical gestures. "Just like him": these words not only deflate the entire discourse, they not only dispel the auras and loftiness of Lenin's opponents, but they also appeal to the workaday speech of everyone. They appeal to everyday life, and link up with everyone's daily, ubiquitous speech. Consequently, they extend the most solid, quantitatively and qualitatively mundane associative ties between speaker and listener.

From this point of view, the lexical colouring of Lenin's discourse matters. Such is the "translation" of the foreign lexical plane into the Russian plane (we have seen his comic translation of Svinhufvud's surname), e.g.: "Question: What should be done if power in Russia is seized by the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, but in Germany a similar revolution does not take place, a revolution that would overthrow not only Wilhelm II but also the German Guchkovs and Milyukovs, or if you replace the German Nicholas II with the German Guchkovs and Milyukov, then in terms of the war nothing at all will change?"³⁸

Calling Wilhelm II the German Nicholas II means not only likening them as much it does translating everything into the Russian dimension. Yet, in this case, "Nicholas II" is not, of course, the real Nicholas II, but only the most specific, the most associatively rich concretisation of the words "tsar", "autocrat", etc., effected in a specifically Russian and modern lexical plane. Such "translation" possesses such an enormous power to deflate the subject in the eyes of readers, that everything else in the article, relating to Wilhelm II and the German bourgeoisie, will be coloured by the Russian lexical milieu's entire associative liveliness.

Such are the following examples of lexical colouring leading back to everyday life: "The gentlemen from the Provisional Government have run the show into the ground".³⁹

The most convenient way to insert such lexically rich verbal matter is to use figurative speech.

Just as rhymes in poems connect not only word endings and not only rhyming words but also whole verses and the lines that conclude with these rhymes, images connect in our mind not only two concepts, two words, but bring two whole lexical unities into contact, each of which leads to different lexical milieux. "Side by side with this government—which as regards the present war is but the agent of the billion-dollar 'firms' 'England and France'—there has arisen the chief, unofficial, as yet undeveloped and comparatively weak workers' government, which expresses the interests of the proletariat and of the entire poor section of the urban and rural population. [...] Russian capital is merely a branch of the worldwide 'firm' which manipulates hundreds of billions of rubles and is called 'England and France'".⁴⁰

Here we are supplied with images of England and France as firms, and the Provisional Government as a commercial agent. The images are fleshed out. England and France are not only firms, but “billion-dollar firms”, “a world-wide firm which manipulates hundreds of billions of rubles”. Moreover, in the second phrase, the image is supplied in a condensed, underscored form. The firm is “called England and France”, and thus the word “firm” sets the tone; it dominates the second part of the image. “England and France” are no longer “firms”, but only the name of a firm. Via their associative threads, the lexical unities “firm” and “agent” lead us very far into the midst of daily bourgeois life, and this has a strong effect in terms of lexical colouring on everything subsequently said about England and France, and the Provisional Government’s foreign policy.

The second lexical device, which I will note here especially, is the device of lexical structure.

In this case, Lenin tellingly uses the collective singular (“the American” instead of “Americans”, “the worker” instead of “workers”). The device makes phrases more specific.

“The worker says” vs. “the workers say”: in the second case, the plural deprives the subject of concreteness, adding to the meaning the shade of generalisation—not the specific plural “workers”, but the generalising “working class”.

Meanwhile, although “the worker” is used collectively, the singular makes its specific.

At the same time, “the worker says” is also more specific in the temporal sense than “the workers say”.

The latter is general. It does not refer to the present moment. (It can be replaced with “in working-class strata, it is said” or “it is claimed”.) The specificity of the singular enables Lenin to develop general claims in the form of specific bonds, e.g., “Peace without annexations and indemnities cannot be concluded until you reject your own annexations, for it is laughable. It is a game that makes every worker in Europe laugh. He says: their words are eloquent. They call on the nations to overthrow the bankers while they appoint their own bankers to the ministries”.⁴¹

The device is even clearer in the following example: “The American, from the merchant’s point of view, asks whether they will pay or not. And he answers, again, from the perspective of sheer

commercial calculation: they have nothing to pay. And you won't even get twenty kopecks for a ruble".⁴²

In this case, the device is reinforced by the introduction of numbers. The introduction of exemplary numbers is also a typical device of lexical simplification, a device encountered quite often in Lenin, e.g., "You say that they (the workers and peasants) should be equal. Let's weigh and calculate. Take sixty peasants and ten workers. The sixty peasants have excess grain. They go about in tatters, but they have grain. Take the ten workers. After the imperialist war, they go about in tatters and are exhausted. They have no grain, fuel or raw materials. The factories are at a standstill. How are they equal, in your opinion? The sixty peasants have the right to decide, and the ten workers must abide by their decision. The great principle of equality, the unity of workers' democracy and the majority's decision!".⁴³

Instead of the plural "workers" and "peasants", the exemplary numbers are specific, because they clarify the relationship.

But they are more specific than real figures, because we cannot feel big numbers, and so they must be simplified and schematised to become palpable numbers that have palpable relationships. In this sense, the simplification of monetary figures that happens among the masses is curious. Thus, fifty billion will be called not only fifty thousand in conversation, but even fifty rubles or fifty kopecks. In this case, "billion" is no longer a number, but a unit, and the simpler it is, the more convenient it is. Therefore, sixty peasants and ten workers are more convenient and concrete than sixty million peasants and ten million workers. (That is why a newspaper account of a single death is more specific than the news that thousands have perished.)

This is especially important, of course, when it is a matter not of precise figures, but of the relationship between them, the comparison of two quantities, moreover, two imprecise quantities.

"The democrats of the civilised countries are armed to the teeth. They fear, however, the emergence of a hundred Bolsheviks in some free republic with a population of one hundred million, like America. That's a nasty business. It turns out the democrats cannot deal with a hundred immigrants from hungry, ravaged Russia".⁴⁴

8.

Lenin's discourse—simplified and deflated, incorporating daily life into the tradition of speechmaking and political literature, and therefore unusually dynamic and influential—is a new stage in the revolution of these discursive structures. Certain features of Lenin's style harken back to a special tradition.

The source of Lenin's discourse, its historical roots and seeds, is a special issue. The west's huge tradition of revolutionary style has been reflected in his occasionally pungent puns,⁴⁵ his polemical idioms (e.g., "the denuding of Bonapartism", "robbing democracy while hypocritically observing the appearance of democracy", "about the heroes of forgery", "leftism' infantile disorder"), and the titles of his polemical articles. Among the Russians, it was undoubtedly Alexander Herzen who influenced Lenin's polemical style, particularly the deliberately vulgarised style of his short articles in *The Bell*, with their stark expressions and punning titles. But this tradition has been refreshed by the introduction of unprecedented, fresh lexical matter, which shifts Lenin's discourse. The nature of this lexical matter is closely bound up with Lenin's polemical attitude to the lexicon of his opponents—with his acute analysis of lexical unity (his unmasking of smooth, fraudulent words, his dispelling of auras), with the destruction of lofty lexical colouring, and, finally, with the emancipation of a moving, evolving thing from schematic, immobile words.

1. Vladimir Dal (1801-1872) was a Russian-language lexicographer. He is author of *Explanatory Dictionary of the Live Great Russian Language*, published in four huge volumes in 1863-1866. (Ed. note)
2. Pavel Katenin (1792-1853) and Nikolay Nekrasov (1821-1878) were Russian poets, writers, and literary critics. (Ed. note)
3. This combination, based on lexical unity, can be used as a poetic device. Take, for example, two meanings of the word "heart": 1) the heart as the receptacle and centre of emotional life; 2) the heart as a special emotional appeal. Alexander Blok combines them in the lines "Still I would wish you merriment, / Heart, my gold".
4. The comic effect is aggravated by the fact that Zhevakin gives examples of phrases in Italian rather than French.
5. The meaning of the word "expropriator", as it was used in tsarist legislation ("expropriation to the treasury") did or did not enter Russian linguistic consciousness minimally. By the way, I should draw attention to the fact that the word "expropriation" was making the rounds during the Revolution of 1905 in a sense approximating the one we have been discussing. When used in this special meaning, the word also had an abbreviated form: "ex". Although, in this series, the word "expropriator" has a meaning that not only does not resemble the meaning evinced in the phrase I have adduced but a precisely opposite meaning, which, of course, can deprive the phrase of its unambiguity and accuracy.
6. We must, of course, note other factors, ensuring the huge dynamism of the Russian phrase. 1. It is more expressive in the phonic sense. *Grab'te* is a short, two-syllable word that begins with the extremely expressive consonant compound GR. There are two plosives, PT, on the border between the syllables. Meanwhile, the word *ekspropiiruute* has three syllables before the accent and two syllables after it, which severely weakens its effect. 2. The suffix -UITE (OVAT') is an imperfective suffix, which in a temporal sense gives the word

a propulsive colouring. And yet an important reason (if not the main reason) for the greater expressiveness and dynamism of the Russian phrase is the difference between their main features and lexical colouring.

7. See the legend of Peter of Amiens, whose foreign speech his listeners did not understand, but they followed him all the same. The value of intonation manifests itself in those cases when words that do not have a profane meaning are uttered with a threatening, pejorative intonation or, on the contrary, when profane words are uttered with a tender intonation. In this case, words are simply “discursive matter”, filling in the “meaningful” intonational series beyond meaning.
8. Lenin, “The First Stage of the First Revolution”, *Pravda*, Nos. 14 and 15, March 21 and 22, 1917.
9. There are not only ironic quotes in Lenin’s quotations. He quite often uses current “alien” words in quotation marks. He thus seemingly emphasises he cannot vouch for the words, that he used the first words that came to hand to denote things. Thus, words in this case are not exposed, but simply cannot be guaranteed. These cautious quotation marks demonstrate Lenin’s linguistic cautiousness.
10. This applies even to such nominals as Jews, Germans, etc., commonly used—consciously, of course—in *Novoye Vremya*. Here it is not a matter of specific ethnicities, but of common names for lexical unities, surrounded by well-known emotional auras. (Of course, this does not relate to proper names that are usually underscored graphically.) It is interesting that, in Russian poetry, the “allegory” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the “symbol” of the twentieth century are also often depicted with capital letters. The emphasis here is the same as in the cited examples: the absence of specific meanings, words as “names of names”, and a certain emotional aura.
11. Lenin, “On the Harm of Phrase-Mongering”, *Pravda* No. 69, June 13, 1917.
12. Lenin, *A Great Beginning: Heroism of the Workers in the Rear ‘Communist Subbotniks’*, Moscow, July, 1919.
13. Lenin, *The Heroes of the Berne International*, June 1919.
14. Lenin, “Soviet Power and the Status of Women”, *Pravda* No. 249, November 6, 1919.
15. Lenin, “On Deceiving the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality”, *Two Speeches at the First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education*, Moscow, 1919.
16. Lenin, “Speech Delivered at a Meeting in the People’s House, Petrograd”, *Severnaya Kommuna* No. 58, March 14, 1919.
17. Lenin, *The Third International and Its Place in History*, May 1919.

18. Lenin, "Answer to a Query by a Peasant", *Pravda* No. 35, February 15, 1919.
19. Lenin, "On the Harm of Phrase-Mongering".
20. Lenin, "On Firm Revolutionary Power", *Pravda* No. 50, May 19, 1917.
21. Lenin, "On the Need to Establish an Alliance of Rural Workers", *Pravda* No 91, June 25, 1917.
22. Lenin, "Speech at First All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies", *Pravda* No. 95, July 13, 1917.
23. Nikolay Maklakov (1871-1918) was an officer of the Imperial court, State Councilor, and a prominent right wing statesman and a Russian monarchist. (Ed. note)
24. Lenin, "A Reminder to the Newborn ... 'New' Government", *Pravda* 50, May 6, 1917. Viktor Chernov (1873-1952), one of the founders of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party; Irakli Tsereteli (1881-1959), a Georgian Social-Democrat. Both actively took part in the Russian Provisional Government in 1917 and were against the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution. (Ed. Note)
25. Lenin, "How the Capitalists Conceal Their Profits", *Pravda* No 94, June 29, 1917. The brief passage I have set in brackets, which is the whole point of Tynyanov's argument, has been excised from the official English translation. (Translators note)
26. Therefore, the press that is hostile to Communists does not use the word "Communists", but the synonym "Bolsheviks". This is because the meaning of the word "Communists" suggests much more than the word "Bolsheviks", which thus only denotes a thing.
27. Cf. "Our party's old name makes it easier to deceive the masses and slows down progress, for at every step, in every newspaper, and in every parliamentary faction, the masses see the leaders, i.e., people, whose words are louder, and whose deeds are more visible, and all of them are "Social Democrats, too". [...] All of them cash in old bonds, issued by 'social democracy'". (Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, 1917).
28. Lenin, "On Deceiving the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality".
29. Lenin, "The Straw in Someone Else's Eye", *Pravda* No. 70, June 1, 1917.
30. Lenin, "Speech at First All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies".
31. Lenin, *Letters on Tactics*, April, 1917.
32. Lenin, "Concluding Speech on the Issue of the Party Program,

- March 19, 1919", *Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Verbatim Report*, Kommunist Publishers, 1919.
33. Lenin, "On Deceiving the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality".
 34. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at a Meeting in the People's House, Petrograd".
 35. Lenin, *Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Verbatim Report*. Pehr Evind Svinhufvud (1861-1944) was the third President of Finland from 1931 to 1937 openly supporting fascism. (Ed. Note)
 36. Lenin, "Report on The Current State of Affairs", *Pravda* No. 40, May, 1917.
 37. Lenin, "Seventh All-Russia Congress Of Soviets", *Pravda* Nos. 275, 276, 277, December 7, 9, 10, 1919. William Christian Bullitt Jr. (1891-1967) was an American diplomat who negotiated diplomatic relations between the US and the Soviet Union in 1919. He was the first US ambassador to the Soviet Union, appointed in 1933. (Ed. Note)
 38. Lenin, "Our Views", *Pravda* 35, April 18, 1917. Pavel Milyukov (1859-1843) was founder and leader of Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets), Foreign Minister in the Russian Provisional Government. Alexander Guchkov (1862-1936) was a Minister of War in the Russian Provisional Government. (Ed. Note)
 39. Lenin, "What the Counter-Revolutionary Steps of the Provisional Government Lead To", *Pravda* 43, April 28 1917.
 40. Lenin, "The First Stage of the First Revolution (Letters from Afar)", *Pravda* Nos. 14 and 15, March 21 and 22, 1917.
 41. Lenin, "Speech at Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils".
 42. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at a Meeting in the People's House, Petrograd".
 43. Lenin, "On Deceiving the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality".
 44. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at a Meeting in the People's House, Petrograd".
 45. E.g., "'Socialists,' who speak out against 'dictatorship in general,' while body and soul standing for 'democracy in general'" (Lenin, "Thesis and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", *Pravda* No. 51, 8 March, 1919); and "Free trade in grain means freedom of profit for the rich, and freedom to die for the poor" (Lenin, "Answer to a Query by a Peasant", *Pravda* No. 35, 1919).

Boris Kazansky

LENIN'S DISCOURSE AN ATTEMPT AT RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

1.

It is hardly possible to completely encompass and shed total light on Lenin's discourse in terms of its essential and distinct features, to characterise his command of language as an orator. First, to do this you would have to be completely on par with him as concerns the complex circumstances of his speeches, to be not only a perspicuous eyewitness, but also an active participant in the ideological, political, and actual circumstances of his public addresses. Only such proximity could let us hope to assess the real worth of his words with sufficient fullness and accuracy. Denied this, we risk missing the vital, truly significant elements of a published text's genuine content. To accurately evaluate the speeches of an orator, politician, and public figure, we must experience the intonational power of his voice and the expressions produced by his face, gestures, and body movements. We must give ourselves a clear accounting of the actual situation that prevailed at each moment of the speech to be able to follow the impact of each phrase and weigh the force of each step and turn in his thinking. Only then, after considering and weighing all these factors, could we satisfactorily understand and evaluate the true content and full power of the words of a politician such as Lenin was.

The oratorical word is the strongest of all species of spoken and audible words. More often than not, it can be manifested in direct action, translating it into an act of will. The oratorical word has the maximum effect. It cannot be listened to like a tale. It must be met as a call of one will to another and assimilated, decided on yea or nay. Here, it is insufficient to approach these effective elements of rhetorical speech, essential to understanding and evaluating it, by means of literary analysis;

especially during a magnificent revolutionary upheaval of international significance that has struck a chord in millions of people, the words of the revolution's leader takes on a huge value, making them utterly incompatible with a "text". The tense, persistent determination, ready for action, the charm of personal temperament, eroding all resistance, the razor-sharp and steely logic of dialectical thinking, blocking every conclusion except one, all so unquestionably are dominant in political discourse over purely verbal content that the researcher, helpless before it, comes to the text of a speech as he would to a text written in a foreign language he barely understands.

Indeed, almost without exception, speakers of all ages and parties have nurtured their speaking techniques on literature, often on exemplars of special oratorical literature. The relatively peaceful environment that has surrounded speech with numerous traditions and conventional manners facilitated its evolution into a lush, decorative art. Lenin regarded speeches, articles, and books as "art" in a completely different sense, the "art" that Marx argued an insurrection should be. He regarded the word as a means of political art, a tool of the revolutionary struggle. At the same time, like the whole spirit of Marxism that suffuses Lenin, the word serves a necessary, stern, heroic cause. Therefore, it is pointless to pore over Lenin's speeches for "poetry" or "rhetoric". He gives no thought to the elegance of his constructions. He does not flaunt poetry and erudition. Pomposity and pretentiousness, and gloating over poetic prettiness and stylistic flourishes disgust him. He hates the "phrase", despises "declamation", and regards even his own principles and slogans not as sacred dogmas, but as working, utilitarian encapsulations of action, i.e., they are really useful in the moment and under the circumstances. Lenin views the word only as a means of transmission, a dialectical and practical tool of political influence. In terms of vocabulary, Lenin's discourse always comes across as direct, artless, even colourless and indifferent, like the language of science, consisting of technical terms and precise definitions and statements, the purest prose, devoid of all imagery, all verbal games that enliven the word. But this is not so.

Lenin's discourse is not "literary" or "artistic". It contains neither "poetry" nor "rhetoric." This does not mean, however, that it is needless and fruitless to examine its verbal aspect. On the

contrary, it is all the more interesting to understand the role of the word in such a relevant, artless and, at the same time, powerful genre of oratory, to discover the basic levers and drivers that feed and distribute the flow of speech and convey the thought. The more remarkable it is that, for all the harsh simplicity and technicality of Lenin's discourse, in which he maintains a strict Spartan abstinence, its machinery clearly reveals forms and devices of speech, constantly and seemingly familiar, which, formally speaking, can be wholly and rightly defined in terms of traditional and, ultimately, ancient rhetoric.

What does this mean? It means, first of all, that the ancient system of rhetoric was true, truer and more universal than it was thought to be. Indeed, the comparison of revolutionary discourse with antiquity is not accidental. Nothing like the exclusive freedom and direct action of the word, which in Athens constituted an organic and constant phenomenon of political life, as inalienable as the air, a circumstance of the political environment, has ever been encountered in the world again. Second, it means there is an urgent need to resurrect genuine ancient rhetoric in its essence, to liberate it from the bondage of serfdom in which it was entangled by the dominant ideology of the word, having been turned into moribund scholasticism. Labelling many verbal expressions and discursive constructions with Greek and Latin names—anaphosis, metaphor, apostrophe, epiphosis, metonymy, hyperbaton, oxymoron, prosopopeia, etc.—does as little for scholarship as a pharmacy does for medicine. We must disclose the actual content of these terms, understand them as a system, a system of vital verbal functions.

Produced in terms of ancient rhetoric, a formal, technical analysis of Lenin's discourse—the only one now available in view of the considerations we have voiced at the outset—can be particularly convincing in this respect. Nobody suspects Lenin's discourse of artificiality and pretentiousness: it is utterly pragmatic. If, nevertheless, we discover in it all the typical devices, canonised by the ancient system, it means they have real pragmatic significance. They play an active role, not only a decorative or, more broadly, an aesthetic role. In turn, this also makes it necessary to adopt a new view of the substance of the aesthetical. The boundaries of verbal creativity have been fluctuating more and more under pressure from the new data introduced by the new consciousness. The example of

Lenin's discourse—a particular case, but a case of huge historical value and an extremely typical case—has revealed the bankruptcy of the old verbal aesthetic unusually starkly. “What is justice?” said a peasant during a debate of the land question in the State Duma. “Justice is the individual”. But can we say the same thing about aesthetic norms?

We usually distinguish in speech between figures of thought and figures of speech. I shall distinguish between structural devices—the way the course of a speech is constructed or conducted—and functional devices—figures of speech and connotations. In other words, I distinguish between syntactical and phraseological devices and semantic devices in the broad sense of the word, and how both are applied in sentences, phrases, passages, and even broader bounds. Of course, structural devices also have their own semantic functions, and functional devices, in turn, perform structural chores, while both are facts and factors of style and expression. It is obvious, however, that the advantage lies on different sides in each case. Both are extremely diverse and can attain great complexity in the totality of their expressive qualities. I do not mean to give here an exhaustive analysis of them and catalogue all the species and subspecies of Lenin's discursive devices. I will focus only on the simplest, most specific, and striking structural and functional devices. I shall in no wise undertake to classify them systematically, which would inevitably come across as scholastic. I think that much will be clear from the examples, perhaps more than from my commentary.

The most interesting structural devices in Lenin's discourse are those based on repetition in a wide variety of shapes and degrees. We can distinguish here between the repetition of a single word—noun, adjective, verb, adverb, pronoun, and conjunction—and a separate phrase or expression. Further, we can distinguish between repetition, underscored by alteration of a word's form, e.g., degree of comparison, number, tense, mode, etc., or elaborated by the addition of analogous elements or extending it to a more complicated group. Repetition can be double, triple, etc. Repetition can be indirect, i.e., synonymous or analogous, enumerative or gradual. Moreover, it can partly coincide with paraphrase, comparison, examples, and other such devices, as well as with different species of metaphors, etc. On the other hand, repetition

can be symmetric and asymmetrical, anaphoric and epiphoric (initial and final), and so forth, depending on its position in the phrase and passage and discursive intonational system. Finally, repetition can be parallel and antithetical in terms of meaning and modality, including all kinds of oppositions and contradictions (paradox, oxymoron, euphemism, litotes, antiphrasis, antonomasia, catachresis, etc.). Sometimes, this involves wordplay (puns) and witticisms.

Judging only by the text, it is difficult to talk about purely intonational repetitions, which can only affect the structure of a passage or phrase, or the analogy of morphological forms or semantic analogies, or perhaps not affect them at all. All these methods of repetition, from the simplest to the most complex, integrated, manifold, and figurative repetitions on the level of the passage, are extremely common in Lenin's discourse. We can regard them as Lenin's favourite structures, ordinary and typical in his speeches and articles.

There is no need to undertake a formal analysis of the many examples of repetition in Lenin's discourse and classify them by compiling numerous graphs involving the most complicated terminology. The examples should speak for themselves. Readers will excuse me for piling them together in one spot, but otherwise I would have had to cite them in several places.

1. "The most important thing now is [...] the most important thing is [...] the most important thing is [...] the most important thing is working for oneself, not for the capitalist, not for the nobleman, not under the lash".
2. "If we do not root out this betrayal [...] from the heads, from the hearts, from the politics of workers, we cannot escape the disasters of capitalism. We cannot escape new wars".
3. "A government that has betrayed democracy and revolution, a democracy of imperialist slaughter, a government that protects capital and landlords from the common folk".

4. "Alone', we told ourselves. 'Alone', we have been told by almost every capitalist country, no matter what deals we have made with them, no matter what conditions we have named, no matter what negotiations we have undertaken".
5. "It continues to cause us difficulties; it continues to cause us great difficulties, I would say. Not because we have doubts [...] There are no doubts in this respect [...] Not because we have doubts [...] There are no doubts on this score: I can say this for sure. In this sense, the issue presents no difficulties. The difficulties arise from the fact that [...]".
6. "His whole life, Marx struggled most of all against the illusions of petit bourgeois democracy and bourgeois democracy. Most of all, Marx ridiculed the freedom of workers to starve to death and the equality of men selling their strength. [...] Marx elucidated this in all his works on economics. Marx devotes all of *Capital* to elaborating the truth that [...] You will hardly find a single chapter in any of Marx's works that does not deal with this".
7. "This was a test not on Russian soil, but on international soil. It was test by fire and sword, not by words. It was a test in the final, decisive struggle".
8. "It has not and will not become [...]".
9. "You do not want to believe; you cannot believe".
10. "He searches; he cannot help but search".
11. "They are letting us be strangled; they let Hungary be strangled".
12. "Property separates, but we are uniting an ever greater number of millions of labourers all over the world".
13. "They have not understood and have no desire; partly,

they are incapable of understanding”.

14. “All these paths and trails have led and will lead to the proletarian revolution”.
15. “They laugh at it and will keep on laughing; they cannot help but laugh”.
16. “He who has always hesitated cannot help but hesitate and shall continue to hesitate for a long time to come”.
17. “Relations are improving. They must improve; they will definitely improve”.
18. “Any assistance that might be provided to us, that will be provided to us, will not only fail to eliminate this condition. It [...] will further strengthen this condition, exacerbate it”.
19. “We must combat the revolutionary phrase; we definitely have to combat the revolutionary phrase so it will not be said of us, ‘The revolutionary phrase about the revolutionary war brought the revolution to ruin’”.
20. “If we want to fight [*bit*] the autocracy together, together we must likewise finish it off [*dobit*], together we must kill [*ubit*] it, and together repel [*otbit*] the inevitable attempts to restore it”.
21. “To avoid being a Frankfurt talkfest or the first Duma and be a National Convention, we must dare, be able, and have [*smet*’, *umet*’, *imet*] the strength to deal merciless blows to the counterrevolution”.
22. “No, the formula is obsolete. It is useless. It is dead. It would be useless to resurrect it”.
23. “The war cannot be ended at will. It cannot be ended by sticking a bayonet in the ground. The war cannot

be ended by an agreement of socialists from different countries, by a manifestation of the proletariats of all countries, by the will of nations, and so on".

24. "Only the dictatorship of a single class, the proletariat, can resolve the issue in the struggle against the bourgeoisie for power. Only a dictatorship of the proletariat can defeat the bourgeoisie. Only the proletariat can overthrow the bourgeoisie. Only the proletariat can lead the masses against the bourgeoisie".
25. "Politics begins where there are millions, not where there are thousands; not where there are thousands, but only where there are millions does serious politics begin".
26. "Step by step. Once we have stepped on an inclined plane: step by step".
27. "The crisis has come to a head. The whole future of the Russian revolution is at stake. The whole future of the international workers' revolution for socialism is at stake. The crisis has come to a head".
28. "There is no middle ground. Experience has shown there is no middle ground. Either all power to the Soviets [...] or [...] there is no middle ground. Experience has shown there is no middle ground. Either all power to the Soviets [...] or".

I think these examples are quite convincing. The art in them is obvious, and the rhetoric meets the eye, but this is not only because they have been ripped out of context. It is worth remembering, however, whose words these are and imagine the whole speech in its specificity. On the contrary, the notion of rhetoric has become moribund. It should be replaced by something else. As we evaluate these examples, let us try and never lose sight of the entire essence of Lenin's words.

First of all, these examples point to a great verbal tenacity: the same words and phrases return again and again, like leitmotifs

in music. Sometimes, these repetitions generate in Lenin's brusque, cutting, short phrases an unusual economy of words, a lapidary style that is stingy and concise to the extreme. In the longer passages, which unfold more fluently, these repetitions act like a cadence, measuredly rocking the speech back and forth, and forcing the intonation's movement. They are always the fulcrums around which the verbal mass is disseminated. It is attached to them by nodal points and is thus immobilised, concentrated, and closed. This internal stoppage of motion imparts tremendous persuasive force to the word, seemingly destroying the general perspective or removing the word from it. The scale is increased, so that certain elements of speech, thus isolated from the overall flow and plane, more or less recognised, immediately attain an extraordinary prominence and expressiveness, and grow to a size commensurate with the overall dimension. Rejection, opposition, extension, opposition, and gradation acquire an unexpected sharpness and relief. Changes even within a single repeated word—changes in number ("dodging the lesson and lessons of the revolution"), degree ("obscene and supremely obscene peace agreements"), verbal tense (exs. 8, 14–18) and aspect (exs. 8, 12, 17), verbal conjugation and modality (exs. 9, 10, 13–18), prefixes ("a heavy and an ultra-heavy peace", and exs. 20, 21), and other such morphological changes are rendered extremely palpable and come across as modulations to a different tone, thus underscoring the enhancement underway, especially in cases when the variation encompasses several words or a phrase. Such phrases as "the revolutionary phrase about the revolutionary war brought the revolution to ruin" (exs. 20, 21) sound like puns, so strong is the impact of consonance in them, and perhaps this consonance involuntarily has led, in fact, to such combinations and even, perhaps, was reflected in the structure of ex. 2 (the concatenation of the prefix *iz-* ("from") in the original Russian). But this is a side effect, of course, just as the impact of consonance on the structure of speech and its attraction is secondary. Lenin, who is no joker and is disgusted by pretty words and verbal flourishes, is averse to any tendency to refined and brilliant styles, and he displays so few specimens of witty wordplays, such as the expressions "credulous unconsciousness and unconscious credulity" or "the bourgeois democracy and the democratic bourgeoisie". All these are examples of the same repetition technique.

But we should not imagine that Lenin simply beats readers and listeners over the head with repetition like the first stick that has come to hand, and that it likewise explains the typical stability of words and images in his work, turning them into leitmotifs that dominate entire passages. Repetition generates the "geometric" style of Lenin's discourse, straightforward and graphical due to its extreme economy of means, like a drawing devoid of any colouring and shading that would render its clear lines blurry and vague. Lenin appeals neither to the emotions nor the imagination. Both would only impede the direct motion of thought; they would deprive his discourse of the tenacity and firm strength, the steely temper that distinguishes it. Lenin appeals to the decisiveness of the will, which must be moved onto a certain path. To make this happen it must be stopped. The attention must be focused, the field of possibilities must be narrowed, and the will must be clamped in the tight ring of the only correct solution. The repetition-filled structure is the rectangular structure that closes off the exits. It is most easily legible in the example of verbs repeated in all tenses and thus excluding all other possibilities: "Relations are improving. They must improve; they will definitely improve", "it has not and will not become", and "have led and will lead" sound like "was, is, and will be" or "now, in days to come, and forever more". Essentially, they are pleonasms and paraphrases of the concept "forever", but by supplying the verb in all tenses, the discourse not only replaces an abstract adverb with concrete temporal forms but also exhausts all others. Absolutely the same exhaustive coverage, excluding all other conclusions, is achieved through modal comparisons: "They have not understood and have no desire; partly, they are incapable of understanding"; "Any assistance that might be provided to us, that will be provided to us"; and "You do not want to believe; you cannot believe". Even stronger are the expressions clinched by negation: "He who has always hesitated cannot help but hesitate"; "He searches; he cannot help but search"; and "They laugh at it and will keep on laughing; they cannot help but laugh". A similar role of an exhaustive generalisation, enclosing the solution in the square outlined by the argument, is played by such juxtapositions as "shameful and supremely shameful", "heavy and ultra-heavy", etc.

These repetitions can even be hyperbolic or paradoxical, due to the same tendency to maximum scope and generalisation, reduced to one node, e.g., “This is seen by all people, even the blind. It is seen even by those who are worse off than the blind, by those who do not want to see at any price. And yet they see it too”,¹ or “The selfsame resolution is more shameful than the most shameful peace [...] more shameful than any punishing and supremely punishing peace [...] more shameful than any shameful peace whatsoever—shameful despair”.² The final example illustrates especially vividly how, by means of repeating the same word, only strengthened in degree, the two basic and opposed conceptions for and against the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty are grasped and brought head to head.

The same phenomenon of envelopment and generalisation that forces a decision is also represented by more complicated species of repetition. Elaborating on the previous dissemination, multiplication, paraphrase and other species of repetition reinforce it, increasing its degree while remaining on the same line, as it were. Thus, for example, the “whole” future of the Russian revolution is at stake: the whole future of the international workers’ revolution for socialism is at stake, where the expansion of scope is obvious, or “Politics begins where there are millions, not where there are thousands; not where there are thousands, but only where there are millions does serious politics begin”, which can be illustrated by the formula $ab Ba^*$. The definition of the realm of politics is intensified, and this is done by negating another realm and underscoring only the repeated definition, while at the same time the aspect of number, which is simultaneous and akin to the definitive aspect, is denied. Thanks to its combination with a new qualifier, “serious”, the repetition of “politics”, the term under definition, is intensified. Finally, the inversion of the construction’s elements heightens the juxtaposition of the contiguous notions and increases the impression of expansion. Moreover, this cyclical discursive movement (see exs. 26–28) gives it the look of a syllogism, thanks to which the repetition comes across as a logical conclusion. In this connection, the handling of the negative aspect acquires a new force by analogy with the reversed negative judgement. Similarly, examples of the present cyclical construction (exs. 26–28) can be illustrated by the formulas aAa , aA^*a , and aA^{*2} ,

where A denotes the elaborated, disseminated a , and the second power, its intensification. Yet the repetition of the initial a , which concludes these numerous constructions, is no longer the same a after the elaboration of A and AA^* , but much more intense and significant.

The elaboration and strengthening of the repeated elements, therefore, proceeds in very different ways, as is evident from the examples I have cited. Thus, in ex. 23, the expression "the war cannot be ended" is anaphorically repeated three times: in the first sentence ("at will), indefinitely and generally; in the second, through the vivid description of "sticking a bayonet in the ground"; in the third, through a triple gradation that exhausts all revolutionary possibilities—an "agreement" of socialists from different countries, a "manifestation" (generalisation) of the proletariats (expansion) of all (intensification) countries, by the "will" of nations (generalisation, simplification, and expansion). We find the same gradation in ex. 24: "resolve the issue in the struggle [...] for power" (generalisation, abstraction, description), "defeat" (definition), "overthrow" (further definition and specification), and "lead the masses against" (a clearer and more original definition). Ex. 6 is more complicated: "struggled his whole life against illusions". The essence of the illusions is clarified in the next sentence: "ridiculed the freedom of workers to starve to death and the equality of men selling their strength". The understanding that these exposés are important is reinforced by the phrase "in all his works on economics". The development of Marx's idea is repeated hyperbolically with the proviso, "Marx devotes all of *Capital* to elaborating the truth that [...]". Finally, the previous assertions are repeated in the conclusion, as if summed up, through expansion, reinforcement, and negation: "You will hardly find a single chapter in any of Marx's works that does not deal with this". It is the same triple repetition, with a negation and generalisation in the first sentence; with negation and intensification via a striking metaphor-cum-proverb, in the second; and with an intensified generalisation, bereft of the duality of the previous sentences and, consequently, intonationally and logically consummating itself as a kind of coda, in the third. Perhaps the best example, generalising the same concept in sequential order by means of its elaboration or intensification, is ex. 4: "no matter what deals we have made with

them, no matter what conditions we have named, no matter what negotiations we have undertaken". The generalisation is clearly stepwise. Along with these techniques of generalisation, we should also point out generalisation techniques involving parallelism, enumeration, delimitation, and similar concepts of the same order. The comparison of such elements in general likewise generates a restriction in the field of decision-making by exhausting all possibilities, but only, so to speak, at the extreme. The extreme of this kind of induction, however, is not situated indefinitely far away. On the contrary, it is quite close at hand: three phrases in a single construction, a single intonation, and parallel meaning achieve the goal of encompassing the entire range of decisions, which excludes all other possibilities. So, if we do not delve into the exact meaning of the comparisons, we could see the last example, essentially a consistent and stepwise generalisation, as a convincing example of three kind of relations with capitalist countries that is completely exhaustive (deals, conditions, negotiations). Among other, further examples, see ex. 2 ("from the heads, from the hearts, from the politics") and ex. 21 ("dare, be able, have").

These repetitions, especially the periodic and circular repetitions, as well as assonant repetitions, testify to Lenin's undoubted focus on words. The same can be said of the numerous instances of anaphoric repetition, which has such intonational significance. Finally, these are rounded out by devices for amassing synonymous epithets, sometimes by means of gradation, e.g., "immeasurably heavier, more brutal, shameful, oppressive [peace treaties]"; "vacillations, indecisiveness, evasiveness, stalling, omissions, etc.", followed by "these petty concessions, hesitations, evasions, and omissions"; "instead of a mercilessly firm, steadfastly resolute, selflessly courageous and heroic politics [...] their spinelessness, their hesitations, their indecision"; and "when the last labourer, any unemployed person, every cook, every ruined peasant sees, sees with their own eyes [...] when the poor see and feel it".³

Finally, we should examine several more complex examples, which are marked by the particular stability of words and images in Lenin's discourse. They are so dominated by repetition that whole passages seem to have been halted and fused together.

29. "Events so clearly dictate our task to us that procrastination positively becomes a crime. [...] Waiting under these conditions is a crime. The Bolsheviks cannot wait for the Congress of Soviets: waiting is a crime. Waiting for the Congress of Soviets is child's play, a formality, a shameful flirtation with formalities. [...] Waiting is a crime in the face of the revolution".
30. "Our miserable excuses for leftists [...] dodge the lesson and lessons of history, and they dodge their responsibility. The dodges are in vain. They will not succeed in dodging the bullet. The dodgers are bending over backwards. [...] Facts are stubborn things. The fact that [...] it is a fact that [...] it is a fact that [...] Facts are stubborn things. Our miserable excuses for leftists, dodging the facts of their lessons, dodging the question of responsibility [...]"
31. "The Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks have finally slid into the trash pit of counterrevolution, because they had been steadily sliding into this pit in May and June. [...] The Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks bound themselves hand and foot with their policies. They have tied their own hands [...] and this has tied them up even more. They have slid to the very depths of the disgusting counterrevolutionary pit. [...] Their hands are tied. They are at the bottom of the pit".

In these examples, the handling of two or three themes can be compared with the musical constructions known as the canon and the fugue. In the first example, the main theme, "waiting for the Congress of Soviets is a crime", whose way has been prepared by the introductory phrase, is the entire passage's leitmotif. In the first part, its changes are rung, and it combines with complementary formations. Initially, it is supplied incompletely and with a reservation ("positively"). Then, after a new lead-in resounds in the chord "waiting is a crime", their variation and elaboration in its first part and a variation on the chord follows. This is a new elaboration of the theme's first part involving two combinations, growing in strength, and, in conclusion, the chord resounds again, this time amplified.

In the second example, the modulation is driven not by synonyms, but morphological variations: “they dodge”, “they dodge”, “dodges”, “dodged”, “dodgers”, “dodging”. The first two are combined with different themes (“from the lesson and lessons” and “from their own responsibility”), with two parallel variations to be developed. The third provides only one amplified theme, “dodges are in vain”, which in the fourth has a reinforced negative repetition and therefore takes on the guise of a coda. Further, the main theme, in a new, subdued variation (the participial form) opens a new section, disseminating the content of the first section and segueing into a new theme: “facts are stubborn things”, which is repeated, encompassing the progression “it is a fact that”, repeated anaphorically three time. Subsequently, the first motif and the lead-in “our miserable excuses for leftists” are again repeated, seemingly uniting all the elements of the passage in one blow—both the opening’s supplementary motifs and the second motif: “facts—lessons—responsibility”, which represent a *stretto* of sorts. The deployment of the motifs can be denoted as follows: $abcc^2$, bd , b^2 , b^3 , $b\text{-}ef$, $e\text{-}e\text{-}ef$, ab^1ecd .

Similarly, we see two motifs in the third example: “sliding into the pit” and “tying one’s hands”. They divide the passage into two parts, which open anaphorically (“the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks have slid” and “the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks have tied their own hands”) and elaborate on the corresponding motif. The third section opens with a heightened repetition of the first motif and concludes by combining both motifs, squeezed into short phrases: “Their hands are tied. They are at the bottom of the pit”.

We see quite clearly the severity, nearly musical, of the construction in these examples. Their logical function can, I imagine, be understood from our analysis of the previous examples.

Repetition generally seems to have a lyrical function, originating in the organic connection with the rhythmic repetitions and periodically recurrent melodies of songs, the primary manifestation of the poetic word. Repetition’s intonational power, inherent to it even today in verse and prose, testifies to its origins as a motor. But reducing repetition’s role only to this would mean wildly underestimating its full value. Words and discourse have other

aspects besides the motoric aspect, aspects in which repetition plays an equally important and completely different role. At the same time, intonational repetition need not coincide with lyrical repetition. It is present in all genera of words, and since the movement of lyrical discourse, epic discourse, and dramatic discourse is different in each of these genera, the species of intonational repetition typical of each is different as well. Rhetorical intonational repetition may have its own peculiarities, including the strongest and, perhaps, principal repetition in this sense, anaphoric repetition.

The same should be said in general about structural repetition. The encapsulations of the almost musical composition of the passages, cited above, by no means signify the identity of this repetition with lyrical or musical structure, even if it can be encapsulated with literally the same formula. We have seen that rhetorical structure serves special ends inherent only to oratorical discourse. The examples taken from Lenin's discourse are especially persuasive, for they cannot be suspected of serving lyrical, epic, and generally poetic ends. As I have already pointed out in my analysis of individual examples, the rhetorical word has its own specific rhetorical function that differs from the functions that render words lyrical, epic or dramatic.

Considering the change of the function itself, however, we cannot help admitting that we can discuss the corresponding structural elements in various functional systems. Thus, for example, "plot" is present in unique aspects in narrative, lyric poetry, and speech. So, wherever we find repetition, whether in rhetoric, music or dance, it is still repetition, although it plays different roles in different realms. Thus, for example, repetition is an ordinary thing in such narrative genres as the fairy tale, the heroic folk tale [*bylina*], and the ballad, in which the triple sequence of challenges, the obstacles encountered, etc., play a role in defining the plot. It moves the plot along by reinforcing the sense of delay within the narrative, thus underlining the temporal aspect and building up anticipation as the plot seeks its denouement. It is like a dam, raising the level and increasing the mass of the stream and the force of its forward movement. On the contrary, the repetition that Alexander Veselovsky sought to detect in *The Song of Roland* (repeated three times with varying

descriptions of the same moment, if we understand it in this way, rather than as a consecutive link of three homogeneous moments) is, rather, a lyrical repetition than an epic repetition, despite what Veselovsky called it, for it lacks the progressive aspect inherent to narrative.⁴ It lacks the delay technique, and thus the temporal aspect is removed and movement is abolished. A kind of interlude is generated, similar to the one performed by the chorus in the intervals between scenes in ancient tragedies. This interlude is lyrical.

We can identify something similar in rhetorical repetitions. They can act to unfold the “plot”, move the presentation along, develop and refine the arguments. In a word, they can serve the progressive or narrative movement of oratorical discourse. They also generate a kind of “dam” by provoking and intensifying expectation, since the “denouement”, explanation or conclusion at which the speaker drives, and with it, the fulcrum bearing the main weight of the speech, is propelled forward. Building a phrase or passage can also be achieved by different means, with the same goal of shifting the principal weight to the end. These progressive repetitions can be distinguished from others, which, on the contrary, suspend movement, not by building up its pressure, but by turning it inside itself, as it were, forming a kind of motionless whirlpool, whose funnel, figuratively speaking, swallows and absorbs all our attention. Obscuring the horizon, they cut off our sight lines, thus cancelling the aspect of motion. Precisely this type of repetition prevails in Lenin’s discourse and typifies it, as we have seen in the examples cited. As I indicated in my analysis of these examples, Lenin’s preference for this kind of repetition has to do with the very essence of his discourse. He appeals neither to feelings nor imagination, but to will and determination. His discourse does not deploy a panorama for passive contemplation. It does not serve as a guide, leading the indifferent tourist along. It fights the listener, forcing him to make an active decision, and, to this end, it pins him up against the wall. “Don’t move! Hands up! Surrender!”. That is the nature of Lenin’s discourse. It does not allow for a choice. I would argue this is the specific essence of oratorical discourse, particularly of political speech.

2.

The comparison is an extremely diverse device. It can lend itself to the instant and be limited to almost one world, expressively underscoring it, but it can be elaborated into an entire phrase, passage or a freestanding composition of an even larger scope. Moreover, it can be an introductory element, supplementary illustration, an explanatory example to the overall meaning, which introduces and facilitates it, but it can also be this main aspect's immediate substitute and even its direct expression. On the other hand, it can be a simple juxtaposition of synonyms, like a paraphrase, or metaphorical, i.e., changing the meaning of the word or expression itself. Further, it can be elaborated into an illustrative example—a picture, portrait or scene—or act as a general, constant backdrop for the individual metaphors, juxtapositions, allusions, and paraphrases that return to it, or be sustained concurrently, fulfilling a compositional function. Finally, it can be extremely diverse in terms of character, structure, verbal means, and purpose.

As an act of thought, by analogy, the comparison is too general and uncertain an aspect, and as such cannot serve the purpose of poetics, which must be based solely on verbal matter itself. The analogy also lies at the heart of metaphors and assimilation, allusions and synonyms, examples and so on. Therefore, we must find another approach to understanding the verbal phenomena encompassed by this name—first, the presence of comparative particles and copulas that emphasise comparison and assimilation. “Like”, “as if”, “than”, and so on are not obligatory features and do not yet constitute a comparison. There is no difference between the expressions “tears flowed like hail” and “tears hailed down” in terms of technique. One cannot be called a comparison, and the other, a metaphor.

On the other hand, the same role can be played by many other words and expressions, e.g., “seem”, “resemble”, “equal”, “you can say”, “in its way”, “almost”, “quite”, and “real”. “He is quite a giant”, “he is a real beast”, “he is almost an angel”, “he is some kind of savage”, “he is kind of a comet”, etc., are all examples of comparisons that are not essentially changed by the sensation produced by a copula, e.g., in the comparison “he is our banner”. These are all examples of comparisons that assimilate through identification. They are countered by negative comparisons: “it is no joke”, “That

is no white swan swimming out”, etc. They differ from quantitative comparisons: “blood is more bitter than water”, “higher than the clouds”, “farther than the eye can see”, “clear as clear can be”, “like death warmed over”. In all these cases, two elements are compared, and the comparison consists in juxtaposing them in some way. We shall term them simple comparisons. They are extremely common in Lenin’s work.

32. “(Waiting) means consigning the Russian revolution to the scrapheap”.
33. “If you ask the Germans (about the terms of peace), it will be a piece of paper”.
34. “It was easy to start a revolution in Russia. It was like lifting a feather”.
35. “It must be taken as a fact”.
36. “It is like comparing pounds and inches”.
37. “Like people whose hands were tied, they called [...]”.
38. “(Officials) from the boondocks have been turning into workers who are a special kind of ‘weapon’”.
39. Which will be the most trifling thing”.
40. “This is also preaching, but preaching by action. [...] Our decree is a call, but not a call in the old spirit. [...] No, it is a call to the masses, their call. [...] Decrees are instructions calling for a mass practical cause”.

These examples suffice to show Lenin’s extreme sobriety and caution in his comparisons. They usually take the form of equivalences or identifications, and thus they rarely employ the most common conjunctions: like and as if. They usually translate the matter at hand into something more specific and illustrative, often repeating the main content in a more prominent, expressive form,

sometimes resorting to metaphor. In most cases, they are prosaic and juxtapose facts, but sometimes they express a juxtaposition that is nearly paradoxical, e.g., "The free military alliance of tiny Poland and enormous Russia is in effect the complete military enslavement of Poland by Russia". These comparisons readily use proverbs and current expressions; moreover, the usage and ordinariness of these expressions are typical of Lenin's discourse. By the way, we cannot help noting that Lenin sometimes cites these expressions incorrectly, since they are based on ignorance of the original meaning. Thus, "to measure as accurately as a yardstick" and "according to Ilovaysky"⁵ are not clear because, in this connection, Ilovaysky is imagined to be an arithmetic textbook, whereas it is known as a standard history textbook. Or, "they appeal to feelings, forgetting that people's fists were clenched, and the bloody boys were before their eyes".⁶ Use of this quotation renders the picture vague, since, in Pushkin's original, the words describe the remorse of the murderer Godunov.

Especially interesting from the perspective of poetic language are metaphysical comparisons. Metaphors are also based on analogies, but they are concealed, since the juxtaposition of two aspects is not made explicit, but merely stipulated in the alteration of the word's meaning. In this case, of course, the metaphor is such a natural phenomenon of language that the shift in meaning ceases to be felt. Here are several examples of Lenin's metaphors: "the best vanguard of the revolution", "dodge the lesson and lessons of the revolution", "dodge one's responsibility", "dodge the facts", "the illness of the revolutionary phrase", "the childhood illness of novelty", "sowing illusions", "hide the main point of disagreement", "hide behind proud phrases", "force a refusal to hand over power to the Soviets disguised in the phrase 'combined type'", "the press, which screams about it in one million copies", "marry the system of the Soviets with the Constituent Assembly", "emasculate the content of revolutionary doctrine by dulling its revolutionary edge", "hide in the shadow of declarations", "intoxicate themselves with the sound of words", and "enter the thickets of utter confusion". All these examples of extending the meaning of words are so understandable and so widely used that their metaphorical value is quite diminished. This is evident from the fact that sometimes they cannot be realised and combining them, in particular,

produces a discrepancy, such as “dodging lessons in the shadow of declarations”, or “inventing a scarecrow”, “composing an enemy”, “self-serving classist shouts”, “lies that drown and shout down the revolution’s most unquestionable and palpable lessons”, “the soldiers no longer have the stick over them: it was overthrown by February”, “charlatans have been deliberately promoting and inflating the scarecrow of the tsarist counterrevolution”, “the peculiar intertwining of our governmental measures and our agreements”, “merging with our trade unions”, “the game has come to such a stalemate that the revolution’s collapse is inevitable if one adopts the middle position”, and “dictatorships cannot be implemented without several gears from the avant-garde to the masses”. It is hardly possible to speak of metaphor in all these cases, for, apparently there is no sense of the playfulness and life associated with a change in meaning in these phrases. In their majority, these expressions have already become a special jargon, the jargons of newspapers and political rallies. They are intriguing in the history of our age’s language as elements of the revolution’s political vocabulary, but they are not valuable or indicative to Lenin. Of course, it would be wrong to argue the sense of metaphor is equally weak in all these instances. Thus, speaking about the Party’s attitude to trade unions, Lenin initially employs an analogy with the avant-garde (“the Party, so to speak, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat”). The metaphor is also too difficult to realise. Lenin, apparently, senses the awkwardness, apologising for it: “Trade unions generate the link between the avant-garde and the masses”. He then compares trade unions with a reservoir (“trade unions are a reservoir”, “dominant authorities”), “a series of gears in a transmission”, and, finally, “the audible gears of work”.⁷ The images, therefore, fluctuate, and the themes change, and perhaps the final unification, which turns out strange during Lenin’s attempts to flesh it out, has emerged here not only as the outcome of an indifferent or slovenly attitude to expressions that have lost their power as imagery, but rather the same, nearly musical, compositional tendency I noted when speaking of repetitions that conclude like a chord.

More interesting are real metaphors, in which, consequently, the aspect of comparison is hidden and not always defined. It is a kind of allusive paraphrase, as illustrated by the following examples.

41. "All of humankind is confounded in a single bloody bundle, and we cannot escape it on our own".
42. "History so quickly drives [life's] locomotive".
43. "It cannot be stricken from history, and there is no way you can scrape it out".
44. "It's impossible to conceal incredibly bitter reality with a phrase".
45. "History cannot be convinced with speeches. When we wanted to turn the tide of history, it was we who were turned, while history did not move an inch".
46. "Our duty is to bravely look the tragic truth in the eye".
47. "Dictatorship is a big word, a cruel word, a bloody word".
48. "To escape imperialist war by a desperate leap".
49. "I know that the reverse rule will blaze its trail with thousands of loopholes".
50. "I am not in love with decrees".
51. "To change concepts and throw sand in the eyes of the workers and peasants".
52. "If the masses are hurting, and they don't know what is hurting, and [Tomsy] doesn't know what is hurting, but he is hurting, too, then I say it is a merit, not a defect".
53. "To pour the thin oil of reformist phrases on the raging revolution".
54. "Of course, we are making a right turn, which will take us through a rather dirty barn".

55. "If you don't sign the [conditions], you will be signing the Soviet regime's death sentence in three weeks".
56. "If you cannot adapt, if you are disinclined to crawling on your belly in the mud, you are no revolutionary, but a chatterbox, because there is no other way."
57. "To be able to dissuade oneself of that simple fact by uttering different revolutionary incantations."
58. "But we want to rebuild the world. We want to put an end to the world imperialist war. [...] We fear ourselves. We hang onto our dear, dirty shirt because we are used to it. It is time to shed the dirty shirt and put on clean clothes".
59. "We, who have so far marched beneath an open banner and attacked our enemies by yelling at them".
60. "We have gone beyond phrases".

These examples are quite revealing. Primarily, they are examples of Lenin's spirit, which is manifested in two ways, as the spirit of grandeur and the spirit of truth. They are distinguished quite starkly from each other in terms of their "high" and "low" vocabulary. It is no wonder that we encounter many specimens of the former in the article "On the National Pride of the Great Russians",⁸ in which Lenin takes on the role of a new Karamzin, and in his speeches on the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. Lenin attains great poetic expressiveness in these texts. But the examples of the second kind of spirit are, perhaps, even more valuable, because the expressive power of speech emerges in them by opposite means, through simple and even rude words and images, which, however, thus hit their mark even more surely and thus more acutely reveal, as if casting a tall shadow, the uplift of genuine strength. "Dirty linen", "dirty shirt and cowshed", and "crawling on your belly in the mud" are extremely naturalistic images, and in Lenin's discourse, imbued with a passionate striving for the ultimate truth, they acquire an extreme degree of expressiveness. In this

case, the decision is driven into the lowest lowlands, set on the very bottom, and shown palpably there is no other way out, no other solution. Then suddenly this negative description is transfigured, gaining a rationale and new sense due to its juxtaposition with heroic words, underscored by their extreme antitheses: "no revolutionary, but a chatterbox", "we want [...] we want [to do great things] [but] we fear ourselves". In both cases, the acuity of the contrasts brought face to face amplifies them to magnitudes that shut off all other exits except the solution wedged between them. Lenin achieves a great deal of power with this outstanding device, since its spirit is strengthened and justified in this case by the Marxist worldview's stern heroism.

It is also interesting to examine the use of metaphor as paraphrase, e.g., "confounded in a single bloody bundle", "throw sand in the eyes", and "pour the thin oil. (Instead of "calm" or "pacify"; moreover, in this case, too, Lenin seemingly invests a current expression with an ironic meaning that it did not have initially, and then underscores it with the diminutive "thin oil" [*maslitse*].) These expressions are adduced, more or less directly, as clear in themselves, for all their allusiveness. They are not specific illustrations of more general ideas and are not appendices to direct meanings that serve as their rationale and motivation. Translating them into the prosaic language of concepts is not always possible nor easy. For his part, Lenin apparently is far from illustrating abstract ideas with specific examples in this case. Instead, he immediately supplies the opposite—a sensual, poetic form of expression simply because that is how he thinks and, perhaps, he was not always able to convey their content in other words himself, for sometimes the very symbolism of such phrases imparts to the content their general, undefined meaning, which is not amenable to an exhaustive translation. The examples of Lenin's usage of this symbolic language are quite interesting.

Let us turn, finally, to more complex types of comparison.

First, let us note cases of widespread comparison, to which discourse returns again and again. One example—the combination of several comparisons (the avant-garde, etc.)—has already been adduced, and we could add to it examples of repetitions ("dodge", "slid", "tied") in which we noted the peculiar musical character of their composition. We will note several more examples

of the stability of comparative images. Such, for example, are the historical parallels. The need for the New Economic Policy is motivated by an analogy with the siege of Port Arthur. The entire article, which is in fact entitled "From Storm to Siege", is based on this parallel. The signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty is compared with the internal agreement the Party seemingly reached with Stolypin in 1907, abandoning its decision to boycott the State Duma, and, on the other hand, with the Treaties of Tilsit.⁹ "We have signed the Treaty of Tilsit, a new Treaty of Tilsit. [...] We will come to our victory, to our liberation, like the Germany after the Treaties of Tilsit". In these examples, a "shameful and obscene pact of brotherhood" is juxtaposed to the "unprecedented, shameful agreement with Stolypin" and "the immeasurably more serious" (previously, "extremely serious"), "brutal, shameful, oppressive peace treaties", "obscene and supremely obscene peace treaties". (Note repetition of the word "shameful" in all degrees of the adjective.) Thus, we witness a contrast strained to a supreme degree by an entire system of repetitions, brought into particularly sharp relief against a general backdrop of juxtapositions engaged in combat amidst an atmosphere of newspaper and verbal stigmatisation of the "obscene peace treaty" and even rancour within the Party itself.

The other analogy, deployed by Lenin for the same occasion, involves comparing Russia and Germany with a house pet and a "predator armed to the teeth". "A humble domestic beast lies next to a tiger"; "you have no army, but next to you lies a predator"; "to take Petersburg in its next leap. This beast leaps well".¹⁰ The comparison with the predator, having become a commonplace, worn thin by newspapers and political rallies, is updated; it is supplied with new power and expressiveness in the image of the tiger and the imaginative descriptions of the state of affairs. These vignettes are not attached to the text as illustrations, but metaphorically, meaning they are transmitted directly in the idiom of images.

Regarding the same affair, the hysterical outcries over the obscene peace treaty, Lenin compares the psychology of the anti-Brest-Litovsk indignation with the "psychology of a duelling young nobleman who hysterically calls for war, with bourgeois warmongers brandishing swords". (See this passage in another speech at the same Congress, delivered the following day: "[T]hrowing words around and brandishing cardboard swords is useless".)¹¹

Both variations, cited here, apparently derived from a speech delivered a week earlier, about an article in the newspaper *Communist*. “[This newspaper] should have the nickname ‘The Nobleman’, for it sees things from the viewpoint of a nobleman who, as he was dying, beautifully posed with sword in hand, said, ‘Peace is shameful. War is honour’. They see things from the nobleman’s viewpoint, but I approach things from the peasant’s viewpoint”.

Finally, again on the same topic, while discussing the revolutionary possibilities in Germany, Lenin employs comparisons from the field of embryology: “embryonic state”; “the republic in Russia was born immediately, born so easily. [...] The masses gave us the skeleton, the basis of this power. [...] The Republic of the Soviets was born immediately”. These comparisons were undoubtedly prefaced by a speech delivered two months earlier. “But Germany is still only pregnant with revolution, while we have given birth to a healthy baby, the socialist republic, which we could kill by starting a war”. In a second speech, given the same day, he talks about “the movement in the west and the German movement, but in fact no movements have kicked off there yet, while we already have a newborn, loudly bawling baby”.

One of the favourite comparative images I have come across in Lenin’s speeches is “icon”. He employs it so episodically, without setting up the audience or explaining it, that it might even seem incomprehensible, as in the following phrase: “Socialism is no longer a matter of the distant future or an abstract picture or an icon”, whose lack of clarity is heightened by the clumsy combination of “matter”, “picture”, and “icon”. He elaborates on the comparison in another passage: “[A]fter the death [of great revolutionaries], attempts are made to turn them into harmless icons, so to speak, to canonise them, to comfort the oppressed classes with the glory of their name and fool them”.¹² An even more complete explication of the comparison is provided in the following passage: “The resolutions of the [supporters of Jean Longuet] turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into the same sort of icon as was found in the resolutions of the Second International. You must pray to an icon, you can cross yourself before an icon, you should bow to an icon, but an icon can change nothing in practical life and practical politics”.¹³ The comparison is elaborated here and explicated by four parallels or, rather, by three parallels

and the concluding negative perpendicular; moreover, the three parallels ring the changes on the same word in terms of cases and prepositions while rhyming the verb. In contrast to the ironic argument of the previous example, the comparison in this case is equipped with three illustrations, which metaphorically define the status of a slogan that has remained only a sacred phrase. In contrast with this cluster of images, the last phrase deflates the image of the icon to the language of business prose, thus stressing the powerlessness and alienation of everything symbolised by the word in the circumstances of real life. This is a rather complex example both in terms of structure and elaboration of the metaphorical theme, and the subtle play of lexical functions of the verbal elements that constitute it.

Aside from the tenacity of the images, these examples testify to the cautiousness of Lenin's discourse. He can employ an image clumsily or sloppily only if the word has become a commonplace term to him and, consequently, has shed its three-dimensional imagery. Otherwise, he sets it up, explains and illustrates it. Lenin's modesty and exactingness towards metaphorical, figurative comparisons are also borne out in his reservations and apologies. We have already encountered several such cases. Likewise, speaking of the "bureaucratic perversion" of the workers' state, he confesses, "We should have hung that sad [...] label on it".¹⁴ Or, using the image of "switching, transferring or changing" [*peresadka*], which was apparently popular, Lenin inserts it twice in different speeches with a proviso, apologising, as it were, and setting up the audience to catch his drift: "Only when we have done this shall we, speaking figuratively, be able to change horses, to change from the peasant, muzhik horse of poverty, from the horse of an economy designed for a ruined peasant country, to the horse which the proletariat is seeking and must seek—the horse of large-scale machine industry, of electrification, of the Volkhov Power Station, etc."¹⁵ I note parenthetically that the metaphoric paraphrase is also here elaborated and explicated metaphorically in two steps. First, metaphorically in the graphic image of the "peasant, muzhik horse of poverty"; moreover, these specific epithets reinforce the vividness and contrast, and then in the abstract allegorical phrase "the horse of an economy", which functions as an appendix to the first and is bound to it by anaphoric repetition of the basic word "horse".

It is followed by a metaphorically simple and clear phrase, propped up by a similar anaphora, which sets the stage for an allegory that parallels the first allegory, which still seems as heavy as the content it represents. Lenin rarely uses metaphors allegorically. In the examples we examined earlier, we could point to the "thin oil of reformist phrases", perhaps. On another occasion, recalling this comparison, Lenin once again inserts it apologetically, which was typical of his exacting, reserved discourse.

"In this sense, so to speak, if we invoke an old comparison, we did not manage to switch to other trains or teams of horses".¹⁶

Let us dwell on comparisons, adduced as examples or complex descriptions, sketches, imaginary speeches, one's own speeches, etc.

Speaking on the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, Lenin uses the following comparison to illustrate his point: "Two men face off against ten. One puts up a fight, while the other runs away: that is treachery. Two armies of a hundred thousand soldiers each face five such armies. One army is surrounded by two hundred thousand soldiers. The second army should go to its aid, but it suddenly learns the other three hundred thousand enemy soldiers have set a trap for it. Can it go to the aid of the first army? No, it cannot. This is neither treachery nor cowardice. A simple increase in numbers has changed the whole conception".¹⁷

Objecting to Sukhanov's faith in voluntarily surrendering power to the proletariat, Lenin says, "Perhaps in the children's room, 'voluntary concession' indicates something easily returned. If Katya has voluntarily ceded the ball to Masha, perhaps it will be altogether easy to return. In politics, however, the voluntary concession of influence demonstrates such weakness on the part of the one who concedes it, such flabbiness, such lack of character, such spinelessness".¹⁸ We find a rare example of Lenin presenting a picture (against Bukharin's so-called buffer group) in the following passage: "A buffer! Such a buffer that I find it difficult to select a parliamentary expression to describe the buffer. If I could draw caricatures as Bukharin is able to draw them, I would depict him thus: a man with a bucket of kerosene who pours the kerosene on the fire. I would caption the drawing, "Buffer kerosene". Lenin keeps up his witticism. "There is no doubt that Bukharin's desire was the sincerest and most 'bufferish.' But the buffer did not come off".¹⁹

Lenin juxtaposes similar satirical vignettes regarding the military command's request to reinstate the death penalty at the front in 1917. "Sweet-hearted, mawkishly sweet-hearted ministers and ex-ministers, who pound their chests, assuring us they have souls, souls they are damning by introducing and carrying out the death penalty against the masses, and they even cry over it, are improved editions of the pedagogues in the 1860s who followed Pirogov's precepts and shed a philanthropic tear for the ordinary man's son who had been 'legally' and 'justly' subjected to a caning, rather than carrying out the caning in the simple, ordinary, old-fashioned way".²⁰

We could find several more examples, but generally they are not numerous nor are they typical. Considerably more frequent, it seems, are instances of specific illustrative examples, in which Lenin has succeeded in grasping and encapsulating in a few strokes, despite his economy, the essential evaluation of a situation. Thus, posing questions to Otto Bauer and Max Adler apostrophically and providing his own replies (a device typical of Lenin's polemics), Lenin, having outlined a decisive moment in the Civil War, couples negotiations between workers or the intelligentsia, and the White General Denikin with a foreign adviser's imaginary opinion of them that includes a comparison of these compromisers with the western socialist leaders. Lenin often resorts to such couplings or imaginary speeches, which he places in the mouths of others: French workers, Finnish government delegates, "the majority", etc., sometimes putting himself in the shoes of his subject. Thus, speaking of the preference given to shock work enterprises in material terms, Lenin cites an example. "If I am so preferred that I get an eighth of a loaf of bread, I will thank my benefactors humbly for this preference. Without this, the shock workers movement is daydreaming, a cloud, but we are materialists after all. If you say shock work, then give us bread and clothing and meat".²¹ I imagine that such examples are sufficient to describe Lenin's comparisons in the broadest sense of the word, even bereft of the commentary that could be supplied here only in a preliminary, superficial, and general form. A full-fledged scholarly analysis is hampered by such theoretical and material difficulties, that any attempt to undertake one right now, given all the conditions noted at the beginning of the article, would be doomed to failure. I prefer not to have such ambitions. My main

task in the article has been to pick out examples and equip them with introductory notes that point in the direction of understanding them rather than providing readymade interpretations.

I admit that a more direct route to the essence of Lenin's discourse would be supplied by analysing examples in which the means of evoking a response and expressing an idea were not so clear. I have in mind such phrases as, "Those who wish to help waverers must begin by stop wavering themselves", although it resembles Horace's famous dictum: "If you want me to cry, you must first cry yourself"; or "A hungry man cannot distinguish a republic from a monarch; a cold, barefooted, exhausted soldier who has been risking his life for someone else's interests is incapable of taking the republic to heart. And then, when the last labourer [...] no words [...] no forces [...] will defeat the popular revolution. On the contrary, it will vanquish the whole world". I admit they are more typical of Lenin's discourse. But they are too difficult and complicated to analyse. First, we must do the simpler work.

Oratorical discourse, including all species of spoken address (preaching, appeals, invective, orders, lectures, reports, debates, and so), is the broadest, most ill-defined, and varied realm of speech. It is the least amenable to the term "art", and yet it is art. The frontiers between poetics and rhetoric are blurred. Oratorical discourse allows all shades of poetry, and it can be home to narrative, descriptive prose, personal appeals, monologues, and dialogues, as well as exclamations and other species of lyrical expression. It can be structured rhythmically and use fanatical [*sic*] means (harmony, assonance, and sometime even rhyme). It can be accompanied by mimicry, gestures, body movements, and even segue into genuine action or acting. All these elements, however, are altered in oratorical discourse, subjected to its own laws, as painting takes on a special role and meaning when it serves scenography. They do not make up the heart and soul of oratory. Depending on the specific atmosphere in which the speaker immerses them, the perspective with which a manner of speaking endows them, they are deployed differently each time in terms of their relative specific gravity, acquiring colour and volume, and altering the very nature of each. We should distinguish here between texture and manner. It is obvious that, in terms of its media, engraving requires other means than oil painting, but the latter can have different manners.

Depending on them, the means employed can change, respectively and mutually. The main and most significant feature of Lenin's discourse is its analytical nature, its cruel, almost technical character. As a true Marxist, he had to see the product of bourgeois ideology in the dominant system of concepts. In its lexicon, "every word has been forged in the interests of the bourgeoisie" and, consequently, is a tool of distraction and exploitation. Therefore, he does not trust words that have graduated from the school of literature, and he suspects every expression inherited from the previous political culture if not of being an enemy, then of being a dubious defector, which must be subjected continually to a thoroughgoing interrogation and search before trusting it. Moreover, as a genuine materialist in the philosophical sense, Lenin primarily demands that he and others give a clear account of the real meaning of things, a real appraisal of phenomena as facts of life and the class struggle, i.e. pragmatically. He checks all truths, slogans, and concepts against human need and benefit, reducing their evaluation to a weighing, to action, mercilessly exposing their emptiness and uselessness if they do not lead to a solution and actual benefit.

Hence his extraordinary, demanding, almost suspicious treatment of words in general, especially keen to all obscurity, confusion, pap, and double-talk. Seemingly striving for the ultimate truth, extreme realism, direct consciousness, and the utter exposure of things, he despises the "phrase" with every fiber of his being, tirelessly combating the slightest tendency to "lull oneself to sleep with words, declamation, and exclamations", "to hide in the shade of declamation", "to get drunk on the sound of words", mercilessly exposing in words the haze of uncertainty and "principled" abstraction. He seeks out words that clearly and definitely convey the real relationship of things, honestly and directly, without glossing over, covering up or smoothing the rough edges, words that appeal to the will's capacity to weigh and decide, and only to it, without appealing to the imagination or feelings, capably only of clouding and exciting and, hence, of distracting and weakening one's attention, of dissipating the will's tension, dulling the sharpness of our determination by leading us away from the fact, stated in a way that should force a decision, like a gun aimed point blank.

The essence and power of Lenin's discourse also consist in merciless, fearless analysis, exposing the ultimate truth, analysis

leading to the single conclusion about what decision to make. Only from this viewpoint can we correctly consider the qualities of his vocabulary and the significance of his verbal and compositional techniques. The entire construction and all the active functions of his discourse are guided by this central, dominant force, which imparts its effectiveness, justification, and interpretation.

The analytical, pragmatic, and Marxist spirit of Lenin's discourse does not in any way mean the words he employs are monochromatic and indifferent. Only the "currency" of colouring, the coefficient of wordplay we use to measure it must be different than for discourse of a different level, manner, and texture. Lenin's discourse comes across as smooth and immobile, perhaps even flat, only to the superficial gaze, accustomed to other scales of verbal effect. The examples we have adduced have persuaded us, however, that there is a good deal of movement in Lenin's discourse, and even vortices and storms in his verbal environment. We must simply approach it with a more complex, sensitive barometer to catch sight of them.

Lenin's discourse is extremely restrained. It excludes, as phrase-mongering, much more than literary discourse considers necessary. It sees declamation, exclamations, and intoxication with words beyond the limits placed on these tendencies by the artistic demands of style. It can detect "glorifying", i.e. the lyrical aspect, even in political arguments.²² It is quite clear that to assess the style of Lenin's discourse we must consider its own limits of lyricism, epic, and dramatics; otherwise, we would simply ignore everything that constitutes poetry in Lenin's discourse. Meanwhile, we have seen that Lenin has his own spirit. This spirit of truth, which is most typical of him, at the same time can go unnoticed if you are not fitted with the right prescription glasses. The different field or levels of vocabulary in Lenin's work are shaded and intoned differently. We see this when we examine the two spirits present in his work, as in the satirical illustrations (see also "they flitted into the village and gabbed", "they gabbed about principles"), and the nature of his quotations, metaphors, and comparisons. Like the metaphors and comparisons, the quotations are not designed to prettify the speech. They are not decorations, caressing the imagination, nor costumes that colour and drape speech, more often concealing than underscoring the content dressed up in them. The quotations

are valuable in that they supply the speech's literary background and can serve as a measure of "literariness". In Lenin's work, they consist mainly of proverbs and literary quotations that have become commonplace sayings. These are most often sayings from the Gospels, Krylov, Griboyedov (he cites the famous lines from *Woe from Wit*, "He was going to his room and ended up in another one", several times), and classics from the school curriculum. He quotes poetry quite rarely. There is no sophistication in his choices; there are no modern authors. Apparently, this is the legacy of his school days, which had become second nature. These are no longer quotations, but sayings. As such, Lenin usually uses them to speak allegorically. This typifies Lenin's discourse quite well, his caution and restraint in choosing words, their vividness and their power to analyse and expose.

His intimates were in their own environment during his speeches. Naturally, they possess a correct approach to them, for every movement of his speech, every intonation of his voice was heard by them the way he wanted to be heard, pointing to a specific decision. But those who do not have this barometer must first devise one. This article's goal was to show how it is done.

The examples cited in the essay were taken from the following speeches and essays by Lenin:

1. "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power", *Prosveshcheniye* No. 1-2, October 14, 1917.
2. *A Publicist's Notes*, February 1920.
3. "The Crisis Has Matured", *Rabochy Put* No. 20, October 20, 1917.
4. "Speech At A Plenary Session Of The Moscow Soviet", *Pravda* No. 263, November 21, 1922.
5. Ibid.
6. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 23, 1919", *Pravda*, March-April, 1919.
7. "First All Russia Congress of Working Cossacks", *Pravda*, Nos. 47, 48 and 49, March 2, 3 and 4, 1920.
8. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report*. March 6-8, 1918.
9. "First All Russia Congress of Working Cossacks".
10. "Better Fewer, but Better", March 2 1923.
11. "Speech Delivered At A Non-Party Conference Of Workers And Red Army Men Of Presnya District, Moscow January 24, 1920", *Pravda* No. 18, January 28, 1920.
12. "First All Russia Congress of Working Cossacks".
13. *A Publicist's Notes*.
14. "Better Fewer, but Better", March 2 1923.
15. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 23, 1919".
16. Ibid.
17. "Speech At A Plenary Session Of The Moscow Soviet".
18. Ibid.
19. "On the Revolutionary Phrase," *Pravda* no. 31, February 21, 1918.
20. "The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry", *Vperyod*. No. 14, April 12, 1905.
21. "Constitutional Illusions", *Rabochy i Soldat* Nos. 11 and 12, August 4/5, 1917.
22. *Letters on Tactics*, April 1917.
23. *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, September 1917.
24. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 23, 1919".
25. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report*. March 6-8, 1918.
26. "Lessons of the Revolution", *Rabochy* Nos. 8 and 9, September 12 and 13, 1917.
27. "The Crisis Has Matured".
28. "One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution", *Rabochy Put* No. 10, September 27, 1917.
29. "Letter to the Petrograd and Moscow Party Committees", October 1, 1917.
30. "Strange and Monstrous", *Pravda* Nos. 37 and 38, February 28 and March 1, 1918.
31. "Constitutional Illusions".
32. Speech At A Meeting Of The Central Committee Of The R.S.D.L.P.(B.), February 1918.

33. Ibid. January 1, 1918".
34. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report.* March 6-8, 1918.
35. Ibid.
36. "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power".
37. "Constitutional Illusions".
38. "The Dual Power", *Pravda* No. 28, April 9, 1917.
39. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 19, 1919".
40. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 23, 1919".
41. *The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (B.), April 1917.*
42. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 19, 1919".
43. "Better Fewer, But Better".
44. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report.* March 6-8, 1918.
45. "Better Fewer, But Better".
46. Ibid.
47. *A Publicist's Notes*, February 1920.
48. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 23, 1919".
49. "Better Fewer, but Better".
50. *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation, and Trotsky's Mistakes*, December, 1920.
51. "Better Fewer, but Better".
52. *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation, and Trotsky's Mistakes.*
53. *A Publicist's Notes.*
54. "Speech in the Central Committee,
55. "Speech in the Central Committee, February 23, 1918".
56. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 7, 1918".
57. Ibid.
58. *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution.*
59. "Speech at the Russian Communist Party Congress, March 7, 1918".
60. "Speech at the Congress of Soviets, March 15".

1. Lenin, "First All Russia Congress of Working Cossacks", *Pravda*, Nos. 47, 48 and 49, March 2, 3 and 4, 1920.
2. Lenin, "Strange and Monstrous", *Pravda* Nos. 37 and 38, February 28 and March 1, 1918.
3. Lenin, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power", *Prosveshcheniye* No. 1-2, October 14, 1917.
4. Alexander Veselovsky (1838-1906) was an influential Russian literary theoretician. Formalists were often polemically discussing his work, which they considered to be an important achievement in literary studies. (Ed. note)

5. Lenin, "The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry", *Vperyod*. No. 14, April 12, 1905. Dmitry Ilovaysky (1832-1920) was a Russian official historian writing school books on the activities of tsars and generals. (Ed. note)
6. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report*. March 6-8, 1918.
7. Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation, and Trotsky's Mistakes*, December, 1920.
8. Lenin, "On the National Pride of the Great Russians", *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 35, December 12, 1914.
9. Pyotr Stolypin (1862-1911) was Russian tsarist statesman, a big land-owner, and Minister of Interior. Connected with his name is a whole period of extreme political reaction. The Treatise of Tilsit were two agreements signed by Napoleon I of France in the town of Tilsit in July 1807 in the aftermath of his victory at Friedland. (Ed. note)
10. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report*. March 6-8, 1918.
11. Lenin, "Report at the Congress of Soviets, March 14, 1918", *Pravda* Nos. 47, 48 & 49, March 16, 17 & 18, 1918.
12. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1918.
13. Lenin, *A Publicist's Notes*, February 1920. Jean Longuet (1876-1938) was one of the reformist leaders of French Socialist Party and of the Second International who took a social-chauvinist position during the Second World War. (Ed. note)
14. Lenin, *Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bubkarin*, 1921.
15. Lenin, "Better Fewer, but Better", March 2 1923.
16. Lenin, "Speech At A Plenary Session Of The Moscow Soviet", *Pravda* No. 263, November 21, 1922.
17. *Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Verbatim Report*. March 6-8, 1918.
18. Lenin, "The Root of Evil", *From a Publicist's Diary, Rabochy* No. 10, September 14, 1917.
19. Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation*.
20. Lenin, "Paper Resolutions", *Rabochy* No. 2, September 8, 1917
21. Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation*.
22. Ibid.

Boris Tomashevsky

CONSTRUCTING THE THESES

Our day and age, fascinated with poetics, has completely forgotten the sister of poetics, rhetoric. Even the word rhetoric itself strikes our ears as unpleasant. And yet, there is no arguing that poetics, i.e., the discipline that studies the structure of literary works, can progress normally only when it is based on a comparative study of rhetoric, which, respectively, deals with non-literary works (the ordinary juxtaposition of poetry and prose). Given the denial of rhetoric's legitimacy, the need for comparative excursions leads to the problems of rhetoric being shunted off on contiguous disciplines. In the field of language, the problems of rhetoric have been yielded to linguistics (i.e., to stylistics, a relatively narrow realm of the science). In the field of reasoning, these problems have been absorbed into logic and psychology, and poetics awaits comparative cues from these three disciplines. Instead of the clear albeit terminologically awkward juxtaposition proposed by the old scholastic science—between poetry and prose—swayed by the ways of linguistics, we have promoted a different juxtaposition—between practical and literary language, although this juxtaposition does not cover all issues of verbal constructions, referring exclusively to the realm of language. Second, neither does it correspond to the borders that divided poetry and prose, for prosaic language, perhaps, should be juxtaposed with practical language no less than with poetic language.

Logic and psychology, which might serve us in analysing the genesis of verbal structures, have absolutely nothing to say about the intrinsic value of these structures as verbal expression, for, however bound up thought is with language, in the shape of internal discourse, we still cannot replace the problems of verbal construction with the problems of thinking.

The basic issues in the structuring of verbal matter are not affected by logic, psychology or linguistics. That old hag rhetoric should be resurrected just as poetics has been resurrected. Until this has happened, the scholastic theory of literature will not forfeit its significance, for it unites the problems of rhetoric not yet assimilated by the new scientific thought. It is also necessary for the progress of modern culture. Currently, a typical subsidence of culture has been taking place. The age of the "greenhouse" intellectual life has passed. The seedlings grown in the greenhouse have been put to use. Hence the broad democratisation of art and such symptoms as a kind of utilitarianism in artistic trends. They are all manifestations of a healthy tendency to generate a broad cultural tradition. It is a kind of flywheel, a storage battery that ensures the smooth operation of the future. Like any social process, this subsidence is also attended by negative, ugly phenomena, but generally the process is healthy and historically necessary. The greenhouses and hotbeds have been demolished. (Intellectuals are wrongly confused with the intelligentsia, the professional bearers of culture who are necessary for all social relations.)

To put it bluntly, culture's immersion in life also involves the careful cultivation of prosaic speech. Pisarev's dream of merging fine literature with popular scientific literature has finally gained a real footing in Russia, albeit not in the shapes imagined by the realist. We are faced with the practical issue of developing a normal rhetoric.

Such things as the establishment of courses in journalism and oratory, instruction in the art of polemics, and treatises on these questions show us the spontaneous phases through which a normative rhetoric emerges. But no normative discipline is vouchsafed progress without the simultaneous existence of the relevant theoretical discipline. I do not wish to say theoretical rhetoric is meant to solve normative problems, for example, the task of the general theory of elasticity still mainly involves producing the practical, technical discipline of structural resistance. Nay, the relationship between normative and theoretical disciplines is considerably more complicated. Direct utilitarianism does not always stimulate culture; sometimes, it impedes it. But the fact that the two series coexist is a cultural and historical fact that guarantees the progress of theoretical research in the field.

Henceforth, one will be unable to use the so-called newspaper style and chaotic verbal constructions with impunity. Attention has now been paid to this, and every writer senses that he is being observed from without.

The most significant realm of modern prose are works about society and politics. Lenin was the greatest figure in the world in modern social and political literature. That is why it is the most natural thing to begin theoretical studies in the field of rhetoric with Lenin. It is quite natural that the first stage of the discipline should be dominated by descriptive methods of study. Describing the structures of Lenin's articles shall be the foundation of the new rhetoric.

Lenin, who fought with words as his weapons his entire life, felt the whole responsibility of verbal construction. He knew both the positive, empowering force of words and their negative force, the force of inertia and friction, the power of commonplaces and weatherworn expressions.

The main task of Lenin's verbal constructions was their effect on the present. For a theorist, he had a rare flexibility for turning general statements into slogans, into the verbal directives of political action. Hence the close link between words and deeds, and the leitmotif, especially in his polemics, of the relationship between words and actions. "For one thing, no bourgeois politician with any experience will ever have difficulty in mouthing any number of glib, 'brilliant', high-sounding phrases against annexations 'in general,' as meaningless as they are non-committal. But when it comes to deeds, one can always do a conjuring trick".¹ "[A] Marxist must take cognisance of real life, of the true facts of reality, and not cling to a theory of yesterday, which, like all theories, at best only outlines the main and the general, only comes near to embracing life in all its complexity".² "[A] real workers' government [...] does not deceive the workers by talking about reforms [...] but is fighting the exploiters in real earnest, making a revolution in real earnest and actually fighting for the complete emancipation of the workers".³

Hence Lenin's striving after expressive slogans in his verbal constructions, slogans that have a close, specific, current meaning. Avoiding universal general political maxims ("phrases", "theory", "chatter"), he seeks to briefly and clearly convey the

directives of the current political campaign.

In this respect, the so-called theses he delivered on April 4, 1917, the day after his arrival in Russia, are typical.

The form of the speech itself—*theses*—testifies to the desire to cram tremendous political content—basically, a declaration of the Bolshevik Party's entire political programme—into a series of short slogans. The genre is not unique in Lenin's work. In its pure form, it would be repeated in December 1917 ("Theses on the Constituent Assembly") and January 1918 ("Theses on the Peace"). Without the external apparatus of dividing the text into numbered points, the same structure dominates Lenin's declarations and resolutions. Such works as "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution",⁴ and "Political Parties in Russia and the Tasks of the Proletariat"⁵ are extended theses.

The theses were published in *Pravda* on April 7, 1917, along with a framing article entitled "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution".

In the newspaper, the theses are preceded by a brief note on the circumstances of their publication, a dry article (half as long as the first thesis) that quickly introduces the situation in which the theses were produced. If we recalled the political climate, the mockery of the newspapers about the "sealed train car" [*in which Lenin had returned to Russia from exile in Switzerland*], the emphatic logomachy around general liberal topics, and the overall fervour and passion, the business-like tone of the introduction to the theses are a kind of stylistic device, imparting a special energy to their verbal expression.

The theses are grouped according to an external rationale. The first two present a historical evaluation of the current moment (war and revolution). The next two concern Lenin's attitude to the Russian authorities (the Provisional Government and the Soviets). The next four elaborate on the revolution's social and political programme (the state's structure, the agrarian programme, financial policy, industrial organisation), while the final two concern the Party (convocation of a Party congress and organisation of the International).

The first four theses are the most developed, as they touch on current events. The next four theses, which set out tasks for the future, are inserted only as grounds for a specific activity.

The third thesis, on the Provisional Government, is the least developed of the four. Lenin's negative attitude to the Provisional Government provokes the most verbal stinginess.

The verbal volume of each thesis thus corresponds to its relevance. Obviously, this relevance should be regarded from the perspective of April 4, 1917. In this sense, historical and political commentary on the theses would be interesting, but naturally, I have refrained from this.

The three well-developed theses are each divided into two parts: a general statement and the directives of political propaganda that follow from it. I shall quote the relevant paragraphs.

From the first thesis: "In view of the undoubted honesty of those broad sections of the mass believers in revolutionary defensism who accept the war only as a necessity, and not as a means of conquest, in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with particular thoroughness, persistence and patience to explain their error to them, to explain the inseparable connection existing between capital and the imperialist war, and to prove that without overthrowing capital it is impossible to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence".

From the fourth thesis: "The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses".

The paragraphs are thematically similar. It is a matter of explaining things to the masses. They are similarly stylistically as well. In both cases, we see a striking emphasis on so-called continuous combinations.

"Thoroughness, persistence and patience", "to explain their error, to explain the connection, to prove", and "a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation [...] especially adapted to the needs". In this case, words and phrases resonate with each other ("persistent, patient"). (Compare "adapt ourselves to the special conditions of Party work", in the second thesis.)

This continuous construction is a typical and deliberate device on Lenin's part: "the masses [must] join the class-conscious

workers in their cautious, gradual, well-considered, yet firm and direct steps towards socialism" ("Blancism").

"They are trying to get away with empty phrases, evasions, subterfuges; they congratulate each other a thousand times upon the revolution, but refuse to consider what the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies are".⁶ "[C]oncretely things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more [*varied*] than anyone could have expected".⁷ "The question is put in an abstract, simple, so to speak one-colour, way, which does not correspond to the objective reality" (*ibid.*).

Names are likewise listed in this manner, without the use of conjunctions. "Is it because Chkheidze, Tsereteli, Steklov and Co. are making a 'mistake'?" ("The Dual Power").⁸ "The order of the day now is a decisive and irrevocable parting of the ways with the Louis Blancs—the Chkheidzes, Tseretelis, Steklovs, the party of the O.C., the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, etc., etc." ("Blancism"). "The Guchkovs, Lvov, Milyukovs and Co." (*ibid.*).

Constructions of this type are analogous: "The formula is obsolete. It is no good at all. It is dead" ("Letters on Tactics").

Three-part constructions are ubiquitous. In linguistic expressions, the number three is a synonym of "many". It is no wonder that we call three periods in a row *mnogotochie* ("ellipsis"). It is no wonder that in fairy tales, the third time is the charm.

Let us return to the April Theses. Amid the variegated syntax, these two passages are distinguished by their syntactic analogies, and they are the two passages that Lenin himself has singled out. In "Letters on Tactics", he writes, "To leave no shadow of doubt on this score, I twice emphasised in the theses the need for patient and persistent 'explanatory' work 'adapted to the practical needs of the masses'".

This is emphasised in the afterword to theses, fashioned as an argument with Goldenberg.⁹ "I write, announce and elaborately explain: 'In view of the undoubted honesty [...]'. [T]he bourgeois gentlemen who call themselves Social-Democrats [...]". And further: "I write, announce and elaborately explain [...]". "The Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the only possible form of revolutionary government [...]". "Yet opponents of a certain brand present my views [...]".

These continuous, three-part, conjunctionless passages give the impression of excerpts from an infinite verbal series. Since, in the theses, there is a direct correspondence between the importance and verbal volume of the utterance, this artificial amplification of discourse is used in these emphatic places, replacing verbal prolixity. For, with his extremely condensed style, Lenin had no other means for generating verbal plenitude. Where an increase of verbal volume was required, he would resort to the syntactic symbolism of this volume, to the algebraic sign of the sum of the series.

Later, in the afterword that frames the theses, Lenin again resorts to the device. "Mr. Plekhanov in his paper called my speech 'raving.' Very good, Mr. Plekhanov! But look how awkward, uncouth and slow-witted you are in your polemics". "It is, of course, much easier to shout, abuse, and howl than to attempt to relate, to explain, to recall what Marx and Engels said in 1871, 1872 and 1875 about the experience of the Paris Commune".

The afterword concludes with a thematic phrase about words and deeds: "They have got themselves in a mess, these poor Russian social-chauvinists—socialists in word and chauvinists in deed". This thematic conclusion seemingly explains the exclusively business-like and dry introduction to the theses.

Thus, by tracing one of the stylistic devices for structuring the theses, we see that, along with the principles of logical construction, an equation of verbal volumes is present in this case.

Another device for varying and individualising the theses is the diversity of syntactic combinations. The theses consist of paragraphs, consisting of sentences. The number of paragraphs in each thesis is different. There are five paragraphs in the first thesis, three in the second, one in the third, three in the fourth, three in the fifth, three in the sixth, one each in the seventh and eighth, and two in the tenth; the ninth is divided into three points, and point two into three subsections. The structure of the paragraphs is varied. (I do not take into consideration here the ninth thesis, the "bulleted" thesis.) Seven constitute full-fledged, well-elaborated sentences, while the remaining fifteen are verbless phrases, slogans like "Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy", or "Fraternisation". And yet the overall structure is such that the theses segue from verbal phrases to verbless phrases. After three

paragraphs structured around complete, extended sentences, the first thesis concludes with two brief verbless phrases, the last of which is a single word: "fraternisation". The second thesis consists of three full paragraphs; the third, of one verbless paragraph. In the fourth thesis, the situation is reversed: two verbless paragraphs (the first of them continuous), while the concluding paragraph is a full sentence. Beginning with the fifth sentence, the structure is utterly verbless.

Doubts might arise as to whether we are dealing, in these verbless structures, with genuine sentences or whether they are a phenomenon on the order of lists, tables of contents, and so on. Meaning that each construction represents a headline of sorts, an equivalent, a symbol of a potentially conceivable verbal construction; as in a table of contents, similar constructions denote an entire article or even a treatise.

It is understandable why this psychological breadth of the verbless construction is palpable, why expression acquires an extremely condensed character (which is tangibly confirmed in the formula "fraternisation"). And yet these constructions are still sentences, with potential, psychological verbality, as testified by the verbal derivation of most of the nouns in the nominative: "organisation" (as activity), "fraternisation", "explanation", "recognition", "transferring", "merging" [*the immediate union of all banks in the standard English translation*], and "renewal" [*merely "a new International" in the translation*].

In two instances this is not the case, but in both instances the presence of the sentence is particularly stressed.

1. "No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear". "No support" [*in the original*] is in an oblique case [*the genitive*] in parallel with the nominative of "explanation" [*again, in the original*]. "Explanation" definitely focuses on the construction's potentially having a verb.

2. "Not a parliamentary republic—to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step—but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom".

Here the presence of an inserted sentence ("to return [to it] would be") definitely gives the impression the main construction is a sentence.

The absence of verbs and their substantivising conveys a special modality to these constructions, the modality of orders being issued.

The construction is accelerated and supercharged: it attains the maximum energy of expression. It is like a coiled verbal spring.

I should stipulate that I do not approach the question from a linguistic perspective, and I have little interest in the expression's functional value. I am animated by the design of the entire work and, by pausing over elements of style, I want merely to show how the verbal matter, disseminated throughout the work, is similarly coloured.

If we trace the distribution of verbless constructions in the theses, we shall see how the supercharging of expressive energy is consistently pursued. It is done in three steps: within the first thesis, in the segue from the second to the third thesis, and, finally, the chiasmic arrangement of the fourth thesis ultimately sets the stage for the transition to the saturated, verbless fusions of all the other theses.

Such are the methods for arranging similarly structured verbal matter into general theses. We see telltale parallelisms and peculiar anaphoras, reminiscent of Zhirmunsky's *The Composition of Lyrical Verse* (Petersburg: Opoyaz, 1921). I am far from arguing that analysing the configurations of similar verbal matter in works gives us knowledge of how the material is structured. It is not a matter of the shape of configurations or verbal arabesques, but of their expressive and structural function.

Even a purely poetic work is relatively indifferent to the shape of the configuration as such. This is borne out by the fact that all attempts to classify such repetitions boil down to the truism that all manner of forms are present in real matter. This was the case with the attempt to classify euphonic repetitions (see, in particular, Bryusov's latest work on Pushkin's tone painting), and the same time happened to the classification of anaphoric phenomena, i.e., with analogous verbal material. The same thing happened to the attempt to study verse as a complex of individual feet. It transpired that when you pose the question thus, any combination of words is a foot; otherwise, there is no such thing as a foot. Similarly, the classification of euphonic and verbal repetitions does not advance the issue one iota except by making the mere assertion that such repetitions exist. For it transpires that all

forms of combination and composition are equal. Otherwise, these forms would be intangible and indifferent in themselves.

It is not about the shape of combination, but the structural rationale, the expressive function of the given phenomenon, the given individual construction.

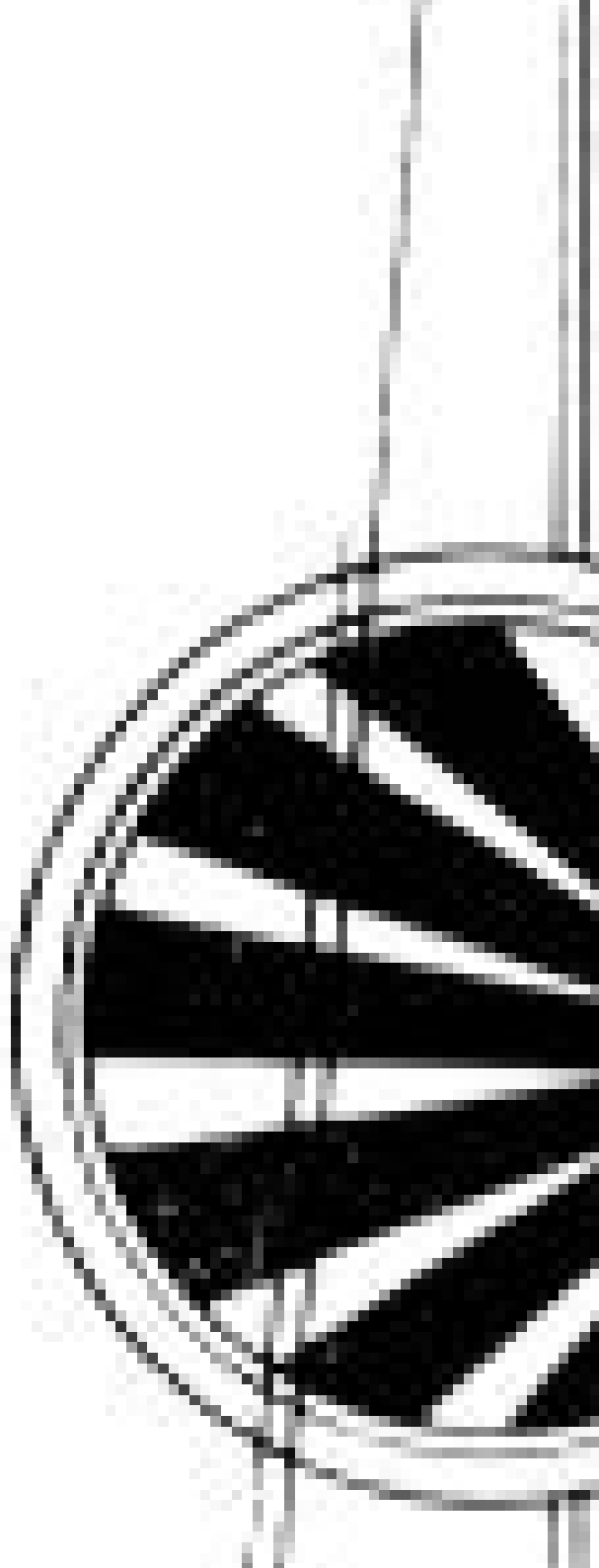
In this case, too, what matters least to us is that the ten theses are divided into groups of four and six by stylistic devices for defining full-fledged and verbless sentences, and that the first group (the "ring") is framed by continuous combinations. What matters to us is the theses are structured not according to purely logical thinking for selecting the right verbal expression, but according to the laws of the verbal (in this case, utilitarian verbal construction), which deal in volumes and the potential energy of expression. It matters that at the moment of a programmatic declaration, the law of verbal formulas was in play, that there was a structural plan.

I leave aside the issue of the thematic distribution of the matter. And yet prose works have their own plots and their own thematic gambits. In the case we have been studying, we have a frame (onset and afterword), whose rationale is that theses, which were written earlier, are reported in a newspaper. This frame has its own opening, *peripeteia* (polemic), and *denouement* (the final combination of the two themes: the polemic and the overall antithesis of words and deeds).

But the analysis of the thematic, plot structure is not among my tasks. By pointing out some methods for distributing verbal matter, I merely wished to show how the problem of amplifying and intensifying thematic can be solved by means of structure in addition to the specific selection of vocabulary. The message can be contained not in the selection of emotional worlds, but in structure itself. In this sense, it is telling that the April Theses are bereft of hyperbolic words (if we do not consider words that take on the significance of political thematic: "predatory", "treacherous", "deceitful", etc.; these words are not covered by simple robbery, betrayal, and lies—cf. "the obscene peace") with the exception of the word "unprecedented" (a typical word in Lenin's lexicon; see his conversation with Dukhonin: "behaviour that brings unprecedented disaster to the working masses").

Lenin's lexical stinginess is compensated by the peculiar expressiveness of his constructions.

1. Lenin, "Blancism", *Pravda* No. 27, April 8 1917.
2. Lenin, *Letters on Tactics*, April, 1917.
3. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, November 1918.
4. Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, September 1917.
5. Lenin, *Political Parties in Russia and the Tasks of the Proletariat*, July 1917.
6. Lenin, "The Dual Power", *Pravda* No. 28, April 9, 1917.
7. Lenin, *Letters on Tactics*, 1917.
8. Nikolai Chkhcheidze (1864-1926), was a Georgian Social-Democrat, Menshevik; as a member of the Provisional Government was supporting the First World War. Irakli Tsereteli (1882-1959) was one of the Menshevik leaders; Minister of interior in the Provisional Government. Yuri Steklov (1873-1941), was revolutionary and historian. Member of the Bolshevik party. Wrote several books on the history of the revolutionary movement. (Ed. note)
9. Joseph Goldenberg (1873-1922) was the Russian Social-Democrat. Was follower of Plekhanov and defencist during the First World War. (Ed. note)





4













DEVICES OF LENIN'S SPEECH

For the Studies of Lenin's Language

Alexei Kruchenykh

Translated by
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The translation of Kruchenykh's *Priemy Leninskoy rechi: K izucheniyu yazyka Lenina* (Приемы Ленинской речи: К изучению языка Ленина), Всероссийский союз поэтов, Moscow, 1928. The translation is made from the third edition.

Foreword to the 3rd Edition

After taking a look at the text before the new edition went to print, I became convinced that the main lines of my arguments needed no corrections. The work done by other scholars, right until recent times, confirmed this. For example, the book *The Language of a Revolutionary Epoch* by A. Selishchev (Rabiroso, 1928) also defines one feature of the revolutionary language: lowering of the high style, “the tendency to simplify the language, to render it a common tone”, not shying away from folksy, even “hard” words. This is evident in Lenin’s language, as A. Selishchev points out through multiple examples.

Among the reasons why I felt the urgency to republish the work was that the 2nd edition was quickly sold out.

January, 1928 A. Kruchenykh

Foreword to the 2nd Edition

The study of the language of V. I. Lenin in all its richness and diversity is a task, which will occupy the front rank of Russian linguistics for years to come. In this book it is naturally possible to cover only a very narrow strip of this enormous field. I have tried to mark out some directions for the future research—my main concerns being Lenin's speeches and his agitational writings.

The reform carried out by Lenin in these works is simply colossal. Lenin changed radically the way phrases are constructed and put to use a great number of new words and expressions, which had been brought to life by the revolution. All contemporary revolutionary orators and publicists are in immense debt to the great begetter—Lenin. To chart this legacy in its entirety—that is the future task.

I would like to point out one essential thing in Lenin's speeches: they are shining examples of a measured, adequate "lowering of style". As we know, the revolution purged the lifestyle of many lofty words and dusty expressions; the revolutionary masses brought into everyday use expressions that had never before existed, and also distributed expressions that by then had been known only locally. Lenin, in all his ingenious sensitivity, detected this stream that invigorated the language and solidified it in his speeches and writings.

The devices, through which this was achieved, are the main subjects of my work. For this reason, I feel that the title *Devices of Lenin's Speech* describes the content more accurately than the previous, far too sweeping *Lenin's Language*. The book, which might some day appear under the latter name, should process more material and present more far-reaching conclusions than this work. But as such a book doesn't yet exist, this serves as a starting point in creating a science of Lenin's language.

In addition, the book includes a notable amount of systematically classified citations from Lenin's brightest and most vivid writings and speeches. These might serve as a preliminary material for future scholars. It might also present the first step for those aiming to work further on Lenin's language.

I

The Russian Language— an International Language

The Russian language has become an international language because of the significant role of the October Revolution. One has to know only a few words—“Lenin”, “Bolshevik”, “Soviet”—all around the world these words function as a password, uniting the workers of all countries.

Conclusion: studying the Russian revolutionary speech is not only our concern, it is a matter of an international importance.

Besides, the most comprehensive literature about the socialist revolution has been published in Russian.

Any scholar of the revolutionary movement, especially of the previous decade, must unquestionably get acquainted with the comprehensive Russian literature available on the subject.

The primary sources are of course the most important, and of these particularly central are Lenin’s speeches. They were like a focal point gathering together the revolutionary energy of the Russian and the international proletariat.

As just as the word was Lenin’s primary weapon until the October Revolution, so does the word also serve as the primary weapon of the international revolution taking place in Europe, Asia, America and Australia.

Because of this, despite that Lenin’s speech loses its sound effects and its “smell” in translation, his main theses remain always precise and expressive, thanks to the almost mechanical clarity and simplicity of his words. Even in translation they become universal slogans of the working masses.

Also, the fact that Lenin’s cause proved to be the victorious one shows clearly that he used a strong and adequate language to express his ideas. This requires that it should be thoroughly studied.

Many people have felt this need. Boris Eikhenbaum calls in his article “Lenin’s Basic Stylistic Tendencies” for a special seminar dedicated to the study of Lenin’s language:

Lenin's style should be the topic of special research, in connection with the history of Russian oratorical and journalistic style.

His suggestion is justified: for the contemporaries of the October Revolution, especially the young, it is crucially important to internalise Lenin's linguistic power of nature, in order to integrate it successfully into their own work.

Zinoviev expressed his view followingly (in the meeting of the Moscow Komsomol faction, November 21st 1924, celebrating the 5-year jubilee of the Young Communist International):

There was a time when our opponents, with whom we have been fighting since the underground days, would declare: "Look at your Lenin! He hasn't written one single text worth translating". This is what Trotsky said, among others. Back then all anti-Leninists would claim that Lenin had produced nothing but polemics, delivered in a wooden language, and that his texts would never be read by anyone outside the small clique of Bolsheviks.

This is what they said, firmly convinced. But now the time has come, when the golden books of comrade Lenin start to appear in translation in European languages. And soon they will be translated into Asian languages and to all the languages of the world. Would anyone doubt this today? Nobody could make that mistake...

Lenin emerged in Russia at the very primal moment of creating a country. At that very moment, one must not talk but act and crush the old—to organise the new. And Lenin proved to be an ingenious organiser.

Of this complete process of organising, we can separate three essential moments: 1) calculating and naming the prevalent facts, and together with this—foreseeing the consequences of these facts, 2) moment of giving the command, 3) moment of monitoring the implementation of the given command.

All these three moments require that the language is kept logical, clear and simple.

II

The Great Man of Practice

A specialist in literature is interested above all in “the word as such”¹, but Lenin was interested “the thing as such”.

For him, the word was auxiliary material. One of his remarks makes this very clear:

Internationalism is not made from words,
nor from resolutions, but from deeds.

He explains his thinking even more sharply and convincingly in this short note:

This pamphlet was written in August and September 1917. I had already drawn up the plan for the next, the seventh chapter, “The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917”. Apart from the title, however, I had no time to write a single line of the chapter; I was “interrupted” by a political crisis—the eve of the October Revolution of 1917. Such an “interruption” can only be welcomed, but the writing of the second part of this pamphlet (“The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917”) will probably have to be put off for a long time. It is more pleasant and useful to go through the “experience of revolution” than to write about it.

Having witnessed Lenin at work L. Trotsky noticed something essential:

In politics, in theoretical writings, in philosophical studies, in studies of foreign languages and in conversations with the people this most powerful machinist of the revolution was irrevocably controlled by one and the same idea, the goal.

He was probably the most extreme utilitarian whom the laboratory of history has produced.

B. Eikhenbaum makes this important remark:

Lenin's speech and articles are exceptionally curious matter for studying oratorical style if only because words were not Lenin's profession and career, but his real deed. Yet his discourse is directed neither towards experts nor the so-called public, but to the entire Russian people and all the earth's nations.

For Lenin, the word presents one of the most important, if not *the* most important value: it is a signal for action. Everyone should study thoroughly Lenin's notes about his views on language. Consider, for example, this word of caution:

The word "commune" is being handled much too freely. Any kind of enterprise started by Communists or with their participation is very often at once declared to be a "commune", it being not infrequently forgotten that this very honorable title must be won by prolonged and persistent effort, by practical achievement in genuine communist development.

In this context it is interesting to note, what L. Trotsky writes in his book "About Lenin":

The power in Petersburg was won. There it was a question of forming the government.

"What name shall we use?" Lenin considered aloud. "Not minister, that is a repulsive, worn-out designation".

"We might say commissars", I suggested, "but there are too many commissars now. Perhaps chief commissar ... No, 'chief' sounds bad. What about people's commissars?".

“People’s Commissars? As for me, I like it.
And the government as a whole?”.

“Council of People’s Commissars?”.

“Council of People’s Commissars”, Lenin repeated.
“That is splendid. That smells of revolution”.

I remember this last expression literally.

This reminds us of Lenin’s demands for language:

One must be able to adapt schemes to life, and not
repeat words that have become meaningless.

It becomes clear, that every true begetter renovates the dictionary.
And Lenin can be “credited” for an enormous amount of
words, some created on the fly, but nevertheless entrenching in the
language and entering dictionaries.

Some pithy words from Lenin on Mikhailovsky:

If this is a polemicist, then I simply cannot understand
what a windbag is!

Also, note Lenin’s use of the word “link”:

Our aim is to restore the **link**, to prove to the peasant by deeds that we are beginning with what is intelligible, familiar and immediately accessible to him, in spite of his poverty, and not with something remote and fantastic from the peasant’s point of view.

And in another context:

May the consequences be what they must, as long
as they won’t develop into a **ruckus**...

Just think: there is a total **want of wares** in
the country...

But as to the people's views, they have a negative opinion on all "grasping and clutching": let us "**commissarise**" and not "bureaucratise"...

I would like very much to quote the example of several **Gos-Trests**² (if I may express myself in the beautiful Russian language that Turgenev praised so highly).

And yet again:

We are not aware of this. Here we are left with communist conceit, with **comconceit** (komchvanstvo), to put it in the mighty Russian language.

Some more words, dispersed throughout his speeches: "Trotskyism", "work party", "governmentation", "clean-up", "to sum up".

It is unlikely that all of these words were "invented" by Lenin. But he strengthened and reformed them immediately upon hearing them, and for this reason we associate them with Lenin's name and regard him as their creator. And do all the "wordsmiths" really invent themselves the words that they introduce into everyday speech?

No, they serve as mediators and messengers of the linguistic power of nature, whose true anonymous author are the masses.

III

Eleven Devices of Lenin's Speech

1. Decisiveness³

Lenin is above all a man of deeds, of a universal cause. And because he foresees the goal of his cause, he has no time for doubts, unlike other speakers who mutters to his audience in the auditorium.

Lenin generally expresses himself in his political writings and speeches very **decisively**. He does not try to persuade his listeners, but to make them face necessities—to agree with the undeniable fact:

Life is marching forward very quickly. In this respect it is magnificent. History is driving its locomotive so fast that before the editors of *Kommunist* bring out their next issue the majority of the workers in Petrograd will have begun to be disappointed in its ideas, because events are proving that the respite is a fact.

We are now signing a peace treaty, we have a respite, we are taking advantage of it the better to defend our fatherland—because had we been at war we should have had an army fleeing in panic which would have had to be stopped, and which our comrades cannot and could not stop, because war is more powerful than sermons, more powerful than ten thousand arguments.

This whole article is very brave and accurate in the face of the undeniable fact, and the last words appear as an undisputable thesis: “war is more powerful than sermons, more powerful than ten thousand arguments”. There’s a fact—take notice!

Decisiveness requires that one formulates his arguments accurately and delivers them in a clear, condensed, almost decree-like form.

In the article "The Character of Our Newspapers" Lenin presents his demands for the modern official speech—it must be short and rich in content, like a telegram:

We must write about these things and note every new fact in this sphere, but we need not write long articles and repeat old arguments; what is needed is to condemn in just a few lines, "in telegraphic style", the latest manifestation of the old, known and already evaluated politics.

He didn't want to waste words but rather crafted the results of his long logical speculations into theses.

Let us remember:

He returned to Russia April 3rd of 1917, and already the next day he spoke to the Bolshevik fraction of the Petrograd Soviet, where he slowly and articulately read aloud his famous theses of the inevitability of the second revolution and the tactics. The same evening he read the same theses in the plenum of the Petrograd Soviet.

He developed his speech on the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk into theses.

Lenin's "points" usually served as a basis for decrees.

This way the decisiveness of Lenin's speech was tied into his activity.

2. Activity

It is difficult to quarrel with Lenin, wrote the English writer H. G. Wells after a meeting with Ilyich.

This is because all Lenin's words were inextricably tied to the cause—and it's naturally difficult to quarrel with facts.

What makes Lenin's speeches so active?

Whether he was writing an article or speaking to the masses he didn't picture himself primarily as a journalist, but an orator, whose words come to their full effect in their delivery.

This is not a new paragraph, this is a crutch, a ladder for climbing the distances that the hands can already feel.

(Nikolai Chuzak)

Lenin's activity grew in relation to the course of the events.

In his youth and during his underground activities Lenin devoted a lot of time for scientific and theoretical work (his main works: *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, *The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy in the first Russian Revolution*, *New Data on the Laws Governing the Development of Capitalism in Agriculture* etc. etc.), but when the political events in Russia became more intense, his voice was one of an orator and agitator, the voice we have mainly learned to know.

Lenin's exceptional determination was one source of his industriousness, which knew no doubt or incompleteness.

This is where the clarity and the resolution of his speech stem from.

There is no middle course. This has been shown by experience.

And further:

No middle course is possible. The working class and socialism must prevail.

The victory of communism is inevitable. Victory follows us.

When the finalised theses are delivered to the masses, there are only two ways about it: as the audience stands face to face with the undeniable facts, they must either turn them down or adopt them in their entirety.

This is once again one of Lenin's rhetorical devices: to put the listener against the wall with life's own logic.

The critics have also noted this device. B. Kazansky writes in his article "Lenin's Discourse: An Attempt at Rhetoric Analysis":

He appeals neither to feelings nor imagination, but to will and determination. His discourse does not deploy a panorama for passive contemplation. It does not serve as a guide, leading the indifferent tourist along. It fights the listener, forcing him to make an active decision, and, to this end, it pins him up against the wall. "Don't move! Hands up! Surrender!" That is the nature of Lenin's discourse. It does not allow for a choice. I would argue this is the specific essence of oratorical discourse, particularly of political speech.

Ilyich's manner to take his rhetoric into the sharpest extremes inspired Vera Zasulich to write pithily about Lenin's "dead man's grip".

Vera Ivanovna Zasulich said to Lenin, according to her own words: "Georgi [Plekhanov] is a fast steed, he gallops and prances—but you are a bulldog, you never loose your grip".

Stalin made this remark of Lenin's speeches:

The two speeches Lenin delivered at this conference were remarkable: one was on the current situation and the other on the agrarian question. Unfortunately, they have not been preserved. They were inspired, and they roused the whole conference to a pitch of stormy enthusiasm. The extraordinary power of conviction, the simplicity and clarity of argument, the brief and easily understood sentences, the absence of affectation, of dizzying gestures and theatrical phrases aiming at effect—all this made Lenin's speeches a favourable contrast to the speeches of the usual "parliamentary" orators.

But what captivated me at the time was not this aspect of Lenin's speeches. I was captivated by that irresistible force of logic in them, which, although somewhat terse, gained a firm hold on his audience, gradually electrified it, and then, as one might say, completely overpowered it. I remember that many of the delegates said: "The logic of Lenin's speeches is like a mighty tentacle which twines all around you and holds you as in a vice and from whose grip you are powerless to tear yourself away: you must either surrender or resign your self to utter defeat".

I think that this characteristic of Lenin's speeches was the strongest feature of his art as an orator.

3. Dialectics

Lenin said: “there is no middle course” for every **given** political moment, but this does not mean, that his arguments would be “eternally” valid and definitive. If at the particular moment Lenin “knows no doubt”, it is possible that in the process of history that what was **undisputed** yesterday may stand in a stark contradiction with the reality and demand a new approach to life. This happened for instance with the famous slogans “take back the loot” and “crush the front”: they made sense only in a certain political situation, but after the change of circumstances and having played their role they had to face a dialectical re-evaluation.

Dialectics mostly characterise the general laws of evolution.

Dialectics examines man within the actual conditions of his existence, and it perceives man mostly as a member of his class and a child of his time. Dialectics never posit anything “in general”—it applies its function to practical conditions.

Lenin was a great dialectic, a combination of a dialectic thinker and a dialectic operator.

The extraordinary dialectics of both thinking and practice naturally reflected in Lenin's speech.

Lenin's speech is the speech of movement.

Lenin invents and analyses processes.

His style gives several examples of how a phenomenon turns into its polar opposite, as in the change of the quantity also brings the change of quality. So, for instance, the demands for the right to work turn in his treatment also in the demands for the right to be lazy:

The author—as befits a little bourgeois—is presumably unaware that the West-European toiling folk have long outgrown the stage of development in which they demanded the “right to work” and that they are now demanding the “right to be lazy”, the right to rest from the excessive toil which cripples and oppresses them.

In this example the demand is strengthened (more quantity), but also the quality changes—instead of work there's laziness.

And the demand has now turned to its opposite, resulting from the unexpected use of the words: “right to be lazy”. The same phenomenon, where the subject turns into its own opposite is evident also in the next example, where the ironically understood “independence” turns into to a real independence:

Marxists consider high capitalism as a progressive phenomenon—of course not because it is “independence” replacing dependence—but because it creates conditions where dependence can be destroyed.

Or:

Our Narodniks aren’t capable of understanding how it is possible to fight capitalism: not by “restraining” it, but by accelerating it; not from behind, but from front; not by reactionary, but by progressive means.

The capital is destroyed by accelerating the capitalistic relations, and in its most evolved form the capital becomes its own negation...

The inert human mind gladly halts at an idea, especially if this idea has once appeared as adequate and “great”.

To be drawn by ideas, believe in them and ignore new facts—this is the tragedy of even many highly intelligent people.

Lenin’s reliable dialectics relieved him of similar mistakes. He always kept in mind that “our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action” (words of Marx and Engels).

Because of this Lenin has no theory about “in general” or for “eternity”:

For us theory forms the basis of actions to be undertaken.

Because of this Lenin’s resoluteness and perseverance are connected to the demands of the moment and have nothing in common with “absolute and eternal truths” or “thing-in-itself”.

A correct revolutionary theory, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close

connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

For this reason, Lenin, the great artist of life, always covered the bones of the theoretical schemes with the living flesh of the ever-changing and evolving reality.

He said: "The more you draw from dialectical thinking, the more you should test the theory by bringing it into action". This was the antidogmatic core of the great decanonisator Lenin.

4. Clarity

Battle with Foreign Expressions Cleaning the Language

Lenin's conscientiousness pushed him towards an extreme clarity. Hesitating, speculating and vague phrases made him angry:

Less political blather.
Less intellectual speculations. Closer to life.

The word **life** must be understood here as a synonym for realism and simplicity. It's pointless to seek beauty and embellishment from Lenin's speeches, instead, we should see there almost technical precision.

Fighting the bourgeois counter-revolution requires accuracy and the ability to see and speak about things as they are.

The clarity of Lenin's expression sharpened his speech and enabled him to orientate quickly in difficult and confused questions.

This ability is absolutely vital for an orator. He isn't thinking of a listener "in general" but an audience in a **certain particular auditorium**; this is why a transcribed speech doesn't always come across to all readers in the published form.

Lenin writes about this difference in the afterword to the article "Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government":

After spending no little effort in correcting the verbatim report of my speech, I am compelled to make the following urgent request to all comrades who want to report my speeches for the press.

My request is that they should never rely on the shorthand or any other verbatim reports of my speeches, never make any endeavour to obtain such reports, and never publish such reports of my speeches.

Instead of publishing the shorthand reports of my speeches let them, if necessary, publish

summaries of them. I have seen newspaper summaries of my speeches that were satisfactory; but I have never seen a single verbatim report of my speeches that was at all satisfactory. Whether this is due to the fact that I speak too fast, or that I do not construct my sentences properly, or to some other reason, I will not undertake to say; but the fact remains that I have never seen a single satisfactory shorthand, or any other verbatim report of my speeches.

A good summary of a speech is better than a bad verbatim report. That is why I request that no verbatim report of my speeches should ever be published.

This excerpt demonstrates once again, that Lenin was highly concerned with the **form** of the speech and worked meticulously to improve it.

It is common for speakers facing an auditorium consisting of different listeners to resort into all sorts of rhetorical tricks and manners: Lenin always is quick to explain expressions that might be hard to understand for someone in the audience. Therefore every quotation made in a foreign language is followed by a translation:

As one of the particularly striking confirmations of the phenomenon observable everywhere, on a mass scale, namely, that of the growth of revolutionary consciousness among the masses, we may take the novels of Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu* (*Under Fire*) and *Clarté* (*Light*).

Please note once and for all, you Cadet gentlemen that dictatorship means unlimited power, based on force, and not on law.

From Ireland to Russia *il n'ya qu'un pas* (just one step).

Or:

What is to be done? We must *aussprechen was ist*, state the facts, admit the truth...

Perhaps this tedious obligation to translate and explain pushed Lenin towards the idea he formulated in the following article:

STOP SPOILING THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

Some Thoughts At Leisure, I.E., While Listening To Speeches At Meetings

We are spoiling the Russian language. We are using foreign words unnecessarily. And we use them incorrectly. Why use the foreign word *defekty* when we have three Russian synonyms—*nedochoty*, *nedostatki*, *probely*.

A man who has recently learned to read in general, and to read newspapers in particular, will, of course, if he reads them diligently, willy-nilly absorb journalistic turns of speech. However, it is the language of the newspapers that is beginning to suffer. If a man who has recently learned to read uses foreign words as a novelty, he is to be excused, but there is no excuse for a writer. Is it not time for us to declare war on the unnecessary use of foreign words?

I must admit that the unnecessary use of foreign words annoys me (because it makes it more difficult for us to exercise our influence over the masses) but some of the mistakes made by those who write in the newspapers make me really angry. For instance—the word *budirovat* is used in the meaning of arouse, awaken, stir up. It comes from the French word *bonder* which means to sulk, to pout, which is what *budirovat* should really mean. This adoption of Nizhni-Novgorod French is the adoption of the worst from the worst representatives of the Russian landowning class, who learned some

French but who, first, did not master the language,
and who, secondly, distorted the Russian language.

Is it not time to declare war on the
spoiling of Russian?

Both in his agitational speeches and in his great scientific works
Lenin combats unnecessary obscurity and vagueness, word-
fetishism:

As for myself, I too am a “seeker” in philosophy.
Namely, the task I have set myself in these com-
ments is to find out what was the stumbling block
to these people who under the guise of Marxism
are offering something incredibly muddled, confused
and reactionary. (*Materialism and Empiriocriticism*)

5. Phrase Haze

Clarity, straightforwardness and accuracy—these are some main characteristics of Lenin’s speech.

This is where stems from his indignation for “heroes of the phrase” and his disdain for agitational texts that call to arms with a pompous, bombastic style, through used-up phrases and generic expressions, which only serve as hindrances for action. This sort of speech is like lint in the hand of a warrior.

We should have less phrases. Because you won’t satisfy the working people with phrases...

The incredibly bitter reality must not be hidden with words...

...A single year... And then it will be impossible to repeat that declaration, because if you remove its envelope of general democratic phrases and parliamentary expressions that would do credit to the leader of a parliamentary opposition, if you cast aside those speeches that so many people like but which we find boring, and get down to the real root of the matter, then the entire declaration says “back to bourgeois democracy” and nothing more.

This is how Lenin could reach the people through the cover of words.

And I don’t believe it’s wrong to assume, that he divided people into three categories: people of deeds, who could become his friends and collaborators; heroes of the phrase—that is, enemies; and finally, the lemmings and weak-willed, for whom he had no use.

Yet again Lenin’s primary attention is paid towards the **cause**. He wants to reveal those, who offer soft explanations and feed people with fairy tales. “Don’t let yourself be narcotised by phrases”, “don’t trade new ideas for old pretty words”: these are some words of advice from this old experienced politician to the young who often take the enemy’s pretty phrases “literally”, only to be deceived by them. If in poetry or literature **the word is the thing**, in bourgeois politics the word exists only in order to **hide**

the thing. This is why Lenin hates this sort of speech and generally calls it **phraseology**. Some examples:

By revolutionary phrase-making we mean the repetition of revolutionary slogans irrespective of objective circumstances at a given turn invents, in the given state of affairs obtaining at the time. The slogans are superb, alluring, intoxicating, but there are no grounds for them; such is the nature of the revolutionary phrase...

The Communist who has failed to prove his ability to bring together and guide the work of specialists in a spirit of modesty, going to the heart of the matter and studying it in detail, is a potential menace. We have many such Communists among us, and I would gladly swap dozens of them for one conscientious qualified bourgeois specialist...

Lenin's task is to foster a capable generation, to nurture technicians and specialists, whose hands our economically backward country sorely needs.

Also in politics, for Lenin the most important words are the professional ones, as he always emphasises the practicality, the **commonplace** aspect of the word, which the "wide Russian soul" so often forgets:

And the writings of Comrade Lenin speak exactly of these things: about the relationship between the masters and the workers, especially working women, who then had to endure heavy suffering, about the working days, salary cuts, punishments—in one word, about everything, that today looks so very secondary to us. (Zinoviev, *Lenin*)

False words are for Lenin no more than a bluff. Those who craft these suspicious expressions have inspired Lenin's harsh term "scoundrel":

The aptness and profundity of Marx's observation become the clearer and more obvious to us the more the content of the proletarian revolution unfolds.

The “formulas” of genuine communism differ from the pompous, intricate, and solemn phraseology of the Kautskys, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their beloved “brethren” of Berne in that they reduce everything to the *conditions of labour*. Less chatter about “labour democracy”, about “liberty, equality and fraternity”, about “government by the people”, and all such stuff; the class-conscious workers and peasants of our day see through these pompous phrases of the bourgeois intellectual and discern the trickery as easily as a person of ordinary common sense and experience, when glancing at the irreproachably “polished” features and immaculate appearance of the “fain fellow, dontcher know”, immediately and unerringly puts him down as “in all probability, a scoundrel”.

Fewer pompous phrases, more plain, *everyday* work...

And further on:

We must all admit that vestiges of the bourgeois-intellectual phrase-mongering approach to questions of the revolution are in evidence at every step, everywhere, even in our own ranks. Our press, for example, does little to fight these rotten survivals of the rotten, bourgeois-democratic past; it does little to foster the simple, modest, ordinary but viable shoots of genuine communism...

...Gentlemen, heroes of the phrase, knights of revolutionary bombast! Socialism demands that we distinguish between capitalist democracy and proletarian democracy, between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution.

These overtly pompous flowers of eloquence of the untalented, lying politicians angered Lenin so much, that he preferred instead to speak in an intentionally crude, rough voice, rather than to echo the phrases of dishonest politicians.

6. Edginess of Repetition

Let's consider the following sample of Lenin's speech. At first sight, the text seems to have excessive repetition as the same words appear consecutively, jarring the flow of thought—however, this is just at first sight! The text slows down exactly at the right moment—and this has all to do with reaching the goal quicker!

Letter to the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.
(Russian Social Democratic Labour Party)

It is possible that these lines will come too late, for events are developing with a rapidity that sometimes makes one's head spin. I am writing this on Wednesday, August 30, and the recipients will read it no earlier than Friday, September 2. Still, on chance, I consider it my duty to write the following. The Kornilov revolt is a most **unexpected** (**unexpected** at such a moment and in such a form) and down-right unbelievably sharp **turn** in events.

Like every sharp **turn**, it calls for a **revision** and change of tactics. And as with every revision, we must be extra-**cautious** not to become **unprincipled**. It is my conviction that those who become **unprincipled** are people who (like Volodarsky) slide into **defencism** or (like other Bolsheviks) into a *bloc* with the S.R.s, into *supporting* the Provisional Government. Their attitude is **essentially wrong** and **unprincipled**. We shall become **defencists** *only after* the transfer of power to the proletariat, *after* a peace offer, *after* the secret treaties and ties with the banks have been broken—*only afterwards*. Neither the capture of Riga *nor the capture of Petrograd* will make us **defencists**. (I should very much like Volodarsky to read this.) Until then we stand for a proletarian revolution, we are against the war, and we are *no* **defencists**.

Even now we must not support Kerensky's government. This is **unprincipled**. We may be asked:

aren't we going to **fight** against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing; there is a dividing Line here, which is being stepped over by some Bolsheviks who fall into compromise and allow themselves to be *carried away* by the course of events. We shall fight, we are **fighting** against Kornilov, *just as Kerensky's troops do*, but we do not support Kerensky. *On the contrary*, we expose his weakness. There is the **difference**. It is rather a subtle **difference**, but it is highly **essential** and must not be forgotten.

We must now examine a new device in Lenin's style: repetition.

The repetition reminds us that the core of the matter is the ideas, not the words, which are left intentionally crude. The deliberately monotonous style and the versatile thoughts create together a very unique tone. And this is not a coincidence. At first sight, a similarly constructed text may appear to us as full of crutches and chains of syllogisms—however, when we look closer, we realise that it's a conscious device, of which we must not divert our attention from.

Kazansky provides us with a more detailed explanation:

First of all, these examples point to a great verbal tenacity: the same words and phrases return again and again, like leitmotifs in music.

Sometimes, these repetitions generate in Lenin's brusque, cutting, short phrases an unusual economy of words, a lapidary style that is stingy and concise to the extreme. In the longer passages, which unfold more fluently, these repetitions act like a cadence, measuredly rocking the speech back and forth, and forcing the intonation's movement. They are always the fulcrums around which the verbal mass is disseminated. It is attached to them by nodal points and is thus immobilised, concentrated, and closed. This internal stoppage of motion imparts tremendous persuasive force to the word, seemingly destroying the general perspective or removing the word from it.

And further on:

Repetition generates the “geometric” style of Lenin’s discourse, straightforward and graphical due to its extreme economy of means, like a drawing devoid of any colouring and shading that would render its clear lines blurry and vague.

Obviously, repetition doesn’t always result in brevity; that is not the point, but the pedagogical aspect of the device.

7. Complication of Repetition

Let us consider another excerpt, which at first sight appears to be full of repetition and complicatedly expressed ideas, but when studied at depth turns out totally clear and direct:

“The New Economic Policy!” A strange title. It was called a New Economic Policy because it turned things back. We are now retreating, going back, as it were; but we are doing so in order, after first retreating, to take a running start and make a bigger leap forward. It was on this condition alone that we retreated in pursuing our New Economic Policy.

Let's observe this citation where phrases are being explained also through their polar opposites alongside with a passage from Isaac Babel's short story “My First Goose”:

“Hey, brother!” Surovko, the oldest of the Cossacks, suddenly said to me. “Sit with us and have some of this till your goose is ready!”.

He fished an extra spoon out of his boot and handed it to me. We slurped the cabbage soup and ate the pork.

“So, what are they writing in the newspaper?” the young fellow with the flaxen hair asked me, and moved aside to make room for me.

“In the newspaper, Lenin writes”, I said, picking up my Pravda, “Lenin writes that right now there is a shortage of everything”.

And in a loud voice, like a triumphant deaf man, I read Lenin's speech to the Cossacks.

The evening wrapped me in the soothing dampness of her twilight sheets, the evening placed her motherly palms on my burning brow.

I read, and rejoiced, waiting for the effect, rejoicing in the mysterious **curve of Lenin's straight line**.

“Truth⁴ tickles all and sundry in the nose”, Surovko said when I had finished. “It isn't all that

easy to wheedle it out of the pile of rubbish, but **Lenin picks it up right away, like a hen pecks up a grain of corn**".

This is what Surovko, the squadron commander, said about Lenin [...]

Here we find two definitions of Lenin's style—first, an abstract definition coming from the brains of an intellectual: "The curve of Lenin's straight line".

The second definition comes from the mouth of the squadron commander, finding the truth from a pile of words: "Lenin picks it up right away, like a hen pecks up a grain of corn".

We must admit, that both of these definitions capture accurately the essence of Lenin's diversely repetitive speech.

8. Elaboration

Lenin almost never leaves a foreign word without translation or explanation in his agitational speeches and articles. For instance, the title “On Compromises” is followed by a short description:

The term compromise in politics implies the surrender of certain demands, the renunciation of part of one’s demands, by agreement with another party.

Lenin has an affinity and skill for explanations and his method is always “straight to the point”. He never strays off into long-winded phrases: he doesn’t want to keep the audience waiting, and risk them forgetting the point during the wait.

Viktor Shklovsky has noted:

Lenin’s style is distinguished by the absence of spells and incantations.

Each speech and article seemingly marks a totally new beginning. There are no terms. They emerge amid the given piece as the specific outcome of the work of separating things.

Lenin’s arguments with his opponents, whether foes or Party comrades, usually start as arguments about words, with claims that the words have been altered.

“Claims that words have been altered”—this serves as another device for explaining, because in order to argue how the words have been altered or placed into a new order, the words must first be understood.

For which goal does Lenin use this device and does he do it intentionally?

It is obviously intentional: repetition and emphasising hit the words “on the head”, which at the first sight might appear as odd, strange and unexpected.

Also, B. Tomashevsky has taken notice of this in his article “Constructing the Theses”:

In "Letters on Tactics", he [Lenin] writes, "To leave no shadow of doubt on this score, I twice emphasised in the theses the need for patient and persistent 'explanatory' work 'adapted to the practical needs of the masses'".

This is further underlined in the afterword to the theses, presented in the form of a polemic with Goldenberg:

"I write, announce and elaborately explain [...]".

A number of articles, divided into large chapters, begin with the elaboration of their theses-like headlines. This is a paragon of Lenin's style, where everything is briefly explicated.

The headlines of the articles are explained in the first few phrases.

And if an important thesis or formula shows up right at the start, it is expanded in further development, and only after that Lenin draws the conclusions:

THE IMPENDING CATASTROPHE AND HOW TO COMBAT IT

Famine Is Approaching

Unavoidable catastrophe is threatening Russia. The railways are incredibly disorganised and the disorganisation is progressing. The railways will come to a standstill. The delivery of raw materials and coal to the factories will cease. The delivery of grain will cease. The Capitalists are deliberately and unremittingly sabotaging (damaging, stopping, disrupting, hampering) production, hoping that an unparalleled catastrophe will mean the collapse of the republic and democracy, and of the Soviets and proletarian and peasant associations generally, thus facilitating the return to a monarchy and the restoration of the unlimited power of the bourgeoisie and the landowners.

The danger of a great catastrophe and of famine is imminent...

Complete Government Inactivity

There is a universal, systematic and persistent sabotage of every kind of control, supervision and accounting and of all state attempts to institute them. And one must be incredibly naive not to understand, one must be an utter hypocrite to pretend not to understand, where this sabotage comes from and by what means it is being carried on.

Control Measures Are Known To All and Easy To Take

One may ask: aren't methods and measures of control extremely complex, difficult, untried and even unknown? Isn't the delay due to the fact that although the statesmen of the Cadet Party, the merchant and industrial class, and the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary parties have for six months been toiling in the sweat of their brow, investigating, studying and discovering measures and methods of control, still the problem is incredibly difficult and has not yet been solved?

9. Quotation Marks

Studying the characteristics of Lenin's style, we must admit that his speeches and articles are full of quotation marks.

This device, when used correctly, creates a number of new effects—words in quotation marks underline irony, banter and jest.

The same thing happens with a word when the stress changes.

If a stressed letter changes the meaning of the phrase, this word or group of words falls inside quotation marks. It now feels excessive to the main idea and gains a new power.

Let us look at a passage, where the words “state of siege” appear three times, every time with a particular tone:

And I am not at all frightened by the dreadful words a “state of siege in the Party”, “emergency laws against particular individuals and groups”, etc. We not only can but we must create a “state of siege” in relation to unstable and vacillating elements, and all our Party Rules, the whole system of centralism now endorsed by the Congress are nothing but a “state of siege” in respect to the numerous sources of *political vagueness*.

Also in the following paragraphs, the irony is expressed through quotation marks.

In the Soviets, the Right Honourable “Socialist” Ministers are fooling the confiding peasants with phrasemongering and resolutions. In the government itself a sort of permanent quadrille is going on in order that, on the one hand, as many Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks as possible may get near the “pie”, the lucrative and honourable posts, and that, on the other hand, the “attention of the people” may be engaged. Meanwhile, the real “state” business is being done in the government offices, in the General Staff.

One comrade said that now they have the “Yuzhbum” and that they are struggling against this “Yuzhbum”,

yet when I asked to which office he had directed his complaint against the “Yuzhbum”, he replied that he did not know, yet that is very important.

He was unable to name the office to which he had sent his complaint concerning the “Yuzhbum”. I do not know what this “Yuzhbum” is; probably it is an office, which suffers from the same bureaucratic distortion as all our other Soviet offices...

Also Y. Tynyanov noticed Lenin’s affinity for quotation marks:

First, I shall focus on one apparently trivial but, in fact, typical device of Lenin’s—his use of quotation marks.

A word is snatched from an opponent’s phrase and put in quotation marks or italicised. Look through Lenin’s articles and speeches, and you shall see they are chockablock with these quotation marks. Lenin enjoys speaking in the words of his opponents, but he makes them suspicious, deprives them of their power, and reduces them to husks.

And further:

A thing at odds with the word has been pulled from it. The word has been shaken in its connection with the thing, and a correction has been made.

There are not only ironic quotes in Lenin’s quotations. He quite often uses current “alien” words in quotation marks. He thus seemingly emphasises he cannot vouch for the words, that he used the first words that came to hand to denote things. Thus, words in this case are not exposed, but simply cannot be guaranteed. These cautious quotation marks demonstrate Lenin’s linguistic cautiousness.

10. Use of Poetry

The presence of irony, hatred of incompleteness and empty phrases and the ability to see things as they are: these are the elementary qualities of Lenin's speech. This is why poetry, especially lyric poetry, which is—according to the writer of one outdated poetry textbook—“the expression of an emotionally moved soul” never interested Lenin.

However, poetry that was involved with some practical task was always necessary and useful to him. Here are his notes on Mayakovsky's poem on Russian Metalworkers' Convention, dealing with our penchant for endless meetings:

Yesterday I happened to read in *Izvestiya* a poem by Mayakovsky on a political theme. I don't consider myself an admirer of his talent, though I fully realise my lack of competence in the literary field. But it's a long time since I experienced such pleasure and satisfaction, from a political and administrative viewpoint. In his poem he utterly derides conferences and makes fun of the Communists because they're always conferring and re-conferring. I don't know whether it's good poetry, but I guarantee you it's absolutely right from a political point of view.

Observations of this sort are very uncommon in poetry, especially in contemporary verse. Lenin quotes poems very rarely, but when he does he uses them for practical, agitational purposes:

Thou art a pauper
Yet thou art abundant...⁵

Only seldom does Lenin quote from the riches of classical poetry, be it Russian or foreign (Lessing, Pushkin, Nekrasov).

It is interesting to note that during a period of forced inactivity, namely his “dacha stay” at the Razliv station of the Primorskaya train line, when the Provisional Government had given orders for his arrest (August–September 1917), one certain rhymed verse harmonised so much with his mind, that he has afterwards mentioned it on two separate occasions, in two different articles:

The Bolsheviks in particular have had the honour of experiencing these methods of persecution used by the republican imperialists. In general, the Bolshevik might apply to himself the well-known words of the poet:

*He hears the voice of approbation.
Not in the dulcet sounds of praise,
But in the savage cries of indignation!*⁶

Savage cries of indignation at the Bolsheviks rang out from all bourgeois and nearly all petty-bourgeois papers almost *immediately* after the beginning of the Russian revolution. And the Bolshevik, the internationalist, the supporter of the proletarian revolution, may justly hear the voice of approbation in these savage cries of indignation, for the fierce hatred of the bourgeoisie is often the best proof of faithful and honest service to the cause of the proletariat by the slandered, baited and persecuted.

The last words “slandered, baited and persecuted” give a strong evidence of his straightforward disapproval.

And in another article:

On account of the vicious lies of “Rech” one could and should repeat the lines:

*We hear the voice of approbation
Not in the dulcet sounds of praise,
But in the savage cries of indignation!*

The fact that the bourgeoisie hates us so savagely only proves, that we are showing the people the right way and the means of dismantling the power from the bourgeoisie.

Lenin quotes the lines “by heart”, therefore in the first example the first line starts “he hears” while in the second one “we hear”.

Irony kills the poetry. "The expression of an emotionally moved soul" is not useful to Lenin, because he is guiding and strengthening the emotions of the masses. In this task one cannot address only one listener, engage in "art for art's sake". The listener must learn the essential things: how to live, work and act.

Most of Lenin's articles and speeches belong to the genre of political agitation. The titles of his articles themselves often smack of exposés and slogans: "A Maximum of Shamelessness and a Minimum of Logic", "The Quasi-Populist Bourgeoisie and Dismayed Populists", "One Step at a Time", "Hesitation Above, Resolution Below", or the renowned "Better Fewer, But Better". He nearly always confronts, on the one hand, opponents and foes; on the other, a mass of people who must be moved, who must be persuaded. In this connection, his discourse is always coloured, on the one hand, by a tone of irony and ridicule; on the other, by a tone of categorical, energetic argumentation. (B. Eikhenbaum)

It is evident that there is no place for sentimental lyricism and embellishing in Lenin's speeches and articles.

A critical and doubting eye will not be charmed by illusory beauty. Nobody's praises should be sung to Lenin, instead his praises will be sung by generations to come.

11. Lowering of Style

For some pseudo-classical Cicero, it would be absolutely unthinkable to introduce any vulgar, common words among the high and lofty ideas when giving a speech on the battle for “the magnificent future”—this would “ruin the style”.

Lenin knew very well, that this very “unthinkable” introduction produces the strongest impression. It reveals the face of an artist with the most uncompromising dedication—of that dedicated to the revolutionary battle:

A third scourge is descending on us—lice and typhus, which are mowing down our troops... Comrades, it is impossible to describe here the horror of those places struck by typhus, where the population is weakened and powerless, and there are no material resources, and all life and communal structures disappear....

We say here: Comrades! We must direct our attention to this question.

Either lice will defeat Socialism, or Socialism will defeat lice!

This phrase astonishes from the very start. What is in common between the word “lice” and the concept “Socialism”, how does one dare to associate them, positing a sharp antagonism between them? On one hand, this juxtaposition creates a new linguistic device—figurativeness—but more generally, agitational assertiveness.

V. Shklovsky has written on Lenin’s use of this device:

People wishing to get to the bottom of Lenin’s style must first realise the style consists in change, not in ascertainment. When Lenin inserts a fact of life into his work, he does not standardise this piece of the mundane, but uses it to alter the comparison’s scale

He compares the large and the small.
He makes use of small-scale examples to bring words down to size and stir them up.

And further on:

Lenin despises people who have memorised books. His style consists in downplaying the revolutionary phrase, in replacing its traditional words with workaday synonyms.

In this sense, Lenin's style closely resembles, in terms of its basic technique, Leo Tolstoy's style. Lenin is opposed to naming. Each time, he outlines a new relationship between word and thing without naming the thing and reinforcing the new name.

Among the formal devices of eloquence—"we will depart honourably from this position"—Lenin inserts this common, working-class expression:

There are immense need and diseases. The famine of 1921 has grown them in fiendish measures. We must fight them like hell, fight them and scramble away from them.

And:

I must say, that we're starting to scramble away from this crisis too.

The words "crisis" and "scramble" appear in stark contrast.

And here's the beginning of the "Letter to the Workers and Peasants Apropos of the Victory Over Kolchak":

Comrades, Red troops have liberated the entire Urals area from Kolchak and have begun the liberation of Siberia. The workers and peasants of the Urals and Siberia are enthusiastically welcoming Soviet power, for it is sweeping away with an iron broom all the landowner and capitalist scum who ground down the people with exactions, humiliations, floggings, and the restoration of tsarist oppression.

These are some “hard words” put to use, never heard before in bourgeois parliaments and salons.

If Pushkin wrote and recited poems in his sleep, Lenin was subconsciously occupied with his goal. N. Krupskaya describes this colourfully:

Ilyich was all activity. He asked Bronski to find out whether it might be possible to get back to Russia through Germany with the help of a smuggler. The journey could be made by plane—no big deal that the plane could be downed. But where to find the magic aeroplane that could transport us to revolution-making Russia? Ilyich had no sleep. Once in the middle of the night he said: ‘You know, I could travel with the passport of a mute Swede.’ I laughed: ‘It won’t work, you might talk in your sleep. You might see the Cadets in your dreams and you would be muttering, “What scum, what scum!” and then everyone would know you’re not a Swede.’

Clearly, he fit his ideas into reality compellingly.

These four words—“take back the loot”—have an irresistibly strong effect.

Lowering of the high style—that was the bravery of a great man, to whom nothing human was alien, and who grasped equally the high summits and the low bottoms.

Lenin spoke for the workers and for the people. And he spoke with their face and their tongue.

Lenin’s lowering of style has been discussed in detail in the article of L. Yakubinsky, and we find a number of quotations underlining this aspect from many scholars of “Opoyaz”, some of them listed below.

The Sources of Influence in Lenin's Speech

Certain critics and theoreticians of poetry and prose, having noticed the stylistic characteristics of Lenin's speech, have tried to locate the sources which may have influenced the formation of his style, charting its birth and development, with most of them seeing similarities with L. Tolstoy (realism, utmost clarity).

B. Eikhenbaum writes:

Generally, Lenin's style is a unique combination of three stylistic layers: the bookish discourse of the Russian intelligentsia, harking back to Chernyshevsky; Russian colloquial, everyday speech and the speech of grassroots quarrelers ("catchphrases"); and Latin oratorical style (e.g., Cicero). The final element is, obviously, the consequence of Lenin's classical education (cf. his frequent use of Latin proverbs), perhaps employed unconsciously to structure certain speeches and articles. By inserting the second element, Lenin violates the traditions of intelligentsia discourse and devalues it. The spirit of everyday words and sayings ("quite unacceptable") is his style's distinctive feature. Here he historically comes into contact with the violation of traditional "poeticalness" that marked Tolstoy and reared its head again among the Futurists, in particular, in Mayakovsky's work. The traditions of the "high" style of oratory have been displaced, despite the maintenance of a number of traditional classical techniques, which attain a new functional significance in such combinations.

Yuri Tynyanov observes this question more detailedly:

The source of Lenin's discourse, its historical roots and seeds, is a special issue. The west's huge tradition of revolutionary style has been reflected in his occasionally pungent puns, his polemical idioms

(e.g., “the denuding of Bonapartism”, “robbing democracy while hypocritically observing the appearance of democracy”, “about the heroes of forgery”, “leftism’ infantile disorder”), and the titles of his polemical articles. Among the Russians, it was undoubtedly Alexander Herzen who influenced Lenin’s polemical style, particularly the deliberately vulgarised style of his short articles in *The Bell*, with their stark expressions and punning titles. But this tradition has been refreshed by the introduction of unprecedented, fresh lexical matter, which shifts Lenin’s discourse.

He also sees the core of Lenin’s speech more distinctly:

Lenin’s discourse—simplified and deflated, incorporating daily life into the tradition of speechmaking and political literature, and therefore unusually dynamic and influential—is a new stage in the revolution of these discursive structures. Certain features of Lenin’s style harken back to a special tradition.

And this makes sense. Everybody has ancestors and parents, but let’s not forget that the parents play in upbringing a smaller role than the peers and friends. With all due respect to his stylistic “forebears”, let’s keep in mind that our task was to examine specifically his, Lenin’s speech.

Speaking of Eikhenbaum’s assertion about Cicero as of Lenin’s stylistic predecessors, they have similarities in emotionality, less so in the temperament of oratory talent.

And speaking of close relatives, while Cicero and Herzen are mentioned, the most important ones—Marx and Engels—are forgotten.

But unlike Marx, who worked painstakingly with complicated laws and theorems and accomplished his arguments on a theoretical level, Lenin was quick to move between different thoughts. He worked endlessly with new formulations and always aimed to implement them in practice.

The second important source in the development of Lenin’s speech is the party politics—his ceaseless participation

in party congresses, assemblies and conventions—the school that created “the Chairman of World Revolution”.

Thanks to this school, Lenin manages to express decisively and clearly the opinion of the collective.

But the most important source is his ability to listen to the Russian people and speak for it, to speak on behalf of all working masses, allowing them to hear in Lenin's speech their own worldwide voice!

IV

Lenin's Anti-Religious Speeches and Articles

So far we have been observing Lenin's political and agitational speeches and articles and witnessed how his magical breath enlivened and kindled them. The words came to life and vibrated. Against this background, it is astonishing to see how formally, dryly and didactically he addresses the religious questions.

This is easy to explain.

Lenin was not interested in religious questions. For him, religion simply did not exist.

The form for the members of RSDLP (b) [Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks)] enquires: "In case you are an atheist, since what age are you not religious?" Lenin's short reply is:

"Since the age of 16".

Lenin found it motivating and necessary to fight with a concrete enemy. How could one fight with an **empty spot**? This is, after all, what religion represented to him. Obviously, the empty spot had to be filled with something useful.

Lenin was among the first one to cultivate and perfect the seeds of atheism, which had been wandering in the brains of many great men already for ages. (Let us remember, how Leonardo da Vinci already at the age of 15 replaced the word "God" with "The Prime Mover", how Giordano Bruno refused the crucifix before being burnt on stake, and many other great atheists.)

For Lenin there is no Orthodox creed or Catholicism—all gravitation towards prayers is for him the same "religion", the prelates of which appear to him as parasites shunning the heavy societal work, feeding on their special status and the self-righteous distribution of prejudices, while using the cunning words of penitence to make us fear the Heavenly Father and to keep us trembling before our Earthly Masters.

Here are the main characteristics of Lenin's antireligious speeches, which usually develop into theses and aphorisms, becoming all the way brisker and commonly acknowledged:

The economic oppression of the workers inevitably calls forth and engenders every kind of political oppression and social humiliation, the coarsening and darkening of the spiritual and moral life of the masses. The workers may secure a greater or lesser degree of political liberty to fight for their economic emancipation, but no amount of liberty will rid them of poverty, unemployment, and oppression until the power of capital is overthrown. Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, over burdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation. Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters just as inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death as impotence of the savage in his battle with nature gives rise to belief in gods, devils, miracles, and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. But those who live by the labor of others are taught by religion to practice charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven. Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.

Having noticed the inebriating effect of religion and how mind-numbingly it affects the working people, Lenin suggests concrete measures to be taken in the battle with the “spiritual booze”:

Our Program is based entirely on the scientific, and moreover the materialist, world-outlook. An explanation of our Program, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog. Our propaganda necessarily

includes the propaganda of atheism; the publication of the appropriate scientific literature, which the autocratic feudal government has hitherto strictly forbidden and persecuted, must now form one of the fields of our Party work. We shall now probably have to follow the advice Engels once gave to the German Socialists: to translate and widely disseminate the literature of the eighteenth-century French Enlighteners and atheists. [...]

Everywhere the reactionary bourgeoisie has concerned itself, and is now beginning to concern itself in Russia, with the fomenting of religious strife—in order thereby to divert the attention of the masses from the really important and fundamental economic and political problems, now being solved in practice by the all-Russian proletariat uniting in revolutionary struggle. This reactionary policy of splitting up the proletarian forces, which today manifests itself mainly in Black-Hundred pogroms, may tomorrow conceive some more subtle forms. We, at any rate, shall oppose it by calmly, consistently and patiently preaching proletarian solidarity and the scientific world-outlook—a preaching alien to any stirring up of secondary differences.

The revolutionary proletariat will succeed in making religion a really private affair, so far as the state is concerned. And in this political system, cleansed of medieval mildew, the proletariat will wage a broad and open struggle for the elimination of economic slavery, the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind.

These thoughts became Lenin's "ABC of Atheism", essential and vital enough to be reinforced in everyday life, poetry and song.

V. Mayakovsky expressed very similar thoughts in his lines:

*We're bored with the heavenly sweeties –
Rye bread is more tasty and fresh!
We're bored with the papery passions –*

Let us live with a wife of flesh!
(*Mystery-Bouffée*)

Lenin professed only one faith—faith in knowledge, science and the cause of the working class.

M. Gorky, who had several discussions with Lenin, described this feature followingly:

I see this man delivering a speech at a labour meeting. The words he uses are extremely simple; his speech is like wrought iron; his logic is like the blows of an axe. Yet in his severe diction I have never caught a word of crude demagoguery, nor the disgusting dandyism of the pretty phrase. He always speaks about the same thing: about the necessity of destroying at the very root the social inequality among men, and about the way in which this can be done. This ancient phrase sounds harsh and uncompromising on his lips. You always feel that he believes in it unflinchingly, and you feel that this faith of his is calm: it is the faith of a scientist, not of a metaphysician or a mystic. It seems to me that he is not interested at all in individual men: he thinks in terms of parties, masses, states. And in this respect, he is possessed of a gift of prophecy, of an intuition that belongs only to a thinker and experimenter who is a genius. He has that fortunate clearness of thought, which is acquired only by hard and insistent labour.

A Frenchman once asked me:

“Don’t you think that Lenin is a guillotine, endowed with a mind?”

“No, I would compare the work of his mind with the blows of a hammer, which possesses the power of sight, and which crushes only that which should have been destroyed long ago”.

Famous Words by Lenin

These were Lenin's words on the compromising movements of Kautsky and Hilferding:

On Compromisers

"They would lawfully marry Constitution with the Dictatorship of The Proletariat!".

"Only the first step is difficult", says the French proverb. Or in Russian: "The first cup of vodka goes as a stake, the second as a falcon, and the third as a little bird".

On Plekhanov

"The difference between an oracle and Plekhanov is that an oracle predicts future events, whereas Plekhanov pronounces his dictum after the event; he brings in the mustard when the meal is over".

On Larin

In the 11th Party Congress Lenin opposed Larin by saying:

"Imagination is very precious—the problem is that Larin possesses it in excess. I reckon that if we could divide his reservoirs of fantasy among all the members of our Party, everyone would have just the right amount".

On Tolstoy

"The contradictions in Tolstoy's works, views, doctrines, in his school, are indeed glaring.

On the one hand, we have the great artist, the genius who has not only drawn incomparable pictures of Russian life but has made first-class contributions to world literature. On the other hand,

we have the landlord obsessed with Christ. On the one hand, the remarkably powerful, forthright and sincere protest against social falsehood and hypocrisy; and on the other, the "Tolstoyan", i.e., the jaded, hysterical sniveller called the Russian intellectual, who publicly beats his breast and wails: "I am a bad wicked man, but I am practising moral self-perfection; I don't eat meat any more, I now eat rice cutlets". On the one hand, merciless criticism of capitalist exploitation, exposure of government outrages, the farcical courts and the state administration, and unmasking of the profound contradictions between the growth of wealth and achievements of civilisation and the growth of poverty, degradation and misery among the working masses. On the other, the crackpot preaching of submission, "resist not evil" with violence. On the one hand, the most sober realism, the tearing away of all and sundry masks; on the other, the preaching of one of the most odious things on earth, namely, religion, the striving to replace officially appointed priests by priests who will serve from moral conviction, i. e., to cultivate the most refined and, therefore, particularly disgusting clericalism".

Epilogue

Although Lenin listened to the opinion of the majority, he didn't always regard it highly.

J. Stalin described it thus:

Party leaders cannot but prize the opinion of the majority of their party. A majority is a power with which a leader cannot but reckon. Lenin understood this no less than any other party leader. But Lenin never became a captive of the majority, especially when that majority had no basis of principle. There have been times in the history of our Party when the opinion of the majority or the momentary interests of the Party conflicted with the fundamental interests of the proletariat. On such occasions, Lenin would never hesitate and resolutely took his stand in support of principle as against the majority of the Party. Moreover, he did not fear on such occasions literally to stand alone against all, considering—as he would often say—that “a policy based on principle is the only correct policy”.

(This trait becomes particularly visible during the period of 1914–1917, when Lenin stood almost alone against social-chauvinism, “to denounce the treachery of the Guesdes and Kautskys and to stigmatise the half-heartedness of the betwixt and between ‘revolutionaries’”, as Stalin puts it.)

Talking about his farsightedness and devotion to principles, Lenin's speech had not only common revolutionary values, but also individual merits: iron consistency, integrity, his “bulldog grip”, all of which we have tried to demonstrate in this work at hand by describing the eleven devices of his speech.

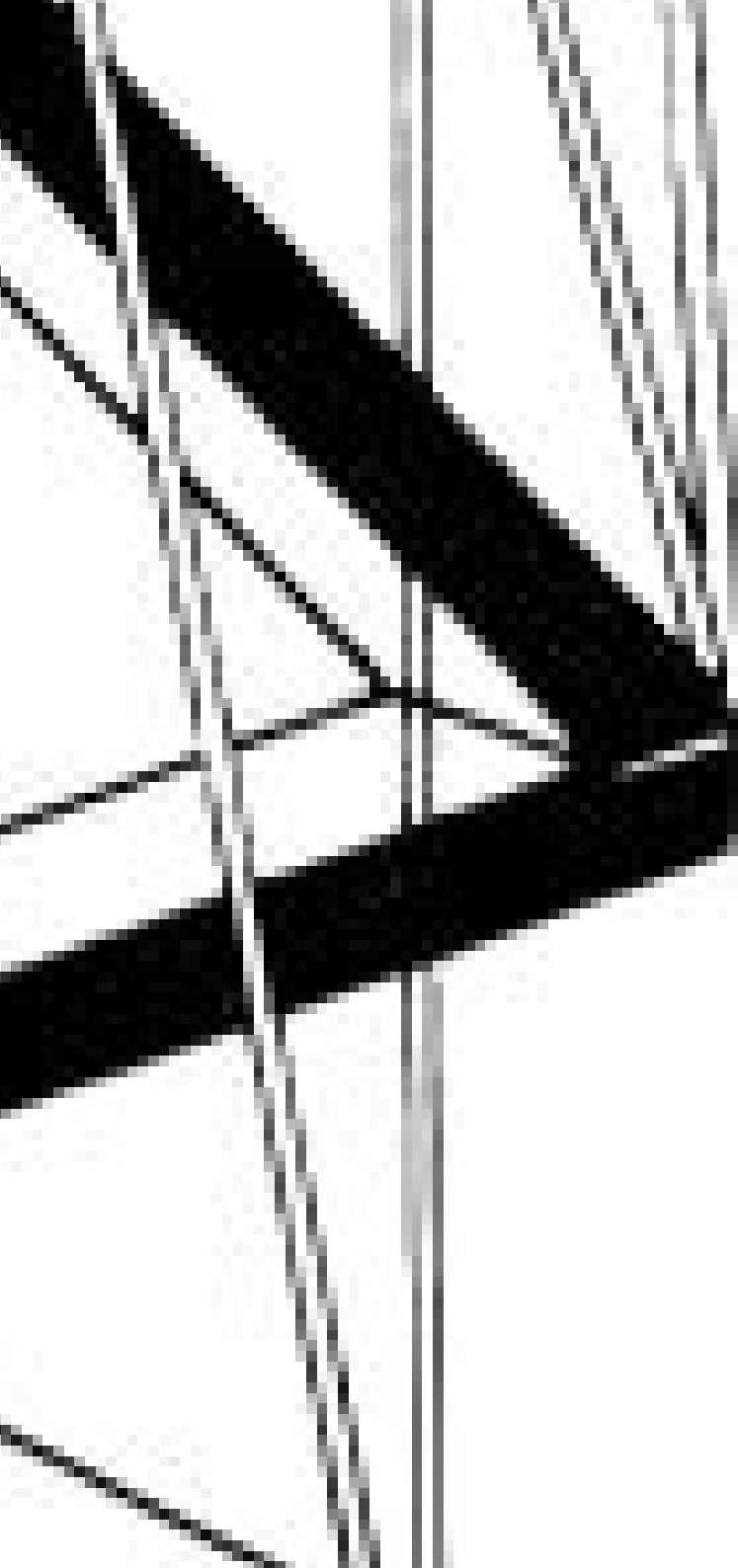
Lenin's speech continues to grow and develop even today: the more we study and understand it, the more convinced we become of its importance not only for our contemporaries but as well for the growing Little Octobrists, who will accomplish the international October Revolution.

1. "The Word as Such" (Slovo kak takovoe) is the name of Kruchenykh's and Velimir Khlebnikov's futuristic manifesto, published in 1913. (Transl. Note)
2. Short for "Gosudarstvennyi Trest" (State Trust). (Transl. Note)
3. My aim in this whole book is not as much to prove as to demonstrate. I think that gathering together Lenin's thoughts on the Russian language (in his own typical style) from his 20 volume collected works serves as the most illustrative proof.
4. Besides, I have tried to organise these points in sections, using Lenin's works and his comrades' recollections as my sources, in order to draw out a map for the big work that awaits in the future.
5. The theoretical principles of Lenin's language have already been covered in the writings of the group OPOYAZ, to which I shall refer to later.
6. A pun on "truth" ("Pravda"), also the name of the newspaper the narrator is reading.
7. Nekrasov, "Who Can Be Happy in Russia?".
8. Nekrasov, "Blessed Is the Unmalicious Poet".







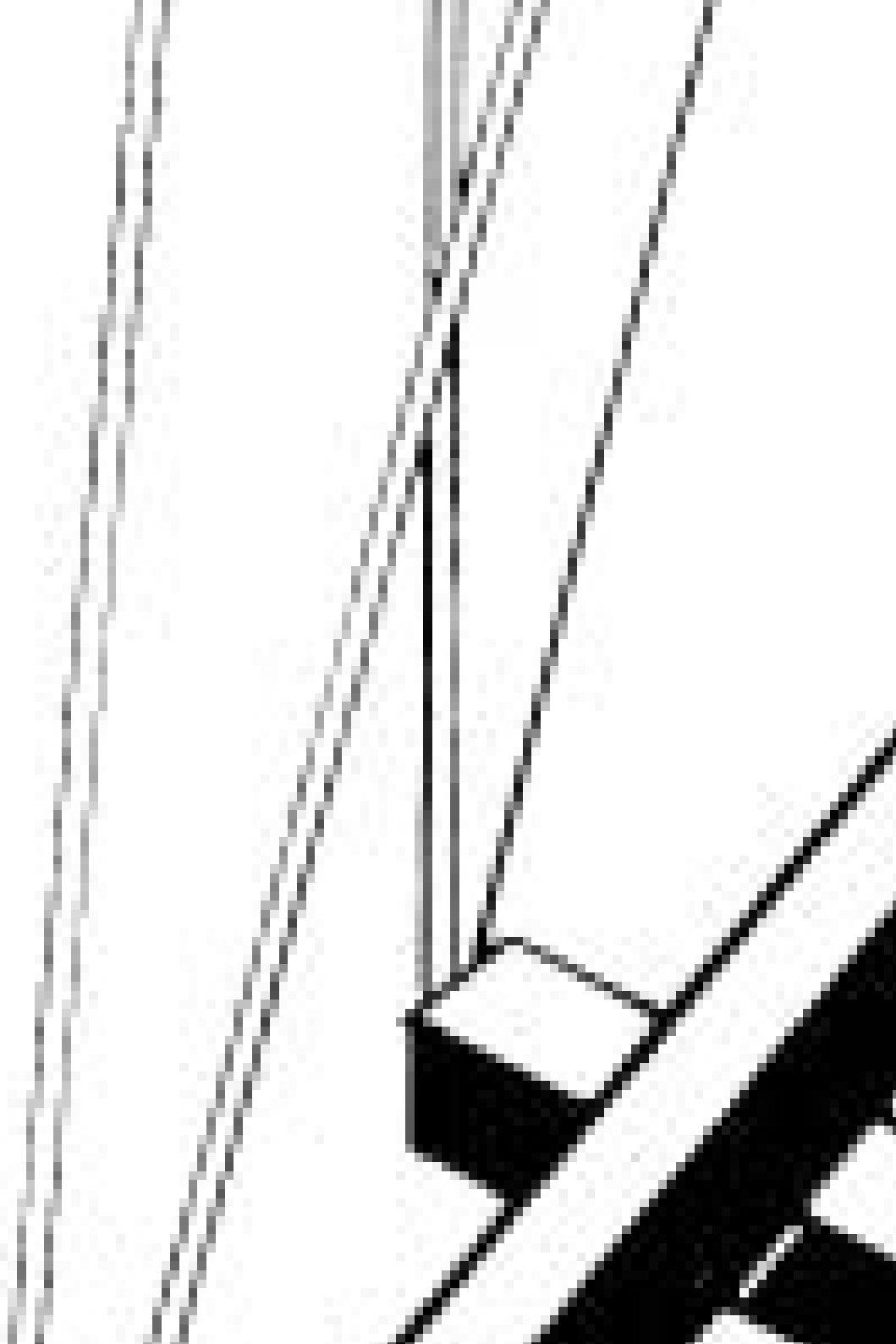




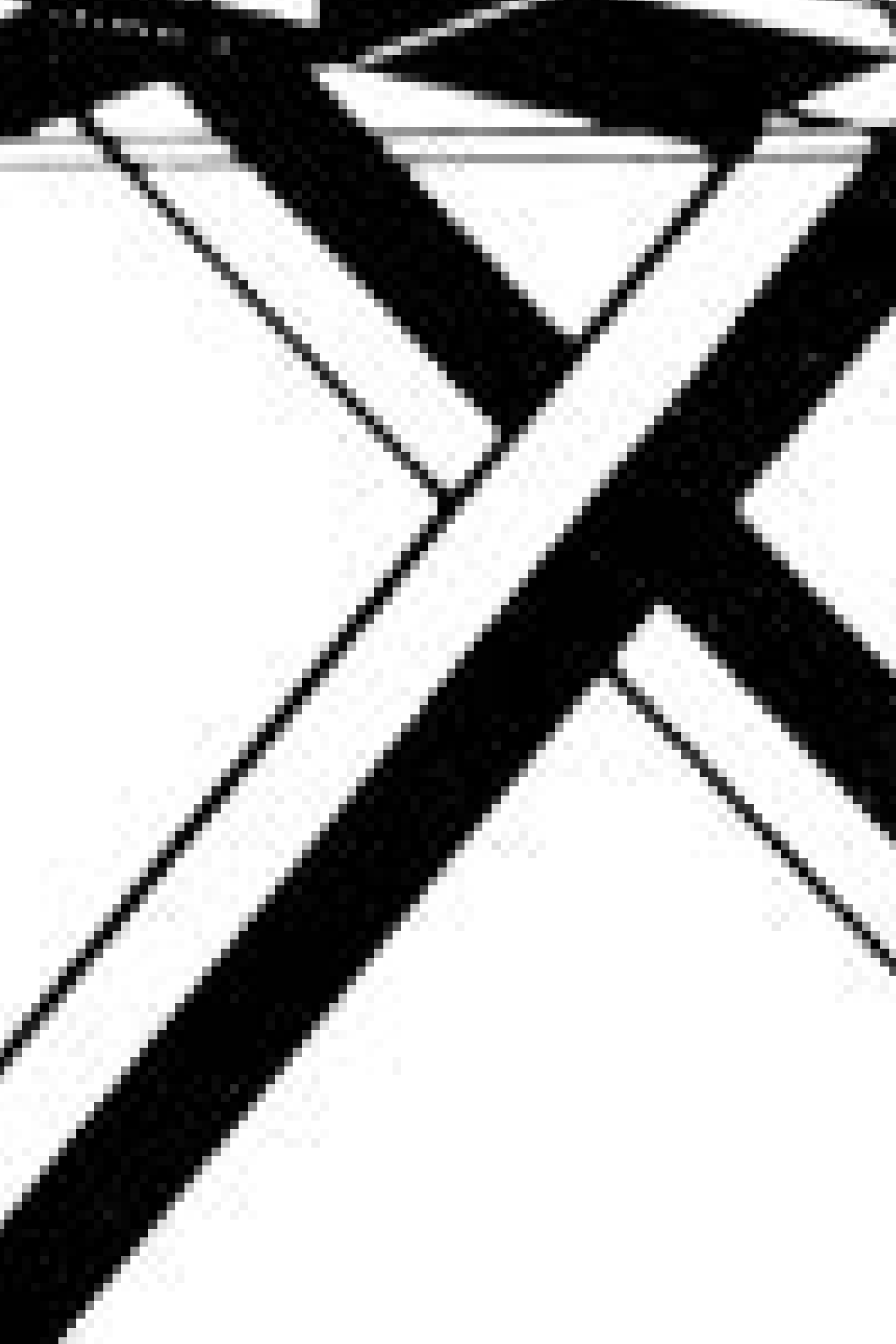




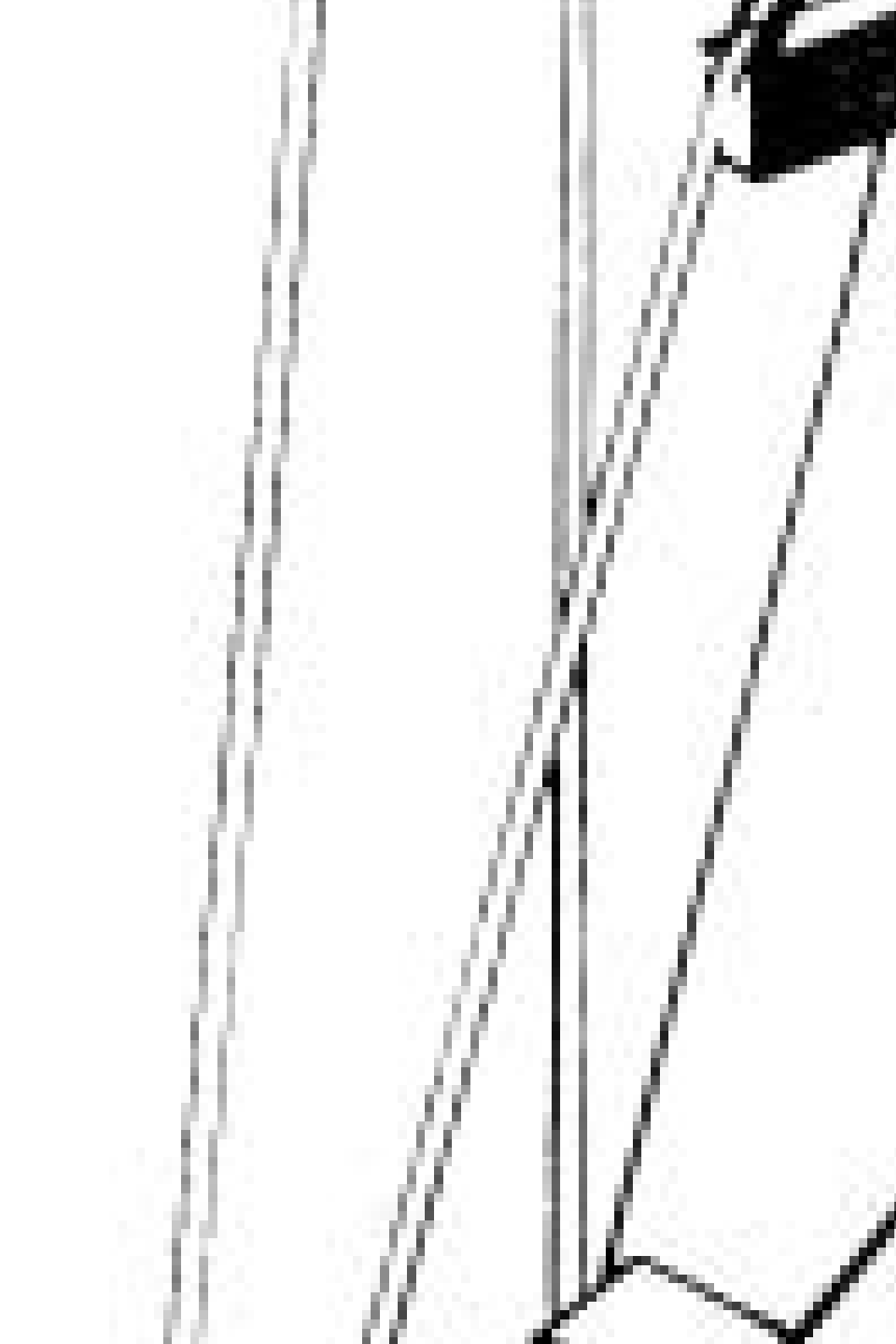


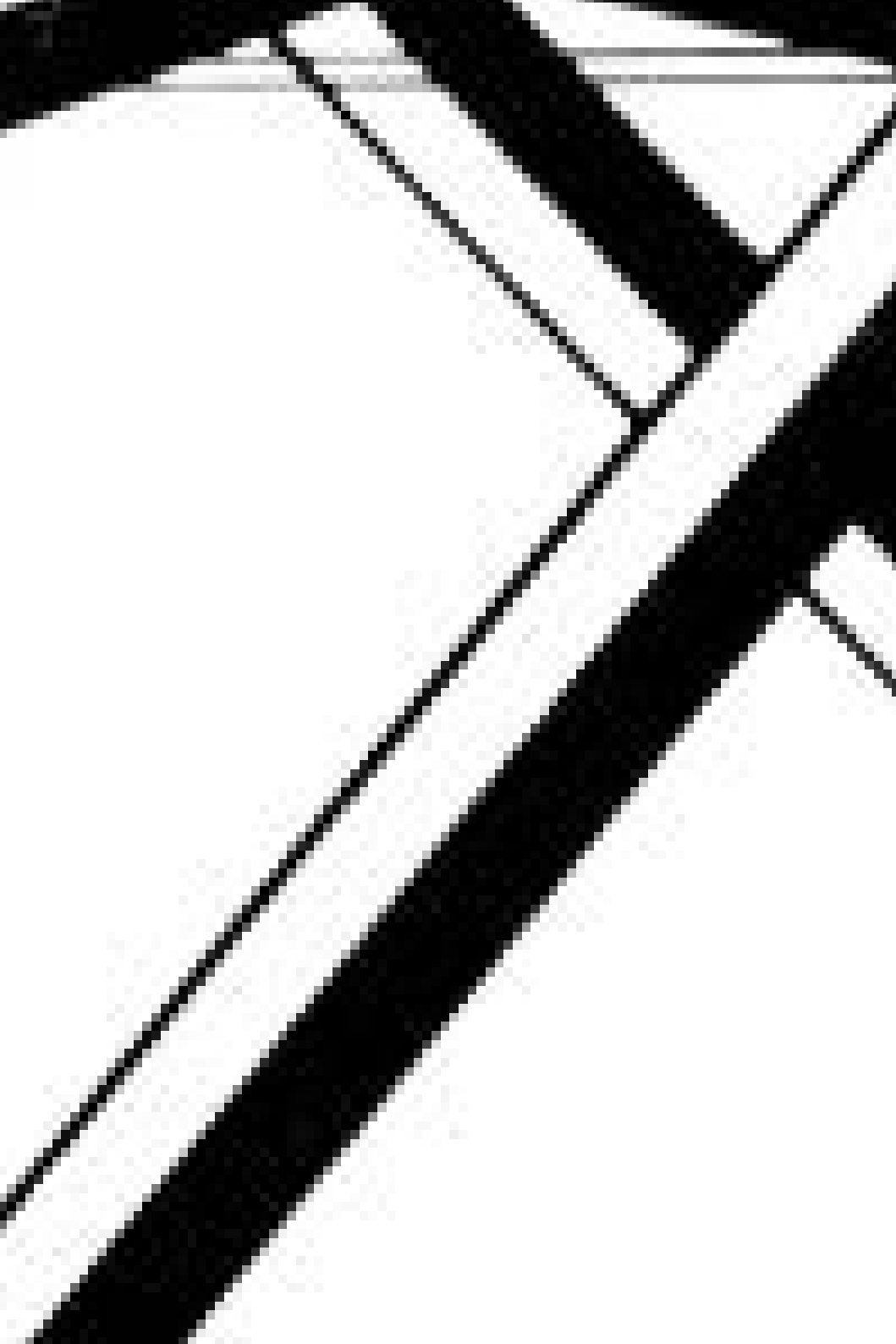
















FOREWORD

In the Shadow of Never-Ending Warfare:
Reflections on Shklovsky
and Particularly Lenin Today

Darko Suvin

There is a wonderful apocryphal anecdote, which I often quote in these horrific years of devolving imperialist slaughters, an imaginary dialogue between Shklovsky and Trotsky, the most intelligent Formalist and the most intelligent Leninist (though each had also serious blind spots):

Shklovsky said to Trotsky—and the first half is a real sentence of his—“I’m not interested in what flag flies on the fortress, I write about perception and literature and don’t care about war”.

Trotsky replied, “But war cares about you”.

In what follows I must resist the temptation to write about Trotsky (who surely gave us the most tenable hypothesis about the Russian Revolution as a “combined and unequal” mega-development¹) since our theme is the Formalists and Lenin, and I therefore focus on Shklovsky and Lenin.

Why?



Lenin should be obvious but isn’t. It is not so much because of him, that is, for a (very necessary) piety about him, as about all our Great Left Ancestors, from Lucretius and Mo Zi through the pivots of Spinoza, Hegel and Marx, up to—and I mention only those nearest and most sympathetic to me, preferring critical sympathy to the fashionable and impossible empathy—Brecht, Gramsci, Mao, Castro, Ho, Tito, and Kidrič.² It is *because of us*: for Lenin’s major international achievement was contracting out of the huge and quite symptomatic carnage of the first capitalist and imperialist world war, a harbinger of all the mass killings, where genocide returned from the colonies to the continent of metropolitan imperialism as a sign that any real liberalism was over at home too and destruction of people, commodities, and nature needed for quicker circulation of capital will henceforth be on a permanent mass basis: World War no. 2 1936–45, no. 3 during the Cold War after 1945, and no. 4 from Libya and Iraq on in this glad new century. We cannot afford to disregard the major historical anti-war gesture, one that earned

Lenin the sympathies of millions in the whole world regardless of all else. Humanity is in a zero-sum conflict with perpetual warfare American-style (also British, French, and as of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan also German and pan-European-style): either we'll get rid of it, or it will get rid of us.

Of course, we need other teachers too, supplementing and where need be modifying Ilyich (as the Russian masses endearingly called him), but he remains central. With him we must begin: all else follows. We need communism for many reasons,³ but the most pressing one is to stop warfare and other sources of mass killings.



On **Shklovsky** there would also be much to say, but the dire need for him is not in “survival studies” (salvational politics) but in “understanding studies” (epistemology and cognition)—without which, maybe circuitously but ineluctably, there will be no survival either; as I put it elsewhere, without poetic justice there is no true communism.⁴ The reason I focus on him as a metonymy for all the different souls of Formalism is a paraphrasing of Dostoevsky's well-known quip that all great Russian literature came out of Gogol's *Overcoat*: though all the Opoyaz writers represented here started together after 1914, Formalist methodology came out of or gravitated around Shklovsky's stress on what is perceptible and what automatised and therefore invisible, on unfamiliar vision as against familiar indifference, in “Art as Device” (“Iskusstvo kak priëm”—“Искусство как прием”). The deviation that disturbs the even and somnolent flow of perception is first a temporal wake-up call, but then—and most important—a call to bring back a full and fresh sense: an Epicurean and Lucretian swerve (*clinamen*) from the even rain of atoms.

Thus, not only is art “what makes the stone stony”; furthermore, “the bent path, a path on which the foot feels the stones ... is the path of art”.⁵ How is that perception of a non-smooth path of life, where you bump into a stone and stop because of it, brought about? It may be done by means of metaphor, or (as all verse does) of formalised rhythm, or many other devices in other arts. In Lenin's political rhetorics (I take this term in its technical, noble sense—one of the essays speaks about Cicero), it

is done by means of argumentative vividness, a change in levels of language which Boynik, in his introduction, rightly calls pointed, for it brings matters to a vivid and noticeable point—somewhat akin to Barthes's *punctum* in photography—so that you stop and pay attention. Perception may thus become both conscious and delightful.



The background for Lenin—the age of imperialist warfare.

The texts assembled here in English (I think for the first time in 90 years) are understandably, for a beginning, focused on Lenin's briefer signed articles. They do not deal with possibly his most important signed work, *The State and Revolution* (except for a reference to why it wasn't finished), nor with the unsigned but clearly his "Decree on Peace" (though it was depersonalised to function as a government declaration). This Decree will bear repetition and meditation today when we would sorely need it again, with updates on covert economic and informational warfare. It had 11 meaty—and for that conjuncture quite precise and exhaustive—paragraphs, but I present here only extracts from five:

Decree on Peace

The workers' and peasants' government, created by the Revolution of October 24-25 and basing itself on the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their government to start immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace.

By ... such a peace the [workers' and peasants'] government means an immediate peace without annexations (i.e., without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and without indemnities.

The [workers' and peasants'] government considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war over the issue of how to divide among the strong and rich nations the weak nationalities they have conquered, and solemnly announces

its determination immediately to sign terms of peace to stop this war on the terms indicated. ...

The government proposes an immediate armistice to the governments and people of all the belligerent countries, and, for its part, considers it desirable that this armistice should be concluded for a period of not less than three months. ...

While addressing this proposal for peace to the governments and peoples of all the belligerent countries, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia appeals in particular also to the class-conscious workers of the three most advanced nations of mankind and the largest states participating in the present way, namely, Great Britain, France, and Germany. ...

[We trust] that the workers of the countries mentioned will understand the duty that now faces them of saving mankind from the horrors of war and its consequences, that these workers, by comprehensive, determined, and most vigorous action, will help us to conclude peace successfully, and at the same time emancipate the labouring and exploited masses of our population from all forms of slavery and all forms of exploitation.⁶

Notice that in this diplomatic (in all senses) document the usual rhetorical expedients or devices analysed by the Formalists have been maximally dampened down. Since you do not vituperate people with whom you want—at least ostensibly—to conclude an accord, there is no mention of capitalism or imperialism, none of economics. His March 1917 text cited by Tynyanov, “Russian capital is merely a branch of the worldwide ‘firm’ which manipulates hundreds of billions of rubles and is called ‘England and France’”, is for the purpose at hand left unmentioned. But knowing full well that the accord would be against the interest of the governments and ruling classes confiding in conquest, so that you must have a Plan B, you do not pull your punches either. In the final paragraph, there is the change of language from a diplomatic governmental declaration dealing in nations and borders to a kind of (yet unborn) Third Inter-

national exhortation: the tradition of workers' struggles in France, the UK, and Germany—left out by me above—is invoked to make it clear on whom the real hope for peace depends—and who will be separately approached to realise it.

This shows very clearly what most of the translated comments also stress: in Lenin there is no disjunction between language and liberatory action, even in public governmental documents which very often employ language to hide, twist, and obfuscate matters.

Alas, the optimistic trust in “Western” working classes proved to be mainly mistaken, though these were strong enough to prevent direct intervention against the Soviets by the “Western” armies in the ensuing Civil War (except for minor actions against Arkhangelsk and Vladivostok).

Thus, the background for Lenin is his winning the peace with the Central Powers and then the Civil War against the “Western” allies, including very much the USA: it is the existence of a potentially socialist USSR. But the absence in the final paragraph of USA—an important, and eventually decisive, belligerent nation since April 6, 1917—indicates a limit to the Decree and (I'm afraid) to Lenin's experiential horizon. Not only: it was a limit of the whole European socialist and then communist tradition, perhaps visible in the fact that its major ecumenical literary critic before the age of Erich Auerbach, Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, and a rediscovered Mikhail Bakhtin, that is Georg Lukács, never wrote anything of note about American literature and culture.



The background for Shklovsky. He knew war fairly well, he functioned as a kind of commissar (from the SR not Bolshevik party) to a Tsarist engineering army unit first in Iran and then in Russia during World War 1. “Art as Device”—variously dated to 1916 or 1917 forheavenssake!—was not by chance born in that pregnant revolutionary moment of impending breakdown of normality. Sklovsky's stance was, I have argued, a “textual materialism” coupled with an ostentatious agnosticism and refusal to speak about supposedly (but as we know today not really) extra-textual socio-political matters and values. This stance—and the subsequent

development of Russian Formalism—is a clear reaction against the carnages of first the World War and then the Civil War 1918–21, when he fled Russia fearing for his life and waited anxiously in Berlin to be readmitted to the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic: maybe we should call his self-imposed limits a Freudian *Abreaktion*, reacting to and working off a trauma.

Thus the epistemic background for Shklovsky and the Formalists is well encapsulated by Jameson:

What distinguishes such [aesthetic] concepts [as the *ostranenie* or “making-strange” of Russian Formalism (as well as its American version, “make it new”)] *philosophically* from genuine dialectical thinking is of course their failure to account for the initial numbness of our perception in the first place, their inability to furnish a sufficiently historical explanation for that ontological deficiency which they can only understand in ethical and aesthetic terms.⁷



Two Limits of Lenin. I’m not at all drawing up here a balance sheet for Lenin’s writing and actions, though it would have been largely positive. But I find two significant places where I politically disagree with his argumentation. The first one seems philosophical, it concerns his book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* of 1909, where the worthy goal of preventing demoralisation after defeat led to a simplified collapsing of positions in modern physics (e.g. of Mach) to their supposed political effect of relativist demobilisation. Lenin at that point knew little and probably cared less about modern physics; he was guarding the “scientificity” of Marx and Engels as a backbone of confidence into a possible revolution with his usual, but here oversimplified, vigour. This opened the door to a quite untenable theory of arts and sciences subjectively “mirroring” an objective reality, that is, to a mechanical materialism later warmly espoused by harmful Stalinist inquisitors into sciences and arts and amounting to a ban on radical innovation within Marxism quite uncharacteristic for Lenin’s own major achievements. He would correct his philosophical bear-

ings after an intense bout of reading Hegel, at the dark time of the inglorious passage of the social-democracy to support of the world war, findable in the *Philosophical Notebooks* (wrongly titled by editors under Stalin, it should have really been *Notebooks on Hegel*).

Even more harmful was Lenin's insistence at the 1921 Party congress for a ban on fractions within the Communist Party, reversing the whole tradition of vigorous interior debates in the first two Internationals. True, he thought this was a temporary measure for one year only in view of introducing NEP as a major "retreat"; but the remedy turned out to be worse than the disease and provided the major plank for Stalinist orthodoxy after 1928. In its consequences it was a truly epochal miscalculation.



The Limits of Shklovsky. The problem with Shklovsky and Russian Formalists is that they found out—together with some other people in that period—the ABC of approaching narrative texts and works of art in general; I argued this 30 years ago and repeated it in my dialogue with Boynik in the second issue of *Rab-Rab Journal*.⁸ However, the alphabet has 30-odd more letters, so you go on to DEF and if you're lucky you get to KLM maybe. But if you don't begin with Formalism, you don't get anywhere but to crass ideological evaluations bound to the current dominant opinions, while if you do begin with form and then get into feedback with perception and other factors from the sociohistorical context, you have a chance to deal pertinently and richly with your material and cognitive-cum-ideological situation. Thus what Shklovsky found out was a cornerstone: absolutely necessary but not at all sufficient.

In the Preface to *O teorii* he famously remarked: "In the theory of literature, I am concerned with researching its internal laws. To use an industrial parallel, I am not interested in the condition of the world cotton market or in the policies of the trusts, but only in the quantities of yarn and the ways of weaving".⁹ This formulation shows that he was fully aware of the real determinants of production—here of cotton—having probably read Lenin's *Imperialism* or at least his German predecessors, but that he consciously forsook them for a narrower but more congenial

and less mined field. To which Victor Erlich in his classical survey reasonably but inexorably objects that this procedure is justifiable and indeed fertile within its chosen limits, but “in the long run an untenable position [that] implied narrowing down arbitrarily the scope of literary research” and cites approvingly Trotsky’s scathing remark in *Literature and Revolution* that it ignores “the psychological unity of the social man who creates and who consumes what has been created”.¹⁰ Later on Erlich remarks that “[most] Russian Formalists were too busy disengaging art from life to admit that poetry could be as potent on the cognitive and affective levels as it was on the sensory”.¹¹

A few years later, Shklovsky returned to his reliance on Tolstoy’s estrangement in order to stress “the necessity of wresting things out of the series [ряд—also range, sequence] of its customary associations”.¹² He ingeniously connects it to the Enlightenment tradition of, for example, Voltaire’s naïve Huron looking at European mores and causing scandal by interpreting the Bible literally, for whom Tolstoy substitutes the intelligent peasant whose down-to-earth reactions in front of institutions and relationships ironically unmask the hegemonic—that is, upper class—ones. In such an approach, things throw off their old names and shapes, the narrator uses them for semantic shifts—tropes or images: “he grabs a concept out of the meaningful sequence in which it had been and transfers it into another, at which point we experience a novelty, the location of the thing in another sequence”.¹³ Just how to understand the relationship of concept, term, and “thing” is, however, left unsaid.

Of course, I’m here not being fully fair to Shklovsky and the Formalists: they didn’t have the abundant narratological and anthropological tools we have today. When Eikhensbaum gives an excellent analysis of “The Chief Task of Our Day”, he speaks of “a typical instance of Lenin’s takedown technique” where we would today say with Bakhtin that this is a plebeian uncrowning, as in Rabelais or Tolstoy. My excuse is: our needs today are for what remains living for us—let the dead bury their dead in proper academic style.

With this I leave Shklovsky to focus on the Lenin possibly alive today.



Lenin's importance for us. I shall here step beyond the texts assembled in this issue, and begin by using the second major clarification of Lenin at that time, Lukács's booklet *Lenin*. I shall take from this partly dated work a main theme sparked by it, though going beyond it: *capitalist degeneration*.

Lukács's central thesis seems to be that Lenin "saw the problems of [his] age as a whole: the onset of the last phase of capitalism... [and t]he actuality of the revolution [as human salvation]".¹⁴ For him, as for Marx, "the concrete analysis of the concrete situation is ... the culmination of all genuine theory, its consummation, the point where it therefore breaks into practice".¹⁵ But what did Lenin see his age as? Lukács mentions an intriguing and for us most apposite debate on the Left in Russia after the failed 1905 revolution whether the current period should be seen positivistically as after the revolution's defeat (that is, we are in 1849) or before the decisive revolution (we are in 1847), as Lenin obviously believed and worked to accomplish. Today we could pose this as: are we in 1915 and even in 1939—a nadir of horror yet on the eve of a political salvation—or in 1991—the unstoppable downward slide of humanity's perdition, of a piece with the Nazi decade (if hypocritically masked)?

My favourite definitional slogan of Lenin's is: "Socialism is Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country" (remember the *lampochki Ilich*?). Were we to generalise his sturdy and vivid examples, this would mean *full democracy from below* (accompanied by suitable political institutions) and *full use of ecologically safe science and technology available to all*. On the most difficult road toward this—think of all the bankers, generals, and the millions of their mercenaries in media etc.—we need two, three, many Lenins: no doubt, updated for a post-cybernetic etc. age, purged of the impatient limits I indicated above, but with the same unswerving dedication and genius as Vladimir Ilyich's.

However, finally, there is a most important difference in our position (human kind's position) under the stars, armies, and capitalist banks today from the age of Lenin—so that he can, alas, no longer be a sufficient guide. Let me start, by contraries, from an imaginary, but easy to compile, representative list of the huge

and permanently needful humanising achievements of the rising bourgeoisies pivoting on the French, American, and Industrial revolutions, and best glorified in *The Communist Manifesto*: it may be enough to suggest here the concepts and practices of Enlightenment, citizenship, republicanism, hygiene and antisepsis, longer life-span for a majority, universal elementary schooling and easy access to the middle and higher schooling, urbanisation, easier transport and communication, and so on and on—in sum, the twin peaks of *easier living*, made possible by industrial productivity, and *happiness* (“a new idea in Europe”, said Saint-Just). I call them “permanently needful”, for although they were first memorably formulated and fitfully tried in and around the three bourgeois revolutions I mentioned (and in a number of precursors), they in fact foundered under a capitalist rule indelibly marked by colonialism and metropolitan exceptionalism—which then necessarily went in each country hand in hand with internal racism and exploitation. The possible universally valid achievements of the bourgeoisie were left to be picked up by socialists and communists (the centrality of Lenin is here evident). Also, I do not wish to claim exclusive vanguard status for North Atlantic revolutions here: the West as against the Rest¹⁶ is *not*—as in the infamous “modernisation theory”—the universal norm in relation to which all vectors toward easier living and happiness from other political spacetimes (say Africa, Asia, or Haiti) would be particular and peripheral. If one believes, as Lenin did when he could afford it, in plebeian democracy from below—the Soviets, or ruling through councils of working people—then all anti-capitalist vectors towards this have the same dignity wherever and whenever they might happen.

Thus, if we situate the useful bourgeois wave’s peak for Western Europe in 1848 and the USA in 1865—later in most other places—then the reflux or devolution of the capitalist period after it is obvious. True, there was a subsidiary but very important upward blip of antifascism and Welfare State, say 1933–73, which put paid to the crassest threat of fascism and demonstrated that a reasonably sane and good life was now technically possible for all; since I was raised and formed by it, I don’t at all wish to minimise the achievements of both the Leninist thrust and the Keynesian response (half mirror image, half cooptation to prevent worse for

the coopters). But on the whole, both in the ongoing world wars and in the triumph of financial turbocapitalism from the 1970s on, *all the positive achievements of the bourgeoisie and capitalism are one by one being taken back*, as if to console us for its forthcoming passing.

As different from Lenin, our problem is that we can't be sure whether the coming new epoch of relations in and around human production (what Yeats memorably called the new beast slouching toward Bethlehem) will be less or more monstrous: will it be communist enlightenment and poetic justice or fascist barbarism fusing slavery, serfdom, and exploitation with the highest technology? One could today make a very long negative list on the model of this early one: it is not by chance that major technological progress "[has led] to disastrous outcomes: pesticides increase pests; hospitals are foci of infection; antibiotics give rise to new pathogens; flood control increases flood damage; and economic development increases poverty".¹⁷ To crown all, in lieu of democracy and the *citoyen*, after 2008 capitalism's legitimate son of fascism is returning. The bourgeois dispensation turns out to be a recipe for the world's most successful transmutation of progress into regress or happiness into misery, and capitalist profitable productivity a recipe of destruction!

Lucca, Sept 2018

1. See my *Lessons from the Russian Revolution and Its Fallout*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Southeast Europe, 2017.
2. See on the last two my *Splendour, Misery, and Possibilities: An X-ray of Socialist Yugoslavia*, Brill, 2016, & Haymarket, 2017; and on sympathy my “Emotion, Brecht, Empathy vs. Sympathy”, *The Brecht Yearbook* 33, 2008, pp. 53–67.
3. What people mean by communism is here crucial, surely not the entirely “statalised” one of Stalin’s type. I use it in the

- sense of Marx—cf. Suvin, “15 Theses about Communism and Yugoslavia, or The Two-Headed Janus of Emancipation through the State....” *Critical Q* 57. 2, 2015, pp. 90-110.
4. See much more in my “What and How Are Poets For in Our Age of Want: Cognition, Emancipation, Communism”, forthcoming in *Minnesota R*, Fall 2018.
 5. Viktor Shklovsky, *O teorii prozy*, Krug, 1925, p. 24.
 6. Lenin, “Decree on Peace”, *Selected Works, Volume 2*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, pp. 459-461.
 7. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 373-374.
 8. “All the lessons of Russian Formalism, without which we cannot begin making sense of fiction, belongs here under the heading of materialism (albeit partial and inconsistent, not yet a dialectical one). Formalism is the A and B of any integrally materialist approach to art, from which we should then proceed to C, D, and so on”. “Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction?”, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edite by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 667.
 9. Shklovsky, *O teorii prozy*, p. 5-6.
 10. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*. Mouton, 1955, p. 97.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
 12. Viktor Shklovsky, *Khod' konia*. Gelikon', 1923, p. 115.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
 14. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study of the Unity of his Thought* [1924], translated by N. Jacobs, MIT Press, 1974, p. 10-11.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.
 16. Naoki Sakai, “Civilizational Difference and Criticism: On the Complicity of Globalization and Cultural Nationalism”, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 17.1 (Spring 2005): 188-205, as well as his *Translation and Subjectivity*, University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
 17. Richard Levins, “Ten Propositions on Science and Antiscience”, *Science Wars*, edited by Andrew Ross, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 180, 183, and 181.

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